

Chemung Valley Soccer Association

U6 & U7

Coaches Hand Book

Introduction to U6/U7's

The typical five and six year-olds have very limited coordination and body awareness and are just learning to appreciate the difficulties associated with manipulating an object as troublesome as a round soccer ball without using their hands. They can dribble in straight lines. They can turn the ball in wide arcs. They can kick with the laces and the toes and they can stop the ball if it is not traveling too fast or coming out of the air. They will pass to teammates if they have time to assess their location and how to coordinate the kick, and they will gladly try to recover the ball when out of possession. Most have no practical concept of space or teamwork and they have very little tolerance for complicated rules. While they are very egocentric, they will share the ball with teammates and, in spite of their limited attention spans and absent pacing skills, players as young as five and six will play small-sided soccer games for up to an hour, if they are provided with, or allowed to take, periodic breaks.

Typical Characteristics of Players Under 7

- Me and I are the most important words in their vocabulary Team is not
- Their first concern is their turn to play.
- Everything is in the here and now; forget about the past and future, they live in the moment.
- Heating and cooling systems are less efficient – they need frequent water breaks (every 8-10 minutes)
- They feel no enjoyment from watching others play when they could be playing too.
- They can only listen for 15 seconds and perform only 10-15 minutes on a task
- They need concise and to-the point directions and are easily distracted.
- Effort is synonymous with performance; if they have tried hard, they believe they have done well.
- Active imaginations – if you utilize their imaginations in practice activities, they will love practice!
- Look for adult approval – watch how often players look to you for approval or to see if you are looking. Also be encouraging when they say —Coach, look what I can do!
- Unable to think abstractly – asking them to think about spatial relations or runs off the ball is unrealistic
- Typically have two speeds – full speed and stopped

- May be aware of game scores – we should try and redirect their interest in the score and turn the focus into having fun (may need to teach parents this as well)
- Often like to fall down because it is fun – they are children having fun (which is something to be watched so that they know the difference between falling and slide tackles, this goes for the parents as well)
- Often cannot identify left foot vs. right foot – they know which foot they use most

COACHING PHILOSOPHY

At this level, the primary concern of the adults is to provide activities that cater to frequent ball contacts and the development of basic motor skills. One-player-one-ball activities and various “fun games” are excellent complements to small-sided soccer games. All activities should include every player. Keep the focus on having fun and keeping busy. Here are some key points to keep in mind:

- At this age kids participate in an activity because they can play and have FUN!
- If they don't have fun...they quit
- If the activity is too hard they quit, too easy and they get bored
- Winning isn't the main objective...it should be how well THEY performed
- They don't know strategy or tactics...they just know how they play
- They learn skills through fun games
- They learn by having as much contact with the ball as possible
- They learn by playing all the different positions on the team
- When they are on the side lines...they can't wait to get back into the game
- Each kid learns at their own rate

YOU, AS A COACH, ARE AN INCREDIBLY POWERFUL ROLE MODEL!

Planning for the Season

PARENT ORIENTATION MEETING

To make this season run smoothly:

- Hold a parent/coach meeting at the beginning of your first practice session. The invested time will pay dividends for all concerned throughout the season

The Purpose of a Parent Orientation Meeting

- Enable parents to understand the objectives of the team
- Allows parents to become acquainted with you, the coach
- Articulate your expectations of them and of their children
- Enable you to address any parents' concerns
- Establish clear lines of communication between you, parents, and players
- Allow you to obtain parental support (assistant coaches, team parents, etc.)
- Emphasize that the kids will fall either because they are tripped or because they just fall (it is part of the game)

How Do You Conduct The Meeting?

Introduce Yourself

- Introduce yourself and assistant coaches (or ask for volunteers at this time).
- Give background information about yourself (why you are coaching, experience)

Talk About Your Coaching Philosophy

- Discuss the philosophy of age appropriate activities.
- State the importance you assign to having fun and developing technique.
- State how you evaluate player development through **skills** and not winning

- Discuss any team rules and guidelines (i.e., must be there 15 min. before kickoff)
- Let them know that all players will receive equal playing time

Discuss Team Guidelines

- Specifics of the program (e.g. players must appear with proper shoes, socks, shin guards and a properly inflated ball).
- Discuss how players must respect opponents, coaches, officials, and the game itself
- Required equipment (shirts, socks, shorts, shin guards, water bottle)
- Recommended size of ball (size 3) and soccer shoes
- Briefly discuss rules of the game and mention ref's experience and their age

