

# Coaching Goals for the Season

## Y-Kickers Age 3-4

Ball Mastery: This will be a slow introduction to the soccer ball. Many kids are going to want to pick up the ball and run with it everywhere they go. That is natural and sometimes encouraged (see Coordination/Agility). Because the kids are only interested in their own ball, use this as an advantage in teaching the skills of dribbling. Coaches should encourage the use of both feet. The goal of the season is for players to have the ability to dribble with the inside of the foot, outside of the foot and their laces and to be able to change directions and stop the ball on the coach's command. Players should be familiar with the ball touching all of the "receiving" surfaces of the body (feet, thighs, chest, and head).

Coordination / Agility: A fair amount of practice time should be spent improving their agility and coordination on every level. This includes hand-eye coordination, foot-eye coordination, motor movements, jumping, changing directions, running, and so on. Use as many games and activities as possible to encourage their development as athletes. This may even include catching or running with a ball in their hands.

Striking a Ball: The ball is immensely bigger than their feet, not to mention their legs. This is of minor concern for the players, right now. However, they need to be exposed to the motor movement of striking a ball with their laces.

Heading: Although the ball will rarely be at head level, it is a good idea to introduce the head as a surface to touch the ball. Allowing the players to put their head on the ball in a non-threatening way eases the fear of heading a ball. This can be done by each player holding a ball in their hands and heading the ball without it leaving their hands.

Rules of the Game: This age group won't understand every rule, yet. The important rules are how to score a goal, which direction they need to be going in, and where and what to do when the ball is out of bounds. Make sure these rules are used and explained in practice so it won't be such a shock in games.

Tactical Situations: About the only thing the players will understand about this will be where to safely stand on restarts (kick-offs, goal kicks, free kicks, and kick ins).

## U5

Ball Mastery/Dribbling: Players should have the ability to maneuver a ball going forward, backward, and sideways. Players should be able to stop the ball with the bottom of the foot on the coach's command. Their motor skills and foot-eye coordination should be improving and thus their dribbling ability should increase. The next progression is being able to change speed while they are dribbling and turning with the ball. This will enable them to run past a defender with the ball still at their feet. Get your players to recognize traffic ahead and turn into the opposite direction to find open space. Encourage them to dribble with their head up to see other players and space. By the end of the season, players should be able to dribble forward with speed. This is accomplished by pointing your toe down and using your laces to touch the ball.

Coordination / Agility: All areas in coordination and agility should be increasing, but all aspects can now improve with the ball at their feet. For new movements or games, introduce without a ball. This will give the players time to learn muscle memory with success, and once learned add a ball at their feet. Keep on working on hand-eye coordination, as well. Stretching activities, although not very useful at this age, can help to improve balance and to start good habits.

Striking a Ball: More emphasis on striking a ball/shooting is needed. Make sure they have their toe pointing down while striking the ball with their laces for the most power and accuracy. A player may kick the ball further with their toe now, but the success rate will only last for a little while longer if the proper technique of striking with the laces is not taught. Encourage the use of both feet. Laces, Laces, Laces!!

Heading: Keep using the sponge balls or beach balls to introduce the head as a surface to touch. Advance to letting the player throw a ball just above themselves to head straight up in the air and attempt to catch it.

Rules of the Game: Once the major rules of the game are understood, players should understand how goal kicks, corner kicks, kick ins and free kicks are taken and what causes them. During the end of practice scrimmage, make sure they are playing by regular 3v3 game rules.

Tactical Situations: Players still do not understand when or why they should pass the ball. They should begin to have an understanding of transition from offense to defense. “As soon as you lose the ball, try to win it back!”

## U6

Ball Mastery: Players should now be able to change speed, stop, and turn with the ball under control, with all surfaces of the feet. 180 degree “Chopping” of the ball with the inside and outside of the feet should be introduced and attempted throughout the season.

Coordination / Agility: Players will still be exposed to many of the same exciting activities as the younger kids. However, as they grow older, coaches can make the playing areas smaller to limit the space and time that players have to move around. This will help them develop reflexes and agility.

Striking a Ball: All players should have the ability to strike the ball with their laces and with both feet. An introduction to the “push pass” as striking a ball is necessary. While the players may not actually use the “push pass” in a game, their muscles need to remember what it feels like to “open the hip up” and pass the ball with the inside of the foot. Striking a bouncing ball with the laces should be attempted.

Heading: Players should be familiar with and unafraid of heading the ball. The next step is to head a ball that didn’t come from them. This should be a lightly tossed ball from a short distance. Increase the distance as they become more comfortable.

Rules of the Game: All rules should be known, including all the different fouls that can be committed.

Tactical Situations: 2v1 situations should be experienced as often as possible. Players should begin to understand how two players can work together to go by a defender (ie a pass!). Players are slowly starting to understand how to work with a partner.

