



**U5 & U6 Coaching Information  
&  
Games and Activities**

# **Training the U6 Player**

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## **SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS AGE:**

5 and 6 year olds are too young to be involved in any structured, organized soccer program. At most, they should be involved in fun activities that encourage them to explore their physical abilities, while including a ball with which to play. The soccer ball should be considered a toy. Make sure these are activity-based games and there should be no activities where players wait in lines to perform.

Although sometimes we may mistake 5-6 year-olds for little adults, they are clearly not little adults. They have many years of childhood and development to enjoy before they are able to look at life in a similar fashion to adults. The reason for this is that they need time to intellectually, emotionally, and physically develop. Although we do live in the same world, the adults and children experience is quite different. Always treat children with care, patience and give plenty of encouragement.

In order to fully understand these wonderful children and to make training sessions run as smoothly and happily as possible, it is extremely important for us to understand the following characteristics about U6 children.

## **Typical Characteristics of U6 Players**

- **Focused on themselves** - reality to them is solely based on what they see and feel
- **Little concern for team activities** – individually-oriented.
- **Enjoy playing, not watching** - make sure every player has a ball in training so they are always playing. They feel no enjoyment from watching others play when they could be playing too.
- **Short attention span** - on average 15 seconds for listening, 10-15 minutes when engaged in a task. Keep activities short and simple, keep lectures to a minimum and make your directions clear, concise and to the point.
- **Typically have 2 speeds** - extremely fast and stopped. They're constantly in motion. No sense of pace; they will often run until they drop.
- **Heating and cooling systems are less efficient than adults** - give frequent water breaks (every 8-10 minutes) or they may just run until they cannot run anymore
- **Effort is synonymous with performance** - if they have tried hard, they believe they have done well. This is a wonderful quality and we should be supportive of their enthusiasm
- **Active imaginations** - utilize their imaginations in training activities and they will love training!
- **Unable to think abstractly** - asking them to think about spatial relations, positions or runs off the ball is unrealistic
- **Unable to see the world from another's perspective** - it is “the world according to me” time. Asking them to understand how someone else is seeing something or feels is unrealistic
- **Everything is in the here and now** - forget about the past and future, they live in the moment.
- **Look for adult approval** - watch how often players look to you for approval or to see if you are looking. Be encouraging when they say “Coach, look what I can do!”
- **Usually unaware of game scores** - we should keep it that way
- **Often like to fall down just because it's fun** - they are just children having fun 😊
- **Often cannot identify left foot vs. right foot** - they know which foot they use most and if they point to their feet you can help teach them left and right

## **BEST QUALITIES OF A COACH FOR THIS AGE PLAYER:**

At these ages, the coach should be positive and encouraging of each child. They should have patience, good humor and a willingness to see the world through a child's eyes. Speaking the child's language is important and accepting that a lot of the child's play will not look at all like soccer. Specific soccer-related information should be limited to basic ideas of how to best keep the ball from running out of bounds. *There should not be any discussions about positions or any other team concepts.*

## **DURATION OF TRAINING SESSIONS:**

30 – 45 minutes is the best option for these ages. Most of the session should be spent in ratios of one ball per child or, if absolutely necessary, one ball per two children.

## **GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF WHAT SHOULD BE HAPPENING DURING TRAINING:**

The children should be having **FUN** with the ball. There should be periods of active playing where everyone is involved, and there should be ample opportunities for short breaks for water and for catching their breath. At these young ages, children work hard and tire quickly. Allow them to have “active rests” where they are not running but are trying to do something specific with the ball.

*Every training session should end with a scrimmage. Keep the numbers from 1v1 to 3v3 and keep as many children actively involved with a ball as possible. Let them play to small goals, with no goalkeepers. A size 3 ball should be used.*

## **U6 Coaching Philosophy**

Keep it simple and **FUN!** At the U6 level, the primary concern is age appropriate activities geared toward frequent contact with the ball and making sure the players are having fun. One player, one ball activities, and various “fun games” are excellent compliments to small sided soccer at this age

## Principles of Youth Coaching

- Developmentally appropriate activities
- Clear, concise and correct information
- Simple to complex progression
- Safe and appropriate training area
- Opportunities for players to make decisions
- Implications for the game

## Game/Activity Checklist

- Are the activities **FUN**?
- Are the players involved in the activities?
- Is creativity and decision making being used?
- Is the space appropriate for the age group and number of players?
- Is the coach's feedback appropriate?
- What are the implications for the game?

## Game Classifications

- Body Awareness** – activities that emphasize the use of body parts, motion, coordination and balance with and without the ball.
- Target Games** – activities that involve solving the objective by going from point A to point B. These activities are more directional and defined and can be done with and without the ball.
- Maze Games** – activities in which the player has the opportunity to move 360 degrees or in a circle environment with and without the ball. Even though the area may be defined, it does not necessarily have a specific target of boundary to go to. These activities allow players to make decisions while moving all directions.

# Games and Activities

## **Ball Retrieve (Body Awareness/Target Game)**

- The coach stands in the middle of the training area and collects all of the balls. The coach then throws the balls in different directions and players must bring the ball back to the coach as quick as possible. The coach can then put various conditions on how to retrieve the ball (example: with one hand, one foot, head only, knees, right foot/left foot alternating, etc.). Once the players have mastered the exercise, the coach can then put additional conditions on the players to solve.

