

ANSWERS TO COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Should we concentrate on passing or dribbling at U-6?

The game at the U-6 level is characterized by awkward, rudimentary attempts at dribbling

mixed with enthusiastic kicking of the ball in the general direction of the opponent's goal. Do not confuse kicking with passing. Passing implies an intention by a player to direct the ball accurately towards a team mate, it implies decision making. Kicking means using the feet to propel the ball in any old direction. You will not see too much, if any, passing in an U-6 game. Passing is simply beyond the ability of U-6 players. In terms of level of difficulty, kicking is the easiest to learn, dribbling is next and passing is the hardest to master for young players.

You might argue that passing should be easier than dribbling and besides, since passing is the essence of team play, it should be taught first. But what is dribbling? Dribbling is essentially passing the ball to oneself. If a player cannot pass the ball accurately to himself/herself, how is he/she expected to pass the ball to teammates? Remember not to confuse kicking with passing.

How do we handle a timid player who doesn't go after the ball?

Once again, you need to allow for differences in maturity among your players. Not every child is naturally aggressive and assertive. In the practical section of this course we suggest having each parent work with his/her child in a one-on-one interaction under the supervision of the coach. This is especially useful at the beginning of the season when players are being exposed to the game for the first time and are still getting to know the coach.

One-versus-one games where the coach is careful to match players of equal ability should help players overcome their hesitation to challenge for the ball. Every time a player goes after the ball he/she needs to receive praise for the attempt regardless of the eventual outcome.

How do we handle a player who dominates the game?

Many teams have one or two players who are physically or technically more advanced than the others. These players usually score most of the goals. As a coach, you don't want to curb the player's progress or 'punish' him/her for being talented by giving him/her less playing time or shouting at him/her to score less goals and pass to teammates. However, you can cultivate leadership qualities in your best player by asking him/her to help the weaker players. Players enjoy scoring goals and receiving the accompanying adulation. Try to make your best player understand that if he/she can pass the ball to teammates, they could score too and enjoy the game as much.

Your practice sessions should be challenging enough for your best players. For example, use activities which incorporate a combination of techniques such as dribbling and passing or dribbling and shooting, or using the weaker foot.

During games, you could coordinate your player shifts with the opponent's coach to ensure that each team's best players are on the field at the same time.

3v3 Is not real soccer. I want my child to play regular soccer.

In the words of Tony Waiters, we need to see the game through the children's eyes. Five year olds do not have the technical, physical or mental maturity to play the adult version of the game. The beauty and essence of soccer does not depend on the field dimensions or the number of participants. Soccer is about the challenge of controlling and manipulating a ball under pressure, beating an opponent, passing to teammates and scoring a goal. These elements are present in 3v3 soccer just as they are in the 11 vs 11 game.

As a rule of thumb, if a player cannot pass accurately from one side of the field to the other, or, worse still, cannot even reach the other side, then the field is too wide. If a player spends all his/her energy chasing the ball and has little energy left to play with the ball, then the field is too big. After all, we are not trying to develop marathon runners but skillful ball players. The size of the field is determined by the technical and physical range of the players. As they grow, players can graduate to progressively bigger fields with more participants.

I want my players to learn how to play positions.

Before a player can learn to play specific positions he/she needs to acquire the basic technical skills of dribbling, passing, controlling and shooting. Trying to teach positions to very young players is akin to teaching trigonometry to a grade 1 class. Let's be realistic. It's a great accomplishment just to get your 4 or 5 year old to chase the ball and kick-dribble it towards the opponent's goal. The 3v3 game allows the players many opportunities to do just that.

Five year olds should be allowed and even encouraged to swarm around the ball. The swarm will disappear by itself when players learn to control and pass accurately under pressure. You cannot eliminate the swarm before its time. The 3v3 game does not eliminate the swarm. It just reduces it to a more manageable size.

Where are we going to find more coaches to accommodate all the teams.

Leagues which have adopted 3v3 soccer have found that it is easier to enlist parents into the coaching ranks since managing smaller squads is less intimidating to a beginner coach. The absence of any tactical or positional aspects in 3v3 soccer makes the task of coaching less daunting to a rookie coach. In fact, the larger base of parent/coaches at the U-6 level creates a reservoir of coaches for the future.

We do not have enough field space

The 3v3 game actually alleviates the field space problem. A 3v3 field can be as small as 15 by 20 yards. Most fields currently used for U-6 play can be split into 3 or 4 fields for 3v3. Many areas previously deemed too small to accommodate a soccer field can now be utilized.

Practice sessions at the U-6 level should revolve mainly around dribbling activities interspersed with the occasional passing activity.

And during games,

ENCOURAGE your players to dribble,
REMINDE them to sometimes try to pass,
DO NOT GET UPSET at them if they don't pass (they simply cannot), and
EXPECT to see a whole lot of kicking.

How do we handle a player who refuses to participate?

There is no magic formula or one definitive method to get a player to join in an activity. Many four and five year olds are socially, mentally and physically not mature enough for a complex team sport such as soccer, and yet, are thrust into organized soccer by their well meaning parents. Some players who are shy or timid might be overwhelmed by the new, unfamiliar environment of a soccer team practice. They will need time and your patience to adjust and enjoy the new experience. The onus is on you, the coach, to try and "break the ice" between yourself and the reluctant player.

