



U6/U8 Coaching Guide

## **MUSC U6/U8 Philosophy**

**Pep Guardiola was once quoted as famously saying...**

*'Can this guy dribble? I only want players who have that skill so that's always what I look at. I want full-backs and central defenders and midfielders and inside forwards and wingers who can dribble because you can learn control and good passing...so yeah dribbling that's the key'*

**During the Foundation Phase, we need to encourage our teams to develop confidence on the ball. This means that instead of focusing on passing early, our coaching should concentrate on helping our players develop a real connection with the ball.**

### **Master the Ball**

Children in the Foundation Phase want to improve and develop their skills – they're ready to learn. Mastering the ball includes building the capability to manipulate and maneuver the ball in any direction, at varying speeds and by using any part of the foot or body. These skills can then be used when dribbling, travelling with the ball, turning, receiving, shielding, or screening the ball during any activity or game.

The practice required to master the ball can't be skimmed over, rushed or – at worse – overlooked. Developing these fundamental skills will form the basis for all development that follows, and the Foundation Phase is a perfect time to start, as young players are ready to explore and experiment. Coaches should encourage this and ensure that players get lots of ball contact (combined with appropriate levels of decision-making), by providing a wide range of small-number activities and games.

There are many methods to use to begin practicing ball mastery: from isolated ball-familiarity exercises that promote touch, feel and manipulation (but require very little decision-making capability), to small-number activities, games and formats that will bring returns in all of the four corners (technical, physical, psychological and social). As a coach, the method you use should be determined by the needs of the group and within that, where possible, the needs of each individual player.

## **Stay on the Ball**

It's difficult to say which part comes first - master the ball or stay on the ball - because in promoting one you're almost certainly working on the other. However, once players grow in confidence because of their improving ability on the ball (i.e. improving mastery), we need to encourage them to stay on the ball for longer. This doesn't mean 'hog the ball' or dribble until possession is lost staying on the ball is about the player knowing that they are able to keep the ball for longer, regardless of the pressure from the opposition or from the lack of space available.

Once players develop confidence in their own ability, time can be spent on thinking about how they might attack and score for themselves – or help others to do the same. For our under 5-8 players this must be established in such a way that their technique is still good even though there's more pressure. This could take years of practice, so ensure you give players lots of variety and opportunities to begin to develop these important, fundamental techniques.

Better technical skills means that players can look for more attacking, threatening and creative options, rather than the easy or predictable ones. More time on the ball means that the game may change whilst a player still has the ball: supporting positions might change into more attacking ones, the player on the ball may suddenly turn or dribble out of pressure and the whole pitch might open up before them.

### **These situations never occur if the player is told to always pass the ball early and to the easiest option.**

This is probably the hardest part for adults to deal with, let alone actively encourage and promote. It's the hardest and most frustrating because there will be lots of mistakes whilst these skills and abilities are developed. It's vital that coaches adopt a patient and consistent approach, so players feel supported when developing this aspect of their game.

It will be well worth the wait: remember that development is a long-term process and by staying on the ball, players will develop their dribbling skills, their turns, twists and their spins away from pressure.

The young players will have to become good at 'hiding' the ball away from opponents, and brilliant at not only knowing when to release the ball but who to release it to. This capability will stay with them for the rest of their playing time and the England DNA promotes this aspect of development right through the phases.

The part you play as a Foundation Phase coach is important, because you start the whole process off and, if done with real passion and enthusiasm, it will be your legacy and your massive contribution to the development of our young players.

Reasons for players to stay on the ball include the following:

- They have no positive or threatening passing options and they are prepared to stay on the ball and see if one appears.
- There's space in front of, to the side or behind them – and they can change the situation in the game to a more positive, attacking one by travelling with the ball.
- They have recognized that the situation is 1v1 and they are going to dribble with the ball.
- They're under pressure, passing options are compromised and they are willing to relieve the pressure and change the situation by screening, shielding, or turning with the ball.
- All of their options are sideways and backwards and staying on the ball may allow the situation to change and present a forward, positive, more attacking option.

To develop ball mastery and the ability and confidence to stay on the ball is really important for players at the youngest end of the Foundation Phase, so please make sure this development is prioritized. Some of your players will be at the stage where managing the ball is all they can cope with. Give them the time they need and provide them with enjoyable ways to practice mastering these skills.

## Step 1: Me and the Ball U6 - U8

### General Descriptions

- Motor skills are still developing.
- Short attention and concentration spans.
- Players are very "Me" oriented. "My ball". Because of this training should be focused around each player having a ball at their feet.
- Use this "Me" time to develop individual technical skills on the ball.
- Players like to play games. Disguising technical work in fun games is a must to keep players engaged.
- Gracious sportsmanship should be reinforced.
- Learn through trial and error
- There can be large differences in ability at these ages. It is important to keep players grouped not only by age but also by ability. Everyone will develop at different rates.
- Players play because it is FUN!

### Important Training Priorities

- Positive reinforcement should be used to get the best response for players.
- Keep your practice sessions simple and fun. Players in step 1 play because it is FUN!
- The game is the best teacher so PLAY! Play as much as you can.
- Individual ball mastery is the foundation at these ages. Introduce activities and skills that will improve players' comfort on the ball.
- Players tends to bunch up - encourage players to find space when they have the ball and when they do not have the ball
- Create opportunities for players to make decisions (U8).
- Encourage and incorporate juggling into your training session. Give specific juggling patterns for players to try. EXAMPLE: start with ball in hands - bounce ball on one (right) thigh and then catch. PROGRESS - bounce ball on right thigh then left thigh and then catch.



