



COACHING FORMULA AND DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS: STAGE 1: 3-5 YEAR OLD PLAYERS

EXCERPTS FROM THE UNITED
SOCCER COACHES PLAYER
DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM





United Soccer Coaches offers the following formula to guide coaches planning for the development of players in the First Stage of Development. Children approximately 3-5 years old. The coaching formula is designed to provide coaches with the recipe for producing the optimum learning environment for players, but these are only recommendations. The coach must also plan for local considerations that may affect the formula, such as climate, field availability, other sports and after school activities and social or religious restrictions.

| COACHING FORMULA | |
|--|--|
| <p>COACHING THEME</p> <p>Priority themes for this stage of development. For a comprehensive list see United Soccer Coaches Competency Matrix.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dribbling. 2. Ball Manipulation. 3. 1v1 Attacking. 4. 1v1 Defending. 5. Shooting at an unopposed goal. |
| <p>SESSION FREQUENCY & DURATION</p> <p>How often & long a training sessions should occur.</p> | <p>2 to 3 seasons per year = 16-20 weeks per annum. 1 to 2 training sessions a week = 20-40 training sessions per annum. 30-45 minutes per session for 3-4 year old players. 45-60 minutes per session for 5 year old players.</p> |
| <p>COACHING TIME ANNUALLY</p> <p>How many hours we should dedicate to training in a 12 month period.</p> | <p>30-50 hours per annum in an organized coaching session with a suitably qualified and experienced coach.</p> |
| <p>NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES DURING THE SESSION</p> <p>The total number of activities including warm-up, main theme and games.</p> | <p>3-4 activities per session related to one or two themes (see coaching themes). Each activity to last 5-10 minutes and repeat 2-3 times.</p> |
| <p>NUMBER OF NEW ACTIVITIES</p> <p>The number of activities introduced into a training session that are new to the players.</p> | <p>United Soccer Coaches recommends coaches introduce no more than 2 new activities per session. One new activity per session is ideal.</p> |
| <p>BALANCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM FOCUS</p> <p>Ideal percentage of training dedicated to individual and team/group training.</p> | <p>95% of time should be dedicated to individual development with every player having a ball for the vast majority of the session.</p> |
| <p>NUMBER OF COACHING POINTS</p> <p>Average number of coaching points/teaching moments a coach will wish to share in a session.</p> | <p>Plan to introduce and reinforce 1-2 key coaching points a session. Focus on skill and basic rules of the game.</p> |
| <p>GAME FORMAT</p> <p>Recommended practice and game format.</p> | <p>Practice - 1v1 format is ideal. Small sided games - 1v1 to 3v3 with no goalies.</p> |



DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

STAGE 1 - EARLY CHILDHOOD (3-5 YEARS OLD)

The introduction to soccer stage coincides with the onset of independence from parents and increased self confidence in most children. Children also start to begin to play cooperatively with others. This does not mean however parents should fully pass the responsibility for learning to the club coach. The parent has a very important role in encouraging the child to play at home. Practice sessions should occur once or twice per week and players should be encouraged to play multiple sports and activities.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS:

- Players should learn the fundamental movement skills of running (forwards, backwards and sideways), jumping, turning, twisting and bending (lowering center of gravity to form a solid base).
- The ball should be involved all the time.

| KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 1 | |
|--|--|
| PHYSICALLY | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tires easily and recovers quickly. 2. Learns best by being physically active. 3. Needs to repeat activities that are well known and mastered. 4. Mainly uses large muscle movement, fine motor skills developing, but more difficult to master. 5. Basic motor skill developing, needs to combine skills in simple games. 6. Boys and girls have equal ability. 7. Center of gravity is higher, resulting in issues with balance. |
| PSYCHOLOGICAL/ SOCIAL | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Likes to play/work on their own, egocentric. 2. Easily motivated. 3. Enjoys initiating activities. 4. Enjoys being praised for endeavors. Sensitive to criticism and does not enjoy failure. 5. Developmentally advanced players start to become more independent and attempt to exercise more control over own environment. 6. Limited attention span, 15-20 minutes. 7. Frustration can come quickly. 8. Has a strong desire for affection and attention from adults. 9. Seeks social approval. 10. Experimental, exploratory behavior is part of development. |
| COGNITIVE/ MENTAL | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasingly able to use visual instructions (play them out of their mind), although observing demonstrations is more concrete. 2. Beginning to take into account ideas and emotions of others. 3. Inconsistent attention span. 4. Moving from being adventurous to be cautious. 5. Interests can be short and quick changing. 6. Imaginative, spontaneous and creative. |



DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS TRANSLATED TO COACHING PLAYERS IN STAGE 1

Child centered coaching requires a commitment on behalf of the coach/adult to embrace a natural starting point in development for each player. The coaches role is not to create parity (all players the same), but to nurture them to a level consistent with their individual commitment, attitude, enthusiasm and talent. To ensure participation in soccer is enjoyable for players and adults, parents and coaches of 4 & 5 year olds need to embrace and work with the development characteristics, and not against them.

TRANSLATED TO PLAYER DEVELOPMENT THIS MEANS:

1. Significant emphasis on fundamental movement skills – running, jumping, skipping, throwing etc
2. Focusing on ball familiarization and dribbling skills – one ball per child.
3. Sessions that are simple, fun, have variety and use large muscle.
4. Selecting activities that do not place undue stress on the muscles, bones and energy systems of the body.
5. Repeating activities regularly – constant change and insufficient reinforcement negatively affects learning.
6. Including activities that take a short time to complete (5-10 minutes), due to short attention span.
7. Camouflaging and concealing technical information by using names, characters and stories.
8. Encouraging trial and error, keeping instruction to a minimum.
9. Using equipment and props to increase complexity but continue to make the sessions fun – hurdles, hoops, ladders, bean bags, etc.
10. Include competitive games, but emphasize successes other than just winning (i.e. effort).
11. Providing considerable encouragement.
12. Keep instruction to a minimum and activity regular.
13. Include 'games and matches' in every session – no need for a separate day for games.
14. Avoiding temptations to place players in specialist positions (i.e. full back, forward or goal keeper).
15. Continually reinforce effort – and constantly praise players.