

LOGANSPORT SOCCER CLUB
6U PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM
SPRING 2018



Goals of this curriculum:

1. Set expectations for what 6U players can do and provide development milestones for 6U players to achieve.
2. Provide coaches and parents ideas to help their players reach those milestones.
3. Provide coaches and parents with helpful points on what to encourage and what to avoid with 6U players.

The 6U Player:

6Us are beginners. These are players who are 4, 5, and 6 years old. For many of them, this will be their first experience playing any organized sport. Hopefully they have played with a soccer ball at home, but this will likely be their first soccer experience as well. 6Us have a wide range of athletic abilities, self-confidence, and motivation. Some 6Us will be excited to play and love being on the field. Some would rather sit on a parent's lap and watch.

Being beginners, we need to teach 6Us the basics of the game. This means we need to focus primarily on teaching them how to control the ball using the different parts of both of their feet. The focus should be on ball control and dribbling. We also need to teach them that the ball is the most important part of the game, and they should try to keep it instead of kicking it away. The focus on ball control means that each player should have their own ball as often as possible during training.

6U Player Milestones:

1. Control the ball with both feet: pass the ball back and forth between their feet. Stop the ball with each foot.
2. Control the ball with the sole of both feet: roll the ball forward and backward and side to side with the sole of each foot.
3. Move side to side with the ball: keeping the ball under control, use the inside of the right foot to move to the left. Use the inside of the left foot to move to the right.
4. Move forward with the ball and stop: keeping the ball under control, use the inside of both feet to move forward and then stop the ball.
5. Turning: keeping the ball under control and using both feet, move forward, stop, turn 180 degrees, and move in the opposite direction.
6. Protecting the ball: keep the ball under control while someone tries to take it. Use their body to keep the ball from the other person.

Development Ideas:

Ball mastery is the goal for 6Us. They should be encouraged to learn to make the ball do what they want it to do. This means controlling it while it is at their feet and controlling it when they receive it from someone else. There are three primary ways of mastering the ball:

1. Stationary footwork exercises: players should learn to manipulate the ball with both feet and the different surfaces of their feet while staying in one spot. Examples of this are sole taps, shuffles, and rolls. Coerver Coaching's 99 Skills to Soccer Ball Mastery is a great app with 30 free examples of stationary ball skills. Other examples can be found on various websites and videos online.
2. Moving footwork exercises: players should use both feet and each surface of their foot to dribble the ball. This can be done on the field with the coach putting limitations on which foot or which surfaces of their feet they use or by using cones to force the players to turn or weave with the ball.
3. Incorporating the footwork they've learned into play on the field: players should be encouraged to use the footwork they learn in 1 and 2 above while they're actually playing. Practicing footwork can be tedious, but if they see they see how fun it is to use their skills in a game, the value of the practice is reinforced.

Training sessions:

1. Academy training: the 6U academy coach will lead one session each week for all of the 6U teams and coaches. This is the primary training session for your team so you and your players should attend it each week. The academy coach will develop a training plan for the session in order to provide the players with an opportunity to develop their skills and to provide the coaches with examples for their own team training sessions.
2. Team training: your team may train individually once each week in addition to academy training. Your training session should last 60-75 minutes and consist of a quick warm-up, skill building exercises, small-sided games, and a cool down. Write up a practice plan using the academy training for inspiration or by coming up with your own ideas. Arrive early so you have time to get your session set up before the players arrive. After training, reflect on what worked and what didn't, and make adjustments for the future.

Games: your team should be at the field and dressed to play 10-15 minutes before your game starts in order to get warmed-up and ready to play. Write out your line-ups before you get to the field. During the game, ensure that each player gets equal playing time. Players don't get better if they don't play. Stay positive, and don't over-coach. After the game, reflect on what you can work to improve at training the next week.

What to encourage:

1. Practice at home: this is the single biggest factor that will determine whether a player becomes a competent soccer player. If they do not practice and play at home, they're not going to master the ball. Attending training one or two nights per week for eight weeks each spring and fall is not enough. Soccer balls can be acquired cheaply. Encourage your players' parents to play with them at home and to practice their footwork with them; young children love to emulate adults. The footwork exercises described above can be done in small areas and even inside. There is no excuse for players not to be playing at home.
2. Keeping the ball: the ball is the most important part of the game. Players should be encouraged to keep it, look after it, and love it. Every player should want the ball at their feet. Encourage them to work on their skills so they can keep it away from their opponents. Help end the "just kick it!" culture.
3. Improvisation: the best players are able to make the ball do what they want with it at their feet. They also do the unexpected. Encourage players to try new techniques or moves or make up their own. Learning to improvise early will set players ahead in their development.
4. Making mistakes: we don't improve by playing it safe every time. Encourage players to take risks and try new things. When mistakes do happen, help players to see why it didn't work and how it might have a better chance in the future.

What to avoid:

1. Negativity: these are beginners. They will struggle, but that doesn't mean they're hopeless. Stay positive even when you're frustrated. We have to make it fun so they want to come back each time. Praise each accomplishment. Always look for the good things they're doing. Correct issues, but don't do it in a way that is demeaning or hurtful.
2. Over-emphasizing results: there's a reason we don't pay referees to officiate 6U games. Winning and losing don't matter at this age. Focus on giving your players the opportunity to develop their skills so they have a chance to be successful when winning does matter and so they develop a life-long love for the game.
3. Over-coaching: we want to teach skills during training and make sure they're learning them, but during games, let the players play. Let them figure out what works and what doesn't. Don't be the "joystick coach" who directs the players like you're pushing the buttons on a video game. You can give helpful ideas at halftime or at training the next week.

Questions, Comments, or Ideas?

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