

Getting Started in Under 6 Micro Soccer Coach Guide

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Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to coach an Under 6 (U6) soccer team. We want to support your experience for the upcoming season, and we value your time. We are glad you're coaching. Kids can't play without you. Read this [Coaches Guide](#) thoroughly and keep it to use as a reference during the year.

About the U6 Micro Soccer Program

The U6 Program is a developmental soccer program, where kids learn by playing on a smaller field with fewer players than in full-size regulation play. The emphasis of the program is on FUN, and learning the basic skills (dribbling, passing, shooting). To promote the joy of the sport without worry of winning or losing, no scores or team standings are kept.

As members of the Positive Coaching Alliance, we expect all coaches and parents to model behavior consistent with good sportsmanship and help us create and promote a positive environment for children to grow as players and individuals. We honor the game, our opponent, and each other. For more information about the Positive Coaching (PCA) program, see www.jlysl.org.

More Soccer Fun / More Soccer Learning

In creating this Micro Soccer program, we've acted on the example of the overwhelming majority of experienced soccer coaches and educators who have for years been saying that small-sided soccer is the best format for younger players. When playing with only two or three teammates, younger players have many more touches on the ball and participate in the game more fully. This increases their enjoyment and learning of soccer. Micro Soccer play also reduces a complex game to its basic features, such as the triangle, which are more readily understood by kids.

Fewer players also reduces the tendency for soccer to degrade to "bunchball" in which a pack of players swarm around the ball, kicking wildly while the more timid players watch anxiously from a safe distance. The program accelerates kids' mastery of soccer, a key to their enjoyment of the game. Kids have more fun with something when they're successful at it.

By gradually adding players and complexity to the game with a step-by-step progression to larger-sided teams, Micro Soccer is a developmental program better suited to kids' changing mental and physical abilities. It challenges kids at an appropriate level, rather than overwhelming them. It enables kids to better handle game situations on their own, without needing constant intervention from adults. In small-sided soccer, the game itself is the most effective teacher.

This Micro Soccer program is based upon successful programs in the Alameda Soccer Club and SF Vikings Club. These, in turn, are largely based upon Tony Waiters' *Micro-Soccer* and *Three Steps to Eleven* programs for players under the age of 12. Waiters recommends that players spend two seasons at each step of a small-sided progression. This establishes "a solid base of skills development and game understanding...in a non-intimidating fun environment."

Your Chance to Get Involved

Micro Soccer needs helpers for the small-sided program, and we especially encourage parents of U6 players to be head coaches, assistant coaches, and game monitors. Even if you

know nothing about soccer, you can get involved in this program. Our Club sponsors Coaches Clinics, training sessions on how to run a practice and teach soccer skills. The emphasis on small-sided games is to let kids play with as little intervention as possible. As an involved and increasingly knowledgeable parent, you will be more and more valuable each year as you and your child progress through their soccer program.

Team Organization

- Each U6 has a roster of 9 or 10 players.
- Each team has one head coach and two assistants, each of whom acts as a “Game Monitor.” Team parents may rotate as Game Monitors.
- Teams are free to practice prior to the start of the season. A practice or two is probably a good idea.

Equipment

Parents need to outfit their child with:

- soccer shoes or tennis shoes (no softball or baseball shoes with a toe cleat)
- shin guards are mandatory
- water bottle
- size 3 soccer ball

Every parent should get their child a soccer ball to practice with at home and bring to practice EVERY WEEK. Soccer balls come in 3 sizes -- 3, 4, 5 -- with size 3 the smallest. Every parent should make sure their child has a size 3 ball. Size 4 or 5 balls are simply too large for a player at this young age.

You can direct your parents to find the above equipment at a local sports store like Montclair Sports, Sportsmart, Big 5, or Copeland Sports. It'll be a drive, but you'll likely find a wider variety at soccer specialty stores like SoccerPro in Concord, at the soccer store in the Bladium in Alameda, and the Sunset Soccer stores in San Francisco and San Rafael.

One of our veteran coaches recommends that players wear turf shoes all year round. Turf shoes tend to be more comfortable and stable than traditional cleats. But, turf shoes in kids sizes are hard to come by. One of our coaches has found turf shoes online at:

<http://www.pittsburghsoccer.com/youthturfs.htm>. Jade Soccer in Oakland and SoccerPro in Concord also carries some youth turf shoes. Parent should buy shoes that fit them to fit **this** season, not next season. If soccer shoes are too big or too small, they'll hurt. If one pair of shoes is too wide or too narrow, try a different brand.

Organizing your Parents to Support the Team

Every parent is expected to help run their child's team. Having parents from every player's family involved in supporting the team goes a long way in enriching your experience as a coach, and enriching the entire team's sports experience. Every coach will have his/her own style of organizing the team, but the basic tasks needed to support a team are the same every season.

Youth soccer is a community program, not a fee-for-service activity. Registration fees go towards uniforms, fields, and equipment, and parents do the coaching, refereeing, and administration. Parental participation is required, not optional, for a child to play soccer. At the end of this Coaches Guide is a “Team Help Wanted List.” **You should enlist the help of all your parents to help organize and run the team.**

With a team infrastructure of supportive parents, you will avoid burnout, frustration, and conflict. Here are some suggestions to help you create a successful team AND a successful season:

Team Meeting

Have a Team Meeting with all of the parents on your team before or at the start of the season. A Team Meeting is a vital method of ensuring that everyone is on the same page. Here are some suggestions for how to have your Team Meeting:

- Have a small “snack time” pot luck right after the first practice, with every family bringing a snack to share so you establish a sense of community.
- Have a pizza party on the field right after the first game, with everyone contributing towards the pizza and drinks.
- Hold your Team Meeting at a playground with a field. After the Team Meeting, play a short (15 minute) Kids versus Parents game.

Try to give families about two weeks notice about your Team Meeting, and follow that up with a reminder one week beforehand. No matter how conscientious you are, there will always be someone who didn't get your message or didn't understand what you meant. Don't pull out your hair; that's just the way it is. Do your best and move on.

We recommend that you draft and send a letter to all of your team families in advance of your Team Meeting. A Sample Letter from the Coach is provided at the end of this [Coaches Guide](#).

Here are some things you might want to cover in your letter and at your Team Meeting:

- ☑ **Your coaching philosophy** – Make sure all your parents understand that U6 soccer is a recreational and developmental program. All players should get about equal playing time, and play a minimum of half a game. We do not keep score (although the kids often do), we do not have standings, and we do not have playoffs. If you have parents who want a more competitive environment for their child, they are in the wrong program. Make sure they understand this.
- ☑ **Your Coaching Expectations** – Describe your goals for the team, how practices will be organized, and your expectations (policies) regarding attendance, tardiness, etc. You don't want to over-regulate your team. However, if you don't provide some structure in terms of your expectations, you're setting yourself up for disappointment.
- ☑ **Ground Rules** – Carefully review the Ground Rules from the Parents Guide with your team parents.
- ☑ **Help Wanted** - Get parents to sign up for tasks to support the team and Club using the [Team “Help Wanted” List](#). The most important jobs to enlist parents for immediately are Assistant Coach, Team Manager, and two Parent Referees.

Overview of the U6 Micro Soccer Format

The benefits of Micro Soccer are widely recognized, as more and more clubs nationwide are choosing to adopt it. Micro Soccer is played with fewer players on the field than traditional formats. This U6 division plays with three players from each team on the field at a time rather than the 7 v. 7 formats used in U8 programs. Benefits include:

- ✓ With fewer players on the field, each child has more opportunities to touch the ball and improve their soccer skills.
- ✓ With fewer players on the field, the "pack" of wildly kicking players surrounding the ball is less likely to form. There is less "bunchball" and more soccer.
- ✓ The extra space encourages players to spread out, supporting each other and making team play more possible.
- ✓ For the U6 division, the way coaches split their teams into 3v3 squads encourages the more timid players to get involved. Virtually all kids show dramatic improvement over the course of the season.

U6 teams have nine or ten players. U6 teams meet for one hour each week on Sundays. **A parent or designated adult is required to be present with each child for the entire session.**

The first half-hour is devoted to a team "practice," directed by the coach. In the second half-hour, games are played against another U6 team. These games are intended to be low-key and fun, with no score kept and lots of positive cheering.

Before each game, coaches split his/her team into two squads, each of which will play a 10 minute 3v3 game (without goalkeepers) against a squad from the other team. Teams are split according to guidelines in order to achieve specific developmental goals. Substitutes are rotated into games "on the fly" every two minutes, so everyone gets to play the same amount. These two games occur simultaneously on adjacent fields. After a short break, two more 3v3 games will be played. Each child will play two 3v3 games each week.

