

In-Town Soccer

Pre-K Coach Information Package



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Coach Guidelines and Principles

Philosophy

Our philosophy in training soccer players is threefold: 1) Make it fun – make activities into games instead of drills. Use lots of positive reinforcement in practice sessions. 2) Let the ball teach the game – focus on maximizing the amount of time each player is touching the ball and learning by doing 3) Keep it simple. Have a plan and a focus for each practice. Start with a challenge they can meet and build on success!

Parent Communication and Roles

It's important to make sure parents understand what you are trying to accomplish and how you will be going about it. So, explain the objectives to the parents at the beginning of the season and get agreement to the basic rules:

- Each Pre-K group of players is divided into “teams” for the purpose of making our youngest players more comfortable with one adult. They are not put into teams so that the time maybe spent having them scrimmage each other. It’s all about touches on the ball and skill-based games afford every player more touches. It’s ok to scrimmage at the end of the session, but no more than 10 minutes.
- You will need extra help to chase balls, tie shoes, and wipe noses to allow you to move among the kids to encourage them to do what you instructed. Encourage parents to help with the session. Ideally, you will have at most two or three kids per parent/coach.
- Remind parents to bring water.
- Have parents be sure kids go to the bathroom just before leaving the house.

Player Development Skills for the Under 6 player

The under six player should develop the following target skills:

- Dribbling a ball. Basic control, change of direction, speed is less important.
- Passing to and receiving from a partner. Encourage the use of both feet for passing and received. This gets harder to learn as they get older!
- Shooting into a goal and scoring. It’s good practice, and they love it!

In support of CCYS U6 player development, Massachusetts Youth Soccer (www.mayouthsoccer.org), offers the following description for U6 players.

Technical Development of 6 - 8 Year Olds

Fun, dribbling, and motor development (running, skipping, galloping, turning, jumping) should be the central soccer themes in U6 practices. In order to become comfortable on the ball, U6 and U8 players need to touch the ball as often as possible. The U8 player is now ready to continue the development of dribbling skills, and begin passing and shooting; however, maximizing touches on the ball while having fun is still the focus from a technical standpoint. As we have said repeatedly in this manual, players tell us they play soccer in order to have fun! What we must remember is that one of the main components of fun, according to young players, is seeing themselves improve at something. For this reason, helping them see their technical improvement when they make improvements and praising them for it is vital. It is important that each player be shown their own improvement and that we do not compare all players to the “best” player. This will be discussed further in this manual under “Slanty Line Concept”.

We cannot stress enough that tactical instruction should be kept to a minimum at these ages. Below are recommended guidelines for you to follow in your work with these young players.

Age Group U-6

- **Skill Priorities**
- **Dribble with all sides of both feet**
- **Dribble out of trouble**
- **Dribble past someone**
- **Soft first touch**

Three Golden Rules for practice sessions

Rule #1: Have fun.

The following guidelines help to insure that both adults and children have fun:

- Have one ball for each child and one for yourself.
- Avoid lines - Maximize touches on the ball per player in practice.
- You have maybe ten seconds to make your point when speaking.
- Pay particular attention to games that give all players lots of ball touches.

Rule #2: Plan ahead.

Plan the session in advance.

- What games you will play – look at the Mass Youth Soccer Website, or chose your own from this document.
- Who is bringing the popsicles for afterwards!

Rule #3: Start short.

Extend the length of the session as you see the kids can stay interested.

The Pre-K session should be 30 minutes – 45 minutes long. Start short at the beginning of the season then increase the length as the kids become familiar with your routines. Try to follow routines they're used to from any Pre-K experiences. If they typically do a "big circle" at the beginning of their Pre-K session, you can mimic that.

Organizing the Session

Mass Youth Soccer’s Website offers a practice plan for every age group. They can be found at:

http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/coach%27s_corner.aspx

There is an additional list of games that are age appropriate following this section.

