Development guidelines for each stage

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*Here you will find the guidelines that should be imposed for each stage of development. It is important that coaches are familiar with the guidelines and follow the guidelines as they are methodologically placed as part of the development pyramid, each block building up to the next.*

**5 & 6 Years of age (*Developing familiarity with the ball*)**

One player, one ball, the ball is his/hers and does not want to be shared. Ignore coaching team aspects of play and allow players to begin to master the ball. Games that use imagination and fantasy should be used as tools to motivate young players. 3v3, 4v4, small goals, no goal keepers (or last player back, keeper on the fly). There should be no ‘set’ position, free play is encouraged. Heading is not allowed at this age. Allow players to hop, jump, skip, tumble, roll, fall during play. Practice should include ‘free’ play and time for players to try new and creative things with the ball.

**Practice should include activities and games that allow players to:**

* Dribble with all sides of their feet
* Develop a ‘feeling’ for the ball
* Dribble out of trouble
* Receive the ball with various body parts
* Dribble at different speeds
* Turn, stop, cut with the ball
* Jump, tumble, hop, skip, roll, fall
* Be creative, use their imagination, have fun

**Under 8 (7 & 8 Years) (*Forming a sense for the game*)**

At this level 3v3, 4v4, 5v5 are seen as the primary methods of training. Technical skills such as passing, receiving, shooting and dribbling (1v1 attacking) are developed here. Conditioned small sided games are the main form of training, the use of conditioned small sided games allows the players to begin understanding game situations (reading/finding space, developing a sense of time on and off the ball, grasping the sense of directional play forward and back, using a variety of speed, understanding opponents, and learning the meaning of a result). The coach must continuously use a variety of conditioned games that challenge the players. Technical skills need to be developed in a functional manner that are realistic so they can be transferred and understood in the game. Tactical awareness should begin to be developed and fostered.

Elementary tactical objectives must be instilled and encouraged but not overemphasized at this age: staying involved in the play, using the complete space of the field, avoid ball chasing. Players at this age should become aware that ‘team play’ is necessary and winning cannot be achieved on your own.

1v1 dribbling/attacking however is very important with this category. Functional 1v1 exercises with a goal or objective is best (i.e. 1v1 leading to a shot on goal is realistic and can be related to a game situation). Games that allow for plenty of 1v1 situations and shooting opportunities are necessary. Larger goals with actual goalkeepers can be introduced at this age. 4v4 and 5v5 remain the basis of all conditioned games.

**Practice should include activities and games that allow players to:**

* Dribble with all sides of their feet
* Dribble out of trouble
* Receive the ball with various parts of their body
* Dribble at different speeds and use cuts, turns, fakes
* Learn the proper passing technique
* Learn the proper shooting technique
* Score goals
* Be creative with the ball
* Attack defenders 1v1

**Tactically players should learn to:**

* Learn when it is best to dribble/pass/shoot
* Solve problems
* Go forward when in possession of the ball, get back when not in possession of the ball
* Support teammates with movement off the ball, opening up

**Under 10 (9 & 10 Years) (*Solving game situations*)**

Each training session at this age group should be designed to challenge and force players to problem solve. Each player should walk away from the session feeling as if they achieved a goal or learned a task/skill. At this age level, although space should increase in training, so should pressure on the ball. Pressure should be increased and be constant. Aspects of team play with the use of conditioned small sided games should be worked on (4v4 to 7v7). Solving game situations should be encouraged with the use of ‘guided discovery’. Homework is used as a tool so players continue to practice their individual skills consistently. Players must understand the importance of practicing their individual skills with the ball and should understand that individual technique is what will allow them to play at a higher level. The coach should monitor and reemphasize player homework by continuously testing players at training. This will keep players motivated on working on their skills.

Training at this age should consist of conditioned games using the basic 4v4 set up and then increased to the 7v7 format. The addition in players on the pitch should not impose too much difficulty for players, instead it should simply increase pressure and game variables. Players should be asked about their decisions on the pitch and should be encouraged to solve various game situations. At the same time, tactical talks should not go on for an extensive period during the practice. As players in this age become increasingly competitive, they should be taught to respect teammates, coaches and officials. The use of fair play becomes increasingly important.

