Coaching Curriculum for Age Group: **12 and Under**

The period this age group is entering is often referred to as the dawn of tactics. Typically players of this age begin to understand basic tactical situations of the game and are more aware of movement off the ball and the reasons for tactical decisions. Problem solving becomes systematic and these players tend to learn quickly. Children of this age typically are beginning to develop abstract awareness, so they can understand coaches when we talk about space and runs off the ball. However, just because they understand these basic tactical concepts does not mean we should focus on these concepts entirely. Players are still developing technically at this age, especially as they go through growth spurts and awkward phases. It is quite common to look out at 12 and under field and see players that are physically the size of adults. Yet, other 12 and under players appear as if could still be in the 3rd grade. These children are all growing at different rates and undergoing physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. The average age for the beginning of pubescence in girls is 10 years old with a range of 7 to 14. For boys it is age 12 with a range of 9 to 16. As coaches, we need to be sensitive to these changes and their social implications when coaching this age group. Some players may pick up skills quickly, where other may struggle. However, it may be the case that this is simply the result of differences in maturation. In a year, the slower developer may surpass the player who developed earlier. For this reason we need to be patient and keep an open mind about all players through these years. They are aware of their struggles more than anyone else as peer evaluation is omnipresent at these ages. When we see them struggling, it is important for us to help them and to keep the game fun.

**Typical Characteristics of players 12 and under:**

- **all children are maturing at different rates**
- **players need to warm-up and stretch** - muscle pulls and other nagging injuries are common. Players should warm up using dynamic stretching and cool down with static stretching.
- **players will typically understand elemental abstract concepts and hypothetical situations**
- **they like to problem solve**
- **peer evaluation is constant**
- **egot is sensitive**
- **coordination may depend on wether or not they are in a growth spurt**
- **technique still needs to be reinforce constantly**
- **playing too much can lead to overuse injuries**
- **playing too much can lead to burnout or drop out** - players the are pushed too much and don't feel like they have a choice in the matter will burn out or drop out
- **this is the dawn of tactics**
- **keep asking the players to be creative and take chances** - we never want them to stop doing these things
- **ask for feedback from them** - they will tell you how things are going
- **try to hand over leadership and ownership of the team to them**
- **KEEP IT FUN!!**
**Skill Priorities:**
Continue with all priorities from 10 and under
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
Introduction to all roles in 3 vs. 3

**Recommended games for Players 12 and Under:**

1. **Four Square Passing** - Form a grid 35 x 35 yard with squares roughly 4 yards across in each corner. Two teams of 4 to 6 players try to score by passing the ball to a teammate who makes a run into one of the four squares. The player can then dribble or pass out of the square. Players in the squares cannot be defended against inside the square. Balls out of play can be passed or dribbled back into play.
2. **Shield Steal** - Half of the players in the group have a ball and half do not. Players that do not have a ball need to steal one from someone who does. If the ball goes out of bounds, the person who touched it last does not get possession. You can teach players the technical points of shielding as a group at the start of the activity. Show technique with wide body sideways, arm providing protection, ball on the outside of the foot, knees bent, turning as defender attacks, using feel to understand where the defender is going. Fix technical shielding errors throughout this activity and make sure the entire group knows how to properly shield. *Version 2:* Make this competitive by breaking the group into two teams and see which one has more balls at the end of the time.

3. **Colors Warm Up** - Half of the players in red pennies, half in blue. Teams playing together in the same space combine in the passing blue-blue-red-red-blue-blue-red-red etc. Ball can never stop, players can never stop moving, and the ball cannot leave the area of play. Coach can limit number of touches, decide which foot to pass with or which side of the foot to pass with. When players can do the first sequence adequately and without frequent errors change the sequence to blue-blue-blue-red-red-red-blue-blue-blue etc. Stress communication and technical passing points throughout. Make this activity competitive by counting errors and setting goals by lowering the allowed number of errors.

4. **2 v 2 + 2 or 3 v 3 + 3** - Three distinct teams in 3 different colored pennies. One team starts as defenders and the other 2 teams play together to keep the ball away from the defense (so it is actually 4 vs 2 or 6 vs 3). When the ball is taken by the defense, the color (two/three players) they stole it from becomes the new defenders. Players must pay close attention to who the defenders are, to score the teams in possession must make 6 passes before losing possession. If they do this, both teams on offense receive 1 point.
5. **2 v 2 with 2 + 2** - In a grid 15 x 15 yards, each team has two players in the grid and two on the outside, on opposite sides from each other. The teams score by either making six passes (with teammate inside the grid or support players) or by executing a 1-2 (wall pass) with a support player. After 3 minutes switch inside and outside players.

6. **Goal Game** - 4 v 4 + 2 in a 35 x 40 yard grid. Five 2 yard goals are spread out throughout the grid. The plus 2 players are always on the attacking team. The teams score by passing through any of the goals to a teammate. Receiving with the inside of the foot, then outside, week foot inside/outside are different requirements that can be put on the players. First team to 10 points wins. Players need to be able to see where the open goals are and receive with the vision of what is around them. With this in mind, if the players are advanced enough, the player receiving through the goal must play 1 touch. Coach could require receiving player to perform a feint before touching the ball.

7. **3 vs. 3 or 4 vs. 4 to Four Small Goals** - In a 30 x 30 yard grid, two teams attack the two opposite goals and defend their two goals. The goals are three feet wide and set up near each corner. With three attackers the players now have the 1st attacker (ball) and 2nd attackers (support) and a triangle shape in attack, looking to change the point of attack away from pressure. The defending team now has the 1st defender (pressure), 2nd defender (cover) and 3rd defender (balance). This game can be played to lines, goals with keepers, four squares or targets.

8. **Bread and Butter** - Typical 4 vs. 4 but with an additional 4 players who stand on the sidelines outside of the grid and can be used by either team as outlets (with only 2 touches). If a team gets scored upon, they become the team on the outside and the outside team plays on the field. Use a grid approximately 20 x 25 yards. Stress correct technique, receiving sideways on and facing where they wish to play. The coach may restrict players to 2 or 3 touches to force quicker decisions, and better body position before the ball arrives. Keep score and make the game competitive.

9. **6 vs. 6 Team Touch** - Play normal 6 vs 6 game except for the fact that every player on the team must touch the ball before they can score. This forces players to show for the ball, to communicate, and to spread out the field. **Version 2:** If players are advanced, you can enforce a 2 or 3 touch limit on the players.

**Every training session should end with a scrimmage**

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US YOUTH SOCCER recommendations for 12 and under:

- Play 8 vs. 8 (including a goalkeeper)
- Field Size: 75-80 yards long x 50 yards wide
- Ball: Size 4
- Training time: Limit to 1 hour 30 minutes