

U10 Benchmarks, Coaching and Player Development

U10 is the next progression for a player from U8. At this level, players will start to separate themselves from each other in terms of their skill, desire, competitiveness, and overall knowledge of the game. At this level, several new concepts are introducing Goalkeepers, Tactical positions, Offsides, and a larger group of players.

Children in the U10 age group will start to identify as a team and start working more as a unit rather than an individual. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together but are still involved in individual play as well. This age group prefers team activities, their competitiveness will start to grow.

Again, the focus for players at the U10 age group is to continue to develop their skills while learning new ones and learning the concept of teamwork and team play. Players will start to favor one position to another (i.e., Defender, Midfielder, Forward, goalkeeper), but should be given as many opportunities to try the other positions as possible. Strategy will start to play a role during games but still should not be the primary focus as with winning, player development, skill & team building and generally having fun is the primary objectives.

U10 Division Rules:

- Goalkeepers introduced.
- Offsides introduced.
- 7 vs 7
- Size #4 ball
- throw-ins, goal kicks, or corner kicks continued with Goal kicks employing the build out line. This line is just after the penalty box and the opposing team must be behind this line until the ball has crossed it from a goal kick.
- Referee and Assistant Referee employed for game. Referee (the center referee on the field) along with the Assistant Referees (line judges) will be responsible for calling the game, offsides, out of bounds, goal kicks, corner kicks and any penalties that may occur during a game.
- 2 25 halves'
- All players are to play at least half of the game.

Components of the Game for the U-10 Age Group

- Technical Development– These are the skills used to play the game, i.e., the “fundamentals”. This includes things like dribbling, passing, shooting, receiving, tackling, juggling, etc. Along with making sure players have fun, skills is probably the most important area for youth players to focus on.
- Tactical Development – Tactics for youth soccer focuses largely on decision making, i.e. how players can make the correct decision given a particular situation. We should try to understand the progression of tactics and develop the players in the proper sequence, so

that players are comfortable solving easier problems (1v1, 2v1) before they move on to solve more complex ones (4v4):

- Psychological Development – For youth soccer, this relates to whether the player is having fun playing soccer, and other aspects such as how they deal with winning and losing, their level of motivation, and how they interact with teammates, coaches, and their parents.
- Physical Development – Fitness for youth soccer players can be largely achieved by just letting them play soccer, although some of the older age groups (U14 and maybe U12) may start incorporating speed and conditioning into practice games and activities.

General Characteristics & Expectations for a U10 Coach:

- Allow the players to make mistakes and encourage them to make their own Decisions. As players progress to U10, they play on larger fields and dribbling may not always be the best option. Players will need to start understanding when to dribble, when to pass and to whom, and when to shoot for goal. At this stage, they will often choose the wrong option, but as coaches and parents, we need to be patient with them and encourage them to make these decisions independently, especially during games. Aimless kicking or “booting” of the ball should not be encouraged.
- Keep instructions simple. Players of this age group will only understand simple tasks. Detailed drills and explanations will confuse them.
- At this age, the players are aware of the score and many parents and coaches are paying more attention to the results. You will start noticing many coaches and parents yelling directions from the sidelines. We should remind ourselves and the parents of our players that improving their play and having fun are the main objectives. As far as possible, we should refrain from yelling directions to the Players during games, as it will hamper their ability to make decisions independently.
- Reduce player dependence on adult guidance through “Guided Discovery”. In practice sessions, coaches should try to allow players to make mistakes and ask players how they could do things better and guide them to the correct answers, rather than telling the players what to do. This will help the players’ ability to solve problems and reduce their dependence on adults for guidance during games.
- Teambuilding. At the U9/10 age group, players recognize the fact that they are part of a team, and they begin to associate themselves with their team. This is a great opportunity to teach young players about the value of teamwork and what it means to be part of a team (i.e., trusting your teammates, not criticizing them, etc.). Certain fun teambuilding activities can be done during some practices, especially in the beginning of the season when players may not be familiar with each other.
- Set the example. Players will feed off your energy whether positive or negative. Set the example for Sportsmanship, fair play, and teamwork. Players will be more competitive in this age than previous ones so continue to emphasize teamwork and sportsmanship.
- Ensure that Practices are structured as safe as possible. With the expansion of skills at U10 and the increase in competitiveness, injuries tend to happen.

- And lastly, the most important rule: Keep it Fun! Players will be more engaging, better focused and learn more if they are having fun. All drills and games should be oriented to maximize the fun factor.

General Characteristics of a U10 Player

- Attention span lengthens from U8---they start to show the ability to sequence thought and actions.
- They start to think ahead and think “If this, then that.”
- They are more inclined towards wanting to play soccer rather than being told to play
- Demonstrate increased self-responsibility – bringing a ball, water and all gear should now be their complete responsibility.
- They start to recognize fundamental tactical concepts.
- Children at this age begin to become aware of peer pressure.
- Players greatly affiliate with their team or their coach—“I play for the Tigers” or “I play for coach Amy’s team.”
- Players at this age are extremely rule bound.
- There is a wide continuum of maturity evident on most teams.
- This is a crucial age for technical skill development.

Typical U8 Practice Structure

- A typical U10 training session should not exceed 1hr.
- Every child should have a ball.
- Warm-up activities should include balance coordination and agility, all activities done with a ball.
- Continue with partner activities and Drills.
- A mixture of individual and partner activities. Add more maze-type games. Introduce target games with a variety of player combinations: 1v1, 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2.
- Finish with 4v4 game to small goals, Goalkeepers are introduced.

