



## General Overview

The proper path of development for our athletes is very important to our Soccer program at the MJCCA. As such, we want to do our part to ensure that everyone who is in our program understands that key areas that we are working on for each age group, and what areas we are hoping to develop. This will also be a good overview of our philosophy for our recreational soccer program. We are basing this information off the US Youth Soccer Player Development Model. For more detailed information, please click [HERE](#)

US Youth Soccer Player Development Model

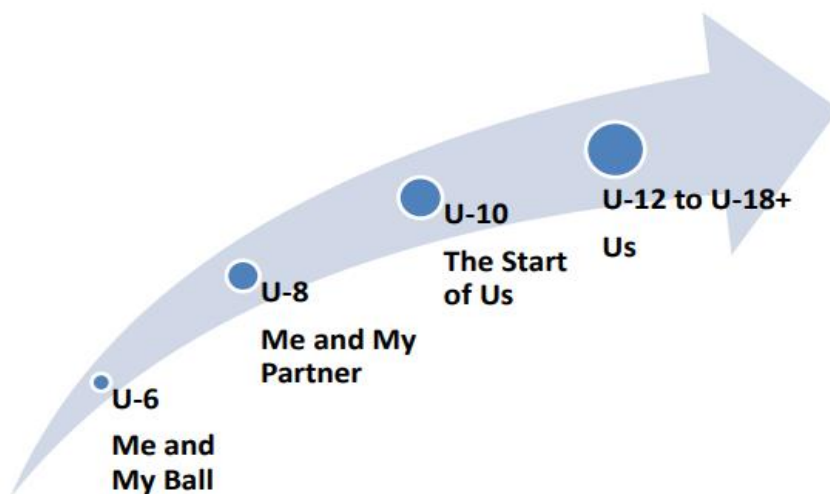


Figure 5: Stages for the Ages<sup>9</sup>

### U-6 Age Group: Me and My Ball

The U-6 age group consist of the Kindergarten and Pre-k age athletes. For many soccer players this is where they get introduced to the sport for the first time. It's important to remember the psychology of this age group is just as important as the physicality. Positivity all the time is what is important here. We also are going to focus on the athletes getting comfortable with having a ball at their feet, as well as beginning to understand the concept of what soccer is.

### **Keys for the age group**

- 4 v 4 Small sided Soccer
- No Goalies
- No Ref's
- No Score kept

### **Objectives**

- Athlete gets comfortable with the Ball at their feet
  - Does not use hands to stop, or change the balls direction
  - Begins to learn the different parts of the foot they can use to dribble
    - IE instep, outstep, sole, heel
  - Begin to learn techniques to change directions
    - IE Pullbacks, Hook Turns
  - Begin to understand boundaries
    - What is out of bounds, and what is not.
    - What is a throw in, goal kick, corner kick
  - Begins to understand Soccer objectives
    - IE to Score a goal, and to not be scored on
  - Good sportsmanship
    - IE it doesn't matter if you win or lose. Always say good game, and have fun.

### **Coaches Points**

- LET THEM PLAY.
  - Don't get caught up in what their position is, trying to get them to do throw ins. Do whatever you can to get the ball back in play quickly, keep the kids engaged and playing.
- Positions do not really matter at this age group.
  - It will be bunch ball, and a lot of everyone swarming to the ball. This is ok. We want everyone to be involved, and everyone to play. Limiting movement, and trying to organize the kids into positions at this age group limits their engagement, and therefore their involvement.
- We want the athletes comfortable having the ball at their feet and trying to dribble. As opposed to just kicking the ball if it comes close to them.
- Do not worry about throw ins

- Some of the kids may know how to do them. This is fine. But we want the ball back in play and the kids playing as quickly as possible. So do not worry if the technique is correct.
  - Especially in the beginning of the season, it is preferred coaches just get the ball and play back into the field as quickly as possible.
- Do not let the players use their hands
- Do not let them sit down on the field
- Try to get them to understand the concept of not taking the ball away from a teammate
- Positive reinforcement always.
  - Give positive feedback for everything. Everything is about fun, and loving the game.
  - Applaud any good sportsmanship, good attitude, good effort
- Emphasize good sportsmanship
  - Shaking hands at the end of games
  - Score doesn't matter, winning and losing doesn't matter

### **U-8 Age Group: Me and My Partner**

The U-8 Age Group is the age where we begin to introduce more players on to the field, as well as goal keepers. We will introduce a very basic concept of positions but most importantly we begin to transition over to an emphasis on passing and using a teammate. Continued development on individual development and comfort with the ball at their feet is also very important.

