

# U7 Benchmarks, Coaching and Player Development

U7 is the next progression for a player. The basic skills that were taught in U6 are to be further developed with a few new concepts added. While many of the players that play in U7 are returning players from U6, many will still be new to Soccer. Please adjust your practices accordingly to this. While you may have some players that are a little more advanced, many players will still need to the basic concepts taught to them as in U6.

Children in the U7 age group still play predominately as individuals and occasionally with a partner. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together but are still involved in individual play. This age group prefers individual activities, but it is possible to successfully get them into activities where they can work in pairs.

Again, the focus for players at the U7 age group is to continue to develop their skills while learning new ones and learning the concept of teamwork and team play. Strategy and game planning should not be a focus, rather encouraging players to have fun, participate, and refine their developing skills is the most important aspects.

## U7 Division Rules:

- No Goalkeepers (this also means that no player can 'camp' out near the goal to stop kicks from going in).
- 4 vs 4
- Size #3 ball
- throw-ins, goal kicks, or corner kicks introduced. Players should be given opportunity during games to correct incorrect throw-ins, goal kicks and corner kicks. Coaches can be on field and assist players if no referee is present.
- 4 8min quarters
- All players are to play at least half of the game.

## Components of the Game for the U-7 Age Group

1. **Technique:** Experiment with the qualities of a rolling or spinning ball. Introduce ball lifting, juggling, block tackle, receiving ground balls with the inside and sole of the foot, shooting with the inside of the foot, toe passing and shooting and dribbling while changing direction. Introduce the push pass.
2. **Fitness:** Agility, eye-foot and eye-hand coordination, balance, leaping, bounding, tumbling, catching, throwing, pulling, pushing, warm-up activities and movement education. Continue education on sports nutrition with players and parents.
3. **Psychology:** Encourage working in pairs, sportsmanship, parental involvement, how to play, emotional management, creativity, dynamic activities, participation of all players and a safe and fun environment. There is still a short attention span unless the player has peaked (keep interest high). Like to show what they can do – encourage trying new things. Developing self-esteem – activities should foster positive feedback and attainable positive success.
4. **Tactics:** Back line and forward line, 1v1 attack and choosing to dribble or pass. Introduce the names of positions (fullbacks and forwards). Institute games of 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2, playing with the ball with a purpose and promote problem solving.

### **General Characteristics & Expectations for a U7 Coach:**

- The Characteristics of a U7 Coach are the same as a U6 coach, only introduce more team and pair concepts to the players.
- Patience. Players at this age are just learning the game of soccer and more importantly, learning social behaviors. Patience is key with a U7 player.
- Keep instructions simple. Players of this age group will only understand simple tasks. Detailed drills and explanations will confuse them.
- Encourage participation. Many players will initially be shy and not as engaging, so try to be inviting and encouraging to players.
- Constantly keep the players on the move. The less instruction the better.
- Keep all players engaged. All players for many drills and games should have their own ball. This will allow all players to participate and minimize players standing around. The more a player stands around, the more likely they will lose focus and not pay attention. At this age, more pair drills are introduced as well, so one ball per pair would suffice in this scenario.
- 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 U7 Player**

- Like to show skills – need approval.
- Beginning to develop some physical confidence (most can ride a bicycle)
- Lack sense of pace – go flat out, chasing the ball until they drop.
- Still in motion – twitching, jerking, scratching, and blinking are all second nature physical movements.
- Still into running, jumping, climbing, and rolling.
- Boys and girls are still quite similar in physical and psychological development.
- Attention span is a bit longer than the U-6 age group.
- Developing playmates
- More into imitation of the big guys (sports heroes becoming important)
- Still very sensitive – Dislikes personal failure in front of peers, making ridicule from the coach in front of the group very destructive.
- Still do not believe in the intensity of the team at all costs.
- Inclined more toward small group activities.

### **Typical U7 Practice Structure**

- A typical U7 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.
- Introduce 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, NO GK's.

