

Crash Course for Coaching U12 Soccer

In our program, at the U12 level, you will have kids that have played for many years and you will have kids who have never played before. One of the challenges of coaching this age is doing your best to make practices and games fun for kids on both ends of the talent and experience spectrum. Regardless of how many years they've played, you will still need to devote some practice time to skill development.

GENERAL INFO

Ball Size: Size 4

Players: 9 players on a field, 1 of which is the goal keeper. All children must play at least half of a game, and no child should play the entire game unless there are only nine players. At this age it is understood that the competitiveness of the game may require you to play players in a certain position, but it should never affect their playing time. Please rotate players to allow them to play every position on the field, including goalkeeper if they desire.

Fouls and Handballs: League will provide referees. Please let your players know to always be respectful of the referee. Your individual behavior towards the referee will go a long way in determining your players' behavior.

Duration of games: U12 games consist of two 30 minute halves with a 5 minute half-time.

Substitutions: Both teams may sub on your team's throw-ins, either team's goal kick, after goals, or an injury. Always get the referees' attention and permission before subbing and sending a sub on the field.

Throw-Ins: Please stress to the kids they need to keep both feet down and use two hands to bring the ball directly over their head.

Goal Kicks: Taken from the corner of the goal box after the offensive team last touches the ball before it goes over the end line. Encourage whoever is taking the kick to never play the ball up the middle. Always kick to the outside. Have a player in the goal and one at the top of the penalty box, along with the person taking the kick.

Corner Kicks: A corner kick is awarded when the defending team last touches the ball before it goes out of bounds over the goal line. Opposing players should be at least four yards away on a corner kick.

Offsides: Offside position is defined as being nearer to the opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second to last defender when the ball is played. This can be a little confusing. Just remember that your offensive player has to either have a defender between him/her and the goalkeeper, or has to be with the ball. You can't be offside on your own half of the field, or on goal kicks, corner kicks, and throw-ins.

Goalkeeper: A goalkeeper may punt or throw the ball from anywhere within the penalty box if they save the ball from going in the goal. Encourage them to distribute to the outside, not up the middle. A goalkeeper is not allowed to touch the ball with their hands if it is intentionally passed back by a team member. This will result in an indirect kick for the opposing team from the spot of the infraction.

Tactics

Tactics make up an important part of U12 soccer and time should be spent often in practice going over your team's tactics, set up, and reactions in different situations. Having your team set up on a field and moving the ball around the field while showing the players how and where they move is a helpful way to show positional movements. Before their first game they need to learn the names of all of the positions on the field, along with what type of formation you plan on running.

Offense: **1.** Kick the ball wide (or towards the sideline) when on defense. **2.** Kick the ball across the front of the goal when attacking on offense. **3.** Most importantly, if your teammate has the ball, don't run at them and stand too close, instead go to an area where they can kick the ball to you. SPREAD OUT!

Defending: Stress that defending does not mean taking the ball from the other team, it means preventing them from scoring. The easiest way to do this is by staying between the attacker and your goal at all times. Introduce the concept of "closing down" an attacker by getting gradually closer to them as they get closer to your goal. Also stress that we defend with one foot forward and one foot dropped, and always try to force the attacker towards the sidelines, not up the middle. DEFENDERS SHOULD NOT BE STATIC ON THEIR OWN END WHEN THEIR TEAM IS ABOUT TO SCORE, they should move forward towards the halfway line. Forwards need to come back and help on defense as well. The kids will have so much more fun if they are always engaged in what is going on, regardless of their position.

Corner Kicks: Spend time at practice, especially before the first game, going over the set up for this both from offensive and defensive point of view. One defender should stand with shoulder on the near post and one on far post. Other defenders should stand on the goal side of offense player in order to stay between the offensive player and goal. Offensive player kicking the ball should kick the ball toward the front of the goal and other offensive players set up in front of goal to try to kick ball in.

