

Stage 2 Coaching Guidelines

Characteristics of the Developing Player

- Players are still developing basic coordination. Combine activities that involve basic movements with activities focused on soccer-specific skills.
- Children this age want to *play*. Use imagination in communicating and make every activity fun!
- Players learn by getting many, many touches on the ball and by experimenting.
- Players should be given simple responsibilities so they can learn how to be a good teammate. They must also constantly encourage teammates.
- Praise effort and risk-taking; young players need the confidence.

Skills to Focus On

1. Running
2. Jumping
3. Turning
4. Starting and stopping
5. Defending 1v1
6. Quick feet
7. Dribbling
 - Turning
 - Beating people 1v1
8. Receiving
9. Passing short distances
10. Shooting

Practice Principles

1. Practice twice per week for 75-90 minutes.
2. Every player should have a ball.
3. Avoid lines when you can. If you must put players in lines, limit them to just four players.
4. Keep activities to 10-12 minutes.
5. Come to practice with a plan and set up early. This will reduce breaks and the distractions that go with them.
6. Give players lots of repetitions at everything.
7. When correcting players, always tell them what they *should* do, rather than what they should *not* do.

What They Should Learn

- ✓ Handling the ball with *both* feet and the hands.
- ✓ Continued work on passing and receiving
- ✓ Returning to an original position once an action is completed.
- ✓ Moving forward when attacking and falling back when defending.
- ✓ Confident in 1v1 def & off
- ✓ Looking to play away from defenders and make decisions to protect the ball. "can we keep the ball?"

Stage 2

(U7 & U8)

A 6-year-old is eager, active and likes to be on the go. Although keen to act independently, a 6-year-old needs parental approval, understanding, praise and encouragement. Pushing too hard or expecting too much can make the child tense and nervous. Peer groups become important and the child will identify with other youngsters of the same sex and with similar interests and activities.

What you need to know about development

Skill development for players at Stage 2 is best achieved through the combination of quality instruction by enthusiastic coaches and unstructured play in a safe and challenging environment. A significant emphasis of development should be on fundamental movement skills and basic soccer skills. For the sake of the child and the benefit of the soccer player, children should be encouraged to play a variety of sports year round. Players start to demonstrate a strong sense of fairness and to this end they should be introduced to simple rules and ethics of the game. Simple tactics and strategies can also be introduced.

Developing independence from family becomes more important now. Events such as starting school bring children this age into regular contact with other children and adults. Friendships become more and more important. Physical, social, and mental skills develop rapidly at this time. This is a critical time for children to develop confidence and adults need to reinforce good behavior with praise and recognition.

Translation to player development

Child-centered coaching assumes a commitment on behalf of the coach to embrace a natural starting point in development for each player. The coach's role is *not* to create parity (all players the same), but to develop all players to the highest level each individual's commitment, attitude, enthusiasm and talent will allow. To ensure participation in soccer is enjoyable for players and adults, parents and coaches of U5 and U6 players need to embrace and work with the players' developmental characteristics, not against them.

Translated to player development, this means:

- Continuing emphasis on fundamental movement skills – running, jumping, skipping, throwing, etc.
- Focusing on ball familiarization and dribbling skills – one ball per child
- Introducing paired and cooperation activities
- Helping players understand a task by demonstration and asking questions
- Planning sessions that require players to be extremely active
- Selecting activities that do not place undue stress on the body
- Repeating activities regularly – young players need lots of reps to master skills
- Disguising technical information by using names, characters and stories

- Encouraging trial and error
- Making sessions fun and challenging using hurdles, hoops, ladders, bean bags, etc.
- Including competitive games, but emphasizing effort
- Providing constant encouragement.
- Including 'games and matches' in every session
- Introducing small sided games – 2v2 to 4v4 – at the end of practice sessions; don't sacrifice practice sessions for games at this stage
- Rotating all players through all positions, including goalkeeper
- Teaching all players fundamental goalkeeping skills – catching, throwing and diving (players love to dive!)
- Introducing basic rules of the game – including restarts when ball leaves the field.
- Improving passing skills

Tactical Focus

At this age, players should focus on:

- Returning to their original positions when an action is finished
- Moving forward on the attack and retreating toward their own goal when defending
- Making decisions to find open team mates or keep the ball on the dribble. Players should be encouraged to keep the ball.