Practice Structure

Warm-ups: Proper stretching of legs arms, and body. Have the players form a circle around you the coach and demonstrate each stretch. have the team count out the length of each stretch. After stretches, have each player have a ball placed in front of them. They will work on ball skills.

1. Have the players place their right foot on top of the ball. Then have the players roll the ball with their foot from heel to toe 10 times with their right foot, repeat with the left foot.
2. Have the players again place their right foot on top of the ball this time have the players roll the ball side to side of their foot, do this 10 times, and repeat with the left foot.
3. The next drill will start again with the ball in front of the player only they will start with both feet on the ground. They will then do touches on the top of the ball with their right and left feet.

The ball should not move only the player. This will take the player a while to get use to. Do this 20 times (10 for each foot).

4. In place dribble. Have the ball in between the players legs and have them dribble the ball from right foot to left foot in place. As with the previous drill, there will be a learning curve but by the end of the season, you should see a noticeable improvement in the players ball handling skills with these drills.
5. Players should spend equal time developing both feet – this is very important!!!

Technical focus at U9/10 level should be a progression of those skills learned at lower levels plus the following:

- Field Play -Technical Skills:
 - Dribble with all sides of both feet (inside, outside, sole)
 - Dribble out of trouble.
 - Dribble past someone (feints, fakes, crossovers etc.)
 - Changes of direction and turns (pullback, inside/outside turns)
 - Soft first touch
 - Receiving the ball with inside and outside of foot and chest
 - Shielding – Players should develop proper technique to shield the balls from opponents.
 - Shooting with both feet (with inside of foot and laces)
 - Shooting for power, for accuracy and volleying
 - Passing with inside and outside of both feet
 - Juggling with both feet and thighs (allowing one bounce between juggles if needed)
 - Basic thrown-in technique.
 - Introduce proper defending technique.
 - Introduce proper heading technique.
 - Introduce basic goalkeeping technique.
- Goalkeeping - Technical Skills:
 - Introduce proper positioning (hands and body)
 - Ball distribution (throwing, rolling, punting)
 - Basic diving from the ready position.
 - Collecting balls from the attacking player's feet.
- Continue to focus a fair amount of practice time on dribbling. At this stage, players can be taught several dribbling moves that are used frequently in soccer, such as step-overs, scissors, cuts, turns and so on. We should continue to encourage them to be creative in their dribbling.
- Incorporate other basic skills into practice sessions.
 - First Touch / Receiving: Players should be encouraged to focus on developing a soft first touch when receiving the ball. Players should first be shown the proper technique to receive the ball on the ground with both feet. Only when they are comfortable receiving the ball on the ground, should they be shown how to receive balls in the air using both feet, thighs, and chest.
 - Shielding: Players should be shown the proper technique to shield the ball from opponents.
 - Shooting: Players should be shown proper shooting technique (using their laces) and have plenty of opportunities to practice with both feet.

- Passing: Players should be shown the proper technique of passing the ball with the inside and outside of their feet. They should be able to pass the ball accurately over 8-10 yards.
 - Juggling: Players should continue to work on their ball juggling skills using both feet and thighs.
 - Throw-ins: Players should be shown the proper way to perform a throw-in.
 - Defending Technique: Players should be shown the proper defensive stance and how to make block tackles. Players should also be encouraged not to rush into their tackles but to be patient and wait for the right time to win the ball.
 - Heading: Basic heading technique can be introduced to the older or more experienced players.
 - Goalkeeping: Basic goalkeeping technique should be introduced to all the players.
- U9/10 Tactical Skill Priorities. Tactical focus at U9/U10 level should be at an introductory level. Problem solving and making decisions for themselves are critical tactical elements in young players. Below are some of the tactical skills to focus on at this age-level.
 - Field Play - Tactical Skills:
 - Wall pass (also known as give and go or 1-2)
 - Importance of the first touch
 - Immediate transition from defense to offense or vice versa
 - Role of the second defender (cover)
 - Width in the attack
 - Player movement on throw-ins
 - Penalty kicks
 - Players should be exposed to these simple tactical scenarios and understand how to both attack and defend these game contexts.
 - 1 v 1 (attacking and defending)
 - 2 v 1 (attacking and defending)
 - 2 v 2 (attacking and defending)

A lot of 1 v 1 duels should be incorporated into practice sessions to allow all the players to get plenty of opportunities to learn how to dribble past an opponent and how to stop one. The basic roles of first and second attackers and defenders should be introduced through 2 v 1 and 2 v 2 games and activities.
 - Goalkeeping -Tactical Skills:
 - Calling for the ball when receiving with defending players
 - Communicating with the other players on the team during the game

Game & Sideline behavior

- It is strongly recommended to have an Assistant Coach or a Team Parent for your team. This way you have a coach on the sideline and on the field. This will help manage the players on the sideline.
- Players should be attentive to the game when on the sideline and be ready to go in. they can cheer their teammates.
- Players should not engage in horseplay, or any disruptive behavior while on the sideline.

- At the end of the game, all players are to line up and shake the opposing teams' players hands as a sign of sportsmanship.
- All items and trash should be picked up and the field clear before teams depart.
- Any issues with players should be brought up with the players parent in a private setting. Do not discuss player behaviors in front of the player and other players.

This is a guideline for structuring your practices. Please adjust this as needed to fit your teams needs. Some players will need further guidance and training as opposed to other players. Be flexible in your approach and keep the following things in mind when out there:

- Are the activities fun?
- Are the activities organized?
- Are the players involved in the activities?
- Is creativity and decision-making being used?
- Are the spaces used appropriate?
- Is your feedback appropriate?
- Are guiding or controlling the players in the activity?
- Are there implications for the game?