

U8 University Coaches Manual

AYSO Region 390 Board of Directors

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Introduction

AYSO Region 390 has adopted a cooperative approach to conducting U8 practices. U8 teams practice twice per week. One practice is a traditional team practice, in which the coach of a team works only with the players assigned to that team. In the other practice, which we call the U8 University, the players from all U8 teams meet together with all of the U8 coaches. The U8 boys and coaches meet one evening, and the U8 girls and coaches meet a different evening when we have separate boys and girls teams. The coaches split the players into small groups (without consideration of team assignments), and work with the groups on skills and tactics. Coaches set up drills and/or games at several stations on the available fields, and player groups rotate between these stations throughout the practice.

We use the U8 University approach with our U8-level teams for several reasons. First, in our region the U8 level tends to have the most player participation. For whatever reason, many players seem to join the AYSO soccer program around this age. Second, many of our coaches obtain their first coaching experience by coaching a U8 level team. This may be a direct result of the first reason: having many players implies the need for many coaches, and we must recruit people who are willing to volunteer but have never coached soccer before. Third, we have found that U8 is the best age at which to seriously focus on developing a solid foundation for soccer skills and tactics. By this age, most players have reached a point mentally and physically at which they can comprehend and ingrain the fundamental soccer concepts and skills.

This manual describes the U8 University approach. It describes our goals for the approach and our philosophy for selecting games and drills. To ease the burden of implementing the U8 University practices, the manual presents a schedule of practices for a typical 10-week AYSO season. For each practice, the manual describes the skill or strategy that is the focus for that week, and details the four stations to be used during that practice.

Goals

We have several goals for the U8 University practices. The overall goal is to improve player *skills* and *tactics* while having *fun*.

A secondary goal is to increase the comfort level of players and coaches with each other, regardless of their assigned teams. This is important for several reasons:

- it enables coaches to provide personal encouragement and attention to the players of both teams during and after a match;
- it eases the difficulty of situations where players must switch teams in lopsided games; and
- it fosters continuity for the player who is assigned to a team with a different coach in subsequent seasons.

Another secondary goal for the U8 University practice is to allow coaches to learn from each other how to conduct drills, motivate players, and deal with discipline problems. In effect we raise the level of all our U8 coaches through mentored sessions run by experienced coaches .

Philosophy

First and foremost, our approach to the U8 University is guided by the six AYSO philosophies:

- Everyone Plays-usually applied to game situations in which everyone plays at least half the game, for U8 University practices this philosophy is interpreted as everyone participating in all the games and drills — keeping the kids as active and involved as possible.
- Balanced Teams-when splitting players into groups during a U8 university practice, we do not attempt to split them by skill level. This way, stronger players can motivate and help players whose skills need some improvement. That said, we do try to augment the stations so as to provide a challenge to players at every skill level.
- Open Registration—every registered U8 player attends the U8 University sessions and registration is open to all players (e.g., players are neither recruited nor required to tryout).
- Positive Coaching-we strive to remain positive when interacting with the players. Having all U8 coaches manage the U8 University practices together helps ensure this, because the coaches naturally act as a check upon each other. In many ways we're coaching coaches as much as we're coaching players.
- Good Sportsmanship-likewise, we strive to install good sportsmanship among the players and their parents/guardians. Combining players into groups regardless of their assigned team helps minimize any sportsmanship problems along team boundaries. It also helps eliminate some of the “ownership problems” typically found with new coaches, especially ones with very good players on their teams.
- Player Development-developing player skills and tactics is a primary goal for the U8 University approach.

In addition, we add the following philosophies:

- Positive Activity-Players should be engaged in positive activity for the entire practice. In particular, we avoid games and drills where players are waiting in lines for their turn, because such situations tend to result in unwanted behavior at the U8 age level.
- No uncertainty-During a U8 University practice, players and coaches should always know what they are supposed to be doing.
- Continuing education of coaches is fundamental — we ask a lot of our players; we are doing nothing more than asking our coaches to put in as much effort to improve as we're asking of our players. We recognize that coaches learn best from other coaches. By having some of our most experienced coaches demonstrate the philosophy that coaching requires on-going training and sharing, we instill a hunger in our coaches to improve and we progressively raise the level of all our coaches

(since U8 coaches usually become our next group of U10 coaches, who'll progress to being U12 coaches, on up).