Player Competencies and Assessment

The JASA Player Development Curriculum offers parents and coach comfort by ensuring there is a plan to guide a child's soccer playing experience from the time they enter the program to the end of their youth playing experience. Part of this planning process is identifying the performance expectations/competencies for each stage of development. In addition, regular player assessment will enable coaches to know a player's ability and take the necessary steps to provide appropriate instruction. Assessment also allows coaches to provide feedback to parents regarding a child's progress and identifies how they can help in the player's development.

With this in mind, the following table provides players, parents, coaches and administrators with a comprehensive list of soccer competencies (skills, techniques, knowledge, tactics) for Stage 2. The matrix represents the recommended time for introducing a competency (+) and the time when the player should become competent (✓). Note players are not expected to become competent in many competencies by the end of Stage 2.

Stage 2 Competencies Matrix

Stage/Chronological Age	U7	U8
Movement Skills		
Run with stops and starts	✓	
Run and change directions	✓	
Gallop	✓	
Skip	✓	
Lateral movements - side-step	✓	
Rolling, bending low, arching	✓	
Balance - on a line	✓	
Balance - on one foot	✓	
Throw – both hands		✓
Jump - stride and bound patterns	Ongoing	
Jump – hurdles	Ongoing	
Quick feet and crossovers		✓
Speed - Coordination of arms and legs	+	
Running technique	Ongoing	
Sprinting technique	+	
Dribbling Skills		
Turns – basic		✓
Dribbling basics		✓
Stage/Chronological Age	U7	U8
Ball manipulation	Ongoing	
Feints and dribble	Ongoing	
Attacking an opponent 1v1	Ongoing	
Shooting at an open goal		✓
Turns – advanced	+	
Running with the ball	+	
Beating an opponent	+	
Escaping an opponent		
Receiving		
Control – Foot	Ongoing	
Control – Thigh		+

Passing		
Ground - Inside of foot - 5 yards	+	
Ground - Inside of foot - 10 yards	+	
Ground - Inside of foot - 20 yards		+
Ground – Instep		+
Shooting		
Instep		+
Heading		
Basic technique	+	
Physical Conditioning		
Dynamic warm-up	Ongoing	
Speed training (Anaerobic)		+
Mental/Cognitive Conditioning		
Confidence	Ongoing	
Concentration	Ongoing	
Stage/Chronological Age	U7	U8
Goalkeeping		
Basic catching techniques		+
Positioning		+
Laws of the Game		
Individual and team behavior	+	
Fair and foul play	+	
Basic rules	+	

Key:

(+) Introduction of the skill, techniques, knowledge & tactics

(✓) Expected time when the average player should become competent

Ongoing = Skill has been introduced, but does not have to be mastered yet.

Stage 2 Programming

1st Grade Program—U7

- *Format:* Gender Specific if possible. (Coed if necessary)
- *Player to Coach Ratio:* 10-12 players to 1 coach (and 1 assistant)
- *Session duration:* 60 minutes
- *Regular Season:* Spring (10 weeks) & fall (10 weeks)
- *Training to match ratio:* Two training sessions per week with regular age group Director Sessions. One match per week. (weekends)
- *Assessment:* Players will be assessed at least once per season and parents will receive an assessment/certificate.

2nd Grade Program—U8 Recreation (Introduction to Youth Academy Pathway)

- *Format:* Co-ed or Gender specific (Boys or Girls)
- *Ratio:* 10-12 players to 1 coach (and 1 assistant)
- *Session duration:* 60-75 minutes
- *Regular Season:* Spring (10 weeks) & fall (10 weeks)
- *Training to match ratio:* Two Training sessions per week with regular age group director Sessions. One match per week. (weekends)
- *Assessment:* Players will be assessed at least once per season and parents will receive an assessment/certificate.

Summer Academy Technical Week

Offered as an optional program for players and parents wishing to continue their soccer experience during the summer.

The purpose of this program is to:

- Consolidate progress in the spring and prepare for the fall season
- Provide additional emphasis on ball skill mastery
- Provide an environment awarding creativity
- Utilize speed equipment to develop excellent sprinting, jumping and agility
- Develop flexibility and core strength
- Raise individual performance and strive for the next level of performance
- Evaluate progress