

**Highland Scots Soccer**  
**U8 Player Development Model**  
**Igniting the Passion**  
(Modified and adopted from US Youth Soccer)

**Philosophy**

*~ Me, the ball, and my friend. ~*

**Mission**

The objective of the fundamental stage is to learn all basic movement skills by building overall motor skills. During the fundamental stage an opportunity occurs for a lifelong turn-on to the game.

**Player Mentality**

Igniting a passion for the game must be the number one objective for coaches of this age group. The aim of the coach is to keep their soccer experience fun, enjoyable and to foster a desire to play. This love of the game keeps people in the game for a lifetime.

**[Coaches at this level should allow players to play in matches without giving many, if any commands. Yelling commands forces the player to lose focus of controlling the ball and focus on listening to their coach. ]**

Now is the opportune time for encouraging skills with either foot as the muscle movement patterns are a clean slate. Ambidextrous skill is certainly a goal for a coach committed to player development. Show players that passing is another option to dribbling. This is not just a technical objective but a psychosocial one since the basis of all teamwork is cooperation between partners. Many U-8 activities will be done in pairs to promote communication, cooperation and the conceptualization of soccer principles. Furthermore, encourage them to get better by practicing on their own with the ball.

Children in the U-8 age group still play predominately as individuals and occasionally with a partner. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together but are still involved in individual play. This age group prefers individual activities, but it is possible to successfully get them into activities where they can work in pairs.

The attention capacity for this age group is still limited to one task at a time. They are quite rightly focused on the ball. In a 4v4 match the opposition for the player with the ball is generally 1v7 even though partner play is now emerging.

**[Players need encouragement to share and approval for trying.]**

**Training Mentality**

Six, 7 and 8 year olds are starting to understand what it means to play a game. They are beginning to cooperate more with their teammates. In fact, they will now recognize that they even have teammates because they will occasionally pass the ball to a teammate purposefully. Some U-8 players will have played for more than a season; however, this does not mean these players are ready for the mental demands of tactical team soccer. True, they do have an idea of the game with regard to scoring or preventing goals, but the emphasis still needs to be placed on the individual's ability to control the ball.

They are still there to have fun, and because some of the players may be new to soccer, it is imperative that activities are geared toward individual success and participation. Parallel play may occur in training sessions for U-8 players,

too. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together, but still involved in both individual and partner play.

### **Section 1 - General Characteristics of the U6 Age Group**

- Like to show skills – need approval with every attempt
- Beginning to develop some physical confidence (most can ride a bicycle)
- Lack sense of pace – go flat out, chasing the ball until they drop
- Still in motion – twitching, jerking, scratching and blinking are all second nature physical movements
- Still into running, jumping, climbing and rolling
- Boys and girls are still quite similar in physical and psychological development
- Attention span is a bit longer than the U-6 age group
- Developing playmates
- More into imitation of the big guys (sports heroes becoming important)
- Still very sensitive – Dislikes personal failure in front of peers.
- Inclined more toward small group activities

Using game-like activities, which allow for trial and error, exposes children to the components of the game. The key training activities are body awareness and maze games. Introduce a few target games too. They need to touch the ball frequently during fun activities that engage them. Small-sided games are still undoubtedly the best option for these players. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but it is also an easier game to understand.

### **Section 2 - Components of the Game for the U8 Age Group\***

**Fitness:** Experiment with the qualities of a rolling or spinning ball. Introduce ball lifting, juggling, block tackle, receiving ground balls with the inside and sole of the foot, shooting with the inside of the foot, toe passing and shooting and dribbling while changing direction. Introduce the push pass.

**Technique:** Agility, eye-foot and eye-hand coordination, balance, leaping, bounding, tumbling, catching, throwing, pulling, pushing, warm-up activities and movement education. Continue education on sports nutrition with players and parents.

**Psychology:** Encourage working in pairs, sportsmanship, parental involvement, how to play, emotional management, creativity, dynamic activities, participation of all players and a safe and fun environment. There is still a short attention span unless the player has peaked (keep interest high). Like to show what they can do – encourage trying new things. Developing self-esteem – activities should foster positive feedback and attainable positive success.

**Tactics:** Back line and forward line, 1v1 attack and choosing to dribble or pass. Introduce the names of positions (fullbacks and forwards). Institute games of 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2, playing with the ball with a purpose and promote problem solving.

\*Please note that the components of the game are in a priority order for this age group.

### **Section 3 - Typical U-8 Training Session**

- Should not exceed one hour.
- Pre Warm-up, including skill development  
*-approximately 5 minutes-*
- Warm-up, including skill development and movement education challenges  
*-approximately 10-12 minutes-*
- A mixture of individual and partner activities.(Main part I and Main part II.) Introduce target games with a variety of player combinations: 1v1, 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2.  
*-approximately 25 minutes-*

- Conclude with a Small-Sided Game of 4v4, two goals and no goalkeepers.  
-approximately 20 minutes

Coaches should devote the end of each training session to playing 4v4 practice games. During these practice games is the best time for the coach to teach rules of the game to the players. Fun games involving small numbers can be played, especially 1v1, 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2 leading up to a final activity of 4v4. It is important to ensure each child has a ball and to focus on fun games. The benefit of the increased number of touches on the ball in those games is irreplaceable. Coaches should be well prepared and have a selection of game-like activities planned, while keeping in mind these young children have short attention spans.

## **Section 4 - U-8 Weekly Training Session Plans**

Each week will have a training session plan for you. This plan is meant to help guide you as a coach, but also to ensure all players are receiving the same standard instruction. We will be using US Soccer's guidelines and practice plans. We feel they are the experts when it comes to player development and by adopting their philosophy and training our youth will have the platform necessary to become the best soccer players they can be.

