



**DEVELOPMENTAL TRAINING  
COACHES MANUAL**

## TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT AREAS OF FOCUS 5-8 YEAR OLDS

The main areas of focus: movement education, starting the process of learning to master the ball, and developing a love for the game.

- Fundamental Motor Skills
- Agility, Balance, and Coordination
- Introduction to mastering the soccer ball
- Individual Technical Ability

**Warm up:** Activities will focus on body movement that can be done with or without the ball.

**Main Activities:** The main activities involve ball control and individual problem solving. Each session should progress to a 3v3 or 4v4 game to small goals.

Creating a joyful environment is mandatory. At these young ages, the primary goal is to make the player's experience with soccer so enjoyable that when he or she has a choice of activities, he or she choose to play soccer on his or her own.

### Some Thoughts About This Age

These children are still young. By the end of this phase, (around eight- years-old) children are beginning to be able to apply past experience to the present situations. For example, at a simple level, they can remember what they were shown or what they tried with the ball from last practice. At the same time, this ability is not present on a consistent basis. They are still not able to imagine consequences (i.e., if you do this, what will happen?). Let them learn through experience.

Do not attempt to replicate organizational schemes that you have seen older teams doing. Five, six, seven and eight year olds are not capable of playing anything that resembles organized soccer. For example, team concepts such as combination play or positions should not be introduced at this age. Do use older players as mentors and role models. Often the younger players will learn simply by watching how the older players move or by what they can do with the ball.

*Consider This:*

How can the coach help all his or her players to develop to their potential? First, help your weaker players to develop their confidence with the ball. At the same time, continue to challenge your stronger players to expand their creativity and confidence. Confidence is the key. The more time they spend during practice and games with the ball at their feet, the more comfortable they will become, the more confident they will become, the more they will look to get involved, and the more fun they will have with soccer. Remember that the level of skill and competence that an 8-year-old exhibits is no indication of the skill and competence that he or she will exhibit at 16 or 18 years of age. You cannot predict which 8-year-old will develop into a real player. Therefore, work to encourage all your players to be competent and comfortable with the ball. This will give all your players the same opportunity to reach their potential. Work during practice to move all your players forward at their own pace. Do not be concerned with match results. Be concerned that all your players want the ball at their feet and they want to score. If you can accomplish this, you have successfully allowed your group to grow as soccer players. During practice, you can add more balls/goals during games to give kids more chances with the ball. You can also emphasize certain themes for the players to focus on, such as getting involved, attacking the goal, taking chances, and then spend the length of the games reinforcing these points. This approach will give your players the green light to experiment and be creative – qualities that, unfortunately at the younger ages, are often discouraged on game day, in the name of being safe and winning.

#### **(U6) - Characteristics of Soccer Players at this Age**

- Short attention span
- Can attend to only one problem at a time
- May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- May or may not understand or remember: what lines mean on the field: what team they are on; what goal they are going for. We need to be patient and laugh with them if they get “lost” on the field.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Give praise often. Give “hints,” don’t criticize.
- Need generous praise and to play without pressure. Prefer “parallel play” (will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates), thus a 3 against 3 game is, in reality, a 1 against 5 game because they all want the ball at the same time.
- Very individually oriented (me, mine, my)

- Constantly in motion, but, with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly.
- Development for boys and girls are quite similar.
- Physical coordination is limited. Eye-hand and eye-foot coordination is not developed. Need to explore qualities of a rolling ball.
- Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc.
- Catching or throwing skills not developed
- Probably can't balance on their feet without falling over.
- Practice should be built entirely around 'fun' games
- Lots of touches and repetitions
- Make sure every child has success

### Things to expect:

Some coaches say that the U6 players are the most difficult to coach because of their attention span. While that may be true it can also be the most rewarding time a coach will experience. These players are the future of soccer and the things they say and do will just make you laugh. Some other things that we can expect when working with these players are:

- Expect bathroom breaks
- Expect them to wander off if they aren't involved.
- They may be shy and not willing to participate.
- They respond better to laughter and fun than they do yelling and drills.
- Be to the point and use simple terms because they get confused easily.

### (U8) - Characteristics of Soccer Players at this Age

- Attention span is not at a "competitive" stage
- Inclined towards small group activities

- Easily bruised psychologically. They will remember negative comments for a long time. Shout praise. Give “hints”.
- They want everybody to like them
- They are developing physical confidence.
- Starting to imitate older players or professional players.
- Lack a sense of pace. Some go flat out until they drop while others need encouragement to move.
- Skeletal system is growing rapidly. Often results in an apparent lack of coordination.
- Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. Make sure they get plenty of water breaks.
- Limited understand of personal evaluation. They need to be encouraged constantly, and asked, “Now, can you do this?”
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play, and remembering what goal they are scoring on. But sometimes they will still forget.

### **Things to expect**

Six, seven and eight year old players are a bit more focused than the U6 players and will start to have a good understanding of what it means to play a game. They are also starting to cooperate more with their teammates. They will not recognize that they have teammates by looking to pass during their games. Often they will repeat the phrase “I can’t do that” but then quickly run to you to show you that they can. Players will also spend a lot of time on the ground either by bumping into other players or tripping on their own, but will usually pick themselves back up and get back in the game. At this age group some of the girls may even be tougher than the boys.