#### **Keys for the age group**

- 6 v 6 (which includes a Goalie)
- Single Referee
- Very LIMITED Offsides
  - IE No Cherry Picking
- Score kept, but no league standings, or championships

#### **Objectives**

- To learn how to pass
  - To use the correct technique passing
- To begin to learn how to spread out
- Further developed comfort with the ball at the athlete's feet
  - Emphasize using both left and right foot when dribbling
- Rudimentary understanding of the Goalkeeper position
- Learning correct throw in technique
- Learning basic rules of kickoffs, goal kick, and corner kicks
- Very basic concept of offensive and defensive positions

- Beginning introduction into offsides
- Improved sportsmanship
  - Being a good teammate
  - IE being positive towards teammates if you get scored on, or score a goal
  - Big praise for passing, and sharing the ball

### Coaching Points

- Fun is ALWAYS most important
- Teaching basic positioning
  - Teach that you are either an offensive player or a defensive player. Keep it very basic
  - No one should play one position for an entire game let alone a whole season.
  - **DON'T BE OVERLY RIGID IN FORCING KIDS INTO POSITIONS**
    - We want the kids to have freedom of movement at this age group
    - We want them to have the ability to be creative and explore their own movement on the field
    - Don't worry about which side of the field they are on, and try not to restrict the areas of the pitch they can go to
    - For this age group, we are teaching concepts far more than we are teaching rigid positioning. This is important for development as they get older as it is more in line with how advanced soccer will look.
    - For reference in Brazil, they don't teach true positions in their youth programs until the kids are in High School! While we aren't that extreme, it's a good reference for how top world programs run things.
  - **WE DON'T WANT PLAYERS PLAYING STATIC POSITIONS**
    - We don't want defensive players just hanging out on their own defensive box
    - We don't want offensive players just hanging out on their opponent's side of the field
    - We want both position groups to be involved in both areas of play. You should be teaching the two groups that while their focus is on either offensive or defense they need to help in both areas.
- Formations DON'T matter
  - Since we are teaching just the basic concept of offensive and defensive positions a true formation doesn't matter
  - Players conceptually should be either an offensive midfielder or a defensive midfielder. We want all players to be involved in both elements of the game.
  - While we are teaching them to spread out and get used to spacing, we don't care if a player is on the left side or the right side. As long as they are using spacing fundamentals
  - Remember win's and losses don't' matter at this age group.
  - This style won't always be atheistically pleasing, as humans we really want there to be more organization and structure. The kids here are in fact old enough to deal with and understand some basic organizational concepts.

- However, this isn't optimum for long term development. Just let go. They may give up some preventable goals. They may not be where you want them all the time. However, long term it does wonder for development
- Just focus on spacing concepts, and offensive and defensive mentalities.
- Learning proper passing technique
  - **SAY NO TO THE TOE**
  - IE use the instep of the foot
  - Keep your ankle locked
  - Stay balanced when you strike (don't fall forward)
- If a teammate has the ball, open up so they can pass to you
  - Don't just run forward
  - Get wide
  - Don't take the ball away from a teammate
  - Getting away from "bunch" ball or "swarm" ball
- Proper Throw in Technique
  - Both hands on the ball
  - Ball goes over the head and touches the back of the neck before throwing it
  - Ball comes in a straight arc over the head (Don't twist as you throw)
  - Both feet stay on the ground
    - Crossing your feet when you are first learning helps with teaching that
  - Once the ball is thrown in, the person throwing it in cannot touch the ball until someone else from either team touches it first
- Proper Restarts
  - Kickoff
    - 2 players inside the circle. Ball IS allowed to go straight backwards if they would like. Or you can pass to teammate in the circle
    - Other team cannot enter the circle until the ball is touched
    - Player cannot pass to themselves or dribble outside the circle
  - Goal kick
    - Goal keeper or defender takes the kick
    - No one from either time is allowed inside the penalty box
    - Ball cannot be touched by either team until it passes outside the penalty box
    - Player cannot pass to themselves or dribble it outside the box
  - Corner Kick
    - You can score directly off the kick
    - No headers from either team
    - Teach where you should line up either offensively or defensively
- Offsides
  - We are trying to prevent cherry picking
    - IE standing right in front of your opponent's goal and staying static
    - If we are teaching the above-mentioned positioning concepts well, this shouldn't happen.

