



A Guide to Coaching U8 to U10 Players

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"From the perspective of player development, we must embrace the viewpoint that growth is a process. Players do not develop in just one season; it takes several years. Unfortunately, many young players are either selected out, or drop out at too early an age, largely because playing is no longer enjoyable." Dr. Ronald Quinn, Head Women's Soccer Coach Xavier University.

CHARACTERISTICS OF and COACHING PLAYERS UNDER AGE 10

Although we may know a lot about the game as coaches, we also need to understand the physical, emotional and mental characteristics of our young players to whom we trying to teach the game. Understanding the characteristics of our players, as in any educational activity, will help us create a developmentally appropriate training and learning environment for them. Children younger than age 10 generally have the following characteristics.

- Cannot follow too many instructions or handle too much information at one time. Explanations must be brief, concise (less than 30 seconds), and tell "why". Ability to stay on task, as well as the ability to sequence thought and action is short, but is increasing. **A positive encouraging environment is critical.**
- Gross and small motor skills becoming more refined and reliable. Coordination is developing. Soccer skills are emerging and becoming more predictable and recognizable. Develop activities that have all players involved. Avoid having your players stand in lines.
- There can be a considerable range in playing ability and physical maturity among your players. Physically mature individuals demonstrate stronger motor skills. A coach's tendency will be to focus on the more capable players. Be aware that many of your less capable players will improve dramatically as their bodies mature. In fact, these players will become some of your better players in the long run because they have had to rely on improving their soccer abilities instead of relying on their athletic abilities.
- Boys and girls begin to develop separately. Some girls may be entering puberty.
- Repetition of technique is very important, but it must be dynamic, not static. They are unsure what actions lead to success at a skill. They lack a clear idea or model of the new skill.
- Some players are beginning to move from concrete thinking to abstract thinking. Tactical instruction can now begin. Starting to recognize basic tactical concepts, but not exactly sure why certain decisions are better. They are uncertain in their actions and in how to achieve desired outcomes. Ability to pace themselves and to plan ahead is improving. You will see a pass that is deliberate. You might even see a "back pass".
- More prone than adults to heat injury. Accelerated heat loss, increased risk of hypothermia. Hydration is very important.
- Increased self-responsibility. For example, they remember to bring their own equipment. You will see your first \$100 pair of cleats.
- Consistent positive reinforcement is important as it is at all ages.
- They play or participate for fun, for enjoyment. However, they are becoming more "serious". Openly, intensively competitive, without intention of fouling. More inclined towards wanting to play instead of being told to play. You might actually catch them practicing on their own without you telling them to do so.
- Peer pressure starting to be a factor. Their parents are telling them to do one thing during the game, you are telling them another thing, but what they end up doing might be what their friend is telling them to do. As a coach, it is important to get your message to all levels as best you can. A preseason meeting can help.
- Adult outside of the family may take on added significance. Prefer identification with a team. Like to have good uniforms, equipment, balls. As a coach, you are becoming a very important role model.
- Nutrition is important. Proper diet for pre-game, post-game, tournaments, etc. need to be highlighted.

Sources:

Arnot, B., Introduction to Coaching the U8-U10 Player, Eastside Youth Soccer Association, <http://www.eysa.org/eysoachingmanual.htm>. Last viewed January 2006. **Ford, D.** 1999. *Coaching Youth Soccer: An Essential Guide for Parents and Coaches*. The Lyons Press. 117p. **Henrichs, A. and others**, U.S. Women's National Teams Program, U12-U19 Club, State, and Region Curriculum Guidelines. <http://www.nebraskasoccer.org>. Last viewed February 2006 **Wein, H.** 2001. *Developing Youth Soccer Players*. Human Kinetics, 216 p. US Youth Soccer National Youth License. Characteristics of U-6 to U12 Players. <http://www.nebraskasoccer.org>. Last viewed February 2006.