

AYSO Region 283

U6 Training Sessions

Compiled by
Evan Ghoujegli

Introduction

Welcome to U6 coaching. Our region appreciates that you've decided to help out this year and we hope to make coaching a positive experience for you. One of our goals as a region in recent years has been to improve our coaching, which in turn will improve the quality of our players. For most players, you'll be the first coach they've ever had, so please put in a full effort as their coach to make their first soccer experience enjoyable. U6 coaching is not a large time commitment, with only a one mini-practice and game per week. However, it can't be stressed enough that learning the basics at the U6 level has a big impact on a player being able to succeed at higher levels. As fun as the games will be, the mini-practices are crucial for player development.

No pressure though. We've included six half hour training sessions that we'd like all U6 teams to run this season. As a region, there are certain skills we want players to be introduced to, and it is your job as a coach to help create this standardization. You should have eight games each season, and should do one of the sessions before each game. After you've done all of them, you can redo a session or feel free to come up with your own. Take some time to study the session closely before you do it so that it is done properly.

A few notes about coaching U6:

- Sessions should be divided into: Stretching (2 min.) Touches Warmup (3 min.) Skill Demonstration (15 min.) Fun Game (10 min.) Water (1-2 minutes) Actual 3v3 game. Times may vary slightly.
- There is some room for flexibility (such as when explaining the rules of the game), but try to stick with that model most of the time.
- Players at this age learn best by demonstration. Always demonstrate what you want players to do and be clear.
- Be sure to give players praise and attention. Don't be afraid to get a little goofy with younger kids.
- Directions should be as simple as possible. Most kids will not hear anything you say if you keep them sitting for more than a minute. Avoid distractions as much as possible.

I hope that coaching is an easy and enjoyable experience for you. For more ideas and information, you should take a look at the U6 AYSO Coaching Manual. Thank you for making our coaching program better and good luck!

~Evan Ghoujehi

Session 1 Rules of the Game

1. Stretch (~2 minutes)

Stretching is important to prevent injury and get players loosened up. It doesn't need to be really complex stretching, but rather a couple simple stretching routines. The coach should lead the stretches and have players count along.

2. Rules of the Game (~10 minutes)

This session will be the only one where the explanations can potentially get a little long, but it is unavoidable. Most players are about to go into the first game of their life and some might not have any idea what soccer is. The best way to counter this is to make the explanations as interactive for the kids as possible. Challenge the kids with questions (So what part of our body do we never use in soccer?). Have the kids demonstrate when applicable (Who can show me how a throw in is done?). If you as a coach need to look into the rules, refer to the appendix in the AYSO U6 Coaching Manual. Here are some of the basics that players should understand.

- Soccer is played with the feet. At no point can they pick up the ball when it is in play.
- Physically show players where the boundaries are and what they mean. What happens when the ball goes out? (A lot of players may instinctively try to keep kicking it when the ball goes out, so show them when the play is over)
- Show players exactly how the game will start and how they will line up. At this point, start a little "explanation game". Simulate a game while explaining the rules. Show players that they are trying to score in the other team's goal. Conversely, show players that they need to try to and stop the other team from scoring. Also take this opportunity to show players exactly what to do when the ball goes out again, whether it is a throw in or a goal. Play should stop immediately.
- **An important note: First, don't worry about passing to teammates. The most important thing is that players are touching the ball and getting more comfortable with it. Second, don't worry about scoring at all. We want players to be competitive, but there are no winners or losers in U6 soccer. So please don't keep score and simply tell players you don't know the score if they ask you.**

3. Throw-in demonstration (~5 minutes)

The ball will be going out of play a lot and players will need to know how to execute a proper throw-in. To make learning the skill more interactive, players should get in pairs with one ball to start. If you have odd numbers, use yourself as an extra person. As you demonstrate a throw-in, players should be doing

exactly what you do, but not throwing the ball yet (make that clear). Focus on two aspects of the throw in, the arms and the legs. First show the arms. (**Coaching Points:** Two hands on the ball spread out, ball on the back of the neck, and release the ball when it is over your head) Second show the legs. (**Coaching Points:** Both feet must stay on the ground). Once you've finished your explanation, let players throw back and forth for a couple minutes. Watch and make corrections. Players will struggle most keeping their legs down.

4. Throw ins- Keep Away from Coach and Score (Rest of Time)

This activity allows players to work on their throw-ins and also helps to get them in the scoring mindset for when the game starts. Not only do players have to throw the ball in, but they also must advance the ball. All players except one should start on the sideline with a ball and line up. The spare player should be on the field with the coach. Players on the sideline should be instructed not only to throw the ball in properly, but also to avoid throwing it to the coach. You should pretty much be standing somewhere on the field a fair distance away from the attacking player. Once the player has the ball thrown into them, they should go and try to score in the goal. Whatever the result is, the player collects their ball and goes to the end of the line. The player who threw the ball comes on the field and the next player throws.