Practice

Avoid any type of lines if at all possible. Instead of having 12 kids taking turns shooting on one goal, make six goals (with cones) and have kids try to score on their partner. You could structure individual practices around shooting, passing/receiving, dribbling, defending, attacking, etc. At this age players should be working on using all parts of foot to move ball around (inside, outside, pull back, etc) and in all directions. There are tons of ideas to be found online by searching U12 soccer drills. Youtube is sometimes easier to comprehend drills because you can see it being performed. After the first practice or two it is a good idea to start implementing some scrimmages or scrimmage situations on half a field at the end of practice. This could be within your own team or against another team that is practicing at the same time.

Warm up: tic tocs, toe taps

Passing: Demonstrate the proper way to pass and receive the ball using the inside of the foot. The players will pass back and forth using proper technique, as you go around correcting their mistakes. They should lock their ankle, and use the inside of their foot. Emphasize the pace and direction of the ball, and that their partner should not have to move to receive the pass. It also needs to have enough speed

that it won't be intercepted. Also emphasize importance of receiving ball with good first touch, with inside of the foot, player should attempt to "absorb" the ball as it hits their foot.

1 v 1 defending drill: Set up two lines (offense lined up about 30 yds from goal, defense lined up on a goalpost). You will be in goal and will play a pass to the forward, who will attack and try to get around the defender and take a shot. If the defense gets the ball they win. We are focusing on defense, so don't worry about what the forward is doing at this time. Have the kids switch lines after every turn. *If you have an assistant set up another offense vs defense with a small goal, so the kids get more reps.

Square or Triangle Drill: Set up a triangle or square of cones. 3 offensive players and 1 defensive for triangle, and 4 offensive and 2 defensive. The offensive players stay on the outside and make good passes to each other, the defensive player tries to steal the ball while staying inside the triangle or square. Switch players often from offense to defense

Positional Shadowing: This is going to be a bit boring at first for the kids, but it will prove invaluable to your team down the road. You start by putting seven kids into the seven different positions on the field, along with someone as a goalkeeper. (4 or 5 kids will be "subs" at this point). Make them say the name of their position, and have them spread out over your entire/half of the field in those respective positions. Then you introduce a ball, which is slowly passed around as the kids adjust their position on the field according to where the ball is. Repetition is the key to this exercise being successful. Do this over and over and over. Bring in different kids in different positions. Move kids around and make them play at different spots on the field. Tell a sub to go in at right midfield and see if he/she gets it right. You should be in the center of the field directing traffic for the whole exercise. After 20 or 30 minutes of this you become a defender trying to steal the ball, and the kids see how many passes they can complete while maintaining their positions. Once they get the hang of that, bring in a couple of the subs to defend with you.

Corner kicks, goal kicks, throw-ins: Save at least ten minutes at the end of practice to go over goal kicks, corner kicks, and throw-ins. Set plays are way overrated, so just make sure they know the right technique for a throw-in and see goal kick advice earlier in this sheet. If they are on offense for a corner kick they should move around and try to get open, on defense, find a player to mark and don't let them get open. One defender should stand on the inside of each post. I cannot emphasize enough how important repetition is for this practice. Emphasize that they need to maintain their formation and move as a group at all times.

Cone dribbling: Set up a line of 5-7 cones a few feet apart and have players dribble weave in and out of cones. Have multiple lines of cones if possible so less standing around. Start with using both feet and then progress to using only right foot and only left foot. Players should get used to using inside and outside of foot to move ball in each direction. You can add a cone several yards out from the end of cones for players to dribble with speed to and turn/pull back and return to start. Encourage more advanced players to start using top of toe to dribble with speed when going in a straight line.

Dribble, pass, switch: space out cones in two lines with a few yards in between them. Divide into pairs with each player starting on a cone. First person passes to teammate opposite of them. Receiving player then dribbles to opposite cone of teammate who passed, while the player who passed switches to opposite cone. Dribbling player dribbles around cone and passes to teammate who just switched with

them, and this continues.....dribble around opposite cone, pass back to teammate and switch to other opposite cone. This should be non stop. Separate cones further apart for more advanced players.

I recommend having your team get to games 15-20 minutes early, and use that time to do a mini practice that focuses on something your team is struggling with... passing, positioning, and moving without the ball. This is the main thing that our teams struggle with, and once they start to “get it” the on-field results are amazing! The main thing is for you to have a good time coaching (after all, we want you to volunteer next year). If you are having fun, the kids are going to have fun. Thanks again for volunteering.