Since two 3v3 games are played simultaneously, the team's coach cannot supervise both games. In Small Sided Soccer, each 3v3 game is supervised by a Game Monitor from each team. The Game Monitor is on the field, primarily responsible for putting the ball in play when it goes out of bounds.

Game Monitors can be parents or soccer-experienced siblings. Since the rules of Small Sided Soccer are so simple, being a Game Monitor requires no more experience than having watched youth soccer games. For Small Sided Soccer to work, each team must provide two Game Monitors each week.

GAME DAY

What Happens on Game Day?

- All U6 3v3 games are played on Sundays. Location and times to be determined. Check your schedule for your game time and field.
- Coaches should arrive early enough to set up a playing field (with provided cones and goals). See below for dimensions and layout. Your opposing coach will set up a playing field adjacent to yours.
- For the first half-hour, each team will practice on the field set up by their coach.

- Each coach will then split their team into two squads. See below (*Splitting Your Team Into Squads*) for guidelines on how to do this.
- Each team will provide two Game Monitors (one for each field), who will be on the fields, running the games. If sufficient parent volunteers are available, then the Head Coach need not also act as a Game Monitor, but can remain free to observe both games.
- For each squad, the coach or Game Monitor selects three (3) players to start the first game. These are all “field players” – there are no goalies in U6 soccer. Coaches must not permit players to simply guard the goal, but must encourage them to participate on both offense and defense.
- Each squad will then play a 10 minute 3v3 game against a squad from the other team. There is no half-time, break, or change of ends. Extra players are substituted “on the fly” so that all kids are given equal playing time. A Game Monitor from each team supervises each game on the field, and another parent on the sidelines manages player substitutions and the game clock. No scores are kept.
- Teams then take a 5 minute break for rest and water.
- Coaches again split teams into two more (different) squads, and another pair of 10 minute games are played.
- Snack time. Great games! See you next week!

Splitting Your Team Into Squads

The developmental range of skills and personality of U6 kids is perhaps the widest of all soccer age groups. Some kids already have skills learned from siblings, parents, or U6 last year. Many have never touched a soccer ball. Some kids possess a competitive nature which helps them wade into a pack of other players and emerge with the ball. Others are easily intimidated by aggressive play and tend to watch from a safe distance.

One of the goals of the Micro Soccer program is to provide a format in which ***all kids*** can have fun and be successful. One of the ways this is achieved is through creatively dividing your team into squads in the following manner:

- For the **first** 10 minute game, coaches will divide their team into two squads: the first squad (Squad A) will be composed of the team’s *more advanced* players, the second (Squad B) of the team’s *less advanced* players. The two Squads A (more advanced) will play a 10 minute game, as will the two Squads B (less advanced).

This works well for both squads. Those players who are playing with skill and confidence will benefit from playing alongside and against similar players. The fast pace of these games provides more touches on the ball and a greater chance to use their skills. Similarly, those players who have yet to develop soccer confidence will find games much less intimidating with the stronger players removed. These relatively weaker players will have the opportunity to do well and develop the confidence necessary to become strong players themselves.

Note to coaches – avoid referring to these squads by the terms “strong” and “weak,” as kids may get hurt feelings. You should also shuffle the composition of the squads from week to week as the level of play of your kids improves.

- For the **second** 10 minute game, coaches will divide their team into two more squads, Squads C and D. These two squads will be of *equal skill levels*, with both more advanced and less advanced players assigned to each squad. The two Squads C will play a 10 minute game, as will the two Squads D.

This mechanism for creating squads **must** be followed by all coaches each week. This ensures that the developmental needs of all U6 players are met.

Keeping Games Fun – The Ideal Game

At the U6 level, the goals are: (1) having kids learn basic ball skills such as dribbling and kicking, and, even more important, (2) making soccer so much fun that every kid will want to come back and play next year.

For four- and five-year-olds, nothing is more fun than kicking the ball into the net for a goal. Development of offensive skills is also the first and most critical individual skill. Accordingly, the Micro Soccer program is geared toward scoring goals. The rules aim at providing scoring opportunities for every child.

The ideal U6 3v3 game will end with 10 goals scored by each side. While we don't keep score, the point is that we want to encourage wide-open games with lots of scoring. If that's not happening, then something is wrong that needs to be corrected.

No Goalies!

One fairly common problem occurs when a player decides to camp him or herself in front of the goal and act as a goalie. Sometimes the player won't leave the goal mouth even when the ball is at the other end of the field. The end result is that it becomes very difficult for attacking players to kick the ball into the guarded (and rather small) goal. They become frustrated and begin to feel that the defensive team is not playing fair. They are correct.

Positioning players in a solely defensive position (i.e. stationed in front of the goal) is not permitted in U6 small-sided games.

Coaches must teach their players to move into the offensive zone when their team is on the attack, and to fall back only when they lose possession of the ball. *Players should be taught to defend the ball and opposing players, not to block the goal mouth.*

If coaches or parents feel that the spirit of the "no goalie" rule is being violated, they should contact the Under 6 Coordinator. If this becomes a persistent problem, then a rules change (for example, a penalty shot against an undefended goal) could be instituted.

If Games Become One-Sided

Occasionally, in spite of the best efforts of coaches, one squad will dominate the other and the score will become lopsided. This is not a desirable situation and should be avoided. Note that, while we don't keep score, kids and parents have a very good idea how many goals each team has scored.

The Jack London Youth Soccer League has a rule for older age divisions (Under 10 and up) that addresses the problem by reducing the number of players on the field as games become more one-sided.

Under 6 takes a similar approach. When a squad has scored three more goals than their opponent, the coach or Game Monitor should act to reduce his/her team's scoring (by resting the more effective players or instructing certain players to pass instead of shoot, etc.). When the squad goes ahead by four goals, the squad will play with only two players. If the squad then goes ahead by five or more goals, they will play with only one player. See Rule 8, below.

While we hope that this rule proves unnecessary, it is critical that the U6 experience be a positive one. The feeling of crushing your opponent (or being crushed) is not one that we believe is a positive lesson for U6 kids.

Special Objectives of U6 Coaches

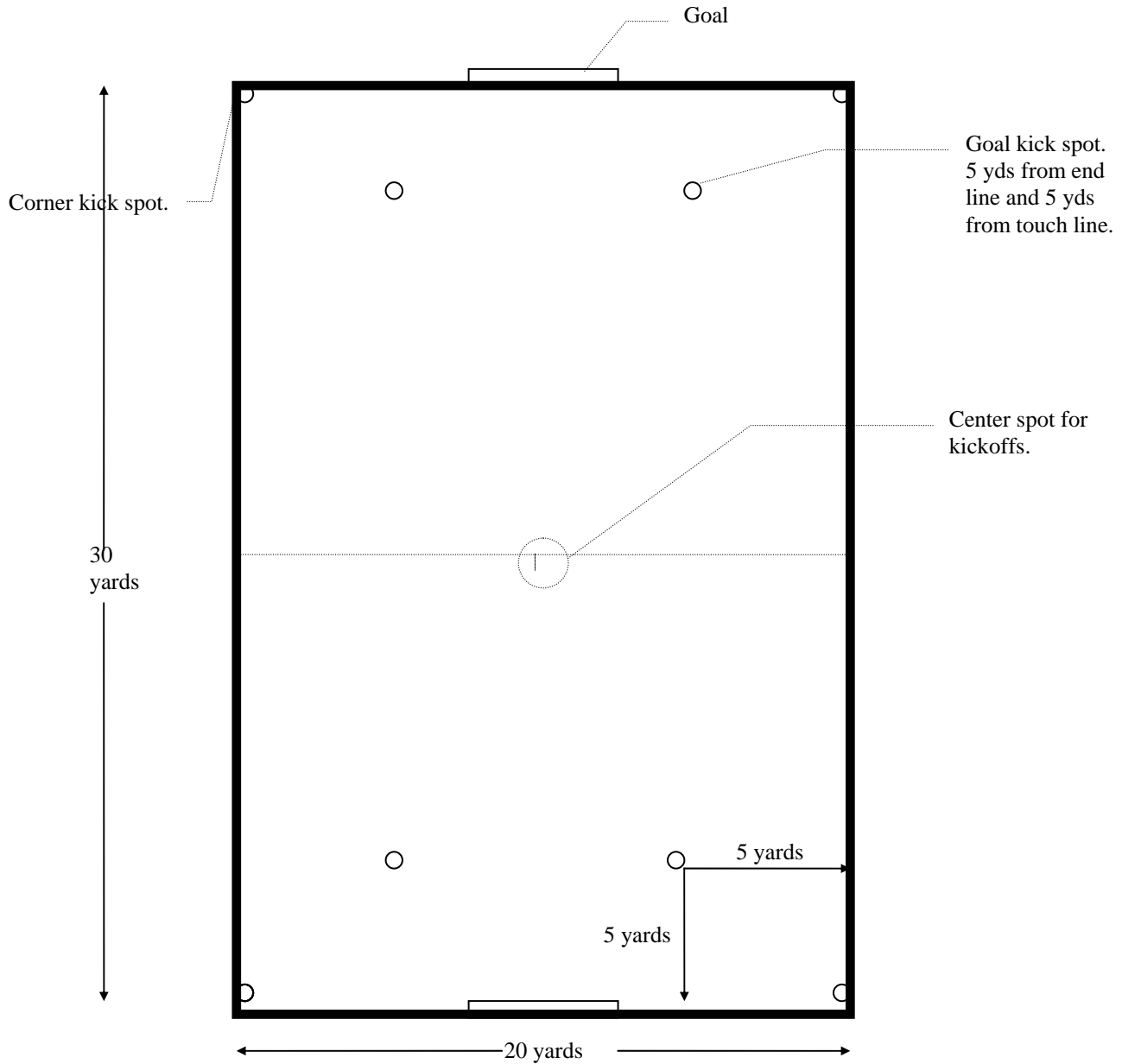
All coaches:

