

Characteristics Of U - 12 Players

Commack Soccer League plays Under 12 on a regulation field and for the first time, 11 a side soccer. At this age LIJSL will also start with Select Training, an island-wide development program for the more advanced players.. As a coach at this level you will find:

- They begin to develop the abilities to sustain complex, coordinated skill sequences.
- Some of the players have reached puberty. Girls, in general, arrive earlier than boys.
- Most players are able to think abstractly and are thus able to understand some team concepts that are foundational to the game.
- They are beginning to be able to address hypothetical situations, and to solve problems systematically.
- They are spending more time with friends and less time with their parents. " They are susceptible to conformity to peer pressure.
- They are developing a conscience, morality and scale of values.
- Players tend to be highly self-critical. Instruction needs to be enabling. Show them what can be done instead of telling them what not to do. Although they are more serious with their play, they are still mainly involved because it is fun.
- They are openly competitive. A few may foul on purpose.
- They are looking towards their role models and heroes in order to know how to act.
- They have a more complex and developed sense of humor.
- They tend to form cliques on teams if allowed
- Girls especially are more conscious of their bodies and are more protective
- More aggressive play by the boys starts to separate them from the girls

Things You Can Expect

Some coaches say that the 10 and 12 year-old players have "turned the corner" and are looking like real soccer players. However, games can still be frantically paced and a bit unpredictable. These players know how much fun it is to play the game skillfully. As a result, we begin to see some the players drop out who recognize the importance of skill and become discouraged with their lack of it. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They will yell at their teammates when they make a mistake.
- They will openly question the referee's decisions.
- Players will encourage each other.
- They will pass the ball even when they know that they will not get it back.
- Team cooperation is emerging. They will run to a spot, away from the play, even when they know that they might not get the ball.
- They will point out inconsistencies between what you say and what you do. They are "moral watchdogs".
- The difference in skill levels between the players is very pronounced.
- Some players might be as big as you are, some might be half your size.
- Not only will some of the players come to training with expensive cleats, but some will also come with matching uniforms, sweatsuits, and bag
- Parents, during games, can be brutal. Some will yell at the referee at almost every call. Address this in you pre-season and during the season meetings. Yelling at the refs gets your team **NO WHERE**. It may make the parents feel better, but we're in this for the kids, not the parents.
- They will get together with their friends and be able to set up and play their own game.

Coaching Rationale

Coaching at this age level is a challenge because many of the players view themselves as real soccer players. Others are at the point where it is not as much fun as it used to be because they feel that their lack of skill development does not enable them to have an impact on the game. They see their skillful

friends able to do magical things with the ball and since they can not do this themselves, they start to drop out.

Our challenge then, if the players are willing, is to keep all of the players engaged, involved, and make them feel important. Skills still need to be the primary focus of training and players need to be put into environments where they are under pressure so that they learn how to use their skills in a variety of contexts.

Here are a few other considerations as we think about working with this aged youngster:

- Our goal is to develop players in a fun, engaging environment. Winning has its place but must be balanced with the other goals of teaching them to play properly. Some decisions will need to be made that might not necessarily lead to wins (i.e.: having players play different positions, or asking players to try to play the ball "out of the back", play skill-based possession soccer rather than "Kick and Run")
- Smaller, skilled players can not be ignored. Although it may be tempting to "win" by playing only the bigger players in key positions, the smaller, skilled players must be put into areas of responsibility.
- Even though they are playing 11 a side, small sided games are still the preferred method of teaching the game. This makes learning fun and more efficient.
- Flexibility training is essential. Have them stretch after they have broken a sweat, and, perhaps most importantly, at the end of the workout at a "warm-down".
- **Overuse injuries, burnout and high attrition rates** are associated with programs that do not emphasize skill development and learning enjoyment. Overuse injuries are also common with players whose parents push them into multiple teams and training sessions such as school ball, club ball and Select. There is only so much an 11 year old body can handle.
- Train for one and one-half hours, two to three times a week. Training pace needs to replicate the demands of the game itself.
- They are ready to have a **preferred** position, but, it is essential for their development for them to occasionally play out of their preferred spot, in training, as well as during games.
- As with previous age groups, training remains best if it focuses on one, or perhaps two topics a session. Activities should be geared to progressing from

fundamental activities that have little or no pressure from an opponent to activities that are game like in their intensity and pressure.

Typical Training Session

Here are some items that should be included in a U-12 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 or small group 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. However some coaches will like to emphasize, say foot skills, for the warm-up in every practice session. There is no absolute right or wrong way to warm up, as long as it is done.

Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, after the players have broken a sweat, again, hopefully done with the ball. 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.

Individual Or Small Group Activities

1 v 1 is very appropriate at this age to build the confidence in the players to take on an opponent. In addition it helps them develop the confidence that they need to defend against an on coming player.

Games of keep away, stressing the proper shape on a soccer field, triangle or diamond, are recommended. Technical excellence in passing and receiving must also be stressed

Play The Game

Small sided soccer can be used to heighten intensity and create some good competition. Practices should have both match related and match condition components.

Progress from the fundamental skill, under little or no pressure to the skill or activity under 50 %, then 75% then full pressure. Build success then gradually increase to game-like conditions and game pace.

Warm Down and 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. Challenge them with some ball trick. Can they complete a juggling pattern? Can one player kick a ball to a partner and then back without it hitting the ground? Can they do that with their heads? How many times can they do it back and forth? 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.