

## LANCASTER YOUTH SOCCER U8 Coaching Guidelines

Lancaster Youth Soccer is a recreational soccer development program. What does this mean? Recreational means it's about having fun playing soccer, we are not an Olympic development program. Development means the primary focus is to teach fundamental soccer skills at each level of play. Have fun, but do so playing soccer.

The **goal of this document** is to:

- ensure consistency among U8 coaches so we're all teaching the same way and using the same vocabulary
- establish goals so coaches have a common understanding of which skills players should have under their belts when they move up to U8's
- offer suggestions on drills, sportsmanship, discipline, to create a fun learning environment
- create confident coaches that are better prepared and more willing to move up through the ranks
- Finally, this is a living document, to be updated with your feedback for future coaches... All feedback is appreciated.

Typically a U8 player that starts at age 6 will have 4 seasons of play before they move up to U10's. A spring and fall season at age 6 and the same at age 7. Our goal as coaches should be to develop their basic skills so they are prepared to move up to the next level. We can't expect these young players to master everything below in a single season, but taught consistently from season to season they will get it over time. Keep this in mind as you read through this document.

During the Fall, players move up in age groups so you will probably have a number of players on your team that have never played at this level before.

U6's moving up to U8's:

- Are playing on a bigger field
- May have been taught positions (Wing, Center, Fullback, Goalie) but have played mostly swarmball

Be sure to start from the beginning and cover the basics. Look out for those blank stares, a clear signal you lost them...

- **Safety** first
  - Shin guards are mandatory.
  - Frequent breaks as needed.
  - Lots of water when it's hot.
- Every player should play **equal time**.
- Every player should get a chance to play at every position.

- Coaches don't keep **score** at the U8 level, but the kids sure do. The kids are there to develop and have fun, minimize the focus on the final score.
- Avoid **blowouts**. While we strive to create competitively balanced teams, inevitably you will find yourself running over the opposing team or have a player or two that run wild scoring goal after goal. Look out for these situations, anticipate them, be prepared to change your lineups so your players are challenged without running up the score. No one likes losing 20 to zip... Some ways to deal with this:
  - After your Allstar has scored 2 or 3 goals, make them your fullback and don't let them cross the midfield line.
  - Make him/her the captain and have them pass up front to the players who have yet to score. Great lesson in sportsmanship.
  - If your whole team is dominating, play pass-pass-shoot. Kids can't shoot on net until they pass twice...
- Bring a **blanket** for kids to sit on during games.
- Bring oranges for halftime, delegate a different week to each parent.
- Get a **team parent** to watch the kids on the blanket while you're coaching the players on the field during games.

#### **Maximize touch time**

- The more time kids spend touching the ball the faster they will develop.
- During drills, no lines or keep them short, every player should have a ball during practice to maximize touches... (and fun)
- Besides, the more they idle in line the more trouble they will get into.
- Keep them moving.
- To maximize player development coaches should schedule a 1 hour practice mid week in addition to the Saturday game. Do not combine practices and games because "it's convenient".

#### **Positions**

- Keep it simple, if using a diamond formation
  - Forward, Fullback, Mid Fielder (Left/Right)
- NO offense or defense! Every player is on offense when their team has the ball, and every player is on defense when the other team has it.

#### **Throw-ins**

- Both feet on the ground, feet on or behind the line, two hands, over the head.
- We're teaching this in U6's so this should not be new.

#### **Out of bounds**

- Quiz to you coaches - The ball is out of bounds when?

- In soccer the ball is out of bounds when the ball has completely crossed and is no longer touching the line. If it's on or touching the line in any way it's still in bounds.
- Same for a goal.
- While our young referee's don't (and should not) call the game this closely, begin teaching your players the rules at this age. (we don't have that many rules to remember in U8's)

### **Team Name and Chant!**

- I've read up a good bit on soccer, and I've heard it said that young kids don't grasp the team concept till sometime after the U8 level. Nonsense! For years now I've come up with a team name based on the color of the shirt: Orange Crush, Red Devils, Blue Sharks... and a very simple, repeatable chant for the kids - "Who are we? - *Orange Crush!!!* And what do we do? *Play hard and have fun!!!* They love it and little things like this focus their attention and make the kids want to come and participate. AND it makes your job easier and more rewarding. Be creative and come up with something that works for you.

### **Rules (Not many in U8's, no off-sides)**

#### **Start play**

- To begin the game or 2<sup>nd</sup> half, and to restart play after a goal is scored, the ball is placed at midfield. The ball should be kicked forward by a player to another player on his/her team. The ball must stay in front of the midfield line (cannot be kicked backwards). The ball is in play as soon as the first player touches the ball. Opposing team lines up 8 yards back from the midfield line.

#### **NO Goalie**

- An arc is drawn around the goal that both the defending AND offensive team is not allowed to enter.
- If they do ???, penalty kick seems extreme. Instruct the ref to keep them moving...
- Perhaps loosely enforced at the beginning of the season...

#### **Throw-ins**

- Enforce poor throwins loosely at beginning of season, ref should teach/correct the player and allow a re-throw. By mid season a blown throw-in results in the other team getting the ball. Throw-in to restart play.

#### **Goal kicks**

- When a team kicks the ball beyond the other team's goal line it results in a goal kick. The ball is placed just in front of the arc, all players line up ~8 yards from there.

### **Corner kick**

- When a team kicks the ball beyond their own team's goal line it results in a corner kick for the other team. Any player can take the corner kick. The ball is placed anywhere within the corner arc. Other team must be 8 yards back from the ball.