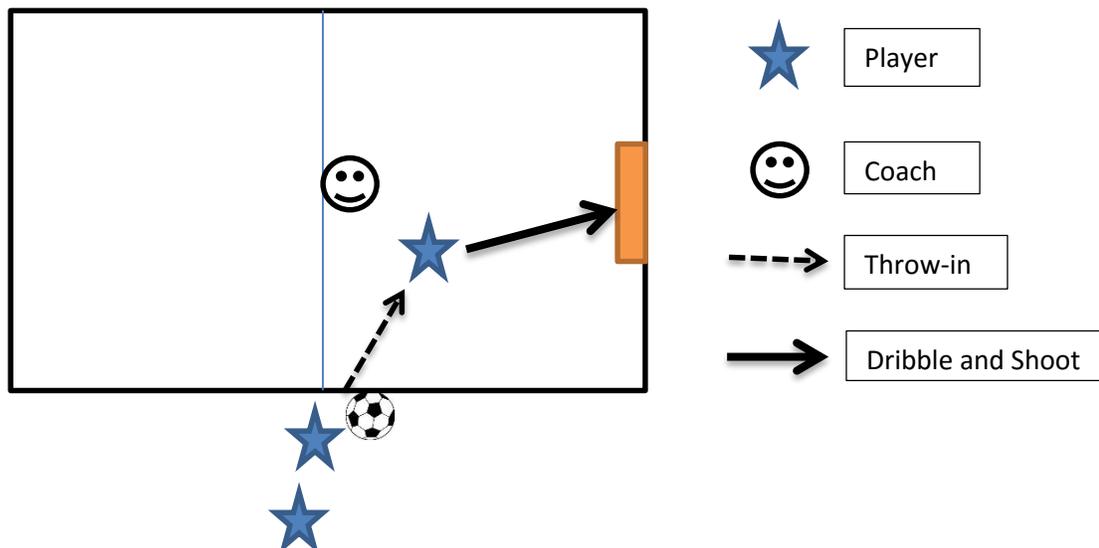
Coaching Points:

Make sure throws are executed properly.

Encourage players to advance the ball towards the goal.

Encourage throwers to look for teammates

Don't worry about dribbling and touches right now even if they're not good. We'll focus on that in the next session. Here is a visual if you need one.



Session 2 Touches and Dribbling

1. Stretch (~2 minutes)

Stretching is important to prevent injury and get players loosened up. It doesn't need to be really complex stretching, but rather a couple simple stretching routines. The coach should lead the stretches and have players count along.

2. Tic-Tocs, Toe-Touches, and Sole-Rolling (3-5 Min.)

These dribbling skills should be done before every practice and allows players to get a lot of touches on the ball. We're going to stick with three skills which should each be done for about a minute or so each. Hopefully by the end of the season, this drill becomes a routine that the players will be familiar with. Each player should have one ball and should have some space. If you need a visual demonstration, you can easily find these skills in an online video.

Tic-Tocs are done with the inside part of the feet. Players will keep the ball between their legs and touch the ball between their left and right foot repeatedly. Their legs will be separated a bit, but not too far apart. The main difficulty most players will face is keeping a good rhythm and shifting their weight properly. **Coaching Points: Try to stay in place and keep the ball between your legs. Develop a rhythm by bouncing on your feet a bit. Get as many touches as possible.**

Toe-Touches are done with the bottom of the foot. Each player has a ball in front of them and stands behind it. They then should be instructed to touch the top of the ball with the bottom of their foot and alternate feet after every touch. Ideally, the ball shouldn't move forward as each touch will be small and delicate. However if you are confident your team is doing well, challenge them to do toe-touches while moving back and forth. **Coaching Points: Alternate feet and shift weight** (some players may struggle with finding a rhythm and keeping their balance). **The ball should stay relatively still with small precise touches being put on it.**

Sole-Rolling- Sole-Rolling is also done with the bottom of the foot. The aim is to allow players to get more comfortable with the ball at their feet by simply rolling it around in place. While standing in place, players will roll the ball forward and backward with both feet. They can also roll it left and right. This can especially help a player get more comfortable with the ball being on their weaker foot.