- Minimize competitive pressures at practices and games. Strongly encourage parents to do likewise. Remember that the emphasis of the Under 6 small-sided program is on promoting the player's enjoyment of the game and the development of his/her individual skills.
- Act as a facilitator, helping players to learn from the game itself. Create situations in which kids can learn by playing and enjoying themselves.
- Create realistic challenges that enable players to succeed. Adapt the challenges to the capabilities of the individual player. Help every child succeed.
- Give every child an equal opportunity to participate.
- Develop and reinforce players' basic individual skills: dribbling, kicking, trapping, and tackling. All 4, 5, and 6 year olds will want the ball and will naturally swarm around it. With only three players on a team, they will all have many opportunities on the ball.
- Develop the players' understanding of the triangle – the basic tactical configuration of soccer. Encourage attacking players without the ball to space away from teammates into supporting positions. Encourage players to communicate with each other.
- On goal kicks and kick-ins, encourage the use of a triangle, with one player going forward and the other going wide.
- Promote maximum contact with the ball for each player. Require each player to bring her/his own ball to every practice/game. Play games that require a ball for each player.
- Encourage kids to play creatively.
- Always remember that the game is the best teacher. Intervene very selectively to demonstrate correct techniques and to encourage players.
- Always promote players' enjoyment of the game.

Field Layout

Each coach is responsible for laying out an entire field on the assigned location. Two goals and sixteen small cones are provided to each coach for this purpose. Use all the cones to clearly mark the field boundaries. The field is marked as follows:

- Dimensions of approximately 30 yards long by 20 yards wide.
- Goals at each end.
- Cones in each corner to mark the location for corner kicks.
- Flat cones to mark the four spots for goal kicks, each 5 yards out from the goal line and 5 yards from the touch (side) line.



Support and Training of Coaches

- Micro-Soccer™ is introduced in the excellent book, *Coaching 6, 7 and 8 Year Olds* by Tony Waiters with Bobby Howe. Every new Under 6 coach in our program receives a copy of this book. The Waiters and Howe series includes several other books and a video.
- Check with your Club and League about Coaching Courses.

Micro Soccer Rules

These rules are intended to simplify the game in a way that is readily intelligible to young children. In general, supervising adults should allow children to play freely with minimal interference. There is no need for uniformed referees or whistles. Use common sense to handle problematic situations not explicitly covered by the rules.

1. The ball: a standard #3 size soccer ball.
2. Number of Players
 - a. Maximum of three players on the field at one time (3v3).
 - b. There are no goalkeepers. All players are “field players.” Positioning players in a solely defensive position (e.g. stationed in front of the goal) is not permitted.
 - c. Substitutions allowed at any time during the games (i.e. “on the fly” without a stoppage of play).
 - d. All children who are present should have equal playing time.
3. Officiating
 - a. Knowledgeable parents, older siblings, coaches, or assistants may serve as Game Monitors.
 - b. Games Monitors briefly explain rule infractions to offending player.
 - c. Game Monitors intervene as little as possible, allowing the game to flow.
 - d. No uniformed referees. No whistles.
4. Duration of the Game
 - a. Games between two squads are 10 minutes each. The clock shall not be stopped for any reason.
 - b. Five minute break between games.
5. Start and Restart of Play
 - a. At the beginning of the game, the referee tosses a coin to determine which team kicks off. The other team chooses its half of the field.
 - b. The ball is kicked off from the exact center of the field. All players must be in their own half of the field. Defending players must be at least 3 yards from the ball when it is kicked. On a kick-off the ball must travel forwards.
 - c. Play is considered to stop when the ball crosses **completely** over the goal line or touch (side) line. If any part of the ball is on the field, then the ball is still in play.
 - d. If the ball is out of play over the touch line, the team that last touched the ball loses possession. The other team puts the ball back into play with a kick-in (not a throw-in), which is classified as an indirect kick (i.e. a goal cannot be scored directly off a kick-in – it must first touch another player). The ball is placed on the touch line where it went out. The opposing team must be at least 3 yards from the ball when it is kicked in.

- e. If the ball is out of play over the goal line, the team that last touched the ball loses possession.
 - i. If the attacking team gains possession, it puts the ball into play with a corner kick. Opponents must be 3 yards away when the ball is kicked.
 - ii. If the defending team gains possession, it puts the ball into play with a goal kick. This kick may be taken from either goal-kick spot. Opponents must be at least 3 yards away when the ball is kicked.
- f. When the ball is out of play because a goal was scored, the team that defended re-starts the game with a kick-off from the center of the field (see 5b).

6. Method of Scoring

- a. When the attacking team kicks the ball completely across the goal line and between the goal posts, it scores a goal.
- b. No official score is kept.

7. Fouls and Misconduct

- a. Fouls are as follows:
 - i. TRIPPING
 - ii. VIOLENT PLAY (striking, kicking, pushing, abusive language)
 - iii. HAND BALL (player uses hands or arms in a deliberate attempt to control the ball)
 - iv. POOR SPORTSMANSHIP (including disruptive behavior, failure to retreat 3 yards from a free kick, excessive gloating after a goal, etc.)
 - v. SLIDE TACKLING (MSC does not permit slide tackling at this age level).
- b. If a foul is committed, the Game Monitor or Coach will briefly explain the infraction to the responsible player.
- c. A foul results in an indirect free kick for the team against which it was committed. A goal may not be scored on an indirect free kick until the ball has been touched by another player of either team. Opponents must be at least 3 yards from the ball when a free kick is taken. If the foul occurred within 3 yards of the offending player's goal, the indirect free kick is taken 3 yards from the goal.

8. One-Sided Games

- a. If one squad draws ahead by three goals or more, the team's coach or Game Monitor should use methods to reduce his/her team's scoring. This may include resting his/her most effective players and/or instructing certain players to remain in the defensive half.
- b. If one squad draws ahead by four goals, they will play with only two (2) players on the field. When the goal differential is reduced to three or less, the squad may again use three (3) field players.
- c. If one squad draws ahead by five or more goals, they will play with only one (1) player on the field. When the goal differential is reduced to four, the squad may again use two (2) field players.

Note: In youth recreational soccer, the objective is make sure that teams are challenged *and* having a good competitive experience. We all love to win, but a team that wins all of its games in a season, or conversely loses all of its games, is not having an optimal experience. If a team is winning all of its games, players are likely not challenged enough. If a team is losing all of its games, players are probably feeling at times less like soccer players and feeling more like orange practice cones. The ideal outcome is for a team to win half their games and lose half their games in the season.

Good sportsmanship should be exhibited in all games. Coaches are required to follow a 3 Goal Rule (a.k.a. The Golden Rule). Although in U6 soccer we do not keep official score, the kids will notice if the game starts to become mismatched. The coach of a team that is losing by 4 or more goals should take action to even up the match by adding a player for each goal over a 3 goal lead. If that doesn't help, the winning team should take steps such as:

- instructing players pass three times before they shoot
- having the lead goal scorer stay exclusively in his/her own half
- removing a player from the dominating team from the match.

The key here is to honor the intent, not the exact letter, of this rule: *evening up the match*. For example, removing one of the least skilled players would meet the rule nominally, but certainly would not be considered good sportsmanship. Good sportsmanship would involve taking steps to make the game challenging to **both** teams.