### 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.

Pairs drills that Coaches can work with the players:

1. Passing and Trapping: two (or even 3 players in a triangle) take turns passing the ball amongst themselves. Have the players practice proper passing with the inside of their foot and proper trapping of the ball (stopping the ball in front of the player).
2. Throw-ins: two or three players take turns properly doing a throw-in, i.e., throwing the ball into bounds over their head with two hands and keeping both feet on the ground. The keeping both feet on the ground is the hardest concept for the players to learn so a possible solution for players that are having trouble with this is to have the players cross their legs when doing a throw-in.
3. Dribbling and passings: pairs of players start with one player dribbling and then passing to their partner going down the field, they will take turns dribbling and passing the ball to advance the ball down the field.

The Following games can be used once you finish warm-ups & drills.

1. **Red light, green light:** This activity is played the same way as the popular children's game, but the players dribble the ball as they play. This can help players develop techniques related to ball control, speed adjustments, balance, and dribbling. <https://youtu.be/Y0bEW0nLPEk>
2. **Freeze tag:** Coaches mark a relatively small area (approximately 20-by-20 square yards) and ask most of the players to dribble their balls around the area. Two or three players will not be

dribbling and will instead be designated as taggers. The taggers attempt to catch the dribblers and tag them. Tagged players then freeze and hold the ball above their head, yelling “Help!” Other dribblers can unfreeze frozen players by kicking their ball through the players’ legs. This helps players develop techniques related to ball control, speed adjustments, evasion, and controlled kicks. <https://youtu.be/1SakjVdtiTU>

3. **The Ouchie Game:** The coach or coaches run around, and players attempt to use their dribbling and kicking skills to target the coach with the ball. This can improve ball handling and directional techniques.
4. **Controlled craziness:** The coach creates a relatively small area (approximately 20-by-20 yards) and players must dribble within this space. At the coach’s cue, the players will attempt to kick their ball at someone else’s. If they hit someone else’s ball, they get a point. If someone else hits their ball, they lose a point. Players should keep track of their points until the coach decides to end the game. This game encourages kids to develop techniques related to protecting and controlling their ball, controlled kicks, and field awareness.
5. **Sharks and Minnows:** Coaches demarcate an area into three sections. The outer two sections are safe zones, while the middle section is the danger zone. Players with balls attempt to dribble from one safe zone to the other without getting their balls stolen by the “bulldogs.” Bulldogs are players without balls in the danger zone who will try to kick the other players’ balls out-of-bounds. This game encourages players to develop techniques related to stealing balls, protecting, and controlling balls, and handling a ball at speed. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tONiMWAgIAA>
6. **Clean the room:** Coaches demarcate an area into two sections, and then scatter soccer balls throughout one section. Players occupy the section with soccer balls, while the coaches occupy the section without soccer balls. At the whistle, players begin to pass the soccer balls into the coaches’ half of the field, while the coaches try to get to the balls and pass them back into the players’ side. When the players have successfully gotten all the balls onto the coaches’ side at one time, they have won. This game helps kids develop techniques related to trapping and passing the ball, as well as stopping and turning quickly. It also promotes endurance and aerobic conditioning. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fmzVhOmmLE>
7. **Monkey in the middle:** players form a large Circle with one player in the middle. The players on the outside of the Circle have to pass the ball to each other through the circle with the player in the middle trying to steal the ball. [https://youtu.be/sUKIMV4LZvA?list=PL39KufQ2\\_rga7IErtaoQ6AIzYBLWcGLP9](https://youtu.be/sUKIMV4LZvA?list=PL39KufQ2_rga7IErtaoQ6AIzYBLWcGLP9)

End practice with a small-sided scrimmage or game (4v4)

- Mark out a small-sided field around 20’ x 30’ with cones.
- Play 4v4, 3v3, 2v2, 1v1 a different possible combination depending on the number of players at practice.
- Spend the last 10-15 minutes of the practice for this scrimmage, allow players to take breaks as needed. Utilize pennies to distinguish teams from one another.
- Incorporate the new concepts of Goal Kicks, Corner Kicks and Throw-ins in scrimmage.

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?