3. Dribbling Grid, Every Step is a Touch and Head Up (~15 min.)

A dribbling grid is the easiest way to teach players new skills and allow players to express themselves. The grid can simply be your half of the playing field. The grid for this session will focus on keeping the ball close and keeping the head up. It is done in two parts and I often tell players that they will be learning two rules today. I make a really big deal that they must remember what the rules are when I question them later in the practice. By challenging them, I feel it helps gets their attention better.

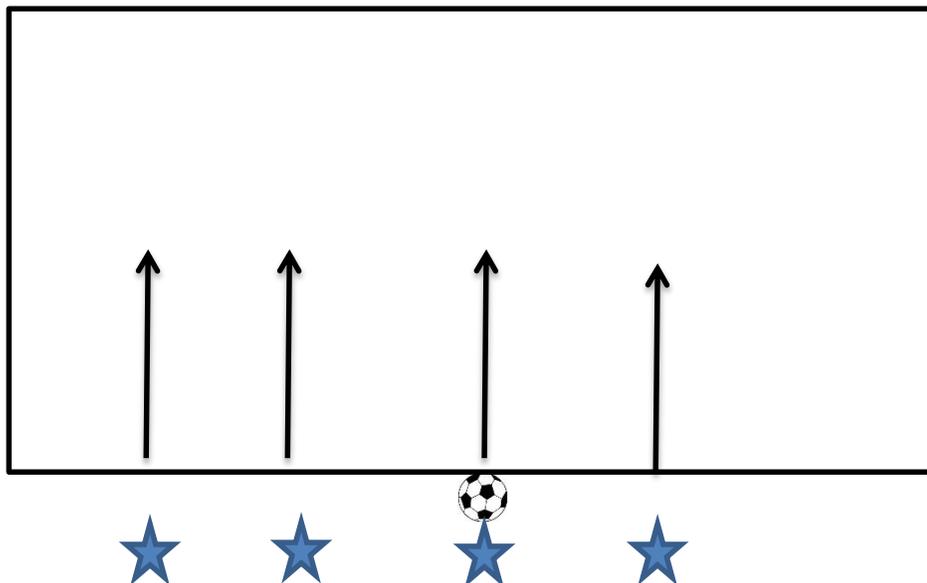
Every Step is A Touch: Players can move anywhere around the grid with only one rule, Every Step is a Touch. Demonstrate exactly what should and shouldn't be done. While dribbling, instead of touch,

step, step, step, touch, it should be touch, step, touch, step, touch, step. This way, the ball will stay close to the player. Players should be encouraged to use both feet while dribbling and should go at their own pace. The main goal is for the ball to stay close to them. Also show the players how to stop the ball by putting their foot on top of it. Once in a while, call out *Stop*, and see which players have effective control of the ball. If players are chasing the ball when you stop the play, encourage them to slow down and maintain more control of the ball.

Head Up: Reminding players that the Every Step is a Touch rule is still active, tell the players you are adding a new rule. Now we want players to have their head up. Demonstrate and exaggerate what it looks like dribbling with your head down and question players what is wrong with that. Obviously they can't see where they are going and also can't see where the goal and their teammates are. Thus, you will now be holding up a certain number of fingers 1-5 every once in a while. Keeping the Every Step is a Touch rule in mind, players must now also keep an eye on you to see how many fingers you hold up. Make it clear that they are not to blurt out the answer, but rather must dribble to you and whisper the number to you. Then they should continue dribbling. Make sure players are dribbling in different areas of the field and not just next to you.

Red Light Green Light (~10 min.)

This game is quite simple, but effectively works on the skills learned in the session. Line up each player with a ball on the sideline and the coach or a parent will stand on the opposite sideline. The coach or parent will call out *Go* and turn away from the players. This signals players to start dribbling towards the coach or parent. When the coach or parent says *Stop*, they turn around. Anyone who doesn't have their foot on top of the ball must go back to the beginning. This process repeats until a player has reached the opposite sideline. All players go back to the beginning and the game restarts.



Session 3 Touches and Dribbling

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2. Tic-Tocs, Toe-Touches, and Sole-Rolling (3-5 Min.)

