



EAST WAKE SOCCER ASSOCIATION

A

**“How to” Guide To
Coaching
Youth Soccer**

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Introduction

There isn't just one way to teach or coach youth soccer. Coaching styles vary based upon our experiences and knowledge of the game. Like with many volunteers, you won't know everything there is to know about soccer. Recreational soccer is about having fun, being safe, and learning about the game of soccer. Your goal as a coach is not to win games, but to develop your players. With this comes success and failure. Teach good sportsmanship! Youth soccer is "player-centered", not "coach-centered". Let the kids play. Allowing the kids to experiment and solve challenges on his/her own is a great way for kids to learn about soccer. Providing uninterrupted playing time keeps the kids interested.

Teach age-specific drills and tactics. Coaching U8's the off-side trap is not age-specific. In fact, for younger soccer players (ages 6 to 10), soccer is not a team sport. Getting the kids to be comfortable with the ball is critical to their development. Based upon the age and skill level of the kids you are coaching, some basic concepts should be followed. Teach the basic skills such as ball control and encourage creativity and involvement. Any drill centered around the ball is excellent for young kids. Youth soccer is NOT adult soccer with little kids. Youth level soccer (usually through U12) should resemble pick-up games that allow the kids to play. Yes, it may seem unorganized, but that's OK.

Coaching Challenge or Classic soccer requires a bit more attention, focus and planning. Higher levels of youth soccer usually involve children who show signs of mastering various skills and techniques. Challenge teams / divisions will tend to be more "intense" and there are certain expectations of both the coaches and parents. Formal try outs are held and "the better" players are selected for a team. Challenge teams practice and play games for most of the year. Traveling to various cities for games and tournaments is quite common. Coaches who wish to coach at this level and/or at the older age divisions should attend coaching clinics to help better their coaching skills. Look at the reference section at the end of this manual for additional information on the various coaching certifications.

Remember, your job as a coach is to develop the kids the best way you know how. Also remember to have fun!

Your Primary Responsibilities As A Coach Should Be....

- **Keep the kids and playing area (practices, fields & games) safe!**
- **Be respectful towards players, parents, opposing teams, referees, and the game of soccer.**
- **Listen to your players and parents. Its valuable information and it will help you become a better coach.**
- **Maintain positive communication and feedback. Encouragement, positive reinforcement, and recognition are all very important to young athletes.**
- **Remember....You are a role model to these young athletes! You are in a position of responsibility and authority. Push yourself to be the best that you can be.**
- **Compete with Class! Class never seeks out self praise, but the praise of others. Class has the element of having pride without being proud. Competing with class respects the game and each other.**
- **Teach the basic rules and skills of soccer. Try and keep your practices organized.**
- **Keep parents informed.**
- **Have fun! If you aren't having fun, the kids aren't either. So relax have some fun! Enjoy the game of soccer!**

Getting Started (equipment)

As the head coach, you need to equip yourself with some basic items: cones, vests (aka pennies), soccer balls, air pump, first aid kit, large water jug/cooler. Balls are usually supplied by the league. Ask your league representative what equipment is supplied. A basic “starter-kit” costs around \$65 to \$75 and includes balls, practice vests, and cones. A whistle is highly recommended also. Don’t over do it with equipment. A soccer ball is the most important piece of equipment you need for recreational soccer.

The following websites are good places to find inexpensive soccer equipment:

<http://soccer.epicsports.com/>

<http://www.soccerpost.com/>

<http://www.scoresports.com/>

Risk Management and Team Administration

Coaching responsibilities also include team administration and risk management. The following topics should help you with both.

- Pre-season parent / coach meeting. Discuss season goals, your coaching philosophy.
- Expectations of parents and players. Sportsmanship, transportation, snack duty, practice times, etc.
- Always keep a copy of your team roster, including phone numbers with you.
- Provide proper instruction to players.
- Provide proper equipment and safety.
- Never leave a player alone after practices or games. You are responsible for their safety!
- Avoid being alone with a player who is not your own. Ask a parent to stay until the other player’s parents arrive.
- You should know the Coaches Code of Conduct, Parents Code of Conduct, and Players Code of Conduct.

Rules and Laws of the Game

Check your league for specific rule modifications. Rules are applied differently at the various age divisions. Some rules may not apply.

