Hello U8 Coaches!

By now you're in the middle of the season and players are ready for more. This is a big development stage where kids can really start building skills and understanding the game a little more.
Below is a quick guide to help with your practices and make this season even better for your players. Only a few minutes to read — it will help your kids!

U8: The Transition Year

U8 is where soccer starts to come together.

Players are still kids and should still have fun, but now they are ready for more structured skill development and are beginning to understand the game beyond just chasing the ball.

At this age, practices should begin to focus on skill development and awareness while still keeping the environment fun and active.

Coaching Points to Remember

- Keep all kids moving and engaged.
- This is the golden age of skill development — focus on ball skills.
- Begin teaching players to look up, find space, and use teammates.
- Keep instructions short and let them learn by playing.
- Do not run long lines or long lectures.

Development Targets for U8 Players

At this stage, players should begin learning:

Ball Skills

- Dribbling with control
- Turning with the ball
- Stopping the ball
- Shielding the ball
- Shooting
- Passing with the inside of the foot
- Receiving a pass and keeping the ball

Awareness

- Look up when dribbling

- Find open space
- Spread out instead of bunching
- Know which direction to go
- Begin using teammates

These skills are learned through repetition and small-sided games, not standing in lines.

What U8 Practices Should Look Like

As players get older and more capable, practices should become a little more structured while still keeping kids active and engaged.

Below are two great practice structure options for U8 coaches.

Option 1 – PPP Model (75 Minute Practice)

This is a continuation of the Play–Practice–Play model, but with a longer practice time and more repetition. The practice should end with a scrimmage.

- 15 min – Warm-up game and stretch
- 15 min – Play 1 (small-sided game)
- 20 min – Skill activity or skill game
- 20 min – Play 2 (Scrimmage)
- 5 min – Cool down, next practice/game prep, pick up gear and call it out

This model keeps practices fun, fast, and game-based while still allowing time to teach skills, and always finishes with the game.

Option 2 – Core Practice Progression Model

This model introduces a more structured training progression while still keeping players moving and engaged.

Core Practice Progression:

1. **Immediate Drill** — immediate start activity as players arrive (Rondo, juggling, etc.)
2. **Dynamic Warm-Up** — Movement preparation with the ball
3. **Pele Series** — Individual ball mastery and foot skills
4. **Direct Pressure** — 1v1 or 2v2 decision making
5. **Small-Group Play**
6. **Phase Play / Numbers Games**

7. **Scrimmage** — Let the game teach and allow players to play freely

This structure builds players from **individual skill → decision making → small group play → game play**.

Both practice models are effective. The most important thing is that practices are organized, active, and focused on player development.

What Success Looks Like at U8

Success at U8 looks like:

- Players getting lots of touches
- Players trying moves and skills
- Players beginning to spread out
- Players looking for teammates
- Players attacking the goal with confidence
- Players leaving practice sweaty, smiling, and excited to come back

Coach Reminder

You are not just running a practice.

You are:

- Building confidence
- Teaching teamwork
- Teaching resilience
- Teaching how to learn
- Teaching how to work hard
- Teaching how to be a good teammate

The impact you have at this age is bigger than you think.

Thank you for coaching and investing in these kids.

Feel free to reach out to me with any questions or if you want help or ideas.
Thanks,

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