Think back to what you, as a parent, had to do to coax your own child when he/she resisted such things as feeding, bathing, going to bed, etc. You made funny faces and acted like a clown. You gained their trust with soothing, non-threatening reassurances, and when that didn't work, you promised them ice cream

The same approach might be needed here. But remember, if your practices are boring, complicated and intimidating, you will have problems convincing some players to participate. However, if your practices are fun and goofy, the players will want to participate. Even the most shy five year old's resistance will eventually break if she sees her teammates merrily engaged in a fun activity full of laughter and playfulness.

To summarize,

BE PATIENT with reluctant players
REASSURE your player and give him/her PERSONAL attention
ALLOW players to sit out and join at their own time and pace
MAKE SURE your practices are FUN
TALK to the player's parents about the situation and ENLIST their help. They know their child better than you do and you are not a child psychologist
PRAISE the player for joining the activity

PRACTICAL

A. ACTIVITIES USING PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION

The trend in North America is to place ever younger players in organized sports. Generally speaking, pre-schoolers do not fully understand and accept the concept of cooperation, structure and team work. Pre-schoolers are also at the very early stage of physical coordination and motor skills development. Mother nature would probably cringe at the sight of 4 year olds being plunged into organized soccer.

Obviously, putting 4 and 5 year olds, who lack cooperative and motor skills, into a team sport such as soccer which requires high level physical coordination presents quite a challenge. In fact, even the simplest version of the small-sided soccer programs in existence today, the 3 v 3 game, is too complicated for your average 4 year old.

However, since we grudgingly accept that U-6 soccer is here to stay, we need to at least gear the program to the very special needs of the 4 and 5 year olds. Our recommendation is to place them in a "fun program" that doesn't necessarily focus exclusively on soccer. The program should include fun games, simple relays and "simon says" type of activities which work on total body coordination and are not just soccer specific. On practice days, only part of the time should be devoted to real soccer such as 3 v 3.

Furthermore, these activities should emphasize individual attention via one-on-one interaction between a player and an older person, be it a parent, an older sibling, or a coach. Coaches are always reminded that the ideal player-to-ball ratio is 1 to 1. In the case of 4 year olds, 1 to 1 is also the ideal player-to-coach ratio.

We feel that this "interactive soccer" approach should be integrated into the 3 v 3 program for U-6. The following page contains a few ideas on "interactive one-on-one" soccer activities. We are sure you could conjure some activities yourself as the only limit is your own imagination.

These activities can also be used as the warm-up portion of your practice. Please remember:

- other fun, none soccer related activities can and should be included. There is nothing wrong with playing tag or ring-around-the-roses or going to the playground swings during practice time.
- It's not a good idea to mix 4 year olds with 6 year olds. The 6 year olds will generally be a lot more mature. Each needs a different program.
- Don't force soccer down their throat. Be receptive to their moods, preferences, and short attention span.
- ABOVE ALL, DON'T COMPARE YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS TO OTHERS. EACH CHILD MATURES AT HIS/HER OWN PACE. BE PATIENT AND ENJOY THEM AS THEY ARE.

PRACTICAL

B. GROUP GAMES

The following games are appropriate for U-6 players. The emphasis is on thought provoking activities as opposed to drills. Some of the activities can be used as a warm-up and are denoted as such:

The U-6 coach needs to pick one or two warm-up activities plus two or three other activities for each practice session. This approach will easily fill a 60 minute practice while providing the players with fun and variety.

Sample Practice Plans:

Plan 1:	(when parents are available to help)	<u>Duration</u>
	Warm-up	
	Dribble-round-the cone (see page 24)	10 min.
	Kick Back (see page 24)	10 min.
	<i>Main activities</i>	
	Parents vs Kids (see page 28)	10 min.
	Dribble Through Tunnel (see page 29)	10 min.
	Four Goal Game (see page 33)	10 min.
	Scrimmage (3v3)	10 min.
Plan 2:	(when parents are not available) <i>Warm- Up</i>	
	House Dribble (see page 26)	10 min.
	King of the Balls (see page 30)	10 min.
	<i>Main Activities</i>	
	Pirate (see page 31)	10 min.
	Storm the Castle (see page 32)	10 min.
	Scrimmage (3v3)	10 min.

The accompanying booklet titled "Assistant Coach Series U6 & US Activity Aids for the Parent/Coach" contains many other activities for you to choose and pick.

Good luck and have fun!

Small-Sided Games: Less is More

TEN: More touches of the ball increases skill development.

REASONS: More open space, fewer numbers, less bunching. Enhanced tactical awareness. The game is less complicated and easier to understand.

WHY: More “fun“ and personal enjoyment; due to small fields and simplified rules.

YOUR: More playing time. Encourages maximum individual participation.

CHILD: More individual involvement improves fitness.

WILL: More responsibility; every child greater opportunities to score, builds confidence.

ENJOY: More freedom of expression; there are no positions, children will find their own position. A child can be a forward one minute, a defender the next. Children will migrate to areas of the field where they feel comfortable. We'll find out, slowly, what their best position is.

SMALL: More children will play. Five four-a-side fields can fit inside a full sized field. This allows for 40 youngsters to play at the same time instead of 22.

SIDED: More child-centered not coach controlled.

GAMES: More experience in all phases of the game. Everyone has to do everything. The emphasis is on PLAYER DEVELOPMENT.