Discuss Team Management

- Have a sign up for parents to assist with team duties (i.e. snack schedule)
- Create an easy to understand game schedule for the season as well as insuring everyone can find the games

Discuss Parent Responsibilities, such as

- Do not coach your child during games. Transport your child to and from practices and games on time.
- Be supportive of all the players (criticism does not improve performance).
- Help your child understand that he/she is contributing to a team effort.
- Focus on mastering skills and having fun, not winning.
- Refrain from criticizing the opponents; be positive with all players.
- Respect the referees (They will make mistakes, but they are doing their best)

PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH COACHING

- All activities should be age appropriate.
- Give clear, concise **brief** instructions and correct information
- There should be a flow of simple to complex activities that is appropriate for the ability of the players and the topic of the practice.
- Maintain a safe and appropriate practice area
- Eliminate drills where children stand in line. If players are not moving the activity will not keep their interest.
- All activities should promote decision-making.
- All practices should finish with a small-sided scrimmage.

Furthermore, As a Role Model Coach

- Demonstrate leadership, good sportsmanship, respect, and coach with humility.
- Treat each player fairly
- Organize practices and teach the game through age appropriate activities and games
- Provide a safe environment; i.e. Inspect playing surface and report any issues to your area representative.
- Arrive at practice on time and remain until a parent picks up every child.
- Maintain a consistent practice schedule, don't vary the times or location of practice.
- Contribute positively to the development of each player's self-esteem
- Give regular feedback to players
- Allow each player to play 50% of every game
- Respect referees, know the rules, and conduct yourself respectfully on the field
- Continue to seek coaching education
- Define player Responsibilities:
 - Bring proper equipment to each practice and game.
 - Have your own ball and make sure that it is properly inflated.

- Inform the coach in advance if it is necessary to miss a game.
 - Try your best at each practice.
 - Work toward good sportsmanship and teamwork.
 - Respect the referees.
 - Be supportive of teammates all of the time.
- Answer questions from the parents.

The Practice

Under 7 years: K and 1st graders

- Effective coaching means, we, the coaches need to understand how the 5-6 year old thinks and what makes an activity fun for them.
 - Short attention span – keep activities short and simple
 - High energy level – keep players moving and involved
 - Extremely self-centered – don't expect too much passing, have a ball for every child during practices, expect to see the "swarm" during the games
 - Responds well to positive encouragement – smiles and praise
 - Learns via imitation – be prepared to "show" rather than "tell"
 - Loves to play games – use games as a tool to teach
- Skills that should be focused on at this age:
 - Dribble with all sides of both feet
 - Dribble out of trouble
 - Dribble past someone
 - Introduce changes of direction and turns
 - Soft first touch
 - Introduce ball protection (i.e. "shielding")
 - Introduce proper shooting technique (with inside of foot and laces)
 - Introduce juggling with both feet (allow one bounce between juggles if needed)
- Tactics that should be focused on at this age:
 - No Tactics!!!

Coaches should not try to teach young players about tactics at this age. This will lead to frustration both for the players and the coach. The focus for U6 players should be learning technique, especially dribbling. Just let them play!!!

The First Practice of the season

First impressions last a long time. Make sure your season starts off on the right foot by considering how you will handle your first practice of the season. The following is a suggested way to handle things.

Prepare

- Before you leave the house, check to make sure you have soccer balls, cones, pinnies, team list, practice plan.
- Other items that are useful include extra water bottle and air pump.

When you arrive

- Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily.
- As players show up, greet them, give them a ball, and ask them to dribble around in the grid to get used to their ball while we wait for the other kids to arrive. Note: the first thing the kids will want to do when they arrive is shoot on the net. Don't let them do this until after you have gone over the safety rules.

Once all of the players arrive

- Introduce yourself and go over the team safety rules and basic rules of soccer (no hands, cannot push or kick other players, must wear shin guards, no jewelry allowed, etc.)
- Take a walk around the field and ask the kids some questions about the soccer field to see what they already know about the game, ask them about the lines on the outside of the field
- Then get the kids to play a quick game of freeze tag first without soccer balls and then with soccer balls
- That may be all you can accomplish in the first night as it will be time to play a game; play 3v3 or 4v4 with no goalies, just give the kids some basic advice (don't fight over the ball with your team mates, try and dribble the ball around the other team, try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player, etc.) and then just let them play
- Always remember that this will be a challenging game for many kids, soccer skills take years to master so do not expect too much too soon
- At the end of the session, offer a bit of praise and remind the kids that if they want to learn how to play soccer then they should practice at school and at home with friends, brothers and sisters, mom and dad, or even by themselves, the best way to improve is to play the game as much as possible

Example Practice Plans

Weeks 1-2

- Dribbling in a square (5-7 min)

Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily.