Approach

As described in the Introduction, at a U8 University practice the coaches set up several stations and groups of players, regardless of team, progress through the stations. The progression follows the practice format describe in the U8 Coaching Manual where activity progresses from Technical Warm-up to Small-sided game training. The practice schedule shown in this section reflects this approach.

Each U8 University practice has a primary focus-a skill or strategy that we want the players to learn. We have attempted to schedule the focus for each week so that players start with fundamental skills and progress toward advanced skills and strategies. That said, we also want to make sure that the players are exposed to enough game strategy and game mechanics (like kickoffs and corner kicks) to have a successful first game just two weeks into the season. Also, we recommend that coaches emphasize the focus for each week in the games and drills they use during their individual team-only practice that week, and that they watch their players during the end-of-training scrimmage to see what and how well the players have learned the focused skill or strategy Providing this feedback to the lead University coaches is essential and allows the coaches to make adjustments to the curriculum as needed to give players as much chance of success as possible.

There are lots of useful drills and games available from coaching books and Internet sites, including the AYSO site. However, based on our experiences and feedback from coaches and parents, introducing too many different drills and games during a season is counter-productive. Often coaches spend much of the station time explaining what the players are supposed to do, not leaving enough time for players to actually work on the skill.

Season Schedule

In AYSO Region 390, there are two outdoor seasons (Fall and Spring). Each outdoor season is 10 weeks long. Some players participate only in the Fall, or only in the Spring, so we use repeat the same schedule for the U8 University practices in both the Fall and the Spring.

The U8 University Season Schedule focuses on the U10 Technical and Tactical fundamentals as described in the AYSO U8 Coach Manual:

Technical	
Instep Kick Dribbling Throw-In Inside of the foot-push pass Inside of the foot-ball control	
Tactical	
Attacking Objectives	Defending Objectives
Maintain Possession Score	Prevent Scoring Regain Possession
Attacking Principles	Defending Principles
Penetration Support Width	Delay Cover Compactness

We will develop each of the focus skills in a dedicated session according to a schedule that will run similar to the schedule below.

Week	Focus/Technical Skill	Key Offensive Principle & Objective/ Corresponding Defensive Principle & Objective
1.	Team Building, Shooting (Instep Kick)	Score/ Prevent Scoring
2.	Restarts (Throw-in)	Using Width to Maintain Possession/ Using Compactness to Regain Possession
3.	Dribbling	Using Penetration to Score/ Using Delay to Prevent Scoring
4.	Passing (Push Pass)	Using Support to Maintain Possession/ Using Cover to Regain Possession
5.	Receiving (ball control)	Maintain Possession/ Regain Possession
6	Skills Olympics, 3v3 rounds	

Practice Schedule

The session schedule should be built upon the guidelines described in pages 29-32 of the U8 Coaching Manual. The outline will generally follow the agenda below.

Time	Activity
5:15	Free Play/Coaches meet to discuss practice plan for the evening
5:30	Group Warm-up incorporating jogging, ball touches and dynamic stretching
5:40	Station 1 - Technical Warm-up
5:50	Water break
5:55	Station 2 - Activity I
6:05	Station 3 - Activity II
6:10	Water break
6:15	Small-sided match play
6:30	Wrap-up, announcements, optional scrimmage

For each session, one coach should be designated to lead the planning and direct setup to ensure the appropriate gear is on hand for the activities as required and coaching responsibilities are delegated for the conduct of the session. During the training sessions teams and coaches should generally be mixed but should follow the session plan in parallel as the activities are intended to build on the development of a specific set of skills.

Scrimmages

At the end of each U8 University practice, we hold an optional scrimmage for any U8 player that wants to stay (be sure it is OK with the parents). If there are a lot of players for the scrimmage, split them and run two scrimmages. Scrimmages should generally not have any more players than in an actual game. The most important activity for the coaches during the scrimmage is to *observe*. It is OK to make a few comments about things the players are doing well, or need to work on, but for the most part the coaches should watch for things that the players need to work on during their individual team practices and at future U8 University practices.

Participation

There's one important item we must emphasize about U8 University. U8 University, indeed all of AYSO, only works if volunteers make it work. Our assumption is that anyone who agrees to be a coach for a U8 team (either head coach or assistant coach) will be at the U8 University practices to help run them. Based on our experience, having too few coaches at a U8 University practice is a recipe for disaster—neither the players nor the coaches get much out of the practice, nor do they end up having fun.