As coaches, you can determine the appropriate time to introduce small-sided games. The time for this maybe after the couple of weeks, or not at all. If a small-sided game is held, it should be 3 v 3 and run for about five minutes. So, if you have 24 kids, you’ll have 4 games going. Encourage the parents to be silent or, at best, slightly demonstrative as the kids play. Mostly they should just stand and smile. Send the kids home smiling!

Example:

Welcome and warm up games	3 minutes
Games (four Games, five to seven minutes each)	20-25 minutes
3 v 3 games (if appropriate – or 1 to 2 additional Games)	10-15 minutes
Warm down	3 - 5 minutes
Total	35 – 40 minutes

An example for a session

- Welcome all the players and the coach starts with one or two games:
 - “Simon Says” and “Quick Feet”/”Tick Tock”
- Water break and break up into color groups and start the previously prepared Games:
 - Game 1 – Red Light / Green Light Game 3 – Body Parts
 - Game 2 – Sharks and Minnows Game 4 – Wickets
- Water break and coaches set up pugg goals for 3 v. 3
- Warm down: “Moving Goal”

Another example for a session

- Welcome – all the players and the coach starts with one or two warm up type games:
 - “Simon Says” and “Quick Feet”/”Tick Tock” work well.
- Water break and break up into color groups and start the previously prepared Games:
 - Game1 – Relay Races Game 3 – Body Parts
 - Game 2 – Monkey in the Middle Game 4 – Kick Out
- Water break and coaches set up pugg goals for 3V3.
- Warm down: “Camp Town Races”

An example for a more advanced session

- Welcome - the coach starts with one or two games:
 "Free Dribble in an area marked by cones".
- Water break and break up into color groups and start the previously prepared Games:
 Game 1 – Red Light / Green Light Game 3 = Marbles
 Game 2 – Knockout Game 4 – Give and Go
- Water break and coaches set up pugg goals for 3V3.
- Warm down: "Shadow" or "Tag"

BASIC FUN GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Red Light Green Light

Pre-k kids love red-light green-light especially if you turn it into "Cars" red light, green light, yellow light, accident (love wiping out), turbo.

Knock' Em Down

Even MORE popular than Red Light/Green Light. Balance dinosaurs (any toy will do) on a row of cones. The kids stand back several yards (behind a cone) and try to knock the dinosaurs off the cones by hitting the cones with their balls. Work on how to do controlled kick/pass with inside of foot (walk like a duck with this). They like the challenge of this.

Hospital Tag

Players dribble the ball, if coach touches you then you must hold that part while continuing to dribble until you go to "hospital" and an assistant coach heals the player.

Simon Says

Good game for the "big circle" at the beginning or any small group. Each child has a ball. Coach says, "Simon says.... Kiss the ball with your right foot." Or, "Simon says... touch the ball with your nose." Have fun with it.

Egg Hunt

Have more balls than players. Have the players line-up across one end of the field. Take their balls and spread them out around the field, these are the eggs. At the other end of the field is a goal called the "basket". Blow the whistle and turn them loose. The object of the game is to get all the "eggs" in the basket as quickly as possible. They are all on the same team, and aren't allowed to take a ball away from another player. Time them to see how fast they can accomplish the task.

The kids really like this game. The more balls (eggs) the better. You should see them score, and turn right around and go back for more balls.

Marbles

Split your team into two groups and line them up behind two opposing lines. Each player should have a ball. Place an unusual color (or size) ball in the middle. This is the marble (a #2 ball works well). Have them try to move the marble across the other team's line by striking it with a ball. After the game starts, don't require them to use their own ball, they are free to use any other ball they can find.

At first the players may get really excited and kick the marble. If this happens, call time-out and put it back.

Variation: eliminate the teams and play it in a circle. The game is over when the ball exits the circle.

Quick Feet

Ask the players to play the ball back and forth from foot to foot, standing still.

- “Hey, everybody. Bend your knees a little. Bounce on your feet.”