- A hard offsides line will not be called, nor will even so-so offsides be called. Only cherry picking.
- For this age, we are going to explain the very basic most concept of offsides, but it shouldn't come into play very frequently in the games
- Continued emphasis on ball control and dribbling
  - There should be a dribbling portion (even if it's a warm up) as a part of every practice.
  - Doing things like outside inside touches, toe taps, tic tocs, and things of that nature to keep improving the athlete's skill and coordination on the ball.
- Winning and Losing doesn't matter. Good sportsmanship, fun, and developments are key here
  - While we will keep score, we will not be keeping standings, or having playoffs.

### **U-10 Age Group: The Start of Us**

The U-10 Age Group is the beginning of when things will begin to resemble "real" Soccer. The athletes should have a basic comfort level with the ball at their feet, have a basic understanding of the proper form in which to pass the ball, and a fundamental concept of positioning. While they are still many new soccer players at this age group, the athletes are more able to quickly understand concepts, and catch up on skills missed. This is the age group where we begin to truly teach team concepts.

#### **Keys for the Age Group**

- 7 v 7 Soccer (includes goalie)
- Single Referee
- Offsides enforced
- Score and standings kept, potential for fun end of season tournament

#### **Objectives**

- Continued emphasis and building upon of foundations in Dribbling, and passing
- Learning the basics of actual tactical dribbling moves
  - IE Step overs, dummies, Maradona's things of that nature
- Learning specific positioning and team concepts
  - IE defense, midfield, forward
  - How the positions work together
- Learning power shooting technique
  - Using laces
- Learning correct way to receive the ball (trapping)
- Learning how to Juggle the ball
- Learning the offsides rule
- Improved spacing concepts
- Beginning to get away from dump and chase mentality

- IE find passes as opposed to kicking the ball blindly down field
- Learning how to do give and go's
- Learning the concept of drop passes
- Emphasis on the importance of teamwork, and playing a role
- Improved sportsmanship within team, and league framework

### Coaching Points

- It is still recreational soccer. Fun is ALWAYS the key element what we are doing.
- Dribbling and individual skill work still an element of every practice
  - Introduce some offensive dribbling moves
  - Introduce juggling as a short portion of every practice
  - Kids should be comfortable rolling the ball in addition to dribbling movements
- Receiving the ball
  - Use your instep or outstep to receive the ball
  - Open up your hips
  - You are trying to catch the ball on your foot or redirect it softly in the direction you want to go
  - You are not meeting the ball with force or trying to "stop" it.
  - Don't fight the ball
- Emphasize passing and proper passing technique
  - **SAY NO TO THE TOE**
  - Ankle locked
- Learning the two main ways to shoot
  - Accuracy Shooting
    - You are using your instep like if you were passing.
    - **SAY NO TO THE TOE**
    - Emphasis is on placing your shot and accurately doing so
    - Giving up some power for accuracy
    - Best used in close range shooting (IE inside the penalty box)
      - Or if 1 v 1 with the goalie
    - This will be the most frequent type of shot the athletes will typically use
  - Power Shooting
    - **SAY NO TO THE TOE**
    - Hit the ball with your laces
      - roughly where the shoes are tied
      - Keep your ankle locked
      - Keep your toe down
      - Swing from the hip not the knee
        - Don't flick out at the ball, use your entire leg
    - Keep your body over the ball
      - This will prevent the ball from sailing over the goal, and help keep the shot on target
    - Emphasis is on a powerful shot (or Smashing the ball)

- Best used if the ball is moving, or bouncing
  - Best used from longer range (IE Outside the penalty box)
  - Also used if there is a small window and no time for an accurate/placed shot
- Learning more detailed positioning
  - PLAYERS SHOULD NOT BE SPECILAIZED INTO ONE POSITIONS
    - Over the course of a game or a season, they should be encouraged to play and learn about every position including Goalkeeper
      - Kids will develop preferences, tendencies, and proficiency at certain positions. However, it's important to emphasize the ability to be versatile and capable of playing everywhere.
  - Learning the role of defenders, midfielders, and forwards
    - Defenders
      - Defend the goal, and prevent the opposing team from scoring
      - Control the defensive third of the field
      - Start the offense by looking to pass to a midfielder
      - Spread out when on offense and support midfielders when on offense
        - Move up to the midfield area when on offense
        - Help contain the ball and keep it on opposing side of the field
        - **NO STATIC POSITIONS**
          - Do not keep players on their own penalty box
          - Keep them used to the idea of pushing up on offense and dropping back on defense
          - Everyone stays involved and engaged. No one stands around doing nothing, guarding nothing, or picking flowers
      - Drop towards the goal, compact inwards and defend the middle of the field when on defense
    - Midfielders
      - Support the defense when on defense
      - Support the offense when on offense
      - Does the most running, and has the most freedom of movement of any position on the field
      - Their job is to control the middle third of the field
      - They need to receive the ball from the defense, and transition the ball to the forwards
      - Depending on formation they may be required to play wide positions
    - Forwards
      - Score goals
      - Control the offensive third of the field
      - Pressure the other teams defense to try and win the ball