In games where there is a mismatch, the Game Monitor should **DISCRETELY** remind the coaches to so adjust. Game Monitors are required to enforce this rule during the game; coaches are expected to honor the intent of the rule.

The Role of the Game Monitor

The Game Monitors play an important role in making small-sided soccer work. The most important job of the Game Monitor is to keep the game moving quickly. The vast majority of your actions will be re-starting the game after the ball has gone out of play or after a goal. Here are a few guidelines to follow:

- **Enforce the Sidelines**
It's tempting to let play continue even though the ball has gone over the touch line (side line) or end line. Our experience is that this will quickly get out of control, with play continuing far afield or even on the next field. Instead, you should strictly enforce the field's boundaries. Kids will quickly learn to stop play when the ball goes over the touch line or end line.
- **Quick kick-ins.**
Try to get the ball back in play quickly. Encourage the player kicking in the ball to do so quickly. One reason why kick-ins can take a long time is that all three players will want to take the kick-in. As your team's representative on the field, you get to pick who takes it. Talk with your coach about how to pick the kicker (e.g. strict rotation, whoever's closest, etc.).
- **Positive Encouragement**
Try to encourage the players on the field (both on your team and the other) with lots of positive comments. It'll be hard to resist a little on-field coaching, and that's okay. But be sure to keep the comments positive.
- **One-Sided Games**
If a game begins to become one-sided, then you should take action or, if the other team is dominating, ask the other Game Monitor to take action. Rule 8, above, is used to remedy one-sided games.
- **Substitutions**
Get a parent on the sideline to keep track of the time and handle substitutions.
- **Have Fun!**

If the kids are having fun, then you're doing a great job. Maybe it's time to consider coaching.

Substitution Patterns

The following substitution patterns ensure equal playing time for a 3 vs. 3 game in which the squad has 4 players.

Rotation Schedule		Player 1	Player 2	Player 3	Player 4
Start	(0:00)	IN	IN	IN	out
1 st Change	(2:30)	out	IN	IN	IN
2 nd Change	(5:00)	IN	out	IN	IN
3 rd Change	(7:30)	IN	IN	out	IN

The following substitution patterns ensure equal playing time for a 3 vs. 3 game in which the squad has 5 players.

Rotation Schedule		Player 1	Player 2	Player 3	Player 4	Player 5
Start	(0:00)	Out	out	IN	IN	IN
1 st Change	(2:00)	IN	IN	IN	out	out
2 nd Change	(4:00)	IN	out	out	IN	IN
3 rd Change	(6:00)	Out	IN	IN	IN	out
4 th Change	(8:00)	IN	IN	out	out	IN

Game Day Protocol

In games, teams should wear matching jerseys (these are supplied by the Club), socks and shorts. Soccer shoes are not required. Tennis shoes are allowed. Turf shoes are recommended. Baseball shoes are not allowed. Shinguards covered completely by socks are mandatory. Each team supplies a game ball and a parent referee.

Perhaps the best part of game day is the Team Tunnel right after the game, where adults form a tunnel with their hands that the players run through to celebrate the end of the game. We encourage both teams to run through the tunnels of BOTH TEAMS. The kids LOVE the tunnels. Most teams have a small snack immediately after the game, and many coaches use this time to talk to the players about the match.

What if the other team doesn't show up on game day? Let the program coordinator know. Use the time to have a kids versus parents game.

What Happens If..

Most of the time things go smoothly during the season. But sometimes challenging situations arise. For example, what should you do if a disagreement between two kids gets at school gets carried over to the practice field, or hurtful teasing or taunting occurs on the field between children?

If there is a problem within your team, we encourage you to first try to deal with it directly with the other adults on the team. Most conflicts are often best handled by the people directly involved, with differences resolved in direct manners such as in person or by phone. Perhaps

one of the least effective ways to resolve conflict is through email, where there is potential for tone to be misread and flame wars to erupt.

Direct communication is best, and the hope is that the coach and parents would be able work out resolution of conflict within the team. If possible, plan for a conversation outside of the hectic space of soccer practice or games. The idea is to aim for communication, not confrontation.

The youth sports experience is important, and our Club and League have made a serious commitment creating a culture of positive coaching in alliance with the PCA. There may be times, however, when you have exhausted all the means you know of to solve a problem within your team. If this is the case, the next step is to enlist the help from your Club, and if needed, the League. Options you should consider are: getting advice, asking for disciplinary intervention, or filing a serious problem report.

- Getting Advice** - If you encounter a problem within your team that you are unable to solve, you may contact your Age Coordinator or the Club's Coaching Director for **advice on what to do next.**
 - Example: *"The coach is very critical of all the players. I've tried talking to the coach, but can't seem to get through. My kid, and the other kids on the team, don't seem to be having a good time. A few of the players are talking about quitting. What can I do?"*

- Asking for Intervention** – You should contact the **Club's Disciplinary Committee if you encounter a problem that you think merits disciplinary intervention.**
 - Example: *There's a coach on a team that we played last week who encourages their players to play very rough and do slide tackles (which are illegal in U6 and U8 soccer). Whenever a player from their team knocks over another player, the team's sideline yells out encouragement. Our coach tried to talk to the opposing coach and their parent referee during half time and after the game, but it didn't do any good. What should I do?*

- Serious Problem Report** – **If you encounter a serious problem, you can file a Serious Problem Report with the League.** Serious Problem Reports should be used very judiciously; they merit very close scrutiny by the League Board, which oversees the 7,500+ players in the U10 and above age divisions. If you encounter a problem serious enough to file a Serious Problem Report, you should notify the Club Disciplinary Committee as well. If a situation arises that merits reporting, parents, coaches or referees may submit a Serious Problem Report. See www.jlysl.org for more information.
 - Example: *At my child's game today a physical fight broke out between the referee and a parent from my team.*

"Challenging" Parents as Allies

As a coach of young children, you are leading a team of players *and their families*. Parents need to be educated, just as your players do, about how the team should work. Make your expectations clear regarding the kind of behavior you will tolerate and what you won't. If a parent has excess energy, utilize it. If a parent is overly critical of his/her child, make them responsible for positive charting, and have them chart their child as well as other players. You can also explain to parents before games what you've worked on in practice, and therefore, what you are looking for in the game.

If one parent is creating an environment that you can't work in and others can't be around, you may need to take action. This can be extremely difficult, especially if you like the young player of the parent. Ultimately, you must decide what is best for your team as a whole.

“Challenging” Children

There will be children overwhelmed by the experience of playing organized soccer, with some reacting in very divergent ways. You might have a child who suddenly becomes very shy and won't participate, or, you might have a child you gets overstimulated and bites. The former is not unusual. The latter is.

Someone who bites or constantly bullies other players is not ready for this situation. The first step is to require that this child be allowed to practice with relentless supervision from their parent. If the behavior continues, the child may need to be removed from the team. As a coach, you must make sure that safety comes first.

Rough play - If you feel one of your players is playing out of control (shoving, pushing) during a game, at the quarter or half breaks you should ask the referee to intervene. If it continues after a player has been talked to by the referee, the child is probably overstimulated and likely needs a chance to collect him/herself on the sidelines. Make a substitution.

If this type of rough play happens during practice, you should look at this as an opportunity to immediately correct this behavior BEFORE it has a chance to happen in a game. Soccer is a sport with lots of contact, but all players need to be in control of their bodies and play safely.

If you hear a parent rewarding, supporting, and cheering this behavior, YOU HAVE A PROBLEM YOU NEED TO DEAL WITH. You might try addressing it like this, “We want all parents to reinforce the positive aspects of the game. I need for you to do that too.” If you feel uncomfortable with this, you could ask your Team Manager to deal with it. If you need to, wait until you can find a more appropriate time and place. You want a conversation, not a confrontation. If it's the other team's parent, have that coach take care of it.

If this is a recurring problem, you need to take action with your Age Group Coordinator and/or the Club Disciplinary Committee.

TEASING is not tolerated or allowed. If you hear it, immediately address it. Sometimes we hear something that might seem funny to us, but the child it was directed at is in tears. If a child is trash talking, get them off the field right away.

Preparing Your Players to Play Soccer

Every year children arrive at the first soccer practice of their life. But, that first soccer practice should not be the first time that child has worn his/her soccer shoes and gear or kicked a ball. If you want players to have a fun experience playing soccer, ask your parents to help get their young players prepared by playing with them BEFORE the season starts. One of the best ways to get a child interested in soccer is to play “soccer catch” (kicking the ball back and forth) with them.