**Practice should include activities and games that allow players to:**

* Receive the ball with various parts of their body out of the air
* Score goals
* Be creative with the ball
* Attack defenders 1v1
* Play passes into space
* Keep possession of the ball
* Volleying the ball to shoot/pass
* Pass with the laces/outside of the boot
* Learn to curve the ball
* Shield the ball

**Tactically players should learn to:**

* Learn when it is best to dribble/pass/shoot
* Solve problems
* Go forward when in possession of the ball, get back when not in possession of the ball
* Defend goal side
* Support teammates with movement off the ball, opening up, create passing lanes, create good angles to receive a pass
* Pressure opponents when not in possession of the ball

**Under 12 (11 & 12 Years) (*Working as a team*)**

This is the stage in which players begin to play 9v9 and should be at a level where they understand the game principles enough to allow them the chance to play 9v9. Basic forms of football begin to be understood and positional awareness becomes increasingly important. The ability to play with 3/4 in defense/midfield, the opportunity to play with 1/2 strikers, these aspects are introduced. Spaces used become larger in size once again, with more pressure being imposed on players. Players must become more tactically aware, movement off the ball should be sharper and movement with the ball should be quicker. Again the goals become larger and goalkeepers are established in goal. Various conditioned games from the basic 4v4 to 9v9 are used. Individual player homework remains essential. Team build up and attack are the most important and individuals begin to realize the true importance of being part of a team/group. Along with the new elements comes the introduction to the offside rule. Possession, build up play, and soccer intelligence are built using the basic forms and conditioned games (5v2, 5v3, limited touches of the ball, decreased space, added pressure, etc). Players should look to get forward and attack while training in any game form (4v4 to 9v9). While at the same time they must realize their defensive responsibilities. Defending should begin as soon as the ball is lost (transition) and should happen as high up the pitch as possible, in an organized fashion. The players should use constant movement off the ball and combination play to create as many scoring chances as possible. Playing to win should be encouraged at all times, attacking being the key focus. Players will enjoy the game more when being set free to move forward and attack. The coach remains the guide not the commander, players are there to solve the problems.

Training sessions should always end with a game (4v4, 7v7). Here the players should be able to demonstrate what they learned in practice.

**Practice should include activities and games that allow players to:**

* Receive the ball with various parts of their body out of the air at different speeds, while moving
* Score goals in and outside the box/with their head/off the volley/from a cross/with a chip
* Be creative with the ball
* Attack defenders 1v1
* Play passes into space, play a through pass
* Use one touch passing
* Keep possession of the ball
* Volleying the ball to shoot/pass
* Heading the ball defensively, heading the ball to score
* Pass with the laces/outside of the boot, short and long
* Curve the ball to pass/shoot
* Shield the ball
* Slide tackle
* Diving headers
* Half volleys, side volleys, scissor kick, bicycle kick
* Combination passing (give and go’s, overlap runs, take overs)

**Tactically players should learn to:**

* Learn to make decisions under pressure
* Solve problems
* Make intelligent forward runs
* Transition quickly between attack and defense
* Defend intelligently
* Understand the role of the second defender
* Defend goal side
* Support teammates with movement off the ball, opening up, create passing lanes, create good angles to receive a pass
* Pressure opponents when not in possession of the ball in an organized fashion
* Use combinations, give and go’s, overlap runs, take over’s, etc
* Play to win

**Under 14 (13 & 14 Years) (*Gaining responsibility*)**

At this age players should begin to realize that football is played more without the ball then it is with the ball. They must learn to always be in the play (defending, build up, attack). Players in this age should be able to make decisions on the field without assistance or guidance from the coach. They should have the confidence to be instinctive with their decisions. The individual players development still remains the priority, however players must learn to fit in the team environment. At this age decisions must be made by the coach on which players have developed enough to sufficiently handle the demands in the 11v11 game format.

In training the basic forms should still be used: Variations and conditioned games of 5v2, 1v1, 4v4 to 8v8, etc. Games should focus on sharp transitional play (attack to defense, defense to attack). Homework to further develop individual player skills remains important. Players at this level should further understand the individual roles on the field and have a better understanding of more complex team tactics.

**Practice should include activities and games that allow players to:**

* Use directional control to get out of pressured situations
* Score goals from various positions on the field, using various techniques to score
* Be creative with the ball
* Attack defenders 1v1
* Play passes into space, play a through pass, play passes over the top, switch play
* Use one touch passing under high amounts of pressure
* Keep possession of the ball
* Volleying the ball to shoot/pass when under pressure
* Heading the ball defensively, heading the ball to score, heading against an opponent, winning the battle in the air
* Pass with the laces/outside of the boot, short and long
* Curve the ball to pass/shoot around defenders, under pressure
* Shield the ball
* Slide tackle
* Diving headers under pressure
* Half volleys, side volleys, scissor kick, bicycle kick, when under pressure
* Combination passing when under pressure (give and go’s, overlap runs, take overs)
* Play at high intensity
* Cross and finish

**Tactically players should learn to:**

* Learn to make decisions under pressure
* Solve various game scenarios
* Make intelligent forward runs
* Transition quickly between attack and defense
* Defend intelligently
* Defend intelligently in numbers
* Defend goal side
* Support teammates with movement off the ball, opening up, create passing lanes, create good angles to receive a pass
* Pressure opponents when not in possession of the ball in an organized fashion
* Use combinations, give and go’s, overlap runs, take over’s, etc
* Play to win
* Positional play
* Various team tactics

Understand the positional roles on the field