

US Youth Soccer

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U12 Systems of Play

8-a-side (7 field players & a goalkeeper)

3-3-1
3-2-2
2-3-2

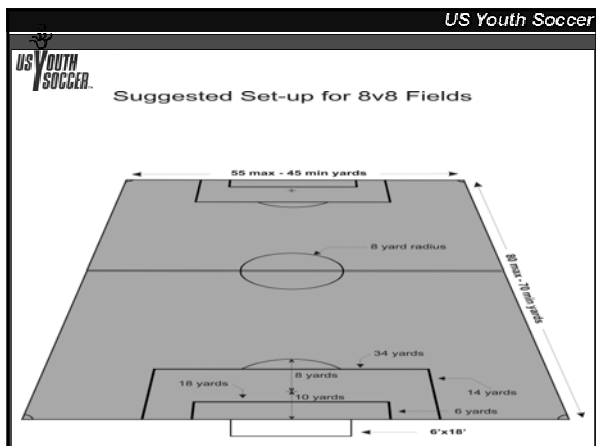
US Youth Soccer modified rules

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Players in this age group should play 8 v 8 to enhance their soccer abilities. This is true for all levels of play, recreational or premier. At this point in their physical and psychological development, most ten and eleven year old children can **play** rather than *play at* the game of soccer. Coaches must be careful at this juncture and not fall victim to the false assumption that these preadolescent children are now able to play mature soccer.





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With fewer players on the field each player will touch the ball frequently in match conditions, thus assisting their technical development in a realistic way. Technical speed is enhanced due to the realistic size of the field. Improving technical speed puts players on the road to tactical awareness. Since there are fewer players on the field they will have to perform both offensive and defensive ball skills frequently during match play. Improving ball skills is the main objective with this age group.



U12 Systems of Play

- * feints with the ball
- * receiving ground, bouncing & air balls with the lower leg, thigh, abdomen, chest & head
- * chipping to score



U12 Systems of Play

- * outside of the foot pass
- * bending shots
- * crossing to the near post & penalty spot spaces
- * heel pass

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- *kicking & receiving with the inside of the instep
- *introduce the half-volley & volley shooting
- *introduce the slide tackle

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- *bowling
- *low dives
- *forward diving
- *angle play
- *near post play
- *saving penalty kicks
- *introduce parrying
- *introduce boxing

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Skills are an important factor at this point in their development because the players need to be introduced to general tactics. The technical/tactical possibility of switching the point of attack occurs for these players on a slightly smaller pitch. The ability to switch the attack from one side of the pitch to the other with one or two touches of the ball is now a real option. This technical/tactical possibility keeps all of the players within the team connected (vertical and horizontal compactness). When this age group plays 11 v 11 on a large pitch the players on the side of the field opposite to the ball become spectators to the game, not players in the game.

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US YOUTH SOCCER. U12 Systems of Play 3-3-1

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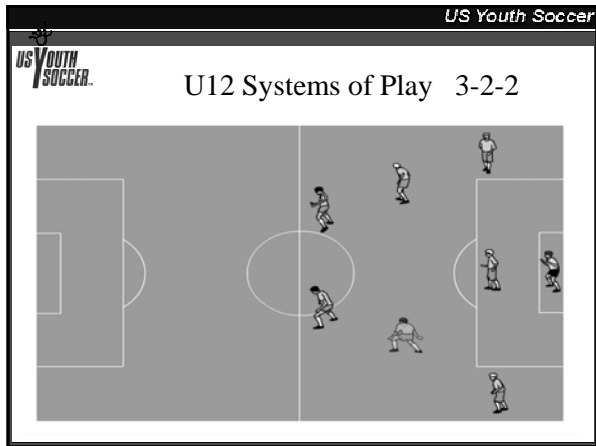
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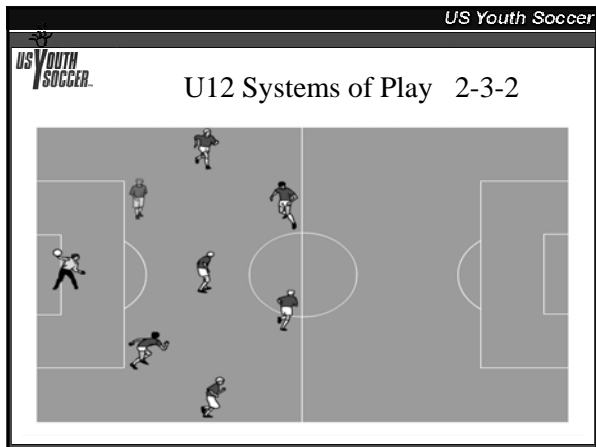
The aspect of player development that will be most impacted by the 8 v 8 environment is tactics. With fewer players on a smaller pitch all players will be continuously involved on “both sides of the ball.” That is they all will be engaged in both offense and defense throughout the match. A much greater demand for tactical *transition* will occur in this small-sided game.