If you have a player who has trouble connecting with the ball, encourage his/her parent to play soccer catch together outside of practice, kicking the ball short distances back and forth. If a player has trouble kicking the ball forcefully, instruct his/her parent to try playing soccer catch on a smooth surface like an outdoor basketball court. Above all, make sure the parent understands that they need to MAKE IT FUN. The aim isn't perfect technique at this point. The goal is for the child to feel that playing soccer is a fun experience in which s/he will be well supported by her/his parents.

Medical Release Forms

The SAY Soccer player registration form is also used as the player's Medical Release Form. In order to play, all players need to be registered and you must have a medical release form in your possession. Registered players are automatically insured through SAY Soccer. **Do not allow any child to play that is not registered, or you could be personally responsible for any medical costs if s/he is injured. Do not discard the Medical Release Forms after the fall season!** You will need them for the spring season. Or, if you are not coaching in the spring, the Medical Release forms may need to follow players who do opt to play to his/her new spring team. Do not give the form to the player. Pass it along to the Program Coordinator.

Positive Coaching (PCA) Participation

In 2002 the Jack London Youth Soccer League formed a partnership with the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA), a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the sports experience for children by helping youth sports organizations like ours build a culture of positive coaching. For more information about Positive Coaching, see www.positivecoach.org and the Positive Coaching section of www.jlysl.org.

The mission of Jack London's PCA partnership is to build and maintain a positive, competitive environment for its youth soccer programs. Jack London's Coaching Director, Ed Shriger, described it best: "We want to weave the positive coaching model into the social fabric of Jack London youth soccer." To date, over 2,600 parents and coaches in the Jack London Youth Soccer League have participated in PCA workshops.

Participation in a PCA workshop is required for all new parents and coaches. Participating in a PCA workshop once as a parent or coach like buying your child soccer shoes: it's simply something that you need to do for your child to play. Attendance at a PCA workshop earns coaches and parents "PCA Certification" for life – you never lose this certification.

EVERY COACH IS REQUIRED TO ATTEND A PCA WORKSHOP AT LEAST ONCE. Check the Calendar at www.jlysl.org for dates of upcoming PCA Workshops for Coaches.

Positive Coaching (PCA) Program

The Jack London Youth Soccer League believes that kids playing soccer can best have fun, build character and develop athletic skills in a positive coaching environment. To provide that environment, JLYSL is working with the Positive Coaching Alliance, or PCA. There are three ways that parents can help implement positive coaching that we want to share with you to:

- 1) Redefining "Winner"
- 2) Filling the Emotional Tank
- 3) Honoring the Game

Redefining "Winner"

In youth sports, our goal is to produce young people who will be **winners in life** as well as on the field. To help our children get the most out of competitive sports, we need to redefine what it means to be a "winner." We believe that winners:

- Make maximum effort.
- Continue to learn and improve.
- Refuse to let mistakes (or fear of making mistakes) stop them.

Filling the "Emotional Tank"

Research shows that the home team wins about 60% of the time because of the emotional support a team receives when it plays in front of its fans. We want our players to have a **portable home team advantage**. The portable advantage is our kids "Emotional Tank," which we can fill with a positive atmosphere and appropriate praise, and which we can drain with criticism and negativity.

Honoring the Game

Sportsmanship may seem an out-of-date concept when professionals and their fans act in ways we would not want our children to imitate. We intend to reverse this trend in our league by "Honoring the Game."

Honoring the Game gets to the ROOTS of the matter, where ROOTS stands for **respect** for

- **Rules:** We don't bend the rules to win. We respect the letter and spirit of the rules.
- **Opponents:** A worthy opponent is a gift that helps us to play to our highest potential.
- **Officials:** We treat officials with respect even when we disagree.
- **Teammates:** We never do anything that would embarrass our team.
- **Self:** We try to live up to our own standards regardless of what others do.

At the end of this package, you will find a sample Parent Agreement. Coaches should collect the signed Parent Agreements from parents at the start of the season. The copy in this package is for you to keep for reference.

At the end of this package, you will also find two copies of the Coach's Agreement. One is for you to keep, and the other is for you to sign and send into your Club.

Can We Do Things Better?

In hopes of constantly improving our U6 program, please email your favorite practice exercises or suggestions for improving the program to the U6 Program Coordinator.

Organizing Practices

The younger the team, the less you coach, and the more you “manage.”

With five and six year olds your most difficult task will be keeping track of them. Additional supervision is important for younger children. Your players will probably arrive vibrating with anticipation.

Your most challenging time is when your kids first arrive. If you are not prepared -- if your fields are not set up and /or you're not sure what you're going to work on -- your practice can quickly deteriorate from training session to anarchy.

Theme and Plan

Have a theme, one theme (dribbling for example), and build your practice around it. Once you have a theme, now you need a plan to execute your theme. Write it down! It doesn't mean you have to constantly look at it or have post-its stuck to your palms! This is your insurance that practice is efficient and focused.

Your theme will dictate how you will set up your fields. One large field? Several smaller ones? For the youngest players, don't use more fields than you are capable of supervising – you are inviting chaos.

Your plan should also take into consideration how you will use your help. Will parents help you set up fields, hand out vests, take half the team, work with goalies, work on a particular technique like throw-ins? Think about it BEFORE you arrive.

Designing Valuable Practices

A badly written plan is better than no plan! Planning a practice makes you think about what your objectives are for the day.

- What's your theme?
- What are your objectives and priorities?

Taking a few minutes to write it down will prepare you for your practice and help your practices flow making them more productive.

Have an “**opening ritual**” – an activity that let's players know that practice has started and it's time to focus on what's about to happen (*a warm-up game like “Nutmeg” or “Soccer Tag”, 1 v 1, etc.*).

Take time after practice to ask your players how things are going - how practice went, how they feel about what you worked on.

Have an “**ending ritual.**”

Basic Coaching Techniques

1. **Less is more.** No more than 30 seconds of talking. Employ the KISS technique – Keep It Short and Simple. Kids want to do one thing, play. The more you talk, the less they hear.
2. **Paint the Picture.** More effective than talking is demonstrating. You might physically demonstrate a move or you might use cones or a magnetic board to demonstrate where they belong on the field, etc. If some kids don't get it, all it usually takes is a few who do. The others will learn by watching.

3. **Count backwards from 10** to bring them in when you want to make a coaching point to the whole team. Have them take a knee in FRONT of you (you can't supervise kids when they're behind you).
4. **No standing in lines!** Bored children will simply create another game to replace the one they're supposed to be playing.
5. **Be aware of the sun.** When addressing your team, make sure you are the one looking into the sun.
6. **Use water breaks as transition times** – to reconfigure fields, move from one coaching point to game to another, or, on a challenging day, give everyone a break and an opportunity to come back more focused. While you are stretching your kids, you could also have your help get vests ready, or resize/reshape your field, etc.
7. **Create games within the game to teach.** If your theme is dribbling, you can play soccer tag, or a monster that chases people who must dribble away to a safe zone (a secret cave?), or minnows who must escape the sharks, etc. Use your imagination.

Correction Methodology

When you see something that needs to be corrected (especially for the group as a whole):

Freeze It: Yell “freeze” and have everyone stop.

Recreate it: Everyone has probably taken a couple of steps since you yelled “freeze” so get everyone back to where they were when the play/game/exercise feel apart.

Rehearse It: Whatever coaching tip you gave, now have the players slowly rehearse it without pressure from defenders or attackers.

Restart It: Try it over with the correction, but now at game speed.

Remember, kids can only absorb a few corrections. If you interrupt too much to correct, the players will become numb to your feedback. Confine your corrections to the most important ones, and keep them to no more than one correction for every 5 minutes or so. It is always more powerful to interrupt and offer praise (“look at what Amanda and Sydney are doing well – they are running forward with the ball”) than it is to interrupt and offer a correction. Sometimes corrections are necessary, but catching them doing it right makes the players want to listen to you.

Training Sessions

The following are recommended training sessions. Generally, focus on one theme for practice. For continuity and effectiveness, incorporate that theme into your warm-up too. For the youngest players, you might spend all season just working on dribbling.

Be realistic in your expectations. It is age appropriate for younger players to swarm to the ball and not want to share it once they get it. The young team that passes the ball is truly the exception.

Finally, express to your parents that you expect practices to start on time. If practice is at 4:00, then your players should have their shin guards on, cleats laced, and (if applicable) hair ready and jewelry off by 3:55. If they're late, don't lecture at your players. They don't drive.

Teaching The Brand New Player

The brand new player needs to learn the following:

In Bounds/Out of Bounds: Create a rectangle (10 yds x 15 yds) is fine. Show them “inside” and “outside.” Be creative. “Fish in the water. Fish out of the water.” Repeat it several times. Now use the “official” words: “Fish in-bounds. Fish out of bounds.” However you do it, you want them to understand where the ball is played and where it isn’t.