Body Parts

Ask the players to dribble around an area and to stop their ball instantly with whatever body part you call out. As they dribble, you call out “bottom of left foot,” “elbow,” etc. When everyone has stopped, you say, “dribble again.” Pause for a few seconds between each command. You can also call out, “sit on you ball.”

Tag...without a ball

Ask all the kids to put their ball outside a space made of cones. Ask one of them to hold a pinnie. That person is “it.” When she or he tags someone, the vest is handed on to the next person who is “it.” No “backsides.”

Moving Target

In a space defined by cones, you (the coach) dribble a ball around slowly. All the kids try to catch up with you and hit your ball with their ball. You can challenge them by moving faster or slower, changing direction, making the space between the four cones larger or smaller, etc.

Moving Goal

You (the coach) jog and shuffle sideways slowly around, and occasionally stop to make a “goal” by spreading your feet wide apart. The kids dribble around and follow you and, in the few moments you stop and make a goal before jogging off, they try to score by knocking the ball between your legs.

Lots of Cones

Place a large number of cones or discs or extra balls or shirts or anything else safe and soft (this could include stuffed animals!) around an area. Then, say to the players, “can you dribble your ball all around this area and NOT let it touch any of these things?” And, “Now, dribble your ball around this area and TRY to hit as many of the cones (etc.) as possible. You can challenge them by saying, “who can hit four or five or six or ten objects first.”

Another variation on this is to put toy dinosaurs or other toys on top of cones and see who can collect the most by knocking over the cones with their ball.

Monkey in the Middle

All players form a circle and choose someone (the “Monkey”) to be in its center. The players forming the circle pass one ball among them while the person in the center tries to gain control of the ball. When this happens, the person in the circle who last touched the ball goes to the center. Some level of competitiveness develops but never on an individual basis and the “losers” quickly get a chance to redeem themselves.

Wickets

Half the players hold their ball in their hands and spread their legs to form a “wicket.”

Spread them over an area about 15 yards square, marked by cones. The other half of the players dribble around pushing their balls through the “wickets” formed by other players’ legs. Players keep their own “score” as they push their ball through successive wickets. After 30 seconds or 60 seconds, the players change roles.

Let the players dribble 3 or 4 times. After each round, ask, “who got more than last time.” Or, determine who got the most “wickets” and set that as a target for the next round.

If the players are having trouble counting, just call out to them when “time is up.” They’ll enjoy the activity no matter how many wickets they dribble through.

Free Dribbling in Small Area Marked by Cones

Players dribble their ball around, exploring the space, taking care not to bump into other players or to lose control of their ball. Make some requests as players dribble:

- Use only the bottom of your feet.
- Use only your heels.
- Use only your left foot.
- Use only your right foot.

You could also have the players dribble among one another by bending over and using their hands to push the ball around, just for fun.

The number of ball touches which a player accumulates at practice is critically important. Get the players involved right away with lots of touches.

Shadow

The players pair up. One of them starts to dribble and the other tries to dribble right behind him or her, staying as close as possible. Ask the dribbler to keep changing directions.. After 30 seconds, the players change roles.

This could also be made into a game of tag.

Relay Races

Groups of three on a line. One player dribbles out 10 yards, around a cone and back and steps on the ball. The second player takes off and so forth. The three players do this two or three times, racing with other groups.

Three vs. Three

Small sided game in a defined square. Use pugs or cones for goals. Depending on the kids, games should last roughly three minutes before you change them to another activity.

For a variation, use three goals to make a “triangle” field. Anybody can score in the third goal.

More Advanced Activities and Games

Knock Out

Use a few cones to make a 10 to 15 yard square. Have all players with ball inside area. Tell them to try and kick each other's ball out, but to keep their ball in. If their ball is kicked out, they must sprint after it and bring it back inside as quickly as possible. Stop them, ask them to count how many times they can kick someone else's ball out. Start up again. Stop and ask who had more than 2,4,.... Now ask them to count how many times their ball is kicked out. Start and stop again, forget to ask for total.