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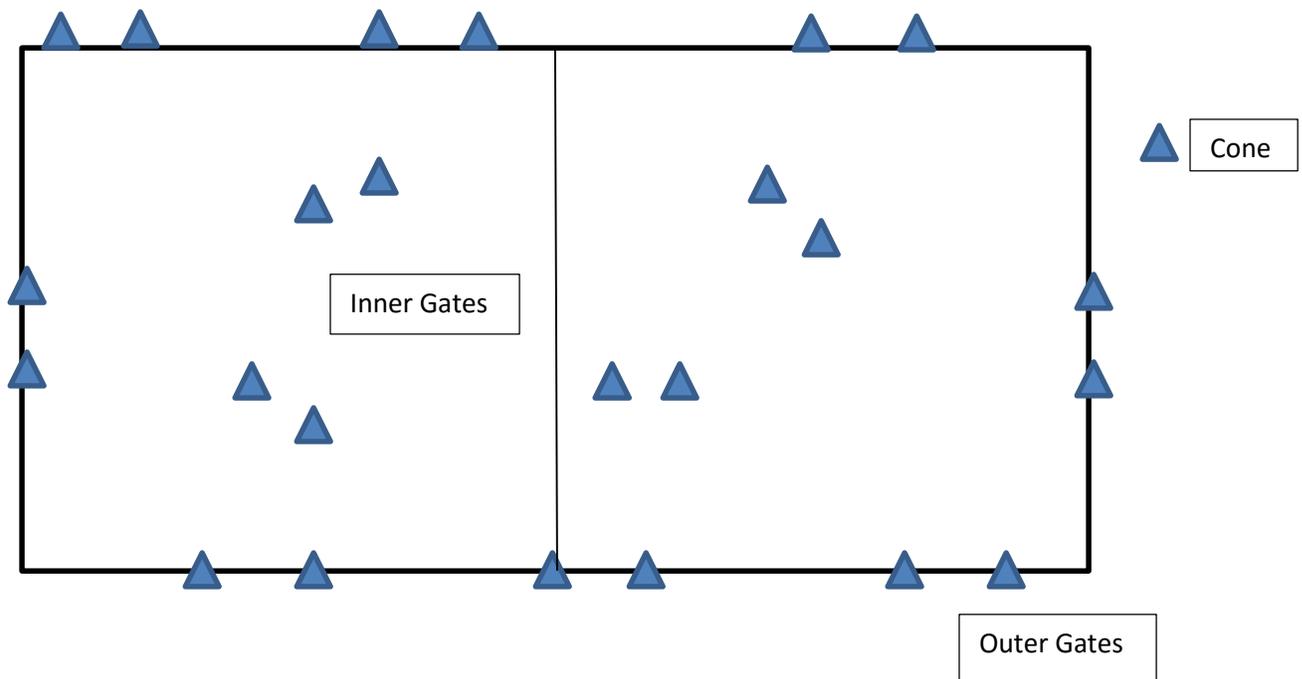
Tic-Tocs are done with the inside part of the feet. Players will keep the ball between their legs and touch the ball between their left and right foot repeatedly. Their legs will be separated a bit, but not too far apart. The main difficulty most players will face is keeping a good rhythm and shifting their weight properly. **Coaching Points: Try to stay in place and keep the ball between your legs. Develop a rhythm by bouncing on your feet a bit. Get as many touches as possible.**

Toe-Touches are done with the bottom of the foot. Each player has a ball in front of them and stands behind it. They then should be instructed to touch the top of the ball with the bottom of their foot and alternate feet after every touch. Ideally, the ball shouldn't move forward as each touch will be small and delicate. However if you are confident your team is doing well, challenge them to do toe-touches while moving back and forth. **Coaching Points: Alternate feet and shift weight** (some players may struggle with finding a rhythm and keeping their balance). **The ball should stay relatively still with small precise touches being put on it.**

Sole-Rolling- Sole-Rolling is also done with the bottom of the foot. The aim is to allow players to get more comfortable with the ball at their feet by simply rolling it around in place. While standing in place, players will roll the ball forward and backward with both feet. They can also roll it left and right. This can especially help a player get more comfortable with the ball being on their weaker foot.

3. Dribbling Grid Pullbacks and Rollovers (15 min.)

This grid has a bit of a different setup. The size of the grid is the same, but you're going to be creating some gates both inside the grid and on the boundaries of the grid. A gate is simply two cones that are about 3-4 feet apart. Players will be going through these gates with the ball, so be sure to make them big enough. Every player will have a ball. The field could look something like this and will be used for the next two activities.



Pullbacks: The first new skill you will teach the players is the pullback. The pullback is executed by putting one's foot on top of the ball when the ball is in front of you, pulling the ball back towards you, and turning 180 degrees. Being able to change directions in soccer is a very important skill to learn. Everyone should have a ball while you demonstrate the skill and should be slowly doing it with you. Watch to see if everyone has got the correct form. Once finished, players will start the drill by dribbling anywhere around the grid. You will call out the word *Pullback*, which will signal everyone to go to one of the cones on the sidelines (They will not go through the outer gates quite yet). Once reaching one of the cones, players will perform a pull before touching the cone and dribble through one of the gates inside the grid. Players will continue dribbling until you call out *Pullback* again. Remember the skills learned previously and be sure that players are keeping the ball close and have their head up.