## **Body Part Dribble (Body Awareness)**

- Each player has a ball in an area such as a 20 x 30 space. Players dribble their ball in the space and avoid touching other players. While they dribble, the coach calls out certain body parts (example: foot, knee or head) and the players respond – similar to a “Simon Says” activity. After the player has touched the body part to the ball, the player should then immediately continue to dribble. This activity promotes listening skills and reinforces the knowledge of body parts and coordination.

## **Glob (Target Game)**

- Players like this so much they would likely perform this activity for the entire training period. Begin with a ball. Use cones to outline the sidelines and the finish line (20 x 30) space should be adequate. Stand in the middle of the area and talk and act like a Glob, challenging the players to try to run (without the ball) across the space without being tagged by the Glob. Once the players have mastered the game, the players must accomplish the same task but must dribble the ball while the Glob tries to get their ball. Re-entry to the game can be done by toe-taps on the ball or otherwise.

## **Everybody's It (Maze Game)**

- This activity borders on the edge of controlled chaos. In an appropriately sized space (20 x 30), develop boundaries. Each player runs around while staying inside the boundaries, trying to tag as many players as possible without being tagged themselves. Give a signal when to begin and let them play for a minute or so. Add a ball to their feet once they have mastered the game. It's a game about vision and awareness. They need to learn how to move into spaces (tag) and out of spaces (avoid being tagged).

### **Gates (Maze Game)**

- The coach places cones throughout the training area (20 x 30) in pairs about a yard apart. Upon command, players dribble a ball through as many “gates” in the time specified by the coach (one minute or so). Each player keeps count of how many “gates” they were able to go through. Add conditions as the players become master of the exercise (example: right or left foot only, alternate feet, inside or outside, etc.). Each player repeats the exercise and task with the opportunity to beat their own score. It is appropriate for younger players to learn to compete against themselves.

### **Freeze/Tunnel Tag (Maze Game)**

- Every player starts without a ball in a designated area with (2) “taggers” in different color bibs. Once the coach says begin, the “taggers” begin to tag as many players as possible. If tagged, they have to freeze with their legs apart and they can be un-frozen if a player crawls through the frozen players legs. Swap “taggers” every minute or so. Add a ball and call the activity **Tunnel Tag**, but the players must now dribble (pass) the ball through the frozen player’s legs to release them.

### **Minefield (Body Awareness, Maze Game and Target Game)**

- Divide your players into two teams. Designate a training area with appropriate size. Use disc cones and spread them out evenly throughout the area. Put  $\frac{1}{2}$  the cones upside down and the other  $\frac{1}{2}$  right side up. Have one team try and turn the cones upside down, while the other turns them right side up. The team who turn the most cones over as designated wins. Start the exercise over with the team who won having to turn the opposite team’s cones over which put them at a disadvantage to begin. Introduce a ball once they have mastered the exercise. Note: once the Minefield Game is complete, use the cones in the area as Minefields while dribbling – teaching the player’s ball control in a fun and challenging environment. Increase the conditions on the players as they master the exercise (example: right foot only, inside foot, right/left foot alternating, etc.). It is important in all games and activities to have the players begin without a ball. Once the players have adjusted to the rules and objective of the games, introduce a ball and increase the challenges to the players.

### **Kangaroo Jack (Maze Game)**

- All players except two or three begin with a ball. Players without balls are kangaroo jacks and must hop like a kangaroo and try to tag players. If a player gets tagged, he/she becomes a kangaroo as well until all players are turned into kangaroos.

### **Red light/Green light (Maze Game)**

- All players have a ball and dribble in a limited space (or towards the coach). When coach says “red light”, players must stop ball and put foot on top of ball. When coach says “yellow light”, players must dribble very slowly. When coach says “green light”, players dribble fast. Coach controls this game with frequency of light changes and variety of changes. Once players catch on to this game, add light of other colors and affix different actions to them. (i.e. purple light = hop back and forth over ball, orange light = run around the ball, black light = dance, blue light = hide behind the ball etc. etc.)

### **Planets (Maze Game/Target Game)**

- Set up cones into multiple squares or triangles that serve as planets (or cities). All players must follow coach’s order and dribble into the planet he calls out. Coach can have all players follow same directions or break up team so they start at different planet and then have them dribble through the solar system in clockwise or counterclockwise fashion. Coach can have groups dribble in opposite direction through the solar system.

### **Snake (Maze Game)**

- In an appropriate space for the numbers you have, have all players dribbling soccer balls except for 2-3 players to start. These players hold hands and work together as one snake to tag the other players. The players with a ball try to avoid getting tagged by the snake. If they are tagged, they join hands with players making up the snake and the snake grows until all players are part of the snake. The snake must stay together as one animal and not break off into little parts. Encourage fun by having the snake hiss.

### **Capture the Balls (Maze Game/Target Game)**

- Set up 3 or 4 “home bases” (squares) with cones roughly 2-3 yards apart. Put the players into teams and have each team get together in their home base. Place all the balls in the center of the space between the home bases. On the coaches command the teams are free to gather as many soccer balls as they can into their home base. Players cannot use hands and there is no pushing each other or sitting/laying on the balls. Teams try to gather as many balls as possible into their home bases. Teams can steal balls from each others’ home bases. The Coach calls time and counts up how many balls are in each home base to determine a winner. Coach allows team 1 minute to make up a new team strategy before playing again.

### **Moving Goal (Maze Game/ Target Game)**

- 2 coaches use a bib or an extra piece of clothing to form a movable goal with each coach serving as a post and the bib serving as the crossbar. Players each have a ball and try to score by kicking their ball through the goal. However, the coaches constantly move and turn to force the players to keep their head up and to change direction as they dribble.

**Keep it simple and FUN!**