Age Appropriate Principles of Play - Defending		
		How it looks in training:
U6	Immediate Chase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting back behind the ball after loss of possession.</li> </ul>
	Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If your team does not have the ball, you want to get it back.</li> <li>Closest player to the ball should pressure the player who has it and try to win back possession.</li> <li>Try to keep ball away from your goal, to the outside of the field.</li> </ul>
	Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not a priority at this age.</li> </ul>
	Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not a priority at this age.</li> </ul>
	Compactness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not a priority at this age.</li> </ul>
U7	Immediate Chase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting back behind the ball after loss of possession</li> </ul>
	Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If your team does not have the ball, you want to get it back.</li> <li>Closest player to the ball should pressure the player who has it and try to win back possession.</li> <li>Try to keep ball away from your goal, to the outside of the field.</li> </ul>
	Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not a priority at this age.</li> </ul>
	Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not a priority at this age.</li> </ul>
	Compactness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not a priority at this age.</li> </ul>
U8	Immediate Chase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting back behind the ball after loss of possession.</li> <li>If you lose the ball, quickly try to win it back.</li> </ul>
	Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If your team does not have the ball, you want to get it back.</li> <li>Closest player to the ball should pressure the player who has it and try to win back possession.</li> <li>Try to keep ball away from your goal, to the outside of the field.</li> </ul>
	Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Second defender in an area to prevent penetration, usually behind the first (pressuring) defender.</li> <li>In a position to become the 1st defender when teammate is beaten on the dribble.</li> </ul>
	Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not a priority at this age.</li> </ul>
	Compactness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not a priority at this age.</li> </ul>

### **Juggling:**

Juggling is a very important aspect of younger player's development. Not only will it improve their touch on the ball, their ball control while the ball is in the air, their general technique, but it will also improve their confidence with the ball, and their concentration level. If a player can juggle a ball 10 times, they can juggle a ball 1,000 times. The only difference is the level of concentration it takes to get to 1,000 juggles. The confidence part comes into play whenever the ball is bouncing or in general, not on the ground during a game, which happens quite a bit, especially with younger players. If players feel confident when the ball is in the air when they are practicing their juggling they will in turn feel much more confident in games when the ball might be bouncing or in the air near them. Encourage your players to juggle when they arrive at practice while you are setting up for your session. Allow time during practice to juggle-first 5 minutes, and last 5 minutes.

Age Appropriate Principles of Play - Attacking			
		How it looks in training:	
U6	Penetration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the dribble.</li> <li>Focus on positive first touch into space.</li> <li>Running with the ball/overall agility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beating defenders by going around them.</li> <li>Simple changes of direction.</li> <li>Finding space-head going up and seeing where to dribble.</li> </ul>
	Improvisation, Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual ball mastery is critical.</li> <li>shielding, ball manipulation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change of speed and direction</li> <li>Introduction of simple 1v1 moves to beat a defender.</li> <li>Try different moves. Be creative and don't be afraid to fail.</li> </ul>
	Mobility	Recognition that standing will not help you. Players should always be mobile, and moving during games and practice to help themselves and their teammates.	
	Support	Not a main priority for this age.	
	Width	Not a main priority for this age.	

U7	Penetration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the dribble.</li> <li>Focus on positive first touch into space.</li> <li>Running with the ball/overall agility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beating defenders by going around them.</li> <li>Simple changes of direction.</li> <li>Finding space-head going up and seeing where to dribble.</li> </ul>
	Improvisation, Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual ball mastery is critical.</li> <li>shielding, ball manipulation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change of speed and direction</li> <li>1v1 moves to beat a defender at a higher tempo</li> <li>Try different moves. Be creative and don't be afraid to fail.</li> </ul>
	Mobility	Recognition that standing will not help you. Players should always be mobile, and moving during games and practice to help themselves and their teammates.	
	Support	Not a main priority for this age.	
	Width	Not a main priority for this age.	

U8	Penetration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the dribble or with a pass</li> <li>Focus on positive first touch into space.</li> <li>Running with the ball/overall agility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beating defenders by going around them.</li> <li>Simple changes of direction.</li> <li>Finding space-head going up and seeing where to dribble.</li> <li>Recognition of when to dribble and when to pass</li> </ul>
	Improvisation, Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual ball mastery is critical.</li> <li>shielding, ball manipulation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change of speed and direction</li> <li>1v1 moves to beat a defender at a higher tempo</li> <li>Try different moves. Be creative and don't be afraid to fail.</li> </ul>
	Mobility	Recognition that standing will not help you. Players should always be mobile, and moving during games and practice to help themselves and their teammates.	
	Support	Recognition of needing to help teammates. Important to help a teammate that has the ball.	
	Width	Recognition of needing to help teammates by using the whole space available.	

#### **Coaching Characteristics:**

The energy you bring as a coach to a U6-U8 training session is contagious. High energy from the coach will transfer to your session and the kids will have more fun! U6-U8 players are not World Cup ready so don't expect perfection, but be sure to encourage players to strive toward perfection. Must be passionate about the game and enthusiastic when working with younger kids. Must be a good teacher. A high priority on creating an environment in which the players have success is key. Emphasis on keeping the game fun is very important with these age groups because players quickly become dis-interested if they are not having fun. Encourage the players to make mistakes and take risks and use their skills. Ask a lot of questions instead of giving them the answers - "I don't know" is not an acceptable response.



