

San Francisco Vikings Soccer Club

U5 and 6:

Duration of Practice:

- 30 to 45 minutes is the best option for these ages
- Majority of practice should be spent in ratios of one ball per child or one ball per two children

Practice should involve fun activities that encourage the children to explore their physical abilities. The activities should be activity-based games that help them experiment with the rolling, spinning and bouncing qualities of the ball. **There should be no waiting in lines** (especially to perform a pre-determined movement or required action). Children at this age love to use their imagination when they play. Keep this in mind when designing games. Also their ability to stay focused on any one thing is very limited. Keep activities short and simple. Allow plenty of opportunities for short breaks and water, because at these ages, children work hard and tire quickly. It can be helpful to include parents in the practice/playtime so they can take ideas home with them to their backyards or parks. Most importantly keep everyone actively involved with a ball as much as possible.

Best Qualities of a Coach for This Age Player:

Patience, good humor, and a willingness to see the world through a child's eyes, the ability to speak their language and accept that the children's play will not look at all like soccer. Remember, fun is a part of the game: if it is not fun, they won't want to learn it.

Game Application:

- 3 v 3 is best option
- No goal keepers
- 30 yds x 20 yds – 40 yds x 25 yds field size
- Size 3 ball
- Restarts with dribble in or kick in

Coaches/Parents should be positive