

# Options for U6, U8 and U10 Soccer Play

*The Game for All Kids!*<sup>®</sup>

Coaching Education Department

US Youth Soccer

# **“ACADEMY” Approach to Pre-10-Year-Old Player Development**

The "Academy Approach" is the same as saying "Scrambled." This is the terminology we sometimes use in the National Youth License and the Coaching Schools; it has been borrowed mainly from the Dutch, and is currently being practiced around the world in regard to youngsters at this age. We are encouraging coaches, clubs/organizations to utilize this format.

It has to do strictly with the setting up of Organized Recreational Soccer Programs. The main idea is no organized league play and using a "non results oriented" philosophy. We preface this "best practice" with research from sports and child psychologists, and pediatricians, who state "recreational soccer" should be organized (if it is to be organized at all for children under the age of 8) to allow the kids to play because they love to win, not have to win, and the goal is to compete to do your best rather than compete to "be the best".

This is my take on the "Academy Approach":

Interested Parents/Guardians register their children to play in a Club/Recreation Department etc.

1. After paying fee and filling out all of the necessary paperwork, receive any other paperwork schedules, directions etc. they get a t-shirt (optional--a ball). Both items have the club/organization logo.
2. The children are randomly pooled into small groups (6-10 is ideal for these age groups, but definitely no more than 10) that are each assigned a Parent/Coach (es) (state/national Licensed preferred). They get together once a week for 45 minutes to an hour to have a practice that stresses the "game approach" (the "Y" License Philosophy).
3. "Game Day"-- Saturday (or Sunday)

Set up:

Cone out small-sided fields for the number of registered players

Place 4 pinnies on each SSG field.

2-3 Administrators/Assistants check-in children from a general list as they arrive.

Group all the children once they have arrived and randomly break them into 3-4 smaller groups and do a brief fun warm-up (everyone with a ball).

Next, randomly scramble players onto the fields until all fields are full.

We want each player to have a chance to play with each other, as opposed to having set teams. So after each game we will rescrumble the players. With U6s the rescrumble is as simple as moving 2-3 players to the next field over. With U8s I like to use the following:

**GAME DURATION:**

"8" minutes each for U6s (3v3 No GK; 25x20--field and goal size can be adjusted)

"10" minutes each for U8s (4v4 No GK; 35x20--field and goal size can be adjusted)

Players play 4 games.

There is a 5-minute period (adjustable) in between each game to get a drink, rescrumble the players and get them to their next field.

**NO REFEREES OR ADULTS ON THE FIELD OF PLAY:**

Each field assigned at least one of the assigned "Parent/Coaches" to supervise to "lead the activity", NO COACHING ALLOWED, and they also serve as "shepherders" for the U6s when the ball goes out the field of play. For U8s see below to put ball back into play.

**ALL LAWS OF THE GAME MODIFIED:**

**NO KICKOFF TO START OR AFTER A GOAL IS SCORED**

Every Game starts with a "Draw" in the middle of the field. After a goal is scored, any player puts ball back into play immediately from the team that was just scored on.

**NO THROW IN, CORNER KICK, OR GOAL KICK**

For U6s "herd" them back onto the field, for U8s a ball that goes out the sides is brought back using the "hustle rule"-- the first player to retrieve the ball wins possession and puts it back into play either with a pass or a dribble--their choice (this rule optional). I like it because it teaches kids not only to make decisions but also less time is wasted and it teaches them the importance of transitioning quickly when the ball goes out of play. Any ball going out the ends (if it is a corner kick situation) all corner kicks are to be short corners; on a goal kick situation, put the ball in play with a pass or a dribble.