Direction: Put scrimmage vests on half your team or divide your team into “1’s and 2’s.” On a rectangle 20 yards x 30 yards, put all your 1’s on one goal line (end line) and all your 2’s on the other. Have them face each other. Put a parent in each goal.

Instruct your players that on the word “GO!” you want all the 1’s to run to Jackson and all the 2’s to run to Georgia. You might do this the first couple of times without the ball, and then try it with the ball.

Objective: Once they know in and out of bounds and direction, now you give them the bottom line- if the 1’s have the ball, they want to shoot it into the 2’s goal. (Make sure you make the distinction between the opponent’s goal and their own goal or you’ll have kids shooting the ball in their own goals!)

If the 2’s have the ball, they want to shoot it into the 1’s goal. The team with the most goals wins.

Basic Defense: If the other team has the ball, get it back! Challenge for the ball immediately! For protecting the goal, try different games. “The goal is the castle. The princess is in the castle. You must protect the princess from the ball!” Or, “The goal is your house. You don’t want the ball in your house.” Repeat, “Not in my house. Not in my house!” Needless to say, the princess and the house are always under siege.

Kick in Technique: If the ball goes out of bounds on the side lines, the ball is put back into play with a “kick-in.” Demonstrate this to all your players at the same time and then taking them aside individually or in smaller groups to practice taking kick ins, and practice trying to use the kick in to make a pass. If the ball is continually going out of bounds don’t restart the game every time. Have parents around the field who can nudge the ball back into play.

Practice Management

This section is written in a conversational tone so that coaches can immediately adopt pieces of it for their practices.

I. Warm up

II. Games With Goals

III. Regular Game

*The following are dribbling warm-up games you could use for a third or even half of your practice. Warm up for five to ten minutes, **stretch**, and do a couple of more warm up games before you move on to “Games with goals.” Any of these games can be modified to use a particular part of the foot- inside, outside, instep, left foot only, etc. There are enough games listed below to last you the season.*

Session I: Dribbling

There are four parts of the foot you use:

- **Inside** of foot for operating in small spaces or because of pressure from a defender.
- **Instep** (laces) used for longer passes, shooting and to dribble with speed.
- **Outside** used to cut ball and change direction.
- **Sole** of the foot for rolling the ball and pulling the ball back.

Teaching Points: Head up, Balance, Keep ball close

Warm Up:

Field 15 yds x 20 yds. Balls for every player. Use discs to mark the field.

1. I want everyone dribbling inside the rectangle with their feet like this (10 second demonstration). Explore ALL the space. No kissing balls! (You could specify a part of the foot, inside, outside, instep, or just let them go). **30 seconds**

2. Stop/Go. On the command “STOP” I want you to stop the ball like this. (Demonstrate using the sole of your shoe to stop the ball, once with the right foot, once with the left). On the command “GO” I want you to go!

“Stop!”...“Go!”.....“Stop!”....“Go!”....etc. **30 seconds**

3. Now listen carefully because I’m going to tell you to **stop the ball with different parts of your body**. It will sound like this. “Right foot. Stop...Go!”..... “Left foot. Stop....Go!”..... “Right knee. Stop....Go!”.... “Left knee. Stop....Go!”....Demonstrate. (You can use elbows, head, butt, whatever. If you have a young team, that doesn’t know right from left, just give the body part. This is a warm up that’s just fun!) **One to two minutes**

4. On the command “Leave it!” I want you to stop the ball with the sole of your shoe, leave it, and go get someone else’s and start dribbling that ball. Demonstrate. (Don’t let this deteriorate into a shoving match.) **One minute.**

5. Now, after I say “Leave it!” I’m going to take a ball away. So keep your head up while you dribble. (This adds an element of competition and the pace will quicken. After you say “Leave it!” you’ll take away a ball, any ball, and put it outside the grid. You might only take up to 2 balls; you might take up to five. Monitor your kids. If they’re really enjoying this, continue for up

to five balls. However if kids start crying because they don't have a ball, then maybe you need to stop this game!) **One to two minutes**

6. Freeze Tag. Everyone dribbling in the grid except one. Put the player outside the grid in a scrimmage vest. On your cue ("here comes the monster"), the player in the vest enters the grid. Every player he/she tags must freeze and stay frozen until unfrozen by being touched by another player (dribbling a ball). Alternate the person in the vest every 30 seconds. If changing vests takes too much time, just have the person who's "it" carry the vest in their hand. **Two minutes**

Stretch: Quads, Hamstrings, Calves, Lower back, Ankles. Water break. **Two minutes**

7. Regular Tag. Everyone in the grid dribbling except the person who's "it" (who's on the outside of the grid). On your command, "It" enters. If tagged, you give your ball to the person who just tagged you. **Two minutes**

Tag games, or any game where players have to "escape" help players: Get their heads up to see the field; make choices about direction and speed (fast, slow); look for open spaces; shield the ball so someone else can't get it; and these activities create game-like conditions.

8. Knock out! All players in grid with balls dribbling except one who's on the outside. On your command, player on outside enters grid and tries to knock out another player's ball. Player whose ball was knocked out is "it." Player who knocked it out retrieves the ball she kicked out and joins others in grid dribbling. **Two minutes**

9. Four Corners. Make sure no more than 10 yds x 10 yds. Mark corners with cones. Equal number of players at each corner (2 or 3). One ball per player. On "Go!" players leave their ball and steal balls from other corners. Players cannot guard their corners or kick out someone else's ball or steal more than one ball at a time. If playing with three players per corner, the first team to collect four balls wins! This is a lot of fun. Adjust the teams to make them as fair as possible. **Three minutes or more** if it's really working well!

10. Change Sides. Grid 10 x 20 yds. Divide your team and put half in scrimmage vests. Part of your team on one end line, the rest on the other, facing each other. Everyone has a ball. On "Go!" each team tries to get to the opposite end line. Players must dribble their ball the whole way and stop it on the end line by stepping on the ball (as opposed to shooting the ball the whole way.) The first team to get ALL their players and all their balls to the opposite end line wins! Make sure the better dribblers are evenly divided. **Three minutes**

11. Crab Soccer. In field 20' x 30'. Start with two or three players on ground in crab position. Rest of players on one end line. On your command "Go!" players try to dribble around/past crabs without having their balls kicked out. If a player's ball is kicked out, or it goes out of bounds, that player becomes a crab. Last player with ball is the winner! Warning: Don't let crabs morph into cheetahs! Crabs must move like crabs! You might play this over and over.

12. Sharks and Minnows. Same as above, but players in the field (sharks) are standing instead of in crab position. Sharks cannot move. They can only kick balls from where they stand.

Games With Goals- Dribbling (5 to 10 minutes)

1. Two 20 x 30 yd. fields (or smaller.) Both fields with goals 8 feet wide. Two 3 v 3 games. Condition: You can only score by dribbling through the opponent's goal.

2. Same as above, but you can only score by stopping the ball on the end line (inside the goal markers).

3. Game where you can only pass the ball back or square (even to the person with the ball). The point- you can only advance the ball by dribbling it. This is too advanced for five year olds. Probably most appropriate for kids at least 7 years old.

Scrimmage: 10 to 15 minutes

Two 3 v 3 games without conditions. There should be corner kicks and throw-ins. Once again, if the ball is continually going out of bounds, put parents around the field to help keep the ball in play.

Ending Ritual: 5 minutes

End with a special game that signals the end of practice. Crab Soccer, Sharks and Minnows, Mingle/Mingle!

Session II: Passing

(For a very young group or brand new team, try continue with the dribbling theme for several practices before moving on to "passing.")

Warm-Up:

Field Set Up: Circle 25 to 30 feet in diameter. Larger if necessary.

1. Nutmeg. Everyone in circle dribbling except one. On your cue, person on outside of circle enters and tries to kick other player's ball out. If a ball is kicked out, player retrieves his own ball, brings it back into the center of the circle, holds it over his head, and stands with his legs spread apart. To be "free", another player must kick his ball between that player's legs. Player who was standing now starts playing again. **Alternate players who are "it" every minute.** *(I often use two people who are "it". You could put them in scrimmage vests.)* **3 to 5 minutes**

2. Inside of foot technique. Demonstrate. *Instead of going into all three parts of the foot to pass with (inside, outside, instep) I'll just cover the inside. We'll look at instep technique in "shooting."* I'd like everyone to hold on to the inside of their foot. (Demonstrate where it is.) Now the inside of your other foot. (Make sure they're holding on to the right area. Have a parent assist you.) That's the part of the foot I want you to pass the ball with. (Demonstrate passing a ball to another player/parent three times with the inside of your foot while trying to knock down the cones.) Everyone get a partner and move on to #3. (#3 has different field set-up. Either have this ready before you do #1 OR have a parent set up two circles as you demo inside of foot.)