Vary this by time. Set shorter and shorter time limits as the players learn the game and develop their skill at this game. For example, "let's see how many balls we can kick out in 15 seconds." Or, "let's see how many seconds it takes for us to kick all the balls out."

Another game is to give 1/2 the players balls and tell the others to take a ball away and try to keep it. Players with a ball after 1 minute win. Repeat 2 or 3 times.

Arrange them in pairs. If you have an odd number, have one play with you. Play 1v1 keep away for 1 minute. Player in possession after 1 minute is winner. Rearrange the pairs and go again for a total of 3 or 4 times.

Ice Monster

Mark off an area for the game to be played and select one kid to be the "Monster". Have the rest of the kids (each with a ball) dribble around within the area. The "Ice Monster" attempts to touch each player's ball, at which point that player "freezes" with their foot on the ball. If a player's ball goes out of bounds, they also freeze. The last remaining unfrozen player gets to be the new Ice Monster for the next round.

Cops and Robbers

Have the kids (each with a ball) line up on one side of the field. These guys are the "Robbers". Have two more kids (the Cops) facing the Robbers somewhere near halfway to the other side. The object is for the Robbers to dribble to the other side without having a Cop tackle the ball away. If a robber loses his ball to a cop, he goes to jail (designate a small area off to the side or use a Goal structure.) Have the Robbers repeat the crossings until there are only 2 left. Make these guys the new cops, pull everyone out of jail and start over.

Pirate (or Monster)

A keep-away game. Coaching points: concentrate on the player's close dribbling and screening techniques. Everybody inside a circle (center circle is fine) with a ball. One player without a ball is the Pirate. Everybody starts dribbling around. The Pirate player tries to steal a ball from any player and pass it out of the circle - now, the two players are Pirates and go after the others.....then three, then four. Finally only one player is left with a ball. He/she becomes the Pirate the next game.

Variation: Just like above except the "IT" player has a ball and tries to roll/throw it at the other player's and knock their ball out of the circle.

Kick out

Everyone dribbles and shields their ball within a circle while trying to kick everyone else's ball out, and simultaneously to protect their own. You can't kick someone else's ball out if your ball isn't in the circle. If your ball goes out you have to leave the circle it gets down to two kids in a duel. The coach may participate to keep the game from becoming too competitive, as the ones eliminated early may feel bad.

Shark and minnows (note: some coaches have reported that Pre-K kids don't like this very much)

Teaches kids with the ball to shield it from an opponent and teaches kids without the ball how to take it away from an opponent. Use pylons to create a 15-yard square. One player, the shark, starts outside the square without a ball. All other players, the minnows, start inside the square with a ball. When the coach yells, "Shark's getting hungry!" the shark starts running around the outside of the square and the fish start dribbling around inside the square. When the coach yells, "Shark attack!" the shark enters the square and has 30 seconds to send as many balls as possible outside the square. When a ball leaves the square for any reason, the corresponding fish must leave the square and stay out until the coach gives the

"Stop!" command at the end of the 30 seconds. A fish has done well if still alive. The shark has done well if few fish survived. Choose a new shark and play another round until every player has been the shark once.

Camp Town Races

Line up all the players on one end of the field. They each have a ball. On the whistle, they all dribble to opposite end, shoot ball into goal, get ball out of goal, and run back and finish with a shot on opposite goal. The first one to finish is the winner. Ask them "Who is going to win the race?" They all learn to say "The player who can dribble it the straightest!" A variation is to start half at one end and half on the other. This really teaches them to try to do it fast while maintaining possession. This drill really helps players deal with the balls that pop out of the bunch.