Week 1: Team Building and Shooting (Instep Kick)

Goals

For players and coaches to meet, have fun and get comfortable with each other.

To be able to shoot with power toward a target.

During Week 1, Teams should be kept with their own coach throughout for familiarity. Pair two teams for each station. Stations will be set up and will evolve in parallel through the “clear the zone”, “knock the cone”, and “score the goal” phases. Pairs of teams can be swapped between stations. Focus from the beginning to the end of the session should be on the Instep Kick.

Time	Activity	Notes
5:15	Free Play/Coaches meet to discuss practice plan for the evening	Have field and goals set up so players can be playing soccer from the minute they arrive. Keep it unstructured and let them have fun with it.
5:30	Group Warm-up incorporating jogging, ball touches and dynamic stretching	Kids stay with their own coach for individual team warm-ups and Introductions. Use top of the foot in warm-ups
5:40	Station 1 - Technical Warm-up	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 66
5:50	Water break	
5:55	Station 2 - Activity I	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 66
6:05	Station 3 - Activity II	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 66
6:10	Water break	
6:15	Small-sided match play	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 66
6:30	Wrap-up, announcements, optional scrimmage	Mix all kids in optional full scrimmage (Start second game as needed)

Week 2: Restarts (Throw-in)

Goal

To be able to understand the various restarts associated with game play (Kick-offs, Throw-ins, Goal Kicks, & Corner Kicks in particular) and the importance of using width to maintain possession.

During Week 2, players will be exposed to the various restarts and strategies for using width to maintain possession. Focus from the beginning to the end of the session should be on proper execution of the restart and the concept of playing to width to retain possession. This means to the sideline for goal kicks, and down the line for throw-ins.

Time	Activity	Notes
5:15	Free Play/Coaches meet to discuss practice plan for the evening	Have field and goals set up so players can be playing soccer from the minute they arrive. Keep it unstructured and let them have fun with it.
5:30	Group Warm-up incorporating jogging, ball touches and dynamic stretching	Consolidated group warm-up. Use kicking for distance in the warm-ups
5:40	Station 1 - Technical Warm-up	Throw ins, Goal Kicks, Corner Kicks, Kick-off station rotation
5:50	Water break	
5:55	Station 2 - Activity I	Throw-In, Throw-In, Throw-In (p.52)
6:05	Station 3 - Activity II	Divide into teams for restart relay race where one of each type of restart must be completed by the team
6:10	Water break	
6:15	Small-sided match play	Teams complete in small-sided play where only restart motions are allowed. To move the ball players may use their hands to pick up the ball and perform a throw-in but not run with the ball. If the ball goes out goal kicks and corner kicks are allowed.
6:30	Wrap-up, announcements, optional scrimmage	Mix all kids in optional full scrimmage (Start second game as needed)

Week 3: Dribbling

Goal

To be able to dribble the ball, running with some speed, without losing control of the ball and the body.

During Week 3, focus from the beginning to the end of the session should be on dribbling.

Time	Activity	Notes
5:15	Free Play/Coaches meet to discuss practice plan for the evening	Have field and goals set up so players can be playing soccer from the minute they arrive. Keep it unstructured and let them have fun with it.
5:30	Group Warm-up incorporating jogging, ball touches and dynamic stretching	Consolidated group warm-up. Use dribbling in warm-ups
5:40	Station 1 - Technical Warm-up	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 58 (or 59, 60, 61)
5:50	Water break	
5:55	Station 2 - Activity I	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 58 (or 59, 60, 61)
6:05	Station 3 - Activity II	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 58 (or 59, 60, 61)
6:10	Water break	
6:15	Small-sided match play	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 58 (or 59, 60, 61)
6:30	Wrap-up, announcements, optional scrimmage	Mix all kids in optional full scrimmage (Start second game as needed)

Week 4: Passing (Push-Pass)

Goal

To be able to make strong passes to a teammate, and to receive the ball from a teammate without losing control of the ball.

During Week 4, focus from the beginning to the end of the session should be on the Push-Pass.