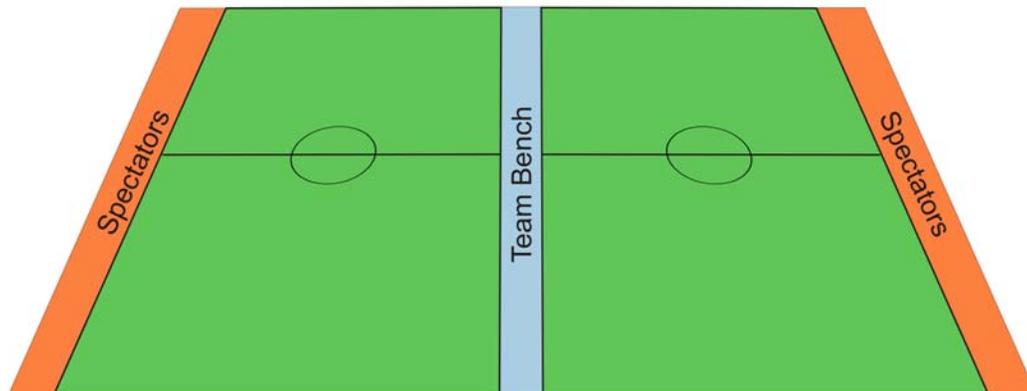
**NO OFFSIDE RULE** for U6s, for U8s

**HANDLING:** U6s who "handle" the ball on the field of play should be told by the "Parent/Coach" that it is not allowed in the game and the game should continue once it hits the ground, continue playing. For U8s the same, but the game can and should be stopped. Play is restarted with an indirect free kick.

**FOULS:** U6s same as "handling," U8s stop the game and restart with an indirect free kick.

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### Suggested Set-up for 3v3 Fields Dual Mode



## Coaching

One of the issues that will come up is the number of coaches it will take to implement this small-sided games format. In the typical American sport a coach can have a direct impact on the result of the game. In soccer a coach's job is done during training because when it comes to the game, it is truly the players game. This is one reason why a coach in the small-sided game atmosphere can and should be more of the "guide on the side" and not the "sage on the stage".

If you look at the field setup with the U6, U8, and U10's it is possible that one "primary" coach could work with the two groups of players from their team at the same time. Looking at the U6 and U8 models specifically, on one field could be the "primary" coach and the other could be an assistant/parent volunteer. At half time, the two coaches simply switch fields. So really the number of coaches stays the same in the "Split Game" model. With the U10's take your roster of 14 players and split them into two groups, so you would only have two subs instead of 8. A coach could watch both matches at the same time and rotate players.

Another option is for one primary coach to stand in between the two playing fields and watch both games simultaneously while rotating players in and out.

## "CC" Days

Yet another way to go for a recreational organization is to have "CC" days. "CC" stands for Cooperatively Competing. This could be done for the U6 and U8's although not limited to the U10's. In this format, players come to the field(s) and go through training with a director of coaching and his/her staff, then simply go and play using the numbers recommended for each age group. This can educate the parent/coach who sometimes has never seen a soccer game and needs the opportunity to watch someone work with children in the youngest age groups. It also allows the players to play with someone new each and every week and indirectly work on cooperating skills instead of competitive skills. This method can blend the two approaches in having players cooperatively competing with and against other players.

This is a different approach than the normal type of league with teams competing against one another, but still one in which development can be considered an option because remember that kids at the ages of U6 and U8 can say the word "team", but do they really know what it means? The parent(s) do, but in the end, the players just want to participate and have fun. So, instead of having twenty different colors of uniforms, an organization could just have reversible t-shirts and the players turn them inside and out when playing.

- Example: You have 600 players in the U6 and U8 age groups based on roster sizes of 6 to 8, which breaks down to approximately 74 to 75 teams. This would result in having 6 to 7 time slots needed to play matches on a Saturday afternoon.
- **Sample Schedule**
- Teams 1-12 Play from 8:00-8:40
- Teams 13-24 Play from 8:45-9:25
- Teams 25-37 Play from 9:30-10:10
- Teams 38-50 Play from 10:15-10:55
- Teams 50-62 Play from 11:00-11:40
- Teams 62-74 Play from 11:45-12:25

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# **Oklahoma Soccer Association – Player Development Guide**

**Developed by: Peter McGahey**

## **Team Formation**

With the 'Player' being the focus of all the decisions at the U6 – U10 age group, formal teams in the classic sense are NOT the most developmentally appropriate avenue for development of these players.

The following is an explanation of how to structure a program both without forming teams and with forming teams.