For each of the following skills stop the kids and demonstrate the proper technique

- Dribble with the right foot and left foot
- Turn the ball using the inside of the foot
- Turn the ball using the outside of the foot
- Use the right foot to stop the ball
- Use the left foot to stop the ball

- Footwork Skills (5 min)

Space the kids out in the penalty area and work on ball touches

For each of the following skills stop the kids and demonstrate the proper technique

- Toe touches – Place the ball just in front of your toes and touch the top of the ball with the ball of your feet without moving the ball, alternating feet - first the right foot then left (20 times).
- Foundations – Place the ball between your feet, with the inside of your feet tap the ball from your right foot to your left foot, without moving forward or backward (20 times).

- Throw-ins (5 min)

Space half the kids out on the end line with the other half 6' across from them.

Demonstrate the proper throw-in technique emphasizing both feet on the ground and the ball over the head.

- Red Light Green Light (10 min)

Players line up across one end of field with balls

- One player gets to be the Stop Light
- When the Stop Light says "Green Light" players dribble, "Red Light" players stop
- Give each child the chance to be the Stop Light (encourage loud voices)

- Sharks and Minnows (10 min)

Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily (the center circle works as well). Quickly demonstrate how to shield the ball from a Shark and explain to keep the ball under control and close to their feet.

- Every child is given a ball and are the Minnows and the coach is the Shark
- The kids dribble in the grid trying to defend their ball from the Shark
- When a Shark knocks a Minnows ball out of the grid have the player do (10) toe touches or foundations to get back in the game.

- Clean your room (2 min/game)

Split into two teams one on each side of the midfield line. Quickly demonstrate the proper kicking technique, inside of the foot and with the laces.

- Each player gets a ball and tries to clean their side of the field by kicking the ball as hard as possible to the other side of the midfield line.
- Kids are not allowed to cross the midfield line to get a ball.
- At the end of the time count the balls on each side of the field and declare a winner, redistribute the balls and play again.

- 3v3 or 4v4 Scrimmage (20 min)

Split into multiple teams with no goalies and set up 20' x 30' grids with cones for goals. Give the kids some basic advice,

- Don't fight over the ball with your team mates
- Try and dribble the ball around the other team
- Try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player

Then just let them play, having parents help out by delivering a ball into the playing area if it goes out of bounds.

Weeks 3-4

- Dribbling in a square (5 min)

Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily.

For each of the following skills stop the kids and demonstrate the proper technique

- Dribble with the left foot only
- Turn the ball using the inside of the left foot
- Turn the ball using the outside of the left foot
- Use the right and left feet to stop the ball

- Juggling Skills (5 min)

Space the kids out in the penalty area and work on the basics of juggling the ball.

For each of the following skills stop the kids and demonstrate the proper technique (may only get to work on one of these skills at first, be patient this is a difficult skill to master)

- Juggling from the knee –
 - Hold the ball out in front of you and drop it while lifting your knee to make contact. Bounce the ball back up to your hands and catch it.
 - Work on using both knees.
 - Challenge player to bounce it twice or bounce it off both knees before catching it.
- Juggling from the foot –
 - Hold the ball out in front of you and drop it while *gently* lifting your foot to make contact. Bounce the ball back up to your hands and catch it.
 - Work on using both feet.
 - Challenge player to bounce it twice or bounce it off both feet before catching it.

- Red Light Green Light, Goofy Version (10 min)

Players line up across one end of field with balls

- Same as regular Red Light Green Light
- When the coach says “Stop” players stop in a goofy pose
- Modify the game so the kids only use their left foot

- Sharks and Sharks (10 min)

Same as Sharks and Minnows but everyone is a Shark and try to kick the other Sharks balls out of the area.

- Remind the kids that they need to keep control of their ball when they try and kick out other Sharks balls.

- **Simon Says(10 min)**

Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily.

Play Simon Says while the kids dribble in the grid and if someone does something they are not supposed to issue a GOTCHA. Simon Says examples:

- Change direction
- Stop the ball
- Kick the ball as hard as you can
- Kick the ball at the coach
- Etc.