Time	Activity	Notes
5:15	Free Play/Coaches meet to discuss practice plan for the evening	Have field and goals set up so players can be playing soccer from the minute they arrive. Keep it unstructured and let them have fun with it.
5:30	Group Warm-up incorporating jogging, ball touches and dynamic stretching	Consolidated group warm-up. Use passing in warm-ups
5:40	Station 1 - Technical Warm-up	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 62 (64)
5:50	Water break	
5:55	Station 2 - Activity I	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 62 (64)
6:05	Station 3 - Activity II	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 62 (64)
6:10	Water break	
6:15	Small-sided match play	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 62 (64)
6:30	Wrap-up, announcements, optional scrimmage	Mix all kids in optional full scrimmage (Start second game as needed)

Week 5: Receiving (ball control)

Goal

To be able to receive the ball from a teammate, then pass it to a teammate, then move into open space.

During Week 5 focus from the beginning to the end of the session should be on the Receiving the ball with the inside of the foot for good ball control.

Time	Activity	Notes
5:15	Free Play/Coaches meet to discuss practice plan for the evening	Have field and goals set up so players can be playing soccer from the minute they arrive. Keep it unstructured and let them have fun with it.
5:30	Group Warm-up incorporating jogging, ball touches and dynamic stretching	Consolidated group warm-up. Use Tic Tocs in warm-ups
5:40	Station 1 - Technical Warm-up	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 67 (63)
5:50	Water break	
5:55	Station 2 - Activity I	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 67 (63)
6:05	Station 3 - Activity II	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 67 (63)
6:10	Water break	
6:15	Small-sided match play	Reference U8 Coaching Manual page 67 (63)
6:30	Wrap-up, announcements, optional scrimmage	Mix all kids in optional full scrimmage (Start second game as needed)

Week 6: Skills Olympics, 3v3 rounds

Goal

Give players a fun chance to evaluate where they stand with regards to the target skill sets of the U8 manual and then allow for unstructured 3v3 play.

Time	Activity	Notes
5:15	Free Play/Coaches meet to discuss practice plan for the evening	Have field and goals set up so players can be playing soccer from the minute they arrive. Keep it unstructured and let them have fun with it.
5:30	Group Warm-up incorporating jogging, ball touches and dynamic stretching	Consolidated group warm-up. Use tic tocs in warm-ups
5:40	Skills Olympics	Pair players and group in stations to perform standard assessment of U8 target skills. Suggested skill assessment provided below.
6:10	Water break	
6:15	Small-sided match play	Divide players randomly and play 3v3 Rounds
6:30	Wrap-up, announcements, optional scrimmage	Mix all kids in optional full scrimmage (Start second game as needed)

Example Skills Assessment

Skill 1: Instep – Perform goal kicks for distance

Setup: allow 5 balls; set cones at 5,10,15, & 20 yards; award 1 point for each cone passed; max 20

Score: _____ + _____ + _____ + _____ + _____ = _____

Skill 2: Dribbling – Dribble with a change of direction

Setup: allow 30 seconds; set 2 gates at 5 yards; award 2 points for each gate crossed; max 20

Score: _____ * 2 = _____

Skill 3: Throw-In – Perform Throw-ins down sideline under pressure

Setup: allow 30 seconds & 5 Balls; set mini-goal at 10 yards along sideline; award 4 points for each goal scored with proper throw-in; max 20

Score: _____ * 4 = _____

Skill 4: Push-Pass – Pass against a rebound wall

Setup: allow 30 seconds; set wall at 1 yard; award 1 point for each touch; max 20

Score: _____ * 1 = _____

Skill 5: Control – Perform Tic Tocs (with ball between legs, touch with inside of the foot, alternating feet)

Setup: allow 30 Seconds; award 1/4 point for each touch; max 20

Score: _____ / 4 = _____

Assessment Total: _____ = _____

After the Season

Although not strictly related to the U8 University, there are a few things that our region's coaches should do after the season ends. First and foremost, take a breath! Know that you've done good work, and that what you've done has impacted the lives of children and their families, sometimes in ways that you didn't recognize at the time. If the players, parents, and other family members thank and compliment you, don't shrug it off-accept their thanks and compliments gracefully, because you've earned them.

After the season ends, the region registrar will ask you to submit rankings of the players on your team. Please take a few moments and fill out the player ranking. It helps the region adhere to the AYSO philosophy of Balanced Teams.

Finally, especially after the Spring season, keep an eye out for a request to bring your equipment in to the AYSO office. Bringing the equipment back in allows the region's equipment manager to make sure that our coaches will have the equipment they need in time for the start of the next season.