Rollovers: Bring the players in and begin teaching players the rollover. The rollover is a bit more difficult and is done from side to side. The foot is placed on top of the ball and rolled sideways to the inside part of the other foot. So if your right leg is on the ball, the ball is rolled left to the inside of the left leg. Practice the skill together similar to how the pullback was practiced. Once everyone has the right idea, show players where the outer gates are. Like the pullback grid, players will start off dribbling normally around the grid. This time, you will call out the word *Rollover*. This signals players to perform a rollover through the outer gates. As they will then be outside the grid, they must then dribble to a different outer gate and reenter the grid by doing another rollover. Probably the most difficult part of the rollover for players is going to be getting the right angle to perform the rollover. They can't approach the gate straight on, but must rather approach the gate from a side angle. Be sure to clearly demonstrate how players should approach the outer gates before the drill begins.

If you want to challenge players a bit more and have the time, call out either signal word so that players can try out both skills.

4. Keep Away from Coach: Pullbacks and Rollovers (10 min.)

This game is not much different than the dribbling grid, but you can make it much more fun by being goofy as the coach. Keep the grid from the previous activity, but remove the gates in the middle. Keep the outer gates. Every player has a ball. The coach should pretend to be a monster or something the kids will want to run away from. You will run around the grid and chase players with their balls, but don't try to steal them. Instead when a player runs near you, they should perform a pullback and run away. If you catch them near the sidelines, they can get away from you by doing a rollover out of the grid. They then should reenter the grid through a different cone gate else another rollover. If the players don't do the skill, kick the ball out and instruct the player to do ten toe touches to get back in the game. Be sure to go after everyone and make corrections when it is necessary. When you are done playing, remind the players of some of the things they have learned in the last two weeks. Every Step is a Touch, Head up, Rollovers, and Pullbacks.

Session 4 Speed Dribbling

1. Stretch (~2 minutes)

Stretching is important to prevent injury and get players loosened up. It doesn't need to be really complex stretching, but rather a couple simple stretching routines. The coach should lead the stretches and have players count along.

2. Tic-Tocs, Toe-Touches, and Sole-Rolling (3-5 Min.)

These dribbling skills should be done before every practice and allows players to get a lot of touches on the ball. We're going to stick with three skills which should each be done for about a minute or so each. Hopefully by the end of the season, this drill becomes a routine that the players will be familiar with. Each player should have one ball and should have some space. If you need a visual demonstration, you can easily find these skills in an online video.

Tic-Tocs are done with the inside part of the feet. Players will keep the ball between their legs and touch the ball between their left and right foot repeatedly. Their legs will be separated a bit, but not too far apart. The main difficulty most players will face is keeping a good rhythm and shifting their weight properly. **Coaching Points: Try to stay in place and keep the ball between your legs. Develop a rhythm by bouncing on your feet a bit. Get as many touches as possible.**

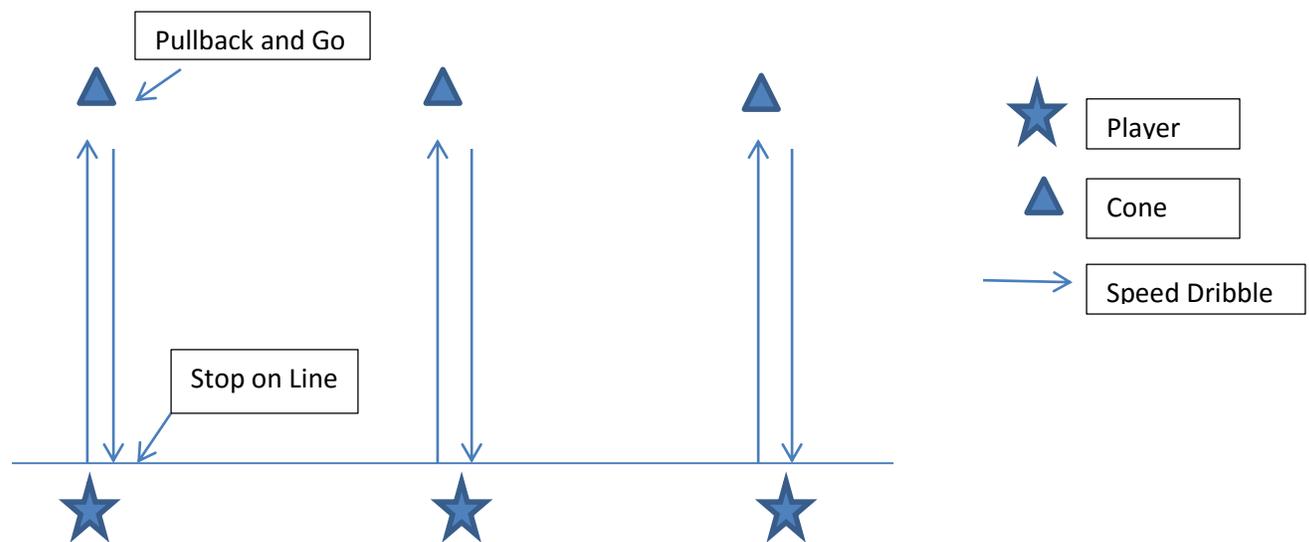
Toe-Touches are done with the bottom of the foot. Each player has a ball in front of them and stands behind it. They then should be instructed to touch the top of the ball with the bottom of their foot and alternate feet after every touch. Ideally, the ball shouldn't move forward as each touch will be small and delicate. However if you are confident your team is doing well, challenge them to do toe-touches while moving back and forth. **Coaching Points: Alternate feet and shift weight** (some players may struggle with finding a rhythm and keeping their balance). **The ball should stay relatively still with small precise touches being put on it.**