Kick-off: A kick-off starts the game. The ball is placed at mid-field, inside the center circle. The opposing team must be outside the center circle. The ball must move forward for a kickoff to be valid and the kicker cannot touch it again until someone else does. The defending team can enter the circle as soon as the ball is touched. A kick-off is also used to restart the game after a goal is scored and at the start of each half/quarter (unless the period ended with a penalty) the ball is kicked off from the middle of the field. The defending team must start on their half of the field and must stay outside the center circle.

Throw-in: When the ball goes completely over the touchline (this is not the sideline) it gets thrown back on the field by a player of the team not committing the infraction. The referee (center ref or assistant ref) will point in the direction of the defending goal. The technique for a throw-in- the ball must be held with both hands. Start with the ball behind the head. Both feet must be on the ground when the ball is released.

Goal Kick, Corner Kick: If the ball goes off the field at an goal line (ends) of the field) there will be a goal kick or a corner kick. If your team puts the ball over the opposition's goal line without scoring the other team takes a "goal kick" from inside their goal box (usually at a corner of it). Your team is required to stay out of the penalty box until the ball clears the penalty box.

If your team puts the ball over your own goal line (and without scoring on yourself) the other team gets a "corner kick" from a near corner of the field with the ball put in the corner arc. Your team is required to stay so many yards away from the ball, depending on the age group of the players.

Penalty kick: Causing a serious foul in your own penalty box - like tripping or putting up a hand to block a shot will give the other team a free kick from the penalty kick mark. All the players from both teams (except the goalkeeper on the goal line) are moved out of the penalty box and the penalty arc.

Free kick: Causing a foul outside a penalty box stops play and gives the fouled team a free kick from where the foul occurred, except when stopping play would disadvantage the fouled team (sometimes this distinction is not made). Less serious fouls result in an "indirect" kick where the ball has to be touched by another player besides the kicker before a goal can be scored.

Off-side: This is also the most misunderstood rule / call made on the field. The off-side rule is designed to prevent goal tending. Here you go...

- a) Being off-side in itself is not an offence.
- b) A player is in the off-side position if he is nearer to his opponent's goal line than both the ball and the second to last defender.
- c) A player is NOT off-side when he is in his own half of the field, even with the second to last defender, even with the last two defenders
- d) A player is NOT off-side if he receives the ball directly from a goal kick, corner kick, or throw-in.

Hand Ball: On the field players can't have contact, deliberate or inadvertent (except to protect themselves from injury), with the ball on their shoulders, arms or hands. You can shoulder push other players but not impede their movement unless you are close to the ball. A good rule of thumb to follow... "hand-to-ball" will almost always get a whistle from the referee. "Ball-to-hand" is usually inadvertent and might not be whistled a hand-ball unless the player gains the advantage by the inadvertent hand-ball.

The Goalkeeper: The goalie is allowed to pick up the ball with his/her hands in the penalty box for up to six seconds at a time - unless they receives a deliberate pass from one of their teammates. Once a goalkeeper in the penalty box has a hand on the ball the other team cannot try to knock it loose.

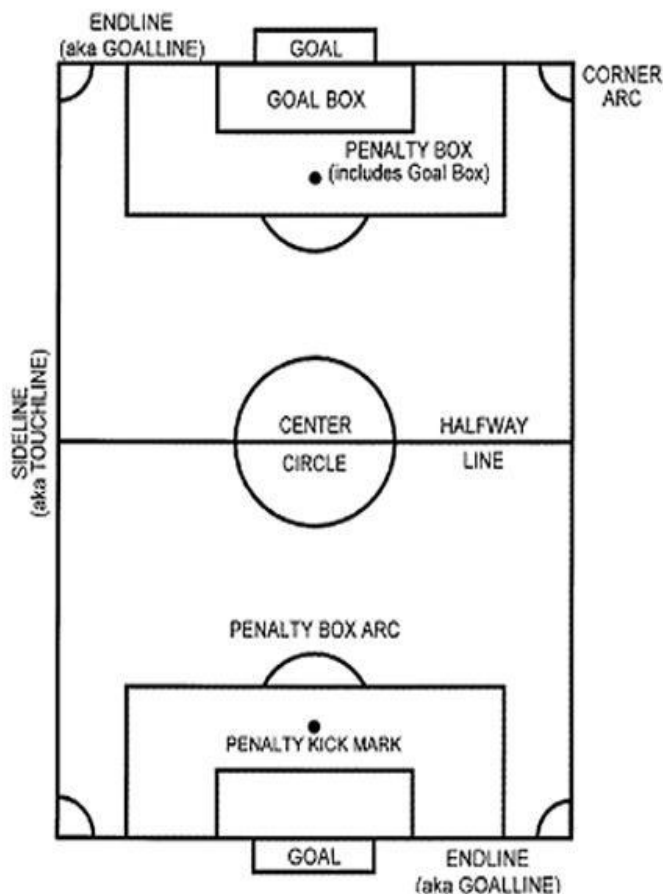
Injury: Players can get hurt frequently. If you notice one of your players hurt tell the referee to stop play. Players on the field should kneel down. Play is resumed with a "drop ball" that becomes live when it hits the ground. Giving an applaud to the injured player when leaving the field shows good sportsmanship.

