

Concord Carlisle Youth Soccer In-Town Coaching Curriculum

Kindergarten

Overview: This document is intended as a guide for coaches to use in training sessions during the season. It contains perspectives on the typical developmental level of the players' age group, specific target skills that coaches should focus on during the season, and a beginning list of activities to draw from. Coaches should schedule at least one practice per week in addition to games.

Philosophy: Our philosophy in training players in soccer is threefold: 1) Make it fun – make activities into games instead of drills. Use lots of positive reinforcement in practices and games. 2) Let the ball teach the game – maximize the amount of time each player is touching a ball and learning by doing (versus listening to a coach or standing around). 3) Keep it simple – have a plan and a focus for each practice that builds; provide a challenge the players can meet, get success, then raise the challenge a little more.

U6 developmental characteristics

U6 players may not understand all the mechanics of a rolling or bouncing/flighted ball and sometimes shy away from the ball. They don't fully understand cause and effect. Do things to get them comfortable with the ball in different circumstances (lots of touches with moving ball, not lots of waiting in line).

- U6 players can only process small bits of information and have a short attention span, so be brief and clear. Structure many, short activities. If you like to talk a lot, don't. U6 players are not usually results oriented – they mostly want to actively participate.
- Celebrate success, U6 players need generous praise and are easily bruised emotionally. Find ways to play without pressure. Don't tell kids to "Do this". Ask them to "Try this".
- Imagination is important to U6 players, be inventive with games. Kids love to chase and be chased (esp. by adult). Go with this in inventive directions!
- Your bottom line is: Are all the players involved and having fun?

Target Skills (all related to becoming comfortable with the ball):

- Dribbling a ball. Basic control, change of direction, speed is less important.
- Passing to and receiving from a partner. Encourage use of both feet for passing and receiving. This gets harder to learn as they get older!
- Shooting into a goal and scoring! Do this a lot, they like it and it's good for them.
- Do not do any heading at this age group.

Kindergarten Selected Activities

There are many activities that can develop the target skills, invent your own! Some ideas follow with room for additions. At each practice, pick a particular theme for focus and build on it allowing for a lot of success and a rising level of challenge. Keep activities moving quickly and plan in advance how to progress. If something isn't working, adjust – you have many variables to play with.

- Dribbling through random “gates” (two cones).
- Out and back dribbling relay race.
- Coach throws all the balls and players dribble back.
- Freeze tag with coach “it” - inside a spacious grid. When tagged, players freeze in a funny position with their legs apart. Other players can unfreeze teammates by dribbling through legs. Hospital tag is a variation, tagged player holds the part of the body that was tagged. When both hands occupied, player freezes and can be unfrozen if a teammate dribbles a circle around them.
- Dribbling within a grid with commands from coach (stop, go, touch ball with body parts, funny face, etc.).
- Knockout (dribbling their own ball in a confined space while trying to knock out the other players balls).
- Two touch passing in pairs (receiving and striking the ball with the instep) through a gate. Count number in a row. A variation is to be moving up the field or roaming.
- Finishing on goal - stationary and a dribbled ball.
- Play 1v1 to goals. This is terrific for letting the game teach the game. A variation is 2v2 to goals with very loose sidelines
- Bring balloons to teach them juggling (keeping the “ball” off the ground with feet, calves, thighs, etc.).
- Four players in a grid - 2 touch passing and calling names.
- 4v1 keep away in a spacious grid.
- 4 players in a grid - 2 touch passing, calling out name of intended receiver.

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Grades 1 and 2 (U8)

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U8 Developmental characteristics

- **Grade 1 and 2 players** like soccer because it is fun. Their attention span is short and they have limited ability to attend to more than one task at a time. Concentration on basic skills will utilize most of their mental energy. Get things going quickly and simply, add complexity in little doses.
- 1st and 2nd graders are easily bruised psychologically by peers and has a strong desire for social acceptance.
- Effort is synonymous with performance ("If I tried hard, then I performed well").