- **Goalkeeper Basics (5 min)**

Demonstrate the basics of goalkeeping

- Show the players where the goalkeeper can use their hands. (inside the small box)
- Players practice with a partner rolling the ball to each other and practice scooping it up

- **3v3 or 4v4 Scrimmage (15 min)**

Split into multiple teams with no goalies and set up 20' x 30' grids with cones for goals. Give the kids some basic advice,

- Don't fight over the ball with your team mates
- Try and dribble the ball around the other team
- Try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player

Then just let them play, having parents help out by delivering a ball into the playing area if it goes out of bounds.

Weeks 5-6

- **Dribbling in a square (5 min)**

Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily.

For each of the following skills stop the kids and demonstrate the proper technique

- Dribble by alternating the left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot
- Right foot pull back, (turning towards the ball)
- Left foot pull back, (turning towards the ball)
- Use the right and left feet to stop the ball

- **Footwork Skills (5 min)**

Space the kids out in the penalty area and work on ball touches

For each of the following skills stop the kids and demonstrate the proper technique

- Toe touches – Place the ball just in front of your toes and touch the top of the ball with the ball of your feet without moving the ball, alternating feet - first the right foot then left (20 times).
- Foundations – Place the ball between your feet, with the inside of your feet tap the ball from your right foot to your left foot, without moving forward or backward (20 times).
- Sole Roll - Place the ball between your feet, using your right foot roll the ball of your foot across your body pulling the ball with it stop the ball with your left foot. (10 times)

- **Freeze Tag (10 min)**

Set up a 30'x30' grid (smaller if less kids), it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily

- Each player has a ball except one Tagger
- The kids dribble around the area trying to avoid the Tagger
- If a kid gets tagged they freeze with their legs apart with the ball over their head, yelling, "Help me, I'm frozen!" (encourage loud voices)
- They get freed when a player passes a ball between their legs.

- **Throw-ins (5 min)**

Space half the kids out on the end line with the other half 6' across from them.

Demonstrate the proper throw-in technique emphasizing both feet on the ground and the ball over the head.

- Sharks and Sharks (10 min)

Same as Sharks and Minnows but everyone is a Shark and try to kick the other Sharks balls out of the area.

- Remind the kids that they need to keep control of their ball when they try and kick out other Sharks balls.

- 3v3 or 4v4 Scrimmage (20 min)

Split into multiple teams with no goalies and set up 20' x 30' grids with cones for goals. Give the kids some basic advice,

- Don't fight over the ball with your team mates
- Try and dribble the ball around the other team
- Try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player

Then just let them play, having parents help out by delivering a ball into the playing area if it goes out of bounds.

Weeks 7-8

- Dribbling in a square (5 min)

- Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily.
- Kids dribble freely and the coach calls out moves (pull back right, pull back left, stop, sole roll, left foot only, etc)
- Body part stop, the kids dribble in the area and the coach calls out a body part (foot, knee, bum) and the kids stops the ball with that part of the body.

- Juggling Skills (5 min)

Space the kids out in the penalty area and work on the basics of juggling the ball.

For each of the following skills stop the kids and demonstrate the proper technique (may only get to work on one of these skills at first, be patient this is a difficult skill to master)

- Juggling from the knee –
 - Hold the ball out in front of you and drop it while lifting your knee to make contact. Bounce the ball back up to your hands and catch it.
 - Work on using both knees.
 - Challenge player to bounce it twice or bounce it off both knees before catching it.
- Juggling from the foot –
 - Hold the ball out in front of you and drop it while *gently* lifting your foot to make contact. Bounce the ball back up to your hands and catch it.
 - Work on using both feet.
 - Challenge player to bounce it twice or bounce it off both feet before catching it.

- Protect the Castle (10 min)

Set up many small (15'x15') grids with 4 kids per grid, with one tall cone (or a short one with a ball on top of it)

- Choose one player to be the knight and defend the "Castle"
- The other 3 "Dragons" try to dribble and pass the ball around and knock over the "Castle"
- If the "Castle" gets knock over set it back up and start again
- Make sure each kids gets a chance to guard the castle

- Mud Monster Tag (10 min)

Set up a 30'x30' grid (smaller if less kids), it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily

- Similar to Freeze Tag except there are two Taggers
- The kids dribble around the area trying to avoid the Monsters (have the monsters make monster noises)
- If a kid gets tagged they freeze with their legs apart with the ball over their head, yelling, "Help me, I'm stuck in the mud!" (encourage loud voices)
- They get freed when a player passes a ball between their legs.