Coach Location: Coaches and parents must stay on their side of the field within so many yards of the midfield line during a game. Coaches should not go passed or beyond the 18 yard line (edge of the penalty box). Some leagues require the parents be on opposite sides of the field from the players and coaches.

Substitutions: You can sub on your own team's throw-ins, on any goal kick, and during a kick off: Let the referee know you want to sub a player. Yell "sub ref" loud so the referee can hear you. Substitute players should sub in/out at mid-field.

Referee: Many youth soccer associations have kids as referees. Many are still learning the game. Even the best most experienced referee makes a bad call. Remember this when it's game day. Respect the referee's decision! If necessary, provide constructive feedback to the referee and/or referee assignor of the league after your game. Feedback helps the referee get better. In some cases, parents may be asked to help on the sidelines (better known as the touchline) In this case, the parent(s) are to help with the direction of throw-ins and calling off-side.

Soccer Field Diagram



Drills for Practice

1. Are useful in developing proper Biomechanics
2. Enable the muscles to memorize a response and perform it under stressful conditions.
3. Improve anaerobic fitness so recovery after surges of activity is faster.
4. Introduce players to concepts not picked up from casual play.
5. Provide an opportunity to develop the non-dominant foot.

Drills should last about 10-20 minutes, depending on the mood of the players and how tired or hot they are. Many drills work better if the coach or an assistant simulates a defender putting on light pressure. *Always avoid running into or otherwise making contact with players when participating in a drill or at any other time so they don't get hurt.*

If you run the same drills in sequence every practice (but use variations to keep them interesting) your players will know the routine and practice will get easier to run. As the season progresses, the players will want to socialize and scrimmage more and drill less. Remember, soccer is an anaerobic sport, so run sprints in practice.

For more ideas on drills and practice ideas, search the following internet sites....

- www.FineSoccer.com
- www.footy4kids.com
- www.cancoach.com
- www.soccerpracticeplans.com
- www.soccerclub.com
- www.soccerhelp.com

Come early to practice and set up your cones to mark out a field, and set up a normal size (8 yard) goal. Bring an index card with the practice scripted out and keep in your back pocket. As players arrive have them:

Drill: Shooting. Players line up with their balls about 18 yards out (extent of the penalty box). One by one, they dribble in and shoot.

Variation: Players line up at a post and kick the ball forward at an angle away from the goal, and while it is still moving take a shot. Remind them about shooting angles, how it gets harder to score the further sideways you move from directly in front of the goal.

Variation: Players kick a stationary ball from as far away as they can and still get it in the goal. Teach them to approach the ball in a "J" pattern rather than straight on for further kicking.

Variation: Add a defender (asst. coach) with light pressure. No shooting until the ball passes the original position of the defender.

Variation: Coach rolls the ball fast out to each player, who is running to the goal, on the ground or bouncy, left side, right side, for a one-touch or two-touch shot. Balls should come mostly from the side or behind, like they normally would in a real game.

Variation: One player dribbles straight for the end line then cross passes to another player going to goal who one-kicks it in. Defender is between the two lines of attackers. Remind the receiver to stay behind the passer so the cross is in front of him.

Variation: One player gives and go passes to another and then shoots. Defender is to the side of both lines of attackers, defender first pressures the dribbler, and then breaks off to engage the other attacker at the "give" part of the pass.

Variation: Two or more "goalkeepers" with all the balls. The goalkeepers drop kick or javelin-toss the balls to midfield as fast as they can. Everyone else is at midfield: when they get a ball they bring it in and shoot, then run back to out to get another ball sent by a keeper.