- Receive the ball from the midfield and look to try and either set up a goal, or score themselves
  - **NO STATIC POSITIONS**
- Common formations coaches use at this age group
  - # of Defenders-- # of Midfielders-- # of Forwards
    - 2-2-2
      - A decently balanced formation. A good formation to begin the season with as you are teaching the concepts and roles for the three position groups
      - 2 center defenders, 2 center midfield players, 2 center forwards
      - No real wide players
      - Teaches athletes about the responsibilities in each third of the field
      - A more offensive formation if you are trying to score goals.
      - Does have the potential for creating static positions as the two forwards may not help much on defense, and the two defenders may not help much on offense, leaving the midfielders with a lot of work to do.
    - 2-3-1
      - This is the most balanced and engaged formation. Transitions well to older groups. Teams should be transitioning to something similar to this by the time the season ends.
      - 2 “central” defenders
      - 1 left midfield, 1 center midfield, 1 right midfield
      - 1 center forward
      - Teaches spacing, and outside play. Since there is more midfield there is less opportunity for “static” players
    - 3-2-1
      - This is a very defensive formation. Not a great base formation to start out with. You would use this if you were trying to hold on to a lead late into a game.
      - Left defender, center defender, right defender
      - 2 center midfielders
      - 1 center forward
      - It is good for transitioning to the older age group and teaching defensive shape. But again, this formation has a huge potential for creating static players. Really should be used sparingly, and situationally.
  - Learning Team Concepts
    - Don’t just boot it down field and chase after the ball
    - Find passes and work the ball up the field

- Learning how to spread wide on offense
- Learning how to compact centrally defense
- Moving up and back as a team
- Its ok to pass backwards

### **U-12 Age Group: US**

The U-12 Age Group is the last age group before the athletes transition full 11 v 11 Soccer on full fields. This is one of the most important age groups in terms of development. This is where we begin to teach full team concepts, advanced techniques, and start preparing them for next level competitive soccer. Psychology, and philosophy factor far more into this age group, and real competitiveness begins to develop.

#### **Keys for the Age Group:**

- 9 v 9 soccer (including a Goalie)
- 1-2 Referee's
- Full offsides called
- Play begins with outside leagues
- Standings, and playoffs are kept

#### **Objectives:**

- Continued development of dribbling, passing, shooting fundamentals
- True positions taught
  - Players will begin to specialize in a particular position grouping, although they should still be exposed to and asked to play a variety of positions. It's ok to begin letting them specialize at positions they are good at.
- Increased emphasis on possession
- Learning about Triangles on the field
- Learn team shape and team movements
- Increased emphasis on playing outside in, and using crosses
- Begin to learn set pieces
- How to set up a wall
- A strong emphasis on possession and keeping control of the ball
- Learn how to make basic attacking runs
- Learn Pressure/Cover concept on defense
- Proper individual body shape and not to "stab" at the ball
- Improved ability to hit volleys, and ranged shots

#### **Coaching Points**

- Continue to work on shooting, passing, trapping, fundamentals
  - Add in Chest Traps and thigh traps

- Let the ball do the work for you
- Don't fight the ball
- Fluid hip movement
- Teaching true position concepts and roles
  - Expand on the concepts of the defenders, midfielders and forwards
  - Teach the idea of playing on a specific side of the field and the importance of width when playing
  - Offensive midfielders vs. defensive midfielders
  - When a defender should join in the attack vs. When a striker should drop back on defense
- Teaching 1 v 1 Defensive player concepts
  - Don't square up to the offensive player.
  - Knee's bent, on your toes in an athletic position
  - Be sideways on to the offensive player
  - Take an angle that will force the offensive player to go into a direction of your choosing aka Sheppard them.
  - Don't stab
    - Don't attempt to charge in recklessly with a tackle.
    - Keep the player in front of you
    - Get in the offensive players face, force a direction, take the ball when they make a mistake or come into your range
- Pressure/Cover
  - This is the concept of defending in pairs. One player is the pressure and the other the cover.
  - Pressure attacks the player on the ball and wants to push them in a certain direction
  - The Cover stays on the pressure players hip (does not get flat in a flat line with that player whether it be horizontally or vertically)
    - Cover's job is to take the ball if the pressure player is beaten or take away the passing lane from the player on the ball.
    - Cover's job is to be support
  - If Pressure player is beaten, the cover player takes on the pressure players role, while the original pressure player drops into a cover position
- Possession is key
  - Don't just kick the ball. Every pass with a purpose
  - Move the ball side to side, and even backwards when needed
    - Whatever it takes to open up the opposing defense
  - Keep Away should be used frequently in practice
- Triangles
  - Triangles is the key to good possession
  - Whenever a player has the ball, teammates should move in a way that the athlete always has a triangle of options to pass the ball to
  - Diamond is also acceptable (2 triangles)
  - This is the MOST important shape in soccer