Sole-Rolling- Sole-Rolling is also done with the bottom of the foot. The aim is to allow players to get more comfortable with the ball at their feet by simply rolling it around in place. While standing in place, players will roll the ball forward and backward with both feet. They can also roll it left and right. This can especially help a player get more comfortable with the ball being on their weaker foot.

3. Speed Dribbling (10 min.)

We're now going to introduce the concept of dribbling with speed to players, which becomes increasingly important in the game as players get older. One of the main issues when teaching players to dribble faster is having them also maintain good ball control. Playing competitive games that pit players against their teammates is the best way to encourage speed dribbling, but they also might forget that every step must be a touch as well. Thus, you must constantly remind players of this in the next two drills.

To start this drill, you will simply need a start line and then a cone for each player on the start line to dribble to. These cones should be about 15 yards from the start line and spaced out pretty well. Each player should have their own ball. The drill is basically going to be a dribbling race and you'll want to encourage players to be really competitive so that they'll dribble quickly. When you say "Go", players will dribble in a straight line towards their cone. When they reach the cone, they will do a pullback and race back to the starting line. Only when they are directly on the starting line with their foot on top of their ball are they finished. This will ensure that they kept the ball close and didn't simply run through the finish with poor ball control.



Your main coaching points are that players should be dribbling quickly while keeping the ball close. Players only getting in one or two touches before reaching the cone should be encouraged to slow down and go at their own pace. Once the pullback is performed, players should accelerate and dribble with speed again. Some players may need you to physically stand on their cone to realize that the cone represents a defender and they want to get away from that defender quickly.

4. Musical Cones (15 min.)

So there really won't be any music involved unless you get creative, but this game works similar to musical chairs. The setup is simply a medium-sized grid with cones placed randomly inside of it. The number of cones will be one less (perhaps two if you want) than the number of players participating in the game. So if you have six players, there will be five cones placed in the grid. The balls will start with the coach and there will be one ball for each cone in the grid. Players start by jogging around the grid. Eventually the coach will throw or kick all of the balls in random directions. This will signal players to retrieve a ball and dribble it quickly to one of the cones. Once at a cone, they are safe and their ball cannot be taken away. Only one player can be at each cone. Obviously one player will not get a ball and they can try to steal a ball from someone. Eventually however, all of the cones will fill up and one player will be left out. You can either play with eliminations and remove balls and cones or have the player do 15 toe touches to get back in. I personally prefer the toe-touches because it keeps everyone playing.

Session 5 Attacking and Defending 1v1s

1. Stretch (~2 minutes)

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2. Tic-Tocs, Toe-Touches, and Sole-Rolling (3-5 Min.)