### **Penalty kick**

- Probably no penalty kicks in 4v4. Will review as we go along.

### **Handball**

- Defined as the deliberate use of the hand/arm to direct the ball should be called by the ref. If a handball occurs then a direct kick is awarded. Spot the ball at the point of the foul, any player can take the kick.

### **Substitutions**

- You may substitute players on your throw-ins and on anyone's goal kick.
- This is a strict enforcement of the substitution rule, discuss with the opposing coach/ref and gain agreement prior to the game. Try to refrain from substituting at any stoppage of play.

### **Ball Control**

- This is the primary goal in U8's, improve their ball control skills.
- How many feet do you have? 2!!! Teach them to use them both when dribbling. Also, teach them where their inside and outside of the foot is and how to use it. Soccer is the only sport that uses only feet, no hands.
- Remind them to keep their **head up** when they dribble, don't stare at the ball. This way they can see their teammates to pass to and defenders to stay away from.

### **Drills**

- Dribble along the white lines using both feet. Again with just the left. Then just the right.
- Sprints, dribbling from one side of the field to the other, again alternate both feet, left only, right only.
  - Keep the ball close in crowds, longer dribbles when sprinting distances...
- Drop discs/cones and have them dribble around them, again using both/left only/right only...
- One of the best ways to teach 6 and 7 year olds and generate enthusiasm is through games. Red Light Green Light, Freeze Tag, Sharks and Minnows, Coconuts..... To the kids they're playing a game and having fun. However, it's important as coaches that you recognize what soccer skills these games emphasize as these games are a teaching tool.
  - Red Light Green Light - teaches them to start moving with the ball, dribble, and stop. To them their just having fun. The stop-

move is simply placing their foot on top of the ball when you blow the whistle.

- Freeze Tag - in one half the field have the kids dribble around while you chase them. Again, they're practicing ball control without knowing it. (dribbling away from you, staying within the lines, and not bumping into other players)
- Sharks and Minnows - line the players up at one end of the field, they're the minnows and you're the shark in the middle of the field. Blow the whistle and have them dribble past you to the other side of the field. The shark tries to kick a player's ball out of the field of play, these players then become sharks and join you in the middle of the field. Regroup and run it again till all the minnows are caught. (hand out pennies to identify those minnows turned shark)
- Scrimmages - always wrap up your practices with a scrimmage. The game of soccer is the best teacher!
- Remind them to keep their heads up...
  - Encourage them to practice at home.
  - Other favorites? Let me know!

### **Passing**

- Passing is all about expectation setting at this age. Young players *in general* don't grasp passing till U10's.
- Yet it should be taught in U8's so they're exposed to passing drills.
- So teach them to pass, but don't expect to see it much in games.
- More advanced players may pass more and carry over to younger players.

### **Aggressiveness**

- Explain what aggressiveness means - go after the ball. Many young players either run away from the ball or don't engage. Soccer is not a spectator sport, encourage them to be aggressive and go after the ball.
- Remind them this does not mean pushing, shoving, hitting are allowed...

### **Sportsmanship**

- Sportsmanship is paramount and begins at this young level!
- "Good game" only when shaking hands after the game. Watch out for the "ha ha we beat you" or "you stink"... Remind them when they line up all you want to hear is "good game".
- Respect for teammates, opponents, and coaches at all times.
- Foul language is grounds for dismissal and will not be tolerated. (see discipline below)
- No one likes a ball hog.

## Zero Tolerance

- *Coaches, players, and parents are not allowed to address a referee during the game!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*
- This a strictly enforced rule in the Nashoba Valley Youth Soccer League (U10's and above, this is the league we belong to), and we enforce it at this level too.
- We lose more young referees because of the abuse they take.
- Keep in mind these referees are young kids!
- If they blow a call, get over it.
- Coaches are responsible not only for the behavior of their players but for the player's parents as well! Sometimes difficult to monitor when parents are on the other side of the field and you're focused on what's happening on the field.
- Tell the ref before the game that he/she has your full support, if any parents get out of hand to stop the game and notify you. Then go over and remind the parents of the zero tolerance rule. (Fortunately at this level this is not a big issue)
- The only exception is safety. If there's an overly aggressive player or some incident that puts a player in danger of being injured, then it is appropriate to discuss with the ref in a civil manner.

## Discipline

- Ah, the best for last. It is NOT too much to expect U8's to behave for 60 minutes of soccer. The more time you spend disciplining the less time you have to spend teaching, and this takes time away from those players who behave and come to play. Parents should keep their kids in line which I hope to address in a separate parent/player code of conduct letter. However, they are after all only 6 and 7 year olds and can't be expected to be perfect angels all the time. You will often times have your hands full, when they cross the line let them know it, if necessary return them to their parent so you can focus on your team. (From a practice strategy standpoint, try to exhaust their nervous energy that they come to practice with early in the practice with a couple laps/sprints before easing into teaching drills.)

Lastly, you may be thinking, "What? We're talking about U8's here." Given the chance, these kids will amaze you! Not teaching them, or at the very least not exposing your players to these fundamentals, is an artificial limitation YOU as their coach are imposing on them. While they may not be able to execute everything you begin teaching them in a single season, keep in mind that over 4 seasons of consistent training they will get it! The more advanced players will perform, and the other players will learn from them. Push them, they can take it.

At any point during the season if you have any questions don't hesitate to contact the LYS board. These are intended as guidelines only, use them as you see fit. These by no means represent an exhaustive list, view them as a beginner's guide. Let me know what works and what doesn't. If you have favorites that work for you I'd love to include them.

Thanks again for your time, here's to a great, safe season!

Jeff Parrow