3. Kick Bowling. Make two circles, 15' in diameter. Half your team around each circle with a teammate across from them. In middle of circle put 6 to 10 cones. See how many they can knock down. You could even time them. "Let's see how many cones each team can knock down in 30 seconds." Have a parent put cones back up while you walk around and give individual tips. **Two to three minutes**

4. Accuracy. Demonstrate. Bring kids in *and now introduce part II of passing technique- where to place non-kicking foot.* To make sure your passes go where you want them to, your non-kicking foot needs to be pointed in the direction you want your ball to go in.

Demonstrate

- ***Non-kicking foot is placed to the side of the middle of the ball.***
- ***Foot pointed in direction you want ball to go in.***

- ***Knee of non-kicking leg is slightly bent.***
- ***As you approach ball, look to see where you're going to pass it, and the look as you make contact.***

Try "bowling" again and challenge them to see if they can knock down even more cones or move on to #4.

5. Soccer Dodge Ball. Half of players in a circle. Half of players spaced evenly on outside of circle. (Circle needs to be big enough for players on inside to move around. But if it's too big, players won't be able to kick ball across it.) Players on outside kick ball and try to hit players on inside. Players hit by ball come to the outside and become "shooter." Ball must hit dodgers below the knee or they are not out.

- If game is too slow, use two balls.
- Player with ball can pass to another player to "shoot" if the player without the ball has a better angle.
- Players on outside can move around to create a better angle to receive a ball and shoot at "dodgers."

6. Inside of Foot Receiving. Demonstrate. As ball approaches you, watch it. Shoulders square to the ball. Knees slightly bent. Legs shoulder width apart (or receiving foot can be behind non receiving foot). Use inside of left or right foot to receive ball. As you receive ball, bring receiving foot back with the ball to absorb energy of ball.

Receiving Ball – for Intermediate players

- Go to ball. Don't wait for it.
- Just before you get ball, look up and plan how you might play the ball once you get it based on where your teammates and opponents are.
- As you receive ball, push it across your body and play it with your opposite foot.

7. Passing/Receiving. In threes (or fours). Place discs about 20' apart. Two at one disc (Players A and B). One player at the other (Player C). Player A passes to C and then runs to where C is. C receives the ball and passes to B. C runs to where B is. And so on... **3 minutes**

8. Teammates Passing and Moving in Circle. (May not work with youngest beginners.) Two large circles, 30' in diameter each. If the ball is always going out of bounds, you may need to make your grid bigger. Assign partners. Half of team in each circle. Partners moving around circle passing to each other. Have them use whole space, changing directions. Players need to be aware so they don't crash into each other. The element of danger should get their heads up! **3 minutes**

9. Teammates Passing in Circle Through Cones. Same as above, but this time, several pairs of cones are placed in the circle. For beginners, make cones at least 5' apart. Players can only make passes to each other if the ball goes between the cones first. If you have 3 teams in a circle, you should have at least 4 to 5 sets of cones. **3 minutes**

10. Teams Passing in Circle. Groups of three in circle, moving, and passing to each other. Encourage them to get heads up (or they'll run into each other.) Players should be trying to make accurate passes AND passes that aren't too hard or soft. **Two minutes**

Communicate: *For the more advanced, encourage receivers to tell the passers where they want the ball. By showing their right hand, they want it to their right foot. The opposite for the left.*

11. Sequential Passing. Groups of three in a circle. Each player on a team with a number (1 through 3). They can only pass sequentially- 1 to 2, 2 to 3, 3 to 1, etc. If you have two groups

of 3 in a large circle, this can be VERY challenging. Use scrimmage vests for one of the teams. **3 minutes**

12. Monkey in the Middle. One person in the circle. Four on the outside. Players on outside pass ball back and forth to each other. Player in middle tries to steal ball. Instead of alternating player in middle every time she steals a ball, alternate player in middle every 30 seconds. Players on outside should be moving to create passing lanes that are free of monkeys! You can use more than one monkey in the middle. **3 minutes or more**

Competition: Winner is team with most completed passes in thirty seconds. Or, winner is monkey with most steals! *If you don't like monkeys, use animal of choice!*

13. Keep Away. You can configure this game a lot of different ways. 2 v 2, 3 v 3, or 4 v 4. One team needs scrimmage vests. Three consecutive passes is a point. If you want to make it easier for one team, you could make it uneven- 3 v 2 or even 4 v 2.

This is a GREAT game to develop passing, receiving, running to space, passing angles, moving without the ball to create space, field vision, decision making, etc. If played full out, it's exhausting. Monitor your players.

Recap: Game Preparation

1. Have objectives/goals written down for what you want to accomplish.
2. Most coaches think about tactical decisions only during the game.
3. Remember to tell you players - mistakes are ok; it's how you respond to them.
4. One of the things that often goes out of a game is FUN! Don't lose perspective.

Recap: Game Day

1. Who will do positive charting?
2. As coach, you are both strategist and emotional tank filler.
3. During pre-game conversation, remind players that nervousness is normal.
4. Tell players that mistakes are ok, it's how you respond to them that matters.
5. Officiating is like the weather - we have no control.
6. We're here to have FUN!
7. During the game:
 - Identify teachable moments.
 - Model positive interaction with officials, parents, and opposing parents, players, and coaches.
8. Always have post-game conversations where:
 - *Players talk first and the coach's summary is last.
 - *Players compliment each other in a winner's circle (just sitting or standing in a circle).
 - *ALWAYS end with a positive.

12 Things I Know for Sure

Observations from a Youth Soccer Coach

1. The **Number One Question** I'm asked by parents of young, new players is: "**Why isn't my kid hungry for the ball out there?**" The two emotions I see most on the faces of the younger players who are brand new to soccer are fear and confusion. Think about why for a moment. We spend a lot of time teaching our children to share, be nice, wait in line and take turns. During a soccer match, we suddenly expect these same children to steal the ball, cut in line, and not share the ball with the other team. But if kids learn these "bad" behaviors in the context of healthy assertiveness, competitive play and good sportsmanship, then soccer can be a safe place for them to learn skills — street smarts, boardroom savvy, survival skills — that extend far beyond soccer. Spend some time (outside of game day) kicking the ball with your child and in simple language explain that during a game, they get to be different and why.
2. **Cheer Wildly; Don't Coach** – At young ages, **kids cannot process multiple commands**. At young ages, simple directions like: "get the ball" and "run towards the goal" are appropriate. Avoid sequenced directions like: "run and steal the ball and then pass it inside to Katie." And, above all, avoid telling kids **how** to do something: "run faster," "pass left," "kick it harder." Wondering what's appropriate to shout out in support of your child from the sideline? Chris Curran of Anderson Township, Ohio, who has coached and refereed soccer for 12 years, encourages parents to show the same restraint as they show at other school events. "If you wouldn't stand up and start shouting 'Sing! Sing it louder, Suzy!' during a school choir concert, you shouldn't spend the whole soccer match screaming, 'Kick it! Kick it harder!'"
3. **Teach Problem Solving** - Coached positively, **soccer is a powerful way to teach good decision-making** and to build confidence. The Dutch model of soccer is built entirely around this concept: everything in soccer is a problem to be solved. Unlike some other sports, soccer players cannot be closely coached at game time. Players make hundreds of decisions independently after the starting whistle blows: where to run, when to tackle or shoot, when to dribble versus pass, etc.. Encouraged by coaches and parents, players become creative thinkers and decision-makers, smart players who excel individually and as a team.
4. **Never Compare Your Child to Another** child. "Why don't you run as hard as Jenny?" "Look how Thomas gets to the ball first." **Comparing one player to another is not healthy** for a child. And I haven't seen many productive interactions between parents when they begin to compare their kids to others. Give your child an internal framework to measure his or her progress. It's not about who's the best out there; it's about what's best for each individual child.
5. **The Worst Time to Talk to Your Child** about soccer is on the way to or from the game. The most basic "parenting 101" fundamentals are: make your child feel safe and make your child feel loved. This may sound over-the-top lovie-dovie, but thousands of years ago even the Greeks knew that "**without a sense of safety, there can be no learning.**" It takes courage for a kid to show up to a soccer field to play a new sport on a team of kids, some or all they may not know prior to the season. Even as an adult player, I still get pre-game jitters. When parents ask me what they should say to their child on game day, here's what I suggest:
 On the way to the game: "***I'm looking forward to watching you play***" and "***I love you***"
 On the way home: "***I love you***" and "***what do you want to eat?***"
6. **See You at the Game**. If you sign your child up to play soccer, then **you should be at the games**. Games are at public parks, and parents should be present for that reason alone.