Target skills

- Dribbling in open space and through fairly open gates (using inside and outside of foot - both primary foot and off foot). Introduce a dribbling feint.
- Passing with a partner through gates while moving.
- Development of inside of the foot and laces kick (discourage toe kicks).
- Development of weaker kicking foot close to parity with primary foot.
- Finishing a stationary and a dribbled ball into the goal.
- Fundamental receiving technique - moving into the path of the ball; using the inside of the foot; controlling (not stopping) the ball away from opponent.
- Simple juggling touches (1-4) off thighs and instep.
- Introduction to low impact heading with coach - overcome the fear of heading with low risk correct technique.
- Maintaining spatial relations on field in 3v3 (1 back -2 up formation)
- Defending attributes including staying between the ball and the goal and pressuring the ball.
- Training of heading should not be done at this age group.

Selected Activities

There are many activities that can develop the target skills, invent your own! Some ideas follow with room for additions. At each practice, pick a particular theme for focus and build on it allowing for a lot of success and a rising level of challenge. Keep activities moving quickly and plan in advance how to progress. If something isn't working, adjust – you have many variables to play with.

- Juggling individually (thigh, instep), begin with bounce in between.
- Dribbling within grid with commands - "inside, outside, change, body parts, ball touches, quick feet".
- Wickets (half team stands with legs apart, other half dribbles around and passes to self through legs).
- Knockout, (everybody with a ball in confined space trying to protect their ball and kick other balls out of space).
- Elbow tag – Players in pairs linking elbows. One player is “it” and at least one player is unattached to a partner. The “it” player carries a ball and seeks to hit a loose player below the waist. The loose player gets safety by linking elbows with a player who has a partner – at this point the partner is loose and tries to join another group before being struck. If struck below the waist, the loose player is “it”. This kind of activity is good for agility, quick starts and stops and is fun.
- Line soccer (half team on one side of box, half on the other, each player with a number – when coach calls number, player from each side with that number races to contest for ball – can be done for possession or to score a goal).
- Play 1v1 to goals. This is terrific for letting the game teach the game. Groups of four can alternate with two players playing and two forming goals with their legs and counting goals (active 1v1 is very tiring in a short period). Score either way through. A variation is 2v2 to goals with very loose sidelines. If you wish to emphasize offense, give the offense more success early by making it 2v1 or 3v1. On defense, emphasize staying between the ball and the goal and pressuring the ball.
- Dribbling through an easy slalom course (relay races).
- Dribbling through gates – competition.
- Open spaces dribbling - alternating outside/inside of foot on every other touch (same foot).
- Dribbling toward a cone, cut and finish on goal
- Technical training in pairs - instep and inside of foot kick with good receiving technique.
- Spacious possession grids - 3v1 or 4v1 - 2 touch keep-away. Emphasize getting to an open space to receive.
- Play games with multiple balls and multiple goals (a scorer must go to a different goal for the next score)
- Play 2v2 from 4 corners (players start at corners, coach serves ball and players compete for possession).
- 3v3 to goals (1 back, 2 up formation). Place dot cones down center line – have front players stay on their own half of the field. Defending player cannot go past front players. Introduces triangular shape.

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Grades 2 to 4 (U10)

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U10 developmental characteristics

- Motor skills becoming more refined. Greater diversity within the group of playing ability/physical maturity. Boys and girls begin to develop separately.
- More prone to heat injury than adults (this age will stop when wiped out; U10 will push the limits).
- Formal decision making develops (tactical concepts) - thinking through cause and effect. Understanding results of effort. Predictability of consequences.
- Repetition of dynamic (NOT STATIC) technique is very important.
- U10 come to play and need feedback. Corrective feedback OK but positive feedback with lots of enthusiasm is better. Can be group or individual. Explanations must be brief and meaningful (not superlatives) get back to play quickly.
- Peer pressure becoming important; peers can be ruthless.
- Identification with team (vs. self). Adult outside the family (i.e. coach) may take on added significance.
- U10 learns better by visual teaching (demonstration) vs. lectures.