## **U6 – Academy Format**

1. Players will be broken into large practice groups based on Neighborhood/School for the purpose of practice sessions.
2. ALL the players in a particular Neighborhood/School practice group will practice at the same time and location.
3. These Neighborhood/School practice groups will be between 24 and 32 players each.
4. Several volunteer supervisors/coaches will be identified to assist with each Neighborhood/School training group. The ratio of coach to player at this age should be kept between 7 or 8 to 1.
5. Each week these Neighborhood/School training groups will be randomly divided into groups of 7 or 8 players for purpose of practice.
6. At least one Staff Coach or experienced and licensed coach from the club will supervise the once per week practice for each Neighborhood/School practice group. This coach will set up the practice session prior to the practice and communicate the session to the volunteer supervisors/coaches. They will also work with the volunteer supervisors/coaches providing 'on site coach training'.
7. Weekly games can be in a mini-game format (Each player plays in four ten-minute mini-games) or can be a traditional 32-minute 4-quarter game. Variety is acceptable.
8. Players will play with a NEW group of players each week. Each week the rosters for games will be randomly divided from all the players in the Neighborhood/School group. This list will be posted on the club web site the Wednesday before a Saturday game.
9. The Academy format allows 'new' players to be signed up and added at any time.

## **U6 – Team Format**

1. U6 players will be assigned to teams with their neighborhood and school friends as much as possible.
2. A coach will be found for each team.
3. Each team will set or be assigned a practice time and location.
4. Teams will be scheduled a game once per week.
5. Clubs are encouraged to use the dual field/split game (two games side by side) scheduling method to maximize playing time for players.

6. Roster size.
  - a. Single Field Game Schedule:
    - i. Minimum: 4
    - ii. Maximum: 6
  - b. Dual Field Game Schedule:
    - i. Minimum: 8
    - ii. Maximum: 10
7. Teams will be allowed to continue in tact from season to season and year to year.
  - a. Re-formation of teams each year or each season is counter-productive to player development. It may seem that it is the correct thing to do in terms of 'fairness' and 'equity' but ultimately breaking teams up results in many unnecessary feelings of uneasiness. These feelings of uneasiness can contribute to players not participating, both in the short and long term
8. New players are added to teams on an 'as needed' basis. Example – lose a player; next player to sign-up from that neighborhood/school is added to that team.

### **U8 – Academy Format**

1. Players will be broken into large practice groups based on Neighborhood/School for the purpose of practice sessions. These groups should be a continuation of the U6 Neighborhood/School practice groups
2. ALL the players in a particular Neighborhood/School practice group will practice TWO nights per week at the same time and location.
3. These Neighborhood/School practice groups will be between 24 and 32 players each.
4. Several volunteer coaches will be identified to assist with each Neighborhood/School training group. The ratio of coach to player at this age should be kept between of 8 or 10 to 1.
5. These Neighborhood/School training groups will be randomly divided into groups 8 or 10 players for purpose of practice.
6. At least one Staff Coach or experienced and licensed coach will lead at least ONE practice session per week for each Neighborhood/School practice group. This coach will set up the practice session prior to the practice and communicate the session to the volunteer coaches. They will also work with the volunteer coaches providing 'on site coach training'.
7. Volunteer coaches may conduct one session per week for the Neighborhood/School practice group without supervision of the Staff Coach or experienced and licensed coach.
8. The second session per week can be optional.
9. Weekly games can be in a mini-game format (Each player plays in five 10-minute mini-games) or can be a traditional 48-minute 4-quarter game. Variety is acceptable.
10. Each week the rosters for games will be randomly divided from all the players in the Neighborhood/School group. This list will be posted on the club web site the Wednesday before a Saturday game.
11. The Academy format allows 'new' players to be signed up and added at any time.