## U7/U8

Ball Mastery: Players should be able to add the “lunge step”, “scissor”, “fake shot” and “fake stop” to their dribbling repertoire. Players should now be able to receive a bouncing or flighted ball, with all surfaces of the body, and control it to the ground in less than three touches.

Coordination / Agility: The ability to change directions and change speeds should be addressed in every practice. This can be done with the ball in almost all cases, but doesn’t have to be.

Striking a Ball: Players need to be able to strike a ball with both feet and should be able to get it off the ground. To help with this, practice by rolling a ball back to them so they can strike underneath the ball. Allow them to place the ball on the cone and strike underneath it to get it into the air. They need to feel what it is like to strike underneath the ball. Ankle flexibility is the major speed bump in accomplishing this. In order to get the ball into the air by using the laces, players need to approach the ball at a 45 degree angle rather than from straight behind the ball. Players should be able to strike a ball out of the air, of varying height and direction, with the laces and inside of the feet

Heading: Balls are now able to reach head height more frequently, so using the head is an important skill to have. Heading the ball from increased distances will allow for success in the game situations. The ability to pass a bouncing or flighted ball with the head should start to emerge.

Rules of the Game: The rules should be second nature and advanced players should now be looking to bend the rules in their favor. Examples would be kicking the ball off a defender to gain a corner, or saving a ball that is going out of bounds by kicking it out for a kick-in, rather than a goal kick. Players that excel will not only recognize fouls quickly, but quickly restart the infraction before the other team is ready to defend it.

Tactical Situations: Players should have a through understanding of and should be able to score in 2v1 situations. A great amount of time should be spent on “getting wide”, or spreading out. It should be automatic that when your team has the ball, that all players form a diamond shape. Players should understand the concept of “Goal Side”. Strict positional play is still discouraged (ie...one player sitting in front of the goal all the time). Every player should defend and attack. Goalkeepers should understand how to distribute the ball to open “safe spaces” after catching it.

## U9/U10

Ball Mastery: Players should be able to add the “lunge step”, “scissor”, “fake shot” and “fake stop” to their dribbling repertoire in matches...not just training. Players should now be able to receive a bouncing or flighted ball, with all surfaces of the body, and control it to the ground in less than two touches.

Coordination / Agility: The ability to change directions and change speeds should be addressed in every practice. This can be done with the ball in almost all cases, but doesn't have to be.

Striking a Ball: Players need to be able to strike a ball with both feet and should be able to get it off the ground. To help with this, practice by rolling a ball back to them so they can strike underneath the ball. Allow them to place the ball on the cone, on a limited basis, and strike underneath it to get it into the air. They need to feel what it is like to strike underneath the ball. Ankle flexibility is the major speed bump in accomplishing this. In order to get the ball into the air by using the laces, players need to approach the ball at a 45 degree angle rather than from straight behind the ball. The heel of the striking foot should be near the ground with the shoe laces pointing towards the desired target. Players should be able to strike a ball out of the air, of varying height and direction, with the laces and inside of the feet.

Heading: Balls are now able to reach head height more often, so using the head is an important skill to have. Heading the ball from increased distances will allow for success in the game situations. The ability to pass a bouncing or flighted ball with the head should be addressed.

Passing: Player should be able to pass with the inside of the foot over distances of 5-15 yards with accuracy. When passing with the inside of the foot, the toe should be pointed as upward as possible with the ankle locked. The non-kicking foot should be beside the ball and pointed towards the target. The ball should be struck with the inside of the foot, closest to the inside ankle rather than the toe. Players should concentrate on striking the ball so that it stays on the ground and rolls with topspin.

Rules of the Game: The rules should be second nature and advanced players should now be looking to bend the rules in their favor. Examples would be kicking the ball off a defender to gain a corner, or saving a ball that is going out of bounds by kicking it out for a throw-in, rather than a goal kick. Players that excel will not only recognize fouls quickly, but quickly restart the infraction before the other team is ready to defend it.

Tactical Situations: Players should have a through understanding of and should be able to score in 2v1 situations. Players should start to understand how to attack and defend in 2v2 situations. Players should have sound understanding of a wall pass and a double pass in 2v1 and 2v2 situations. A great amount of time should be spent on “creating width, height and depth”.....generally speaking... “spreading out”. It should be automatic that when your team has the ball, that players without the ball should get wide, high, and into deep supporting positions (i.e. “diamond shape”). Players should understand the concept of “Goal Side”. Players should understand the off-sides rule. Strict positional play is still discouraged (ie...one player sitting in front of the goal all the time) however, players should start to understand the general attacking and defending roles of the three different lines (defenders, midfielders, and forwards). Every player should defend and attack. However, players should start to understand, “if we all go forward that leaves the goal wide-open so maybe one of us should stay back for now”.....