Target Skills

- Ability to dribble through a slalom course with reasonable skill using inside/outside of each foot.
- Ability to demonstrate 1-2 dribbling feints/moves to beat an opponent.
- Ability to pass through gates with a partner subject to time/competitive pairs pressure.
- Sound (not perfect) striking technique of a stationary ball (inside of foot; laces, outside of foot). Improving technique with a moving ball.
- Individual defense of pressuring the ball and defending the ball.
- Group defense of staying between the ball and the goal (near post). Clearing the ball to the flanks, away from pressure (risk) in the center of the field.
- Limiting ball touches (dribbling) except in forward 1/3 of the field to minimize risk, increase speed of play and switching the point of attack.
- Correct receiving technique with inside of the foot. Development of thigh, calf and chest receptions.
- Small group attack: outlet pass; 1-2 pass (2v1 drills); splitting the defense (2v2); finishing to the far post with a teammate running to that post.
- Juggling 4-20 touches using thighs and insteps; establishing rhythm.
- Training of heading should not be done at this age group except with balloons to teach proper technique. Focus on this occurs at U12.

U10 Selected Activities

There are many activities that can develop the target skills, invent your own! Some ideas follow with room for additions. At each practice, pick a particular theme for focus and build on it allowing for a lot of success and a rising level of challenge. Keep activities moving quickly and plan in advance how to progress. If something isn't working, adjust – you have many variables to play with.

- Play 1v1 to lines (no goals). Teach attacking with feints; defending with pressure. Keep sidelines wide or loose.
- Play 1v1 to goals. This is terrific for letting the game teach the game. Groups of four can alternate with two players playing and two forming goals with their legs and counting goals (active 1v1 is very tiring in a short period). Score either way through. A variation is 2v2 to goals with very loose sidelines.
- Play 2v2 to goals: Attacking to create 2v1 (splitting the defense); defending with interchanging roles of pressure (on the ball) and cover (hanging back a bit). If you wish to emphasize offense, give the offense more success early by making it 2v1 or 3v1. On defense, emphasize staying between the ball and the goal and pressuring the ball.
- Slalom course dribbling - timed relay races with varying surface selections (e.g. outside of foot only).
- 1 touch lead passing up the field. "Wall pass" activities. For example, one player progresses along a line of well-spaced players passing to each and receiving back from each. At the end, this player joins line and player on other end of line starts.
- Practice dribble moves during warm-ups having one player or coach demonstrate a move and then players show move as they approach cones keeping head up. Include feints.
- Juggling - use of thighs, instep, inside of foot, head. Introduce pairs juggling. Good for warmups.
- 5v2 possession grids (1, 2 or 3 touch keepaway).
- 3v3+3 (6v3) transition grid (two teams of 3 play keepaway against each other, the third group of three teams with whichever team has the ball (i.e.: always on offense). A variation is that whichever team of three loses the ball becomes the team on defense.
- 6v6 to 4 goals (goals set up on four sides of field, each team has two goals they can shoot for).
- 3 team (1 team off) rotation - 1/2 field to goals. Game to 1; losing team leaves field (practices juggling?).
- 2v1+GK and 3v2+GK - 1/2 field attack.
- 2v2 from 4 corners (players start at corners, coach serves ball and players compete for possession).
- Receiver in 3 yd. square grid - 2 players with balls alternate serving balls into grid - receiver plays 2 touch back to server. Emphasize control within the grid. Once comfortable, raise degree of difficulty by reducing size of grid and/or speeding up the pace or frequency of served balls.
- Receiving/heading shuttle up and down field or within a circle (half players inside circle, move around, achieve eye contact with player on perimeter who serves ball then gets a one or two touch return).
- Shooting games are great, especially at the end of practice. Lots of scores energize players and leave feeling of success. One game has three lines, one well out in front, one to the side, and one by the goal, - plus a keeper. Lead player out in front pushes their ball so it is moving takes a shot, following toward the goal. This player quickly receives a serve from the a player in the side line for a one touch shot, further continuing toward the goal. Finally the shooter gets a point blank heading opportunity provided by the third line. Players rotate. Prepare keeper that getting scored on a lot is expected!