### **U8 – Team Format**

1. U8 players will be assigned to teams with their neighborhood and school friends as much as possible. Or will be a continuing team from the U6 age group.
2. A coach will be found for each team. Or the U6 coach will continue with the team.
3. Each team will set or be assigned practice times and locations.
4. Teams will be scheduled a game once per week.
5. Clubs are encouraged to use the dual field/split game (two games side by side) scheduling method to maximize playing time for players.
6. Roster size.
  - a. Single Field Game Schedule:
    - i. Minimum: 6
    - ii. Maximum: 8
  - b. Dual Field Game Schedule:
    - i. Minimum: 10
    - ii. Maximum: 12
7. Teams will be allowed to continue in tact from season to season and year to year.
8. U8 teams therefore can be a continuation of a U6 team from the previous season.
  - a. Re-formation of teams each year or each season is counter-productive to player development. It may seem that it is the correct thing to do in terms of 'fairness' and 'equity' but ultimately breaking teams up results in many unnecessary feelings of uneasiness. These feelings of uneasiness can contribute to players not participating, both in the short and long term.
9. New player are added to teams on an 'as needed' basis based on neighborhood/school. Example – lose a player; next player to sign-up from that neighborhood/school is added to that team.

### **U10 – Academy Format**

1. Players will be broken into large practice groups based on Neighborhood/School for the purpose of practice sessions. These groups should be a continuation of the U8 Neighborhood/School practice groups
2. ALL the players in a particular Neighborhood/School practice group will practice TWO nights per week at the same time and location.
3. These Neighborhood/School practice groups will be between 24 and 32 players each.
4. Several volunteer coaches will be identified to assist with each Neighborhood/School training group. The ratio of coach to player at this age should be kept between 12 or 14 to 1.
5. Each week these Neighborhood/School training groups will be randomly divided into groups of 12 or 14 players for purpose of practice.
6. Volunteer coaches will conduct TWO practice nights per week for each Neighborhood/School practice group.

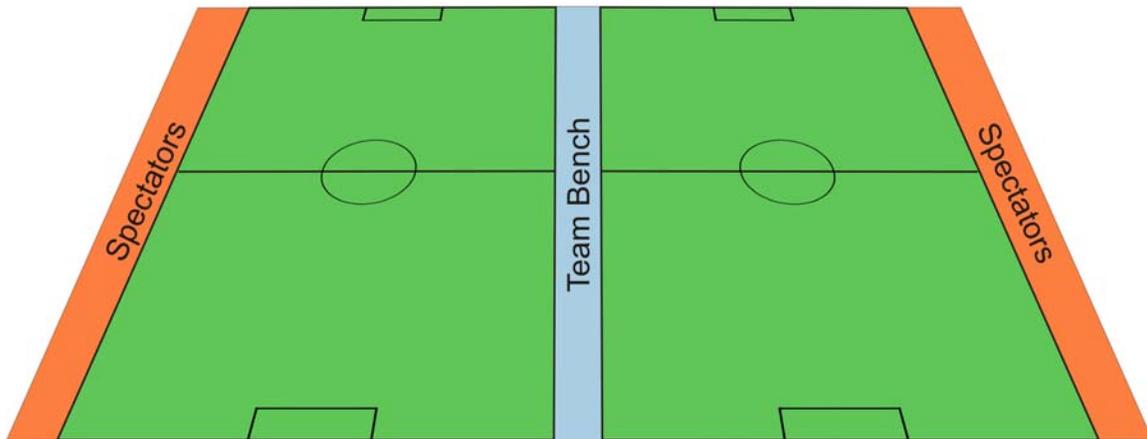
7. ALL the players from the U10 age group will practice at one time and location for the third practice session. (ALL the Neighborhood/School practice groups at one time.)
8. For the third practice session players will be divided up based on the number of players in attendance.
9. The third practice session will be lead by one Staff Coach or experienced coach from the club. This coach will set up the practice session prior to the practice and communicate the session to the volunteer coaches. They will also work with the volunteer coaches providing 'on site coach training'.
10. Weekly games should be competitively balanced. Players should play with a NEW group of players each week. Games consist of two 25-minute halves.
11. For clubs that only play games INTRA-CLUB, there are two options:
  - a. Each week the rosters for games will be randomly divided from all the players in the Neighborhood/School group to ensure competitively balanced games. This list will be posted on the club web site the Wednesday before a Saturday game.
  - b. Teams are established from the Neighborhood/School groups and then scheduled a 3 game seeding schedule. Following these three games a final 5 to 7 game schedule is drawn up with the idea of ensuring competitively balanced games.
12. For clubs that play games INTER-CLUB. Teams can be established from the Neighborhood/School groups and then scheduled accordingly. A 3 game preseason-seeding schedule is highly encouraged to ensure competitively balanced games.
13. The Academy format allows 'new' players to be signed up and added at any time, particularly those programs that establish their teams week to week.