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- ⌘ All of these formations allow the players to execute the principles of play
- ⌘ All players must attack and defend in these systems
- ⌘ Considerable demand of vision & communication is placed upon the players
- ⌘ All formations allow the players to:
 - ⌘ Switch the point of attack
 - ⌘ Attack the far post on corner kicks & from the flow of play
 - ⌘ Stay compact

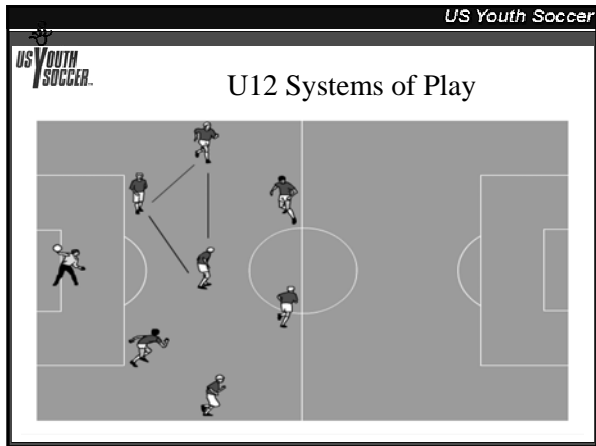


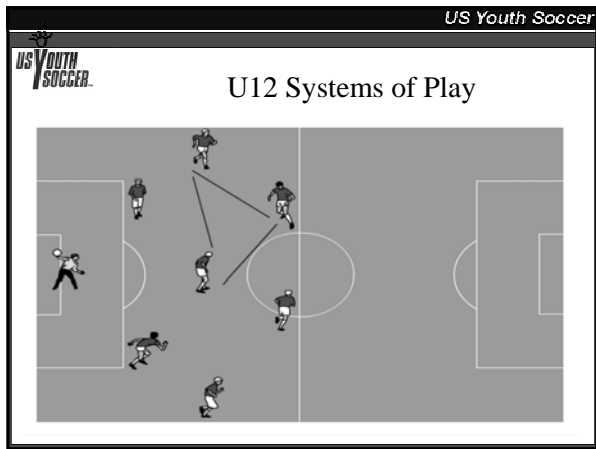


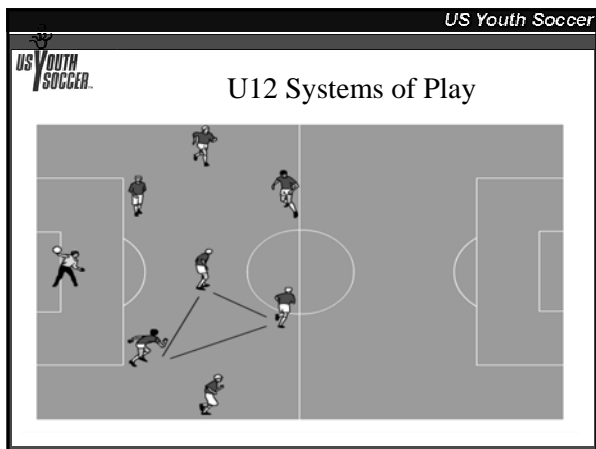
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This formation allows the players to execute the principles of play, but will also place a great demand on mental and physical transition. This aspect of the 8 v 8 environment is most appropriate since the U12 age group is considered the dawning of tactical awareness. Ten and eleven year old players can execute individual and group tactics. The tactical concept of compactness is enhanced in the small-sided game.







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In addition to individual tactics the coach of U12 and U11 teams should teach these tactics:

- ☒ combination passing
- ☒ 2 v 1 defending
- ☒ 2 v 2 attacking & defending
- ☒ the roles of second attacker & defender
- ☒ verbal & visual communication for all positions

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- ☒ commanding the goalmouth for the goalkeeper
- ☒ half-time analysis
- ☒ corner kick plays for both defending & attacking
- ☒ a kick-off play
- ☒ wall passing
- ☒ introduce the principles of defense

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The U12 age group is a transitional age for soccer players. These are players in the throes of puberty. Moving from childhood into adolescence they are going through a myriad of changes emotionally, physically, intellectually and socially. The 8 a-side game serves as their bridge into playing the adult soccer game of 11 a-side.

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The U12 age is a fertile learning period. Players at this age can be expected to be more thoughtful in meeting the demands of the game. Small-sided games generate more opportunities for problem solving for the players to work out together. Hence “teamwork” is promoted!

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The benefits of 8 a-side soccer for these children far outweigh any logistics or administrative problems created for the adults. Our challenge is to find solutions!



US Youth Soccer Coaching Education Department