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Grades 5-6 (U12)

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U12 developmental Characteristics

- Can better acquire and apply knowledge. U12 beginning to think in abstract terms/hypothetical situations.
- A systematic approach to problem solving begins. The game of soccer must present the opportunity for the player to think creatively and solve problems in dynamic conditions.
- Ability to sustain complex coordinated skill sequences.
- Stress skill development and learning enjoyment to avoid burnout, attrition and overuse injuries. Flexibility training helps to prevent injuries.
- U12 players come wanting to play. Coordination improves. If coach gives a clear demonstration, players can replicate or demonstrate.
- Physical, mental, technical speed increasing. Great development phase for learning.
- Coach can use teammates to help solve problems

Target skills (with emphasis on execution of soccer skills under pressure; increased speed, strength, athleticism):

- Reasonable juggling proficiency (10-40 touches).
- Aggressive individual defense with pressure and tackling.
- Execution of feints to beat an opponent; shielding; use of sole of foot to control ball.
- Full competency in striking/dribbling with weaker foot.
- Low impact heading in pairs with proper technique. This is where we introduce heading, a good place to start is with balloons (fun and low impact!). Don't overdo – no more than 5 minutes in any practice. Proper heading is with the forehead (above the eyebrows, below the peak), providing direction.
- Development of fundamental attack patterns: 1-2 pass; overlapping; short- short-long combo; through balls; crosses; runs off the ball.
- Development of small group pressure zone defense using pressure, cover and balance.
- Developing group transition (on attack: opening up; on defense: slowing down the attack with immediate pressure and organizing a shape) and group speed of play.
- Developing group possession skills in grids and somewhat in games.

U12 Selected Activities

There are many activities that can develop the target skills, invent your own! Some ideas follow with room for additions. At each practice, pick a particular theme for focus and build on it allowing for a lot of success and a rising level of challenge. Keep activities moving quickly and plan in advance how to progress. If something isn't working, adjust – you have many variables to play with.

- Juggling every day. This is a good warm up activity. Have contests (allow one minute, players seek to get as many in a row as they can either free-style or off a particular body part – ask for results at end) interspersed with stretches.
- Line soccer (Warm up - half team on one side of box, half on the other, each player with a number – when coach calls number, player from each side with that number races to contest for ball – can be done for possession or to score a goal).
- Introducing and training set plays from both sides of the ball: corner kicks, goal kicks, throw ins, direct kicks, indirect kicks. Rapid play to conclusion (score or out of bounds then a rapid restart can be quite fun).
- Introduction of flank play in channels (wing players stay wide in defined “channels”). Crossing/passing from a flank player to strikers inside the box.
- Fullbacks opening up after goalie save or on any transition to attack in defensive third. Go wide, pull up field to pull attackers out of their attacking zone.
- Proficiency training of 1-3 dribbling moves. Have players practice against stationary teammate at first. Can also build into relay race with multiple stations, at each station (cones, corner flag) a different move is demonstrated.
- 3v3+3 (6v3) transition grid (two teams of 3 play keepaway against each other, the third group of three teams with whichever team has the ball (i.e.: always on offense). A variation is that whichever team of three loses the ball becomes the team on defense.
- 5v2 possession grid. Attackers should emphasize moving without the ball, thinking in advance of receiving the ball what they might do with it. Defenders must work as a team, one pressures ball, taking away options and seeking to “shepherd” attacker into a risky pass that partner can anticipate. Rotate.
- Technical work - longer driven instep kicks; receiving bouncing and flighted balls; offensive and defensive heading development. Teach technique being focused on before scrimmage and then recognize or offer “scores” for players demonstrating technique during scrimmage.
- Utilize 1, 2 or 3 touch restrictions to increase speed of play.
- Play a Passing/Possession game in two grids separated by a dead zone to develop longer passes. Each team has players in each grid, either even or imbalanced. Goal is either to keep possession or go to a goal.
- Add a third grid in place of the dead zone. Three even teams, one in each grid. Teams on outside must pass to each other, middle team seeks to intercept. One middle player can go into grid with ball to apply pressure. Team losing possession to middle team becomes middle team.
- Game on a wide field to 4 goals. Two teams, each team has a playmaker. To score, the ball has to come through playmaker.
- 3 team tournament (6v6) to big goals on a short field – changeover whenever a quality shot is placed on goal forcing keeper to make a save (or if goal is scored).
- World Cup - Players in pairs are teams competing for one or more balls to score in one goal defended by keeper(s). If team scores, they make it to the next round, practice juggling on sideline. Last team to score is “knocked out” and either joins keeper or does sideline activity. Continue until winning team is identified. This is a good closing activity.
- Penalty kick contest (don't do often as there is inevitable a lot of standing around can be a cool down activity at end).