- Teaching Team Shape and Team Movement concepts
  - Spread out sideline to sideline on offense
  - Defensive shape when on offense
    - Defense should look like a smiley face or a U roughly when on offense
    - Shifting in support of the offense depending on where the ball is on the field and able to receive drop passes as needed
    - Defense should always be pushed up as far as midfield when on attack
    - Teach its ok for defenders to make occasional attacking runs and get involved in offense
  - Midfield shape when on offense
    - Midfield is the transition piece between the defense and the offense
    - They should be looking to form triangles with whatever player has the ball
    - They are also typically the widest players when in position
    - Typically, are the players we are making the crosses into the middle
  - Forwards shape when in offense
    - Forwards should be with the last defender of the opposing team
    - They should be constantly moving and making runs while looking to put themselves in a position to score
    - If you are playing with two forwards make sure they are spread out for each other.
  - All positions shape when on defense
    - Compact in the middle
    - Force teams wide
    - PROTECT THE MIDDLE OF THE FIELD AT ALL COSTS
    - Defense does not chase the wide players. That is the job of the midfield
    - Teach marking and staying goal side
    - Use Pressure/cover concepts
- Teach attacking runs for attacking players
  - Diagonal runs, never straight lines
  - Bend your run
    - If your run takes you to the last defender, bend it so that you stay in line with the offside line, then recycle, and restart your run
- Teach crossing and outside/in concepts
  - Attacking players need to make central runs, and be ready to finish crosses
  - NO HEADERS
- Walls
  - The wall should be no more than 10 yards away from the ball
  - More players should be in the wall, the closer the ball is placed to the goal
  - There should be no gap between players in the wall

- Players are allowed to use their hands to cover sensitive body parts without there being a penalty if the ball strikes their hands, as long as their hands have not moved in the process of protecting these areas.
- One player who is on the end of the wall should turn their back on the ball as they are setting up, and be facing their own goalie
- The goalie will give directions to the player as to which direction the wall should move.
- Once the keeper is happy with the walls location, they give the thumbs up, and the player can turn back around face the incoming ball
- The wall should be set up with the outside most player lined up directly with the near post.
- The wall should cover half the goal area (even though it will NOT be on the goal line)
- The keeper will stand on the other side from the wall. The keeper should never be blocked by the wall.
- Common formations coaches use at this age group
  - 3-3-2
    - Left Center D, Center D, Right Center D
    - Left Mid, Center Mid, Right Mid
    - Left Center F, Right Center F
      - A balanced formation, that protects the middle of the field, while still give you width on the wings. Far more offensive, and a good transitional formation to begin the season with
  - 3-4-1
    - Left Center D, Center D, Right Center D
    - Left Mid, Left Center Mid, Right Center Mid, Right Mid
    - Center F
    - This is a formation that gives you a lot of versatility depending on your play style, and the athletes you have on your team. You will have a compact central defense. Two wide player and two players control the center mid. You give up a little bit on the attack with only a single striker. However, if your team can possess the ball well it a great formation. Especially as you start teaching roles. For example instead of using your two center midfielders as flat players. You can have one play a Center defensive Mid (holding Mid), and one play a Center Attacking Mid (CAM). This gives you a diamond look in the middle and gives you an extra player to support the defense who will still push forward, while also an extra player to support the striker without being caught too far forward.
  - 4-3-1
    - Left D, Right Center D, Left Center D, Right D
    - Left Mid, Center Mid, Right Mid
    - Center F

- This formation is very defensive mind and would best be used at the end of games when hold on to a league. It teaches the beginning of a traditional 4 person back line that is seen in 11 v 11 soccer.