Four Squares

Set up four squares with cones, about 15 – 20 yards apart. (Closer is OK, depending on the size and speed of the players.) Split your players into four groups and send a group to each square. Players then dribble from square to square, all at the same time. There are many alternatives:

- Each group dribbles to the next square and stops there (all running in the same direction!)
- Each group passes through the next square and stops at the second square.
- Groups race around, trying to be the first to have everyone back at the square from which they started.
- Three groups run in one direction, one group runs in the other, all the way around and back to the starting square.
- Players go from square to square, stopping at each square for a new challenge. You could ask them, in the area of a square, before they go to the next square, to
 - ❖ Kick the ball in a tight circle
 - ❖ Kick the ball up and catch it in their hands
 - ❖ Play the ball back and forth between their feet 10 times.

Numbers

The exercise is good for 1 vs 1 dribbling skills. It is especially good on a hot day as the kids defending can rest a bit. Divide the kids into 2 groups. If you have ten kids, say, assign each kid a number between one and five. So each team has a number one, a number two, etc. Try to make sure the kids with the same number are evenly matched. Set up two very wide "goals" with pylons. Spread the five kids on each side across each goal line. Call out one or more numbers, and those kids come out to play 1 vs 1, 2 vs 2, etc. and the rest of the kids stay spread across the goal line as defenders. Throw a ball from the sideline into the center and let them play it until a goal is scored, the defenders stop it, or it goes out of bounds.

Variation: Colors. Use two each of different colored pinnies, armbands, or stickers to place on shirts, as younger kids will have trouble remembering numbers.

Give and go

This one is good for getting the kids to move after they make a pass. It is appropriate for kids a little older, who pass the ball but like to stop and really admire their better passes. Everyone spaces themselves around the center circle. Give the ball to one person and they call out someone's name and pass to them. They then run to the receiver's position in the circle. The receiver upon hearing their name called steps forward to receive the pass and yells "I got it!" The sequence is then repeated. Several things are accomplished besides getting them used to movement. The "I got it!" yell addresses the problem of nobody playing the ball in a game because they thought the other was going to play it. We all learn each other's names quickly.

Invariably, someone is always left out so start a countdown from 10 to 0 and they have to figure out who has been left out (the left out person should be quiet). They start yelling among themselves to figure out who it is and this fosters communication on the field. (It's pretty humorous too).

After a few practices, they get it down so they look pretty sharp. Then you toss in another ball. They love it! Now they have to think a bit because people are moving and two are busy with the other ball.

Teach the parents

During the last practice of the season have a scrimmage between the parents and the players (with the coaches helping the players). This serves a couple of purposes. The kids love this game. They get a chance to show their parents what they can do and they enjoy beating their parents. (The parents never win, the coaches make sure of that....) Also, since many of the parents have never played soccer it shows them how difficult the game really is. The hope is that a parent may now think twice before "yelling" at a child for missing and "easy" shot in a game. Everybody seems to enjoy this scrimmage.

Dribbling

Rules

- Every player with a ball
- Every player must keep moving and not run into anyone else.
- When coach says "one" they must stop and put their right foot on the ball (never mind that most cannot yet tell right from left just tell the lefties to use their other right foot).

Ask what part of your foot you should use when dribbling, get lots of answers. Correct one is all parts (trick question). Show how to pull ball back with sole of foot. Ask them to try it after you say start. When they are dribbling around, say "ONE"; once they are all stopped, tell them that now when you say "TWO" they are to stop and sit on the ball. "START", "TWO", Now show some other dribbling technique, for instance cutting the ball across with the inside of the foot. "START", "ONE", Tell them to move faster and to keep their heads up. "START", "TWO". If they did go faster, they probably had some collisions. Ask them how to avoid them. (Right answer is just like cars on Route 1, go slower in traffic and speed up when no one is around and always pay attention to what the other drivers are doing.)

Tell them when you say "THREE" to stop and put their nose on the ball. "START", "THREE", START, encourage them to find space on the field, help them say "there's space over here", "now it's over in the other corner". etc. Do several of the stops and starts to get them a little silly and maybe introduce another dribbling move. Other things „Four¾ - elbow, „FIVE¾-left ear, etc.