

Characteristics Of U - 10 Players

Commack Soccer League plays Under 10 (third and fourth graders) on an approximately 55 x 85 field with eight (8) per side including a keeper. Three-quarter sized goals are used, and modified FIFA rules are in force including off-side. **This is also the first time you will see LIJSL travel teams.** U-10 teams are mainly made up of fourth graders, but because there is a 16-month eligibility window on birth dates within CSL, there are occasionally 5th graders and even some 3rd graders . As a coach at this level you will find:

- Gross and small motor skills becoming more refined and reliable. " Boys and girls begin to develop separately.
- Ability to stay on task is lengthened. They have the ability to sequence thought and actions.
- Greater diversity in playing ability and physical maturity.
- Skills are emerging. Becoming more predictable and recognizable.
- Some children begin moving from concrete thinking to abstract thinking.
- Able to pace themselves, to plan ahead.
- Increased self-responsibility. They remember to bring their own equipment.
- Starting to recognize basic tactical concepts, but not exactly sure why certain decisions are better.
- Repetition of technique is very important, but it must be dynamic, not static.
- Continued **positive** reinforcement needed.
- Explanations must be brief, concise, and mention "why".
- Becoming more "serious". Openly, intensely competitive, without intention of fouling.
- Still mostly intrinsically motivated. " Peer pressure starting to be a factor.
- Adult outside of the family may take on added significance.
- Prefer identification with a team. Like to have good uniforms, equipment, balls.

- More inclined towards wanting to play instead of being told to play. Will initiate play more.

Things You Can Expect

Some coaches say that the 9 and 10 year-old players are beginning to "turn the corner" and starting to look like real soccer players. However, games are still frantically paced and unpredictable for the most part. These players are starting to find out how much fun it is to play the game skillfully, but they will still stop and laugh if the referee gets hit in the backside with the ball during a game. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They start to understand offside, but still forget themselves when the goal is in front of them.
- They will really beat up on each other during practice... especially boy's teams.
- During a game, the parents will scream out "HAND BALL" or "COME ON REF, CALL IT BOTH WAYS" at least fifteen times. (Do not tolerate it, see below)
- They might cry after the game if they lose, but will forget it if you ask them if you want to go out for burgers and fries.
- You might actually catch them practicing on their own without you telling them to do so.
- Their parents are telling them to do one thing during the game, you are telling them another thing, but what they end up doing might be what their friend is telling them to do.
- You will see a pass that is deliberate. You might even see a "back pass". If you are coaching at the travel level this will become more and more frequent even in the "pressure" of a game.
- You will see your first \$100 pair of cleats during practice. They will call the other team bad names... really bad names. This must not be tolerated.

Coaching Rationale

Some of the players that are playing as U - 10's are seasoned veterans of the youth soccer scene. Some of them may have already been involved in traveling to play in tournaments. (There are usually tournament teams at Under 8 and

Under 9 levels.) As a result, some of them might be very nervous about the whole process. It is our job to keep things in perspective for these young, developing players. True, some of them are becoming quite skillful and are seeing how fun it is to play the game when they can really control the ball. However, many of them are still learning the ropes. Even the more experienced players need to have the game be fun!!!

Emphasis is still placed on having players learn how to control the ball with his/her body, but now, they need to find themselves in more game-like situations. Training is more dynamic and starting to have players make simple, basic decisions such as "Which way is there more space?" or "Who should I pass to?".

Following are some more items that a coach of U-10 players should consider:

- Use small sided games as the main teaching vehicle. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but the full 11-a-side game is still too complicated for them to understand.
- How we group players during training takes on even added significance because of the wide margins of ability levels. We need to mix players up often.
- Stretching is becoming more important, along with a good warm-up. Since the game is faster, make sure that they also have good shinguards. Safety and preventive measures take on added significance.
- Training twice a week is plenty. Sessions can be from one hour-thirty minutes to two hours.
- They should all come with their own size #4 ball. In fact, they still need to be encouraged to play with it by themselves.
- Put them into competitive environments as much as possible. This will not only keep them focused, but, it will allow the game itself to teach them. It also will keep things fun for them, and allow you to deal with issues such as 'winning' and 'losing' which is becoming a concern for them.

Playing a 1 v 1 challenge ladder is one example of creating a fun competitive environment within the team's practice regimen.