Most weeks at the U8 level are comprised of one to two games per week and one training day. On occasion, some teams may not have a second game day. Enjoy a day off!

### **Training day**

You will follow the practice plan for your current week. The plan will have the pre-warm-up, three stations, and will end with a scrimmage/game. The three stations will always be warm-up, main part 1, and main part 2. Once everyone has rotated through the three stations, you will come together to do scrimmages.

### **Pre warm-up**

Every practice should begin with a pre warm-up. At this age players need consistency and a transition into the start of an instructional practice. This pre warm-up allows coaches to continue laying the foundation of skill development and will introduce foundation more touches. These touches are the next progression in the building blocks for all future skill introduction. As the players move from one division to the next, they will continue this pre warm-up with increased difficulty, adding more elaborate foundation touches and skills as they master them.

At this age the skill development is moving on from very basic to ones that require more balance, coordination, and thought. The following are the skills we will be instructing at this level:

### **Tick-tocks (Think pendulum on a clock, swing back and forth)**

- Using the inside of the foot, tap the ball back and forth
- Keep the ankle locked and toe slightly up
- The knees should be bent
- Arms out for balance
- See if the player can look away from the soccer ball

### **Toe-taps**

- Using the bottom of the foot to touch the soccer ball

### **Game days**

Before games, if you are looking for a warm up, you can always use your pre-warm-up and warm up from your weekly practice plan. This will give you a good 15 minute warm up. Alternatively, doing the pre-warm-up and practicing striking at the goal would suffice.

- Alternate feet
- Try and stay up on your toes and not walk
- Arms out for balance
- See if player can look away from the soccer ball

### **Sole-rolls**

- Place the bottom of the foot on the soccer ball, roll the soccer ball across the body
- The child should be walking with the ball while performing this action
- Alternate feet

### **Pull-backs**

- Pull-backs are executed by placing the bottom of the foot on the ball, rolling it (or flicking it) backward, and turning with it. It is a way to quickly reverse direction.
- Alternate feet and repeat.
- After children are comfortable with this motion, have them take a few steps dribbling the ball and executing the pull-back.

### **Warm-up**

The warm-up portion of practice will always be listed as the first drill in your practice plan; however, since we are using station based training, not all groups will start with the warm-up. This will not affect their overall training.

### **Main-part**

The main-part of practice will be the core of practice. This will be where the most instruction will come. At the U6 level, it is important to keep it fun and engaging. There will always be two stations that are included in the main-part of practice.

### **Game**

You will always end practice with 4v4 games. The practice plan says 3v3, but since our scheduled games will be 4v4, it is fine to include them at the end of practice. If teams are short or you see some kids struggling with 4v4, you can always create a game of 3v3. This is entirely up to you and can change throughout the season.

## **Section 5 - Team Management**

### **Parent Meeting**

It's important to start the season off with a Parent Meeting. This will give you the opportunity to go over what your expectations are for the season, emphasizing the most important component will be to get their children to "want" to come to soccer. Adding that this will include teaching things other than soccer, such as: listening and following directions. During this meeting you can also pass out schedules, verify allergies, and make note of communication preference.

### **Team Meeting**

Even at the U8 level it is important to gather the kids around, make introductions, and get them excited about soccer. Many players at this age have never been a part of a team. This is your opportunity to get them engaged in soccer and have a good experience. This is true for the parents as well.

On the first day of practice ask them some questions to assess your team:

- Has anyone ever played soccer before?
- Does anyone know how to play soccer?
- Do you use your hands?
- How do you score points?
- Do you throw the ball into the goal?

This engages them and gets them thinking about soccer. Let them know that you only use your feet; that you kick the ball, and that you dribble the ball with your feet to get it from one end of the field to the other and that the object of the game is to score goals. Demonstration is worth a thousand words. Show them what you mean.

### **Parent Communication**

As a league, we will try to communicate any changes, updates, and current events to you as soon as possible. As a division, it will be up to the coaches as to how they communicate with parents. Most parents prefer texting, but some still like the phone call. If you do choose to text, we would ask that you ask for a response and adjust settings so when a parent responds they will respond only to the coach. You may also direct your parents to the Highland Scots Soccer website and Facebook page.

### **Weather Cancellations**

New this season, coaches will no longer be responsible for cancelling games/practices. All coaches will be contacted by either the Director of Coaching or the Director of Fields and Maintenance at least one hour prior to game time. We will also take into consideration the division; the U10 division may still play, but the U8 could be cancelled. Once you are contacted please contact your parents as soon as possible. You may also refer them to the website. There will be a google calendar for your division that will show any cancellations.

### **Team snack**

It will be up to you as a coach to manage the team snack schedule. It is not required that teams participate in a team snack, but at this age some kids may show up just for the treat. Please confirm with parents at your parent meeting if any players have allergies you need to be aware of.

### **Final thoughts**

- Practice for this age group is about improving social skills, improving coordination, learning the concepts of soccer and about having fun.
- U8 requires high energy and a positive attitude. It's more about the kids learning that soccer can be fun.
- Key coaching strategies: no hands, use multiple parts of the foot, but no toes, kick with a purpose, and praise for every attempt to "find a friend" or try a skill in a scrimmage or game.
- Maximize touches on the ball per player in practice. Avoid lines – the kids won't behave well while waiting for their turn to play the ball.
- Minimize lecturing – they have very short attention spans. You have maybe ten seconds to make your point.