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# U7/8 Girls and U7-U9 Boys

## FUNdamentals

To help yourself and your players/kids, sign up for the next Active Start and FUNdamentals coaching course. You'll have fun, make friends, get to know other CVUSC coaches, and gain leaps of confidence in running your own sessions!

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*The focus at this level is to have fun with the ball while learning fundamental movement and soccer skills. Shape over the ball and orientation around the ball are fundamental. We are still focused 90% on individual skill development but you will begin to introduce team shape and tactics. Most importantly, you will be inspiring a love of the game through FUN with our friends and a ball.*

## Technical Focus for the FUNdamental Stage

Throughout this stage, there is a continued focus on developing individual ball mastery while gradually developing an appreciation for collective play. During this stage we spend 90% of our time on technical development. Team shape and an understanding of the smaller games (one vs one, two vs one, two vs two) within the larger games of 4v4 to 6v6, are introduced as a means to support the notion of collective play and positional responsibilities. We have 2 years at this stage of development so think of it in small meaningful steps towards an intended outcome for each focus described below. Again we **divide our focus between technical and tactical development throughout this stage at a ratio of 90% technical and 10% tactics**.

### The focuses throughout this stage

1. **Ball Mastery** is an essential aim at this stage. We focus on developing the player's ability to control the ball through foundation dribbles, dribbling with different surfaces of the foot, changes of direction, cuts, feints, and tricks using the various control surfaces such as the foot thigh and chest. Super skill cuts and feints such as step overs, chops, scissors, shimmies, the Matthews and the coveted Maradona are all fair game at this stage of development and add a lot of fun to your practice. If you are looking for coaching support for teaching ball mastery please do not hesitate in contacting our VP of Development or VP of House to set up a Coach the Coach session.
2. **Receiving a ball or developing a good first touch** is essential at this stage. We focus on receiving the ball or collecting the ball with a controlled touch that keeps the ball in playing distance. We are also trying to create a body shape and ball orientation that allows for a good next move, such as a pass, shot or dribble. Players learn to receive the ball from a variety of angles of play to reproduce the basic triangle shape in team play. At this stage we explicitly teach, "Control, Look, Play." The look leads to a decision: in order, "Do I shoot? Do I dribble? Do I pass?" **THERE IS NO PLAY CALLED KICK IT AWAY!**
3. **First attacker** principles are introduced and developed through this stage: in a one vs one situation we look for a change of direction and change of pace, go straight at the defender and off balance them, head for goal. Here the Super Skills learned in Ball Mastery are applied to real game and one vs one situations where players develop their sense of timing and transition their technique into skill development under growing levels of opposition. Shooting technique is developed over short distances and we introduce the habit of reading the goalkeeper's position. Basic shielding is introduced and developed throughout this stage.
4. **Team Play and Tactics:** Throughout this stage we develop the players ability to play collectively with others towards a common goal. To this end we develop the individual technique of passing, while introducing team shape (triangles and diamonds), positional responsibilities, and how to read the play (we have the ball, they have the ball, we are losing the ball, we are gaining the ball). In terms of passing we are developing basic push pass technique first and we are looking for them to adopt the habit of making passes to feet. By the end of this stage we are looking for players to discern when to pass to feet and when to pass into space. We also

begin teaching players to read the game in terms of areas of pressure and areas of space so that they can learn how to keep possession of the ball as a team. During the stage we introduce the basic phases of play (we have the ball, they have the ball, we are getting the ball, we are losing the ball). Key to this whole focus is communication, “Morgan’s ball!” rather than, “Mine!”

5. It is at this stage that we introduce and begin to work on the principles of **first defender**: jockeying and tackling. We also introduce and develop an understanding for the need to get goal side in conjunction with introducing the proper angles for marking and covering. We introduce varying levels of defensive pressure: high in the field to delay and regain possession, one to one marking in the penalty area. Finally, we introduce the idea of getting compact to prevent passes deep into your own end.

6. We introduce and throughout the two years we **develop the principle of depth of support** with a last player back who covers the back field and serves to support the players ahead. Specifically, we teach them about angles of distribution on the restart of play (i.e. goal kicks).

7. We introduce the role of **Goal Keeper**. This position is rotated throughout the team and everyone is given a chance to develop the skills of start position, side-skipping to get in line with the ball, moving forward to defend and make saves, gathering the ball, handling the ball at different heights (no high balls), and diving from a kneeling position. We introduce throwing the ball out and rolling the ball out with one hand. In practice and in warm-up the coach serves the ball so as to develop confidence so that children are not afraid of the ball. Key to this focus is communication, “Keeper’s ball!”

### **Game Format (games are played once per week and consist of 2 x 15 to 25 minute halves with a 5 minute half time)**

The first and most important principle to reinforce throughout our games is for all of us to applaud and support individual technical play and brilliance. We certainly do not want to emphasize passing over dribbling. Finally, kids must be absolutely free from ridicule or fear from performing any technical action which doesn’t go right the first time. To this end, set up lots of secret technical goals for the kids during their games: feints, cuts, chops, pull backs etc.

For players U7/8 we play 4v4 including a keeper, and our U9 group plays 6v6 including a keeper. We are emphasizing individual technical play and we are encouraging kids to dribble and handle the ball. In terms of shape, we encourage the players to coordinate a basic triangle shape or diamond shape through their play. Regardless of what system you use to set up your team we are looking for two players playing wide on either side of the field, at least one playing high in the field and other playing low in the field.

Coaches referee at the U7/8 age group and we strongly encourage you to use infractions or breakdown of play as opportunities to coach your kids on how to play the game together. It is always best if the coaches from each team coordinate this interaction and encourage good soccer when they see it from both teams.