But if coming to watch your child's game is not one of the highlights of your week, then something bigger is wrong. Soccer is a way for families to spend time together, and an opportunity to create an extended family of friends with other players and their families. If you plan on doing the "drop and roll" (dropping your kid off for games instead of watching) for the majority of games or prefer to sit in the car in the parking lot reading the paper instead of cheering wildly on the sideline, then frankly I don't think our soccer program is a good fit for your family. Youth soccer is coached by unpaid volunteers, and parental support is required, not optional.

7. **Coach the Child First, the Athlete Second.** Some believe you should coach the athlete first, and the individual second. That is, teach athletic skills first, and try to connect with the individual second. Maybe this works for adults. But for young players, the opposite is true. **If a child knows you care about him, he'll be much more motivated** to learn and excel. *The mind is the athlete, the body simply the means it uses to run faster, hit further, or box better.* ~ Bryce Courtenay.
8. **The Coach and Parents are Partners.** Given the focus required by players at this young age to play the game, players need to know that parents and coaches have a healthy partnership. Let's face it: a natural parental instinct is to be protective. Talking to someone about their child is bound to an emotional exchange. In challenging discussions -- whether a coach has an issue with a parent or parent has an issue with the coach -- always **look for communication, not conflict.**
9. **A Soccer Season is NOT a Fitness Program.** I am hearing more parents tell me that fitness is one of their objectives for their child's sports experience. A season of soccer is a good supplement to a youth fitness program, but it is a lousy substitute. If weight and/or fitness are issues for your child, then exercise and diet may be answers. But signing your kid up for a season of soccer is not. One hour of soccer practice a week and plus a game won't get or keep a kid fit. **There are no substitutes for daily exercise and good nutrition.**
10. **You Can't Do a "Don't Do."** If you are going to help coach, give positive instructions. By positive I don't mean upbeat or cheery; I mean giving instructions that describe action. Call out "throw down the line" instead of "don't throw into the middle." **Give instructions that are immediately actionable** ("get to the ball first"), not prohibitive ("don't wait for the ball").
11. **The Tone is Set at the Top.** If there is only one thing I've learned in business, it's this: the tone of any human organization is set at the top. From a little girls' soccer team, a university, a government, or a company like Enron, the people at the top set the tone. **It's the coach and parents who set the tone** for a kids' sports team. And the tone should be: *"We honor the game. We respect the referees and do not question their calls during the match. Above all, we recognize this is a special time in the kids' lives that cannot be relived."*
12. **They Play To Have Fun -** We want to have a positive, supportive atmosphere so that every player has a great experience. Regardless of ability, **every member of the team deserves to be treated with encouragement.** *The most important measure of success in a season is not goals scored or passes made, but whether your child wants to play next season.*

Sample Letter from the Coach

(Ideally this letter is reviewed at a Team Meeting with all team parents prior to the start of the season.)

Date: Two weeks prior to the first practice

Dear Team Parents,

Welcome to the team. This is likely your young child's first or second year of organized soccer. This letter provides information about the upcoming spring season of Under 6 soccer. I'm looking forward to the season, and hope your child is excited about playing.

The objectives for children at this age are simple: teach them to kick the ball and love the game. Even very young players realize internal motivation for acquiring soccer skills. It's great when you see that happen - when kids start to feel competency and joy in their ability to kick the ball and run with it. The most important measure of success in a season is not goals scored or passes made, but whether your child wants to play next season.

Positive Coaching: I doubt this is an issue at this young age group, but it's worth saying every year. We want to have a positive, supportive atmosphere so every player has a great experience. Regardless of ability, every member of the team should be treated with encouragement. I look to you to help reinforce these important concepts: Encourage your child from the game sidelines and cheer wildly. Let the coach, not the player or other parents, know if you are concerned about a specific skill or behavior. Players need to know that parents and coaches have a healthy partnership.

At the first game I will collect your signed Parent Agreement. I will also have extra copies on hand for parents to read and sign. All parents on our team should attend a Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) workshop. If you attend(ed) a New Parents Night, a PCA workshop is part of this orientation. If you can't attend one of the New Parents Night, you should attend a PCA workshop for Parents during the season. PCA workshops are sponsored by the League and are free to all parents. (See www.jlysl.org for info.)

Practices/Games: I will let you know what time our game/practice slot is as soon as I know it. Coaches are assigned practice/game slots about 2 – 4 weeks before the start of the season, after field permits are issued. Parents are required to attend all practices/games; helping out on the field during the practice session and at the game is welcome and appreciated. If you have a child with special medical needs (such as asthma), you must make sure a parent or guardian is always present at practices and games with the appropriate medication.

Games: We will have 8 games, all played on Sundays. The first game is {season start date}, and the last game is {season end date}. I'll notify you if the schedule changes. So that I can plan practice activities and the game line-up, be sure to let me know in advance if your child cannot make it to a game. One to two weeks prior to the start of the season the game schedule is typically posted.

Parents at Games: Soccer is a way for families to spend time together, and an opportunity to create an extended family of friends with other players and their families. Games are at public parks, and each child should be accompanied at all times by a parent or family member. During games, parents will need to be on the sidelines to help resting players substitute back into the game. At this young age, players often need to substitute out during the game for water breaks or rest, and some may need lots of positive encouragement to return to the game after they've substituted out.

Parent Participation for the Team: Every family is expected to bring a snack to at least one game and help out at least once as a Practice Parent.

In addition, every family is also expected to sign up for one of these roles: assistant coach, team manager, referee (game monitor), picture day coordinator, assistant coach, end-of-season party coordinator, Club volunteer, trophy coordinators, Positive Coaching (PCA) contact. For more information about these roles, see the Team Help Wanted List.

In each game our team supplies a referee for the match. Referees can be any parent volunteer, and I will supply game instructions to all referee volunteers. Each week our team needs a parent to referee the match.

The game can't be played without a referee. Sometimes parents are apprehensive about refereeing. But at this age, any person can be trained to be a referee in less than an hour. If we don't have two volunteers as game monitors by 2 weeks prior to the start of the season, I'll create a rotation schedule and assign families to be game monitors. I've found that the more parents are involved in refereeing, the more they learn about and enjoy the game.

Every week I will need help from all team families in marking off the field with cones and setting up the goals. After each game I will need help from all team families in packing up the cones and goals.

The team manager will be contacting you soon for volunteer sign-ups.

Uniforms: For games and practices players need soccer shoes (turf shoes, sneakers or cleats) and shin guards on, and long hair in a ponytail(s) or otherwise securely pulled back. For games, players should be on the field in full uniform, ready to actively warm up 5 minutes before the practice start time.

Must Bring: Each player needs a size 3 soccer ball to practice with at home. Each child needs to bring a soccer ball to practice every Sunday. Each child needs to bring a water bottle with ample water to every game and practice.

Snack: The snack is a social highlight of the game for most kids at this young age, sometimes more important to them than the number of goals scored. Snacks typically include orange slices for game half-times, and juices & a light, healthy snack for after the game. Families rotate bringing snack each week, and the Team Manager will contact you for snack sign up.

Please plan on staying 10-15 minutes after every game. We will use snack time after games to do something called the Winners Circle, where players say something positive, meaningful and specific about what one of their teammates did well during the game. I see the Winners Circle it as just as important as the game itself, and over the years have found it to be something the players enjoy immensely.

Team Meeting: We will have a team meeting for parents sometime in the next two weeks. I ask that all parents be there. It's a chance for us to meet before the season gets underway. At that meeting, we'll have a chance to talk in person about what's in store for the season.

I'm looking forward to a great season of soccer. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Your Child's U6 Coach

Team “Help Wanted” List

Each team needs active involvement help from parents to make the team run. Each Sunday, every family is expected to help the coach set up the cones and pop-up goals before the game, and every family is expected to help the coach take down the pop-up goals and collect the cones. Each family should volunteer for one game for snacks. Some jobs to consider for your team other than what is required by the club:

Parent Role
Picture Day – Distribute Picture Day forms and send out an announcement to the team about Picture Day. If asked, help the coach congregate the team players together on Picture Day for the photo shoot.
Trophies/Medals/Certificate – Collect money from parents for trophies or other season souvenir and buy them in time for the end of season party which can be the Club party or a team party.
Snacks - Each family should sign up at least once for game snacks, bringing orange slices for half time and a light snack and drinks for after the game. The Team Manager may circulate a sign up sheet for game snacks.
Uniforms – Collect order forms and money from parents and purchase and distribute the uniforms. A family is not required to purchase an uniform if they have the right size from a previous season or hand me downs from sibling's.