Variation: Over the top: You need a real goal set up (not just cones). One player as goalkeeper, rest lined up each with a ball in 18 yards in front of the goal. First player shoots, if he shoots over the goal he has one "strike". If he scores, the goalkeeper has one "strike". Each player in line gets to shoot up to three balls, but as soon as they miss any they replace the keeper, who then goes to the end of the shooting line. When someone in line misses, the next player in line should shoot as soon as possible to get a strike against the new goalkeeper before he can set up. Once a player has three strikes they're out of the drill; play continues until there are no players left. If the keeper is struck out he is replaced by the shooter.

Drill: players get in pairs (not triangles or squares - too much talking) and kick to each other. Players can work on trapping and kicking a stationary ball or one-touch kicking a moving ball, right foot, left foot, chip shot and on the carpet, kicking as far as possible to push the partner back.

Variation: One touch passing with the side of the foot, ball can't stop moving. A short hop with the planting foot right before contact with the kicking foot works best for distance and accuracy.

Variation: One partner runs a short distance away, then turns and comes back. The other partner rolls the ball to her as she is turning. The running player kicks or passes the ball back.

Variation: work on headers, throw-ins.

Drill: Cat and mouse. Make a square or rectangle with cones. One *cat* the other players *mice* with balls. *Cat* tries to kick any mouse's ball out of the playing area, which turns this mouse into a cat. Keep playing to the last mouse, which starts as cat for the next round.

Variation: mice have to take the ball from one end of a rectangular area to the other.

Variation: cats have to take the ball from a mouse and score on a goal guarded by a mouse to create a cat. Balls knocked out of the playing area by a cat still belong to the mouse, if a mouse sends a ball out of the playing area twice she turns into a cat.

Variation: mice have a partner they can pass to.

Drill: Lanes. Create lanes with cones, each lane about 20 feet wide. Pair-up one pair in each lane, take turns being attacker and defender, attacker tries to dribble past the defender while staying in the lane. If defender gets the ball out of the lane she switches with her partner and becomes attacker for the next round.

Variation: players can't look at the ball while dribbling.

Variation: Attacker starts with back to defender.

Drill: World Cuppies. All pairs on the field, one narrow goal. Throw two balls out at a time (unless there are only two pairs playing) and always keep two balls in play (players off the field put the new ball in play by throw in or drop kick). Each time a pair scores they come out to rest. Last pair on the field is eliminated from further play (they weren't able to score). Start another round with the pairs that have not been eliminated.

Variation: when ball is thrown in it must be headed by a player to be live.

Variation: Three pairs at a time, throw out one ball, see who can score, winner comes out to be replaced by the next pair in line.

Variation: each pair has one ball, each pair plays one-on-one against their partner.

Drill: Moving monkey in the middle. Groups form a triangle with one monkey in the middle. Triangle moves from one end of the field to the other, no dribbling only passing. If the monkey gets the ball the triangle restarts; if the triangle makes it down the field the monkey position rotates to another player in the group. To make this drill work, the players have to talk and move to space to receive a pass

Drill: Sprint relays. Groups have one player at a time race down the field with a ball and around a goal cone and back. Players hand-off by passing to a player in their group or by scoring on a goal.

Variation: groups cross each other diagonally.

Variation: left foot only, outside of foot only, dribble two balls at a time.

Variation: Coaches act as a defender with light pressure.

Variation: Sprint only - no ball.

Variation: Bumpers: four cones in a square, about 18 yards apart. Each cone has two players standing next to it (if you have more than 10 players in the drill, add another cone for every two players, making a pentagon, hexagon, heptagon, etc.). There is one "chaser" and one "it" player. The "it" runs over to one of the players standing next to a cone and stands next to her. The other person standing next to the cone (the "bumper") becomes the new "it". If a "chaser" tags an "it" they switch roles. Players can run along the area marked by cones and inside of it but not outside.

Small Scrimmage: divide players into small teams. 3 v 3 is a great way to practice small team skills. Use narrow/small goals, no goalkeepers.

Full Scrimmage: practicing for “game day” If possible, schedule a scrimmage against another team in your league.

Positions

There are four basic positions in soccer: backs, goalkeepers, midfielders, and forwards.

Backs play in front of the goalkeeper and are responsible for defending the goal.

Goalkeepers keep the ball from entering the goal. Every rec. team I have ever seen has had a problem in recruiting goalkeepers. Make sure before the game that your assigned goalkeepers are willing to play keeper that day.

