

Longitudinal Soccer Development:  
What is Appropriate  
at What Age?



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Who Are We Coaching?

- What is a 6 year-old?
- What is an 8 year-old?
- What is a 10 year-old?
- What is a 12 year-old?



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Typical Characteristics of U6 Players

- ***focused on themselves*** – reality to them is solely based on what they see and feel
- ***unable to see the world from another's perspective*** – it is "the world according to me" time. Asking them to understand how someone else is seeing something or feels is unrealistic
- ***everything is in the here and now*** – forget about the past and future, they live in the moment



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Typical Characteristics of U6 Players

- **heating and cooling systems are less efficient than adults**- we need to give frequent water breaks (every 8-10 minutes) or they may just run until they cannot run anymore
- **enjoying playing, not watching** - they feel no enjoyment from watching others play when they could be playing too. Make sure every player has a ball in practice so every player is always playing
- **limited attention span** (on average 15 seconds for listening, 10-15 minutes when engaged in a task) - keep your directions concise and to the point. When in an open environment, such as a park, their attention span will dwindle towards 10 seconds
- **effort is synonymous with performance** - if they have tried hard, they believe they have done well




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Typical Characteristics of U6 Players

- **active imaginations** - if we utilize their imaginations in practice activities, they will love practice!
- **look for adult approval** - watch how often players look to you for approval or to see if you are looking. Also be encouraging when they say "Coach, look what I can do!"
- **unable to think abstractly** - asking them to think about spatial relations or runs off the ball is unrealistic




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Typical Characteristics of U6 Players

- **typically have 2 speeds** -- extremely fast and stopped
- **usually unaware of game scores** - we should keep it that way
- **often like to fall down just because it is fun** - they are just children having fun ☺
- **often cannot identify left foot vs. right foot** - they know which foot they use most and if they point to their feet you can help teach them left and right




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### U6 Skill Priorities

- Dribble with all sides of both feet
- Dribble out of trouble
- Dribble past someone
- Soft first touch
- Change Direction




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### Typical Characteristics of U8 Players

- *tend to play well in pairs* – unlike 6 year-olds, these children enjoy playing in pairs
- *are now able to take another's perspective* – they now have a sense of how other people are feeling
- *still unable to think abstractly* – still do not have this capability, be patient
- *heating and cooling system still less efficient than adults* – still make sure to give frequent water breaks




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### Typical Characteristics of U8 Players

- *still much prefer playing to watching* – keep everyone active during practice
- *limited attention span (on average 15-20 seconds for listening, up to 20 minutes when engaged in a task)* – this may vary greatly on any given day depending on school, diet, etc.
- *have an understanding of time and sequence* – they now understand “if I do this, then that happens”
- *many have incorporated a third or fourth speed into play*




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Typical Characteristics of U8 Players

- **extremely aware of adult reactions** – be very aware of your verbal and nonverbal reactions, as they look for your reaction frequently
- **seek out adult approval** – be supportive when they ask about their performance or try to show you skills
- **begin to become aware of peer perception** – a social order is beginning to develop
- **wide range of abilities between children at this age** – children all develop at varying paces




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Typical Characteristics of U8 Players

- **some will keep score** – Results should not be important at this age
- **beginning to develop motor memories** – by attempting beginning technical skills they are training their bodies to remember certain movements
- **less active imaginations than U6 players** – still have active imaginations by adult standards, but some of the silliness that 6 year-olds allowed will not be appreciated by this group




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U8 Skill Priorities

- Dribble with all sides of both feet
- Dribble out of trouble
- Dribble past someone
- Shielding
- Soft first touch
- Introduce proper shooting technique
- Introduce passing




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**Typical Characteristics of U10 Players**

- *attention span lengthens from U8--they start to show the ability to sequence thought and actions*
- *they start to think ahead and think "If this, then that"*
- *more inclined towards wanting to play soccer rather than being told to play*
- *demonstrate increased self-responsibility – bringing a ball, water and all gear should now be their complete responsibility*




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**Typical Characteristics of U10 Players**

- *they start to recognize fundamental tactical concepts*
- *begin to become aware of peer pressure*
- *players greatly affiliate with their team or their coach—"I play for the Tigers" or "I play for coach Amy's team"*
- *extremely rule bound*
- *there is a wide continuum of maturity evident on most teams*




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**U10 Skill Priorities**

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| <p><b>Skill Priorities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue with dribbling foci from U8</li> <li>■ Passing with inside and outside of both feet</li> <li>■ Shooting with both feet--- using laces</li> <li>■ Receiving the ball with all parts of body</li> <li>■ Heading</li> </ul> | <p><b>Tactical Priorities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Basic Attacking Ideas</li> <li>■ Basic Defending Ideas</li> <li>■ Comprehend 1 vs 1 concepts</li> <li>■ Comprehend 2 vs 1 concepts</li> <li>■ Intro to 2 vs 2 concepts</li> <li>■ Comprehend roles of 1st and 2nd defenders</li> <li>■ Comprehend roles of 1st and 2nd attackers</li> </ul> |
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Typical Characteristics of U12 Players

- *peer evaluation is a constant*
- *egos are sensitive*
- *coordination may depend on whether or not they are in a growth spurt*
- *technique still needs to be reinforced constantly*
- *playing too much can lead to overuse injuries*



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Typical Characteristics of U12 Players

- *all children are maturing at different rates*
- *players need to warm-up and stretch--muscle pulls and other nagging injuries are common otherwise*
- *players will typically understand elemental abstract concepts and hypothetical situations*
- *they like to solve problems*
- *Puberty!*



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Typical Characteristics of U12 Players

- *playing too much and not feeling like they have a choice in the matter can lead to burnout and drop-out*
- *this is the dawn of tactics!*
- *keep asking the players to be creative and to take risks-we never want them to stop doing these things*
- *ask for feedback from them--they will tell you how things are going*
- *They want leadership and ownership of the team*
- *Still need it to be fun!!!*



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## U12 Skill Priorities

### Skill Priorities

- Continue with all U-10 foci
- Speed Dribbling in Traffic
- Ability to chip the ball
- Accurately play long passes
- Offensive/Defensive Heading
- Power/Accuracy Shooting

### Tactical Priorities

- Communication
- Basic Support Positions
- Receiving the Ball Away from Pressure
- Combination Play
- How and when to switch the point of attack
- Pressure vs Containing
- Proper 2 vs 2 roles
- Intro to all roles in 3 vs 3




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## Final Thoughts

- *People are always kicking, old or young. Even an unborn child is kicking.*  
~ Sepp Blatter, FIFA Secretary General, 1990

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**THE GAME IS THE GREATEST TEACHER!!!**




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