### **U10 – Team Format**

1. U10 players will be assigned to teams with their neighborhood and school friends as much as possible. Or will be a continuing team from the U8 age group with added players.
2. A coach will be found for each team. Or a U8 coach will continue with the team.
3. Each team will set or be assigned practice times and locations.
4. Teams will be scheduled a game once per week.
5. Clubs are encouraged to use the dual field/split game (two games side by side) scheduling method to maximize playing time for players.
6. Roster size.
  - a. Single Field Game Schedule:
    - i. Minimum: 9
    - ii. Maximum: 11
    - iii. Recommended: 10
  - b. Dual Field Game Schedule:
    - i. Minimum: 14
    - ii. Maximum: 16
    - iii. Recommended: 14
7. Teams will be allowed to continue in tact from season to season and year to year.

- a. U10 teams therefore can be a continuation of a U8 teams from the previous season with additional players.
  - b. Re-formation of teams each season or each year is counter-productive to player development. It may seem that it is the correct thing to do in terms of 'fairness' and 'equity' but ultimately breaking teams up results in many unnecessary feelings of uneasiness. These feelings of uneasiness can contribute to players not participating, both in the short and long term.
8. New player are added to teams on an 'as needed' basis based on neighborhood/school. Example – lose a player; next player to sign-up from that neighborhood/school is added to that team.

