**Training Plans - Age Group Characteristics**

**U-8 – General Characteristics**

* Self-concept and body image are beginning to develop and are very fragile.  Easily bruised by adults; negative comments carry great weight.
* Great need for approval from adults.
* Dislike personal failure in front of peers.
* Ridicule from the coach in front of the group is very destructive.
* Attention span is improving.
* True playmates emerge with the inclination toward pairs activities.  They want social acceptance.  They want everyone to like them.  Inclined more toward small group activities.
* Still in motion – twitching, jerking, etc, are second nature physical movements.
* Beginning to develop some physical confidence.  Still into running, jumping, climbing and rolling.  They like to show individual skills.
* The child’s heart rate peaks sooner and takes longer to recover.  Children elevate their core temperature more quickly and take longer to cool down than adults.
* Lack a sense of pace – they go flat out. They will chase the ball until they drop.

**Coaching Objectives**

* Encourage dribbling with both feet, kicking the ball with both feet, and collecting the ball with both feet.
* Develop the role of the goalkeeper/sweeper.
  + how to use hands
  + coming out to narrow the angle of shots
  + moving out to edge of keeper area and beyond to clear using long kicks with either foot
  + using the hands to throw the ball back into play
* Rotate players into all roles.  Encourage cooperation by field players.  When to pass, when to dribble are decisions you want them to start making.
* Basic attacking shape, triangle and diamond, should be emphasized.  Emphasize creating width and depth in attack.
* Basic defending 1v1 should be stressed.  Team defending, getting back behind the ball, should be emphasized.
* Continued practice on throw-ins.
* Show how to attack and defend corners and free kicks.

**U-9 – General Characteristics**

* Ability to stay physically active is increasing, but still prone to heat injuries more than adults.
* Gross and small motor skills are more refined.
* They have the ability to sequence thought and actions.
* They are starting to think ahead.
* They have an increased sense of responsibility.  They will remember to bring their own water and ball, keep their jersey tucked in, carry own stuff.
* Beginning to recognize tactical concepts such as changing the direction of the ball or moving the ball forward along the outside and crossing the ball.
* Repetitive techniques are very important, but keep it dynamic.
* Continued positive reinforcement needed.
* Attention span is increasing.  You can give explanations that they can comprehend, but be brief.
* Peer pressure is very significant.
* Team identification is important.

**Coaching Objectives**

* Dribbling emphasis; using both feet, keeping the ball close, changing direction, lots of 1v1 activities.
* Working in pairs or threes; lots of 2v1, 3v1, 2v2, 3v2 activities.  Sharing the ball important.
* Continue to work on the triangle and diamond shapes.  Work on getting wide and forward when in possession of the ball.
* Show the concept of team support, wide on each side of the ball and long support.
* Team defending important.  Players need to be two way players.
* Continue to work on U-8 keeper techniques and concepts.
* Provide lots of activities that encourage players to shoot on goal.

**U-10 – General Characteristics**

* Ability to stay physically active is increasing, but still prone to heat injuries more than adults.
* Gross and small motor skills are more refined than 1 year ago.
* They have the ability to sequence thought and actions.
* They are starting to think ahead two and three moves.  Beginning to make better decisions as to when to tackle the ball and when to delay.
* They have an increased sense of responsibility.  They will remember to bring their own water and ball, keep their jersey tucked in, carry own stuff.
* More capable of recognizing tactical concepts such as changing the direction of the ball or moving the ball forward along the outside and crossing the ball.
* Repetitive techniques are very important, but keep it dynamic.
* Continued positive reinforcement needed.
* Attention span is increasing.  You can give explanations that they can comprehend but keep it brief.
* Becoming more serious about “their play”.
* Peer pressure is significant.

**Coaching Objectives**

* Continued emphasis on dribbling, passing (along the ground and lofted passes), collecting the ball both along the ground and out of the air (new).
* Develop an understanding of player with the ball, players supporting the ball, and the player(s) creating length in attack.
* Develop the concept of goal side and inside of the first defender.
* Develop the ability of 1v1 defending, delay and tackling.
* Begin the idea of the second or covering defender.
* Teach the offside rule.

**U-11 – General Characteristics**

* Need more flexible activities to help prevent injury as they are maturing.
* Overuse injuries, and high attrition rates come from a failure to stress skill development and learning enjoyment.
* Beginning to develop ability to sustain complex coordinated skill sequences.
* Beginning to think in abstract terms.
* They have an increased ability to acquire and apply knowledge.
* Players need a problem solving approach.  Soccer must present the ability to think creatively and solve problems while moving.
* More directional games to targets, zones or goals.
* Continue development of basic techniques with limited pressure but in a realistic challenging environment.
* Continue development of basic defending 1v1, delay, pressure on the ball, control, and restraint.
* Develop an understanding of how defending applies to all roles on the field.
* Work on second, covering defender.
* Basic skills in cooperative play (passing, control, shooting).
* Introduce heading and a variety of ways to control the ball out of the air.
* Continue work on team shape in attack, width and depth.
* It is important that players begin to learn the different roles: front players, midfielder, defender in light of the increased numbers on the field and the size of the field.
* Greater instruction of the offside rule.

**Coaching Objectives**

* Since there are now three lines of play (3 defenders, 2 midfielders, 3 forward or 3 defenders, 3 midfielders and 2 forwards) it is important to work team structure.  How do the three lines work together? Team shape; length and width.
* Continue working on individual techniques in a dynamic, problem solving manner; dribbling, collecting along the ground, passing (especially the lofted ball), shooting, collecting balls out of the air.  Start teaching heading.
* Teach the offside rule.
* Continue working on basic defending 1v1, delay pressure on the ball.  Get players to understand the second defender role, cover or support.
* Introduce the principles of play using the terms of:

- Defense: immediate pressure, delay, support, concentration, support

- Attack: width, depth, mobility, penetration, balance, improvisation

* Work on team play, all three lines moving together transitioning from attack to defense.

**U12 and Above - General Characteristics**

* Need more flexible activities to help prevent injury as they are maturing.
* Overuse injuries, and high attrition rates come from a failure to stress skill development and learning enjoyment.
* Beginning to develop ability to sustain complex coordinated skill sequences.
* Beginning to think in abstract terms.
* They have an increased ability to acquire and apply knowledge.
* Players need a problem solving approach.  Soccer must develop the ability to think creatively and solve problems while moving.
* More directional games to targets, zones or goals.
* Continue development of basic techniques with limited pressure but in a realistic challenging environment.
* Continue development of basic defending 1v1, delay, pressure on the ball, control, and restraint.
* Develop an understanding of how defending applies to all roles on the field.
* Work on second, covering defender.
* Basic skills in cooperative play (passing, control, shooting)
* Introduce heading and a variety of ways to control the ball out of the air.
* Continue work on team shape in attack, width and depth.
* It is important that players begin to learn the different roles: front players, midfielders, defenders, in light of the increased numbers on the field and the size of the field.
* Greater instruction of the offside rule.
* Self-esteem is dependent upon peer acceptance.  Players have a strong team bond.
* More emphasis can be placed on understanding the principles of play both in defense and attack because of the growing ability to solve problems and acquire knowledge.

**Coaching Objectives**

* Introduction to the 11 a-side game.
* Further develop the individual techniques of dribbling, passing, collecting the ball with a variety of surfaces, and heading.  There needs to be greater pressure in a challenging, motivating environment.
* Players need to be challenged to transition as a unit from attack to defense and vice versa.
* Further development of the roles on the field.
* Emphasize being a two way player, attacker and defender.
* It is now possible to work in larger groups of 6 or 7 to solve the problem.
* Teach the principles of defense; immediate pressure, delay, depth, balance, concentration, controlled restraint.
* Teach the principles of attack; depth, width, mobility, penetration, improvisation