- Now it is possible to teach them positional play with the expectation that they will get it some of the time. However, it is absolutely necessary that you do not allow players to specialize in any one position. They need to learn basic principles of the game, first. Having them play all of the positions is best for their individual development. Remember, our first responsibility is to develop players and let them have fun.

The basic concept of support of the ball handler is one positional play concept that can be introduced at this age. Another is the concept of triangles all over the field or the through ball from a 4 v 2 advantage

- Whenever possible, allow them to solve their own puzzles. Don't immediately give them solutions on how they can play better.

Use the "socratic" method, that is when you ask a question to make a coaching point direct it at one individual. That way no one can hide by not volunteering, no one can hide by not paying attention.

Travel Coaches

As mentioned above this is the first season for LIJSL travel teams and most coaches taking an Under 10 team are doing so for the first time. Many questions arise and it would be impossible to answer them all here. However the following is excerpted from a talk given by Frank Schmidt, coach of the N.Y. State High School Champion Sachem Boys team, to a group of first time Under 10 coaches.

Travel Coaches – Answer These Questions

1. Will your team's ability in the attacking third determine the outcome of the game?
2. Do the skills required in the attacking third require individual dribbling and ball control?
3. Will your players come closer to developing like Brazilian players by playing 1 v1 and 3 v 3 rather than 11 v 11?
4. Will the teams that win the majority of the 1 v 1 drills win the majority of the games?
5. Will kids quit soccer when they are 13 years old because it is not fun for them and they feel no sense of success?
6. Will changing the size of the ball, the size of the goal, the size of the field require more skill and agility? When they have to adjust to these changes, will that reduce boredom?
7. Will your under 10 teams quickly outgrow designer sweatsuits?

8. Does seeing the “big picture” mean that what you do as a coach with your 10 year old team require you to see and understand the needs of 11, 12, 14, 16 and 20 years olds?

The correct answer to all of these questions is yes. But what we do about them marks us as coaches, rather than as well meaning adults just putting in time. What is contained here in this manual will give you many ideas on how to structure practices and develop players so that their skills improve, their self-esteem improves, their game improves and hopefully, they stick with soccer for a long time.

Typical Training Session

Here are some items that should be included in a U-10 training session:

Warm- Up

A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that involve the ball. Since there should be one theme to the session, hopefully, the warm-up will lead into the theme of the day. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time after the players have broken a sweat, again, hopefully done with the ball. Again, the warm-up should get the players ready to play. It should be lively, fun, and engaging as well as instructional. There is nothing like a good, fast paced activity to grab the player's attention and make them glad that they came to practice.

Conversely running laps, which we all know is not fun, is counter-productive. There are many, many ways to gain aerobic and anaerobic conditioning, with the ball at their feet, that are fun. In addition, when you only have them 1-1/2 to 3 hours per week you don't have the time to “waste” having them run laps. All conditioning work should be done with multiple touches on a ball. This is called *Economical Training*.

Individual Or Small Group Activities

At this age skill work should start playing a more prominent role in your practices. One of the ways that you can make this exciting is what I call the Ball Master. Commission ball master pins that you present like a badge of honor every time a player reaches a certain touches on the ball plateau like 10,000 touches. They can pin these to their soccer bags just like the Ohio State football players tag buckeye decals on to their helmets.

1 v 1 games and challenge ladders become more important here also. Players want to succeed 1 v 1 versus their teammates and their opponents. It is up to us

to devise ways to build their 1 v 1 confidence so that they will take on defenders instead of just blasting the ball away

Technical excellence in passing and receiving is also appropriate at this age. Some portion of every practice should be spent perfecting these skills

Play The Game

Small sided soccer should still be used to heighten intensity and create some good competition. Each practice should have a theme as discussed under "*Practice Organization.*" However that theme should be taught small-sided to maximize touches on the ball.

Some ideas would include 3 v 1 keepaway to encourage success. 4 v 2 keepaway to encourage through passing, 1-2 combination play to encourage running off the ball, overlap relay races, the ideas are as endless as your imagination

Warm-Down & Homework

Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their head, then thigh, then foot, and then catch it. Can one player kick a ball to a partner and then back without it hitting the ground? Can they do that with their heads?

It is important not to nag the children about "homework", however you will quickly be able to see which children worked with the ball during the time they were away from the field. Praise for their improvement will generally get the others working off the practice field as well.

As with the younger age groups, it is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return