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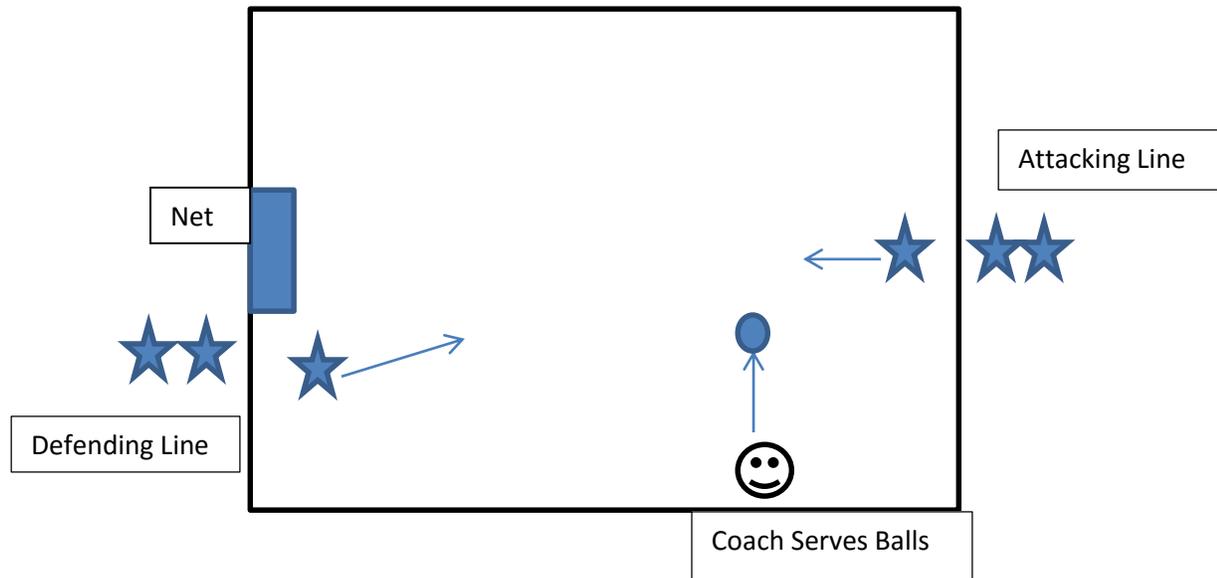
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3. Simple 1v1 (15 min.)

The goal of this session is to have players understand the difference between attacking and defending and to gain an understanding of what to do in those situations. By the end of the session, players should understand that they should advance and try to score when in possession of the ball. Conversely, they should understand that they should stop the ball and prevent the opponent from scoring when not in possession of the ball.

The way we will first demonstrate these roles is through a simple 1v1 drill. Before starting, you should explain the idea stated previously about the difference between attack and defense. It can be as

simple as something like: “If we have the ball, score. If we don’t have the ball, stop the other team from scoring.” The drill will be done on one half of a U6 field with a defending line standing next to the goal and an attacking line standing at the opposite end. One player from each line will come out for each ball. The coach will serve the ball to the attacking line. The attacker simply tries to get the ball past the defender to score and the defender tries to stop them. When the ball goes out of the play, a goal is scored, or the defender steals it, the play is over and the two players switch lines. A new ball is served for the next players in line. Encourage close control and speed for the attackers. Encourage defenders to stay close to attackers and stay between the ball and the goal (goalside).



4. Sharks and Minnows

So there isn't a goal to shoot on for this game, but there are a lot of 1v1 situations. One player or perhaps the coach will be designated as the shark. The rest of the players will be minnows and will each have a ball. The game will be played in an area the size of the dribbling grids done in earlier sessions and you'll want to make sure the boundaries are clearly visible to the players. The minnows will dribble around and keep their ball away from the shark. The shark tries to steal the ball from the minnows and kick their ball out of the grid. Like the game in the last session, you can play with eliminations until all the minnow have been “eaten” or you can allow players to come back in after they do tic-tocs or toe-touches. Again, I prefer doing the skill so that players do not have to sit out.

As a coach, you should be looking for proper dribbling from the minnows. Encourage them to use some of the moves they've learned previously. Ideally, there should be a lot of 1v1s and not a lot of players standing around. Consider adding another shark or making the grid smaller if this happens.

Session 6 Striking the Ball

1. Stretch (~2 minutes)

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2. Tic-Tocs, Toe-Touches, and Sole-Rolling (3-5 Min.)