- Goalkeeper Basics (5 min)

Demonstrate the basics of goalkeeping

- Players practice with a partner rolling the ball to each other and practice scooping it up
- Practice throwing the ball, encourage throwing the ball to the outside of the field

- 3v3 or 4v4 Scrimmage (20 min)

Split into multiple teams with no goalies and set up 20' x 30' grids with cones for goals. Give the kids some basic advice,

- Don't fight over the ball with your team mates
- Try and dribble the ball around the other team
- Try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player

Then just let them play, having parents help out by delivering a ball into the playing area if it goes out of bounds.

Weeks 9-10

- Chaos (10 min)

- Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily.
- Kids dribble freely and the coach calls out moves (pull back right, pull back left, stop, sole roll, left foot only, etc). The coach walks around the field and passively acts like an obstacle forcing the kids to dribble around them.

- Passing Ships (10 min)

- Place half of the kids on each sideline.
- On the coaches signal the kids dribble across the field stopping the ball at the other sideline.
- The team that gets all their players to the other sideline first gets 1 point.
- The first team to 5 points is declared the winner.

- Protect the Castle (10 min)

Set up many small (15'x15') grids with 4 kids per grid, with one tall cone (or a short one with a ball on top of it)

- Choose one player to be the knight and defend the "Castle"
- The other 3 "Dragons" try to dribble and pass the ball around and knock over the "Castle"
- If the "Castle" gets knock over set it back up and start again
- Make sure each kids gets a chance to guard the castle

- 3v3 or 4v4 Scrimmage with Goalies (15 min)

Split into multiple teams with goalies and set up 20' x 30' grids with cones for goals (6' apart). Give the kids some basic advice,

- Don't fight over the ball with your team mates
- Try and dribble the ball around the other team
- Try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player
- Switch out the goalies every few minutes so every kid gets a chance.

Then just let them play, having parents help out by delivering a ball into the playing area if it goes out of bounds.

- 3v3 or 4v4 Scrimmage no Goalies (15 min)

Split into multiple teams with goalies and set up 20' x 30' grids with cones for goals. Give the kids some basic advice,

- Don't fight over the ball with your team mates
- Try and dribble the ball around the other team
- Try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player

Then just let them play, having parents help out by delivering a ball into the playing area if it goes out of bounds.

Weeks 11-12

- Chaos (10 min)

- Set up a 30'x30' grid, it is easiest to space cones every 6' to track the distance easily.
- Kids dribble freely and the coach calls out moves (pull back right, pull back left, stop, sole roll, left foot only, etc). The coach walks around the field and passively acts like an obstacle forcing the kids to dribble around them.

- Juggling Skills (5 min)

Space the kids out in the penalty area and work on the basics of juggling the ball.

For each of the following skills stop the kids and demonstrate the proper technique (may only get to work on one of these skills at first, be patient this is a difficult skill to master)

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 - Work on using both knees.
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- Juggling from the foot –
 - Hold the ball out in front of you and drop it while *gently* lifting your foot to make contact. Bounce the ball back up to your hands and catch it.
 - Work on using both feet.
 - Challenge player to bounce it twice or bounce it off both feet before catching it.

- Passing Ships (10 min)

- Place half of the kids on each sideline.
- On the coaches signal the kids dribble across the field stopping the ball at the other sideline.
- The team that gets all their players to the other sideline first gets 1 point.
- The first team to 5 points is declared the winner.

- 3v3 or 4v4 Scrimmage with Goalies (10 min)

Split into multiple teams with goalies and set up 20' x 30' grids with cones for goals (6' apart). Give the kids some basic advice,

- Don't fight over the ball with your team mates

- Try and dribble the ball around the other team
- Try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player
- Switch out the goalies every few minutes so every kid gets a chance.

Then just let them play, having parents help out by delivering a ball into the playing area if it goes out of bounds.

- **3v3 or 4v4 Scrimmage no Goalies (15 min)**

Split into multiple teams with goalies and set up 20' x 30' grids with cones for goals. Give the kids some basic advice,

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- Try and look up once in a while so that you don't run into another player

Then just let them play, having parents help out by delivering a ball into the playing area if it goes out of bounds.

References

The following sources were the principal references used in creating the Chemung Valley Soccer Association (CVSA) coaching manual:

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 - US Soccer Youth Soccer – Coaching Education (2016)
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- US Youth Soccer Player Development (2006)
- Soccer: How to Coach Your Child, Smith Owen