At U9, games are called by young referees. While off-sides are generally not called we discourage players from adopting a cherry-picking approach to the game. Coaches are encouraged to interact with players and come out on the field to coach as the need arises for you to appropriately encourage the movement or positioning that you are after. Again, we are looking for you to encourage good soccer when you see it from either side in the match.

### **Mercy Rule:**

When your team is up 3 or more goals on the other team you now have an opportunity to coach and teach something new about the game with your players. In no particular order ...

1. The team that is down might add another player, or in the 6v6 game, the winning team might pull a player: your team is learning how to play numbers down and under pressure.
2. Winning team can hold players back and send them in one at a time: your team is learning individual skill and the players who are being sent in later are learning to read the field - send them in to where they think the ball will go rather than where the ball is.
3. In the 4v4 game, the winning team can move to own end and face their own goal as the team that is down restarts play at centre. Winning team turns when coach says "Go": your team is learning to quickly read the field - you can add to this by having one player go to challenge and others to set up in support.
4. Winning team can change focus to "Secret goals" like turns, cuts, feints, carrying the ball to a certain location and trying to pass to another: secret goals are all about reinforcing skills and tactical habits that you have been coaching all along.
5. Winning team's stronger players must play with a certain foot, or certain part of the foot: stronger players are being challenged to develop their own skill set.
6. In the 6v6 game you may attach conditions to shooting such as you must work the ball wide, up the field and then play the ball across the goal in order to score: you are now coaching a system of play that will shape their understanding for how the game can be played.
7. You may teach your team to condense their defensive third and simply protect their lead: now you are playing good Italian football:)

### **Field Size:**

For U7/8 you can set up small fields for these divisions under 22m x 34m  
and you will use Mini Goals for nets  
with a size 3 ball

For U9 you will have fields no bigger than 33m x 50m  
and you will use the Midi 12' Goals for nets  
with a size 4 ball

## **Suggested Practice Format for players in the FUNdamental Stage of Development**

**Session Length: 40 - 70 minutes 1/week**

**Start with a warm-up that gets the kids going and naturally introduces your training theme for the session. It is always a good idea to touch on what you have worked on before as you start your session.**

*Example:* Simon Says followed by Ship to Shore introducing the idea of quickly changing direction with the ball using the outside of the foot. (5 - 10 minutes)

### **Work on a specific technique**

*Example:* Set up paired cones, one kid at each cone with a ball. When you say go they run towards another cone with their ball at their feet and cut back to return to their original cone. Increase the difficulty by calling “switch” while they are on their way to the cone. On “switch” the kids cut back and turn towards their original cone and then immediately cut back to continue to their new cone, cut back and turn to see if they can dribble back to their original cone before you call “switch” again. (10-15 minutes)

### **Progress to practicing the technique with some opposition**

*Example:* Have kids dribble beside a partner and cut back to head towards their original cone, then cut back again quickly to head to the new cone trying to trick their partner as to which cone they are actually trying to get to. From here you might progress to add in a step-over before they cut back, or combine the cut back with other changes of direction such as a pull back. You could end there or you might move on to have them play king of the square. (10 - 15 minutes)

### **Go into a soccer like game with targets, directions, and conditions.**

*Example:* Play soccer in a restricted area with a defined spaces on the field where kids get points if they dribble the ball into these specified space and then quickly cut back to run back out of the area while keeping control of their ball. (10 - 15 minutes)

### **Play a small sided game.**

*Example:* Play 4v4 but give them a “Special Point” every time they perform a cut back to change direction and two points if they step over and cut back. Outside of rewarding great technical play you just let them play and limit your coaching. (10 - 20 minutes)

### **Conclude with a cool-down**

*Example:* Play a round of Simon Says that transitions from whole body movements into some easy stretching. As you finish you can introduce ideas about nutrition, goal setting, hydration, or just comment on some of the great things you just say during your session. (5-10 minutes)

**Alternate Practice Format for players in the FUNdamental Stage of Development**  
**Session Length: 40 - 70 minutes 1/week**

**Start with a warm-up that gets the kids going and naturally introduces your training theme for the session. It is always a good idea to touch on what you have worked on before as you start your session.**

*Example:* Simon Says followed by Ship to Shore introducing the idea of quickly changing direction with the ball using the outside of the foot. (5 - 10 minutes)

**Go into a soccer like game with targets, directions, and conditions.**

*Example:* Kids get points if they dribble the ball into a specified space on the field and then quickly cut back to run back out of the area while keeping control of their ball. (10 - 15 minutes)

**Work on a specific technique or skill.**

*Example:* set up paired cones, one kid at each cone with a ball. When you say go they run towards another cone with their ball at their feet and cut back to return to their original cone. Increase the difficulty by calling “switch” while they are on their way to the cone. On “switch” the kids cut back and turn towards their original cone and then immediately cut back to continue to their new cone, cut back and turn to see if they can dribble back to their original cone before you call “switch” again. Another progression might have kids dribble beside a partner and cut back to head towards their original cone, then cut back again quickly to head to the new cone trying to trick their partner as to which cone they are actually trying to get to. A final progression might repeat the drill and add in a step-over before they cut back, or combine the cut back with other changes of direction such as a pull back. (15-20 minutes)

**Play a small sided game.**

*Example:* Play 4v4 but give them a “Special Point” every time they perform a cut back to change direction and two points if they step over and cut back. Please note that every time you play a small sided game you are coaching shape on the field. (20 min)

**Conclude with a cool-down**

*Example:* Play a round of Simon Says that transitions from whole body movements into some easy stretching. As you finish you can introduce ideas about nutrition, goal setting, hydration, or just comment on some of the great things you just say during your session. (5-10 minutes)