Midfielders play in the middle of the field and try to advance or retard the advance of the ball.

Forwards play forward of the other players and therefore have the best chance to score goals.

Game Day and Pre-game warm-up

As players arrive before the game have them get in pairs, triangles or squares and kick to each other. Walk around and announce positions to each player. After a while, have the team run to a near-by landmark and back. Then have them stretch in a circle by themselves. After referee has checked in the team, and the captains have selected the side and kick-off, circle the team, give last minute instructions, then do the team cheer. Remember, it’s just a game and you are coaching them to have fun and do their best.

It's part mental! Remember, you can't *make* the team play hard. Usually, teams will play up to the level of the opposition unless the other team is much better - playing hard against teams that are similar to them and not playing so hard against teams that are worse.

Players also play hard to impress people that know them, so it helps if they know players on the other team.

“I’m not sure if soccer develops character, but it sure reveals it (among players, parents and coaches).”

It’s also part physical. The biggest factor in game day performance with young players is how much sleep they got the night before. Encourage them to keep their feet dry with waterproof socks, and wear extra undershirts for cold games.

Tell the players to play good soccer until they get tired. Dribbling uses energy, engaging the ball uses energy. If a player gets tired, they should raise their hand to indicate they need to be subbed out, or they can revert to boot ball until they can rest up.

Sub early and often. Sub after every five minutes unless you have an obvious advantage on the throw in. If you have no subs, play a man down just to gain one. The more you keep the ball in bounds, the less the other team can

sub, and the more tired they will get.

Avoid the temptation to sub your lesser players for each other - the effectiveness of your best players declines much faster than a normal player when they're tired (because they have more ability to lose) so you should sub them in and out and keep your lesser players in the entire game. Don't take out players who are doing really well, or who are "on fire."

Coach more to the subs, not so much to the team during the game. Have the subs closeby when they're ready to go back in, talk to them to the extent they'll listen about what's happening good and bad in the game. For the players on the field, encourage the player closest to the ball, and correct for way out of position and not marking in front of the goal.

Listen to your players; they notice a lot of things you don't. At a game, keep asking your smart players what they think about what's happening. Take notes during the game for things to talk about and changes to make later.

Players have misperceptions. Mostly, they think it's up to them to win the game, when they actually have teammates who can help and have jobs to do. For example, rather than engage immediately as first defender, players will try to contain, which gives the attacker time to pass or shoot. A better idea is to attack the ball, hurry the attacker, and rely on your teammates to get the ball.

Also, players tend to value individual glory ahead of team glory, so they might get out of position in an attempt to score - which usually doesn't work and hurts the team when the opposition makes a counterattack. If your players can be socialized into a "team or group" than a collection of individuals, you will have better results.

Coaching your own child

This can be challenging at best. First off, don't confuse the two. Your actions and behavior will be different that at home. Some children find it hard to understand. Ask your child if you want them to be your coach. Treat all the kids the same. Your child should have to tow the line as any other child should. Avoid "parenting" during practices and games.

Coaching girls versus boys

Girls are more relationship and group oriented than boys are. Around the ages of 9 and 10 you begin to see the difference between girls and boys. Strength, speed, and aggressiveness start to "separate" the boys from the girls. This is also the age children begin the various stages of puberty. Not only are the kids trying to learn and master the game of soccer, but they are also experiencing rapid changes within their bodies. Keep this rule in mind: Coach the athlete and not the gender!

Assistant coaches

If possible, draft an assistant coach or be prepared to run chaotic practices. Assistants help run drills and keep players in line. (but...NEVER agree to co-coach...whoever controls the line-up and the substitutions during the game controls the team)

References

American Sport Education Program, “*Coaching Youth Soccer*”, 3d, (Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL 2001)

DeWitt, John, “*Coaching Girls’ Soccer*”, (Three Rivers Press, New York, 2001)

“*Best Practices for Coaching Soccer in the United States*”, US Soccer, Player Development Guidelines

“*The Soccer Coaching Bible*”, The National Soccer Coaches Association of America, (Human Kinetics, 2004)

Other resources.....

US Youth Soccer Organization

<http://usyouthsoccer.org/>

American Youth Soccer Organization

<http://soccer.org/home.aspx>

GrassRoots Coaching

<http://www.grassrootscoaching.com/index.htm>

National Soccer Coaches Association of America

<http://www.nscaa.com>

North Carolina Youth Soccer Association

<http://www.ncsoccer.org>