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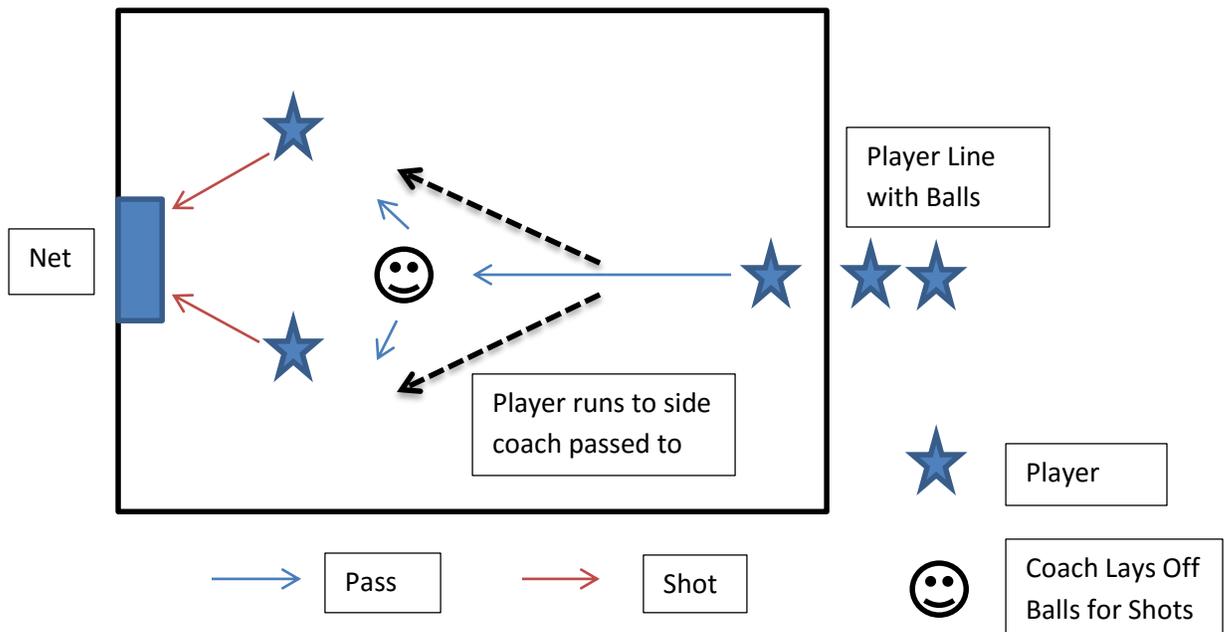
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3. Striking the Ball Introduction (15-20 min.)

For the last session, you'll be working on striking the ball properly. Players will have struck the ball quite a bit by now, but there may be some that have been doing it improperly. You'll first want to get the players together and demonstrate exactly how to strike the ball. The AYSO U6 manual covers the instep kick quite well and is a great resource for this session. You'll probably have a lot of players using their toe to strike the ball and you want them using their laces. Show players where their laces are and perhaps teach them the phrase, "Laces Laces Smiley Faces, Toe Toe No-No". Now have the players practice the technique without touching the ball or only touching the ball softly. You want to keep players close and not having to chase balls everywhere so that you can make corrections. The AYSO

manual goes into more detail but you want to make sure the plant foot is placed next to the ball, the ankle of the kicking foot is locked and pointed down, the body is leaning over the ball, the laces are being used with the foot pointed towards its target, and lastly that players are following through after making contact with the ball. Be sure to demonstrate and emphasize all of these points.

Once they've had time to practice a bit, players will now get a chance to shoot on the goal. This drill is done on one half of a U6 field and players will line up on the midfield line with a ball each. The coach will stand in the center of the field about halfway between the player line and the goal and will face the player line. One player goes at a time and starts the drill by passing to the coach. The player will run forward and the coach will lay the ball off to either the left or right. The player then takes a shot on the goal. A layoff is a short pass that will set up the shot for the player. Try to give the ball to both sides so that players get a chance to use both feet to shoot. For some of the more advanced players, give them a bit of a challenge and lay the ball off a bit wider. This creates a tougher angle that they must adjust to when taking the shot.



Cowboys and Indians (5-10 min.)

This game sees every player get a ball and stand on the outside of the field on the sidelines. The coach will then dribble a ball across the grid and players will try to hit the coach's ball with theirs from the sideline while striking the ball properly. Alternatively, you can have a player be the one running through the middle, but just be careful of injury. Allow players to retrieve their balls after each run through the grid. Get a bit closer to the players as the dribbler if shot power is an issue. Also challenge players and have them use their weak foot for a round or two. Be sure that players are striking the ball as practiced earlier.

Conclusion

So that does it for the first six sessions. Once you've completed these, feel free to try some of your own ideas or return to something that the team may have struggled with. It's important to realize that some players learn at different rates and need more time to practice some skills. Don't blame yourself as a coach if you have some players that don't understand everything you teach. However, recognize the skills where the team needs improvement and revisit some of the related drills.

Be sure to complete your AYSO online course for U6 coaching as it is required to coach at this level. It's quick and might give you a few more ideas beyond this manual. Feel free to introduce yourself if you ever see me up at the complex and let me know how the team is doing. I wish you and your teams the best and appreciate your contribution to our AYSO region.

~Evan Ghoujehi