

# **Coaching Juniors**

## **Coaching rationale**

It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 6 years old, in general, do not do so by their own choice. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives.

With the above assumptions, let's look at some things that we can do to energise the U-6 players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically initiate the sign up for next year.

- Each session should be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible. Basic movements such as running, skipping, hopping, etc. need to be emphasised. If these can be done while kicking, catching, rolling, or dribbling a ball... all the better.
- Training should not last for more than one hour. This is primarily due to physical fatigue and attention span considerations. Train once or twice a week.
- Have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can get into one hour. The emphasis must always be on FUN.
- Encourage your children to bring their own size 3 or 4 ball.
- Although your children may be very much the same age chronologically speaking, their physical and/or mental maturity may vary by as much as 36 months. You need to be aware of this and plan your activities accordingly.
- Team play and passing is an alien concept to these players because they know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they often will steal it from their own team-mates. So don't be concerned if they won't pass, just let them dribble to their heart's content.
- Plan for at least four 90 second drink breaks, especially in warmer weather. Their "cooling system" is not as efficient as in older players.

## **Warm-up**

A very brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about football and to prepare them physically and mentally for the practice session. This should involve individual body activities that may or may not involve the ball. They can chase a ball thrown by the coach and bring it back with different parts of their body. Or they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. When they've been running around for a few minutes you can do some static stretching but try doing it with the ball.

## **Individual activities**

Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1 v.1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or a game where players are trying to knock their ball through gates. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait in lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games of elimination.

## **Play the game**

Move on to the real game, but, make sure it is a 2 v 2, 3 v 3, or 4 v 4 so that everyone gets plenty of touches. You can have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. Switch the game every 5 minutes or so. Be creative. Play with 4 goals or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep all the players involved.

## **Warm-down**

Finish the session with a warm down. Some slow jogging with the ball and a couple of gentle stretches is fine.

## **Review**

Check that the kids enjoyed themselves and ask them what they learnt.