### Suggested Set-up for 4v4 Fields Dual Mode

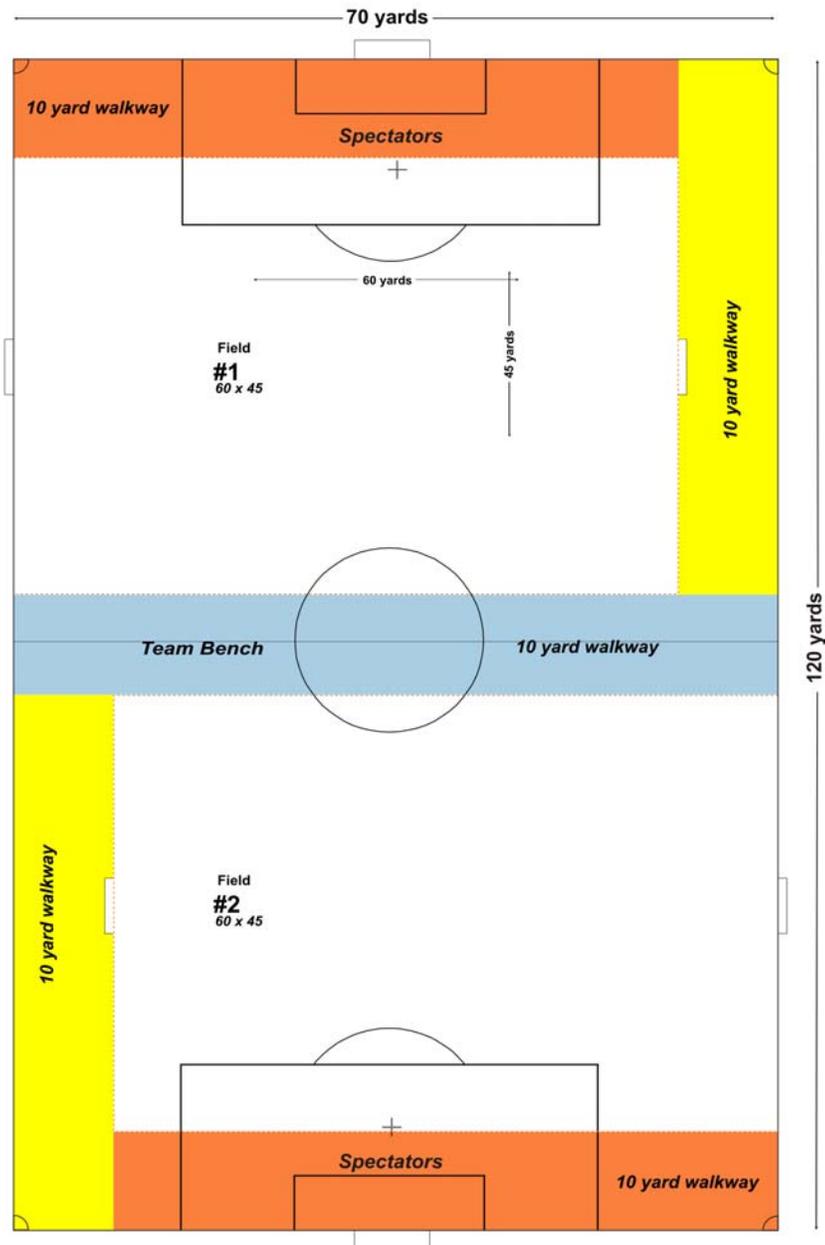


They do have an age appropriate practice of 1 hour 15 minutes during the week. On Friday evenings or Saturday mornings, they play 3 vs. 3. Coaches put them with different teammates each week (round robin of games, two 8 minute halves, 1 referee, scrimmage vests, 20 X 30 yard fields.). At 8, we will give them a few 5 vs. 5 games, and at 9 we actually begin to form a rostered team. Our "rec" program, is basically an intramural type set-up, we just don't call it that because of the parents' perception.

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### Suggested Set-up for 6v6 Fields

*Dividing a 120 x 70 field into 2 - 60 x 45 fields (maximum field size)*



# FOOTWORKS

This is a program run by the local soccer club to foster the development of ball skills for players' seven to ten years old. FOOTWORKS is open to any and all players and participation as a "team" is discouraged. Instead the emphasis is put upon the children playing with the ball to acquire a passion for playing skillfully and intelligently with the ball. To this end when players arrive for a FOOTWORKS session they should be asked to join a different group of players each time. This will also allow them the chance to make new friends. Mixing age groups is encouraged since the focus is on technique, not competition.

Every third session the players should also be exposed to a different coach.

Skills should be taught in game-like activities that are age appropriate. The coaches must work out a lesson plan for each session. Each FOOTWORKS session should be forty-five to sixty minutes long. The last ten to fifteen minutes of the session should be playing a 4 versus 4 match. A different technique should be taught each week. The players must be encouraged to work on their ball skills at home, during recess at school, in pick-up games around the neighborhood and at their soccer team training sessions. FOOTWORKS coaches could also assign soccer homework, such as ball lifting, dribbling moves, ball juggling, etc.

The coaches involved must be those best suited to coaching children. These coaches must have earned a certificate from one of the state level youth modules. Ideally all of the coaches involved should have the full National Youth License, also known as the "Y" License.

One session should be held each week for four to six weeks. The best time would be a weekday evening. A lighted field in a central location is best.

The State Staff Coaches will be glad to conduct two clinics to help a local club get the FOOTWORKS program off the ground. A single two hours clinic should be held for the coaches who will run the FOOTWORKS sessions. Another two hours clinic should be scheduled for players. One hour for under eight players and one hour for under ten players. The coaches who will run the sessions locally must attend these player clinics and assist the State Staff Coaches.

A nominal fee should be charged to the players, perhaps \$3.00 to \$5.00 per session. This money would then be used to purchase the equipment needed to conduct the FOOTWORKS sessions, pay for the lights, etc. The coaches travel and meal expenses should be paid from this fund. Further from this fund and other club funds the fees should be paid for these coaches to attend the National Youth License.

The equipment needed will be cones of various colors, sizes and shapes; junior size bibs of various colors, a first aid kit, a ball pump and portable goals are a great asset. Of course a drinking water supply is mandatory.

Please contact the coaching department at your state soccer association office to make arrangements to implement FOOTWORKS in your area.

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