



# Balls, cones and kids

the soccer coaching newsletter

Issue 2 - February 2005

## Editorial

Welcome to the second edition of **Balls, cones and kids** - the footy4kids soccer coaching newsletter.

The theme this month is how to plan football coaching sessions that are appropriate for the age and developmental stage of your children.

But just what is 'appropriate'?

Certainly drills that involve children standing in lines aren't going to work with the little 'uns. And the coach who tries to explain the subtleties of zone defending to 6 year olds is definitely wasting her time!

But it still goes on - not because coaches don't care but because they don't really understand what makes little kids tick.

The articles in this newsletter might not have all the answers but they will certainly give you some food for

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## Coaching young children

From the [Soccer-Coach\\_L manual](#)

Coaching children under six years of age presents some additional challenges due to their immaturity, short attention span, and less developed muscles. You will also need to deal with a great variation between personalities, physical size, and abilities. Your objective should be for all of the kids to have fun, make friends, and learn some soccer skills that will help them should they decide to continue to the next level. You should not expect to win all of your games or expect everyone to listen to long lectures. Your goal is to introduce them to basic concepts like dribbling and kicking and make it enough fun that they want to keep playing as their bodies and minds mature. Go down to their level of thinking. Don't try to bring them up to yours. What was fun when you were four years old? The kid who is watching seagulls will tell you were the greatest coach in the world if he had fun. He will have fun when he kicks the ball or at least when he makes an attempt and gets praise instead of criticism. [more](#)

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## The mental development of 6-12 year olds in youth soccer

by Dan Freigang Ph.D.

reproduced courtesy of [Fundamentalsoccer.com](#)

### Mental development for 6 year olds and under

The key issue for children under six is positive self-

thought. I know they made me re-think my approach to coaching young children.

As always, I'm keen to get your feedback on **Balls, cones and kids**. [Click here](#) to send me your comments. Thanks.

## Contributors wanted!

[Click here](#) if you would like to contribute an article to **Balls, cones and kids**. You don't have to be a 'writer' - just someone who is actively involved in kids' soccer, either as a coach, parent or player.

The article can be 50 words long or 500, I don't mind.

## Good game!

[Sharks and minnows](#)

[Spiders and bugs](#)

[No-Go zone](#)

[Blob tag](#)

## Ask the coach

Do you have a coaching question? Need advice?

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esteem. Children will play the game longer, try harder and overcome obstacles if the environment is conducive to building self esteem. The concept of "self" is learned, not by winning games, but by facing progressively difficult challenges. Earning success promotes higher levels of self-awareness, stronger self-image and self-confidence. The child up to the age of 6 is focused primary upon developing the self. At this stage all experiences should allow the child to fully engage the physical domain within the child. It would be destructive to make tactical demands on a six year old when they don't have the cognitive ability to comprehend the concept. "The make believe" ability of the child's mind is dominant at this stage. Most interactions of the make believe world can be unitized successfully in the very small sided game. Every touch can be a resounding success. Youngsters have very short attention spans and can't stand hearing verbal descriptions of observations from a coach. Too much verbiage and the moment is lost. Players like to move and require constant opportunity to be successful. The under six player is developing a central nervous system that requires general movement with little refined skill. It's OK if a six year old cannot bend a ball at 40 yards, it's not in their abilities to master such a demand. If we try to teach this demand we waste time and destroy the child's motivation. The world of a six year old revolves around the imaginary victories they create in their realities. This is a normal phase and should be encouraged with corrections and criticisms held to a minimum. Given the correct environment the children will find a way to play. When levels of demand are too abstract in the full 11 v 11 game (tactics) or the physical demands too challenging the result is anger, helplessness and ultimately dropout [more](#)

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## Physical and mental differences between 6-8 year olds

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### The Difference Between 6, 7 and 8 Year Olds

It is important to stress the different stages in growth, development and skills learning that take place over the years. From 6 to 7 is almost a lifetime for kids! All children are individuals and develop in different ways,

## Hold this thought!

In a survey of more than 500 recreational players, 95% of the kids responding felt the most important thing about sports was having fun, not winning; 75% said they would rather play on a losing team than sit on the bench for a winning team [Henschen K, L Griffin in *Psychology Today* Sept '77].

## In the next issue..

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and at different stages, so coaches are still compelled to talk in general terms. For simplicity, consider the 6 year olds as first year players, and 7 and 8 year olds as the second and third year players, respectively. [more](#)

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## What to expect from U-6s

Coaching pre-school, (i.e., under six), children is a lot of fun! Their enthusiasm knows no bounds, they will turn up for practice in the most severe weather conditions imaginable and they smile all the time!!

Developmentally, however, they are very different from children who are just two or three years older.

For example:

- Most of your players will cry immediately when they get hurt. Some cry even when they are not hurt,
- No matter how loud you shout, or how much they "practice" it, they can not or will not pass the ball,
- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field when they should be going to the toilet!
- The only player to hold a position is the goalkeeper (if you play with one.) Don't even consider teaching positional play,
- Twenty seconds after the start of a game, every player will be within 5 yards of the ball.
- Several players will slap at the ball with their hands, or pick it up. Several parents will yell at them not to do that.
- A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get 99% of the player's attention. By all means, stop whatever you are doing and watch for a couple of minutes.
- During a season, you will end up tying at least 40 to 50 shoelaces
- They will do something that is very funny. Make sure that you laugh.

## The final word...

"Victory isn't defined by wins or losses. It is defined by effort. If you can truthfully say, 'I did the best I could, I gave everything I had,' then you're a winner."  
---Wolfgang Schadler

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**free download** (right click, 'save target as') [lesson plans for U8s](#)

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