### **Best Qualities of a Coach for developmental-aged players**

Patience, good humor, and a willingness to see the world through the eyes of a child. Also, the ability to speak their language and accept that the child’s play will not always look like

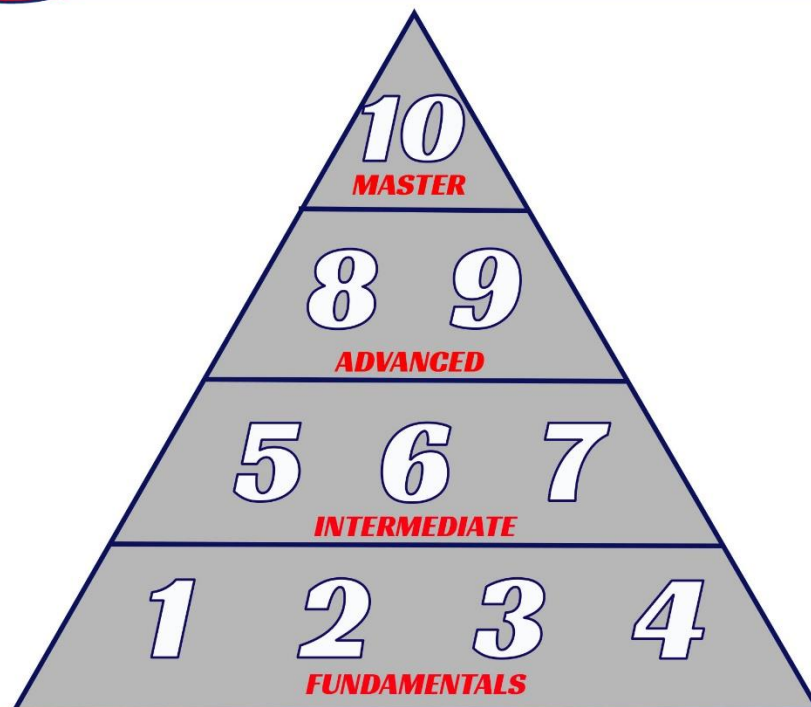
soccer at times. Soccer is still all about having fun with the ball and encouraging the children to want to have the ball at their feet. This coach must clearly understand the capabilities and limitations of their players and appreciate the power of learning by watching. He or she must have the ability to demonstrate or to use other players to demonstrate. Most of all, he or she should care about the safety and well-being of each player as if they were their own child. Be passionate about what you are doing and the players will follow.

### **4v4 Match Recommendations**

- Field 25-35 yards (length) and 15-25 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 4 feet (height) x 6 feet (width)
- 4v4 (no goalkeepers)
- 4 quarters max
- No more than 6 minute quarters
- 5 minute breaks between quarters
- Kick offs, free kicks, throw-ins, goal kicks and corner kicks are used to start or restart play
- Kick-ins and/or dribble-ins are also acceptable
- If used, all free kicks are indirect
- No offside



# DEVELOPMENTAL BALL MASTERY SKILLS PYRAMID



## Fundamentals

**1. Laces Dribble** - With the toes pointing down towards the ground push the ball forward with the laces, knee bent over the ball on contact. After each touch step through with the opposite foot. One touch per step.

**2. Foundations (Shuffles)** - using the inside of both feet push the ball from one foot to the other. In place at first then moving forward and backwards when comfortable.

**3. Toe Taps Forward** - Using the toe end of the sole, tap the top of the ball- alternate left and right feet. In place at first, with a slow rhythm then hopping and picking up speed. Once comfortable, attempt to move forwards.

**4. Toe Taps Backward** - Same technique as toe taps forward but moving backward now.

## Intermediate

**5. Drag Back Turn (Pull Back)** - Dribble forward, stop the momentum of the ball by reaching forward with one foot placing the sole of the foot on top of the ball, then drag or roll the ball back down the side of the body away from the defender and accelerate into a dribble.

**6. Step-On Turn (Hook Turn)** - Dribble forward, place the sole of one foot on the ball to stop momentum, and step beyond the ball with both feet leaving the ball, turning to face the ball and dribble back. Repeat several times using both feet.

**7. Ball Rolls & Brushes** - Using the inside, outside and sole of the foot, roll the ball side to side, backwards and forwards, keeping in contact with the ball at all times. Progress to dribbling the soccer ball with just the sole of your foot by brushing the ball across your standing leg or plant foot.

## Advanced & Master

**8. Inside Cut** - Dribble forward, stop forward momentum of the ball by reaching forward with the inside of the foot and cutting or chopping the ball back down the inside of the body (away from the defender) in one movement and accelerate into a dribble.

**9. Outside Cut** - Dribble forward, stop forward momentum of the ball by reaching forward with the outside of one foot and cutting the ball back to the outside of the body in one movement and accelerate into a dribble.

**10. Cruyff** - Dribble forward, step beyond the ball with your plant foot, then stop forward momentum of the ball by reaching forward with the inside of the foot, and dragging or chopping the ball behind your plant foot, then turn away from the defender and accelerate into a dribble.

*By the time players reach the U9 age group, they should have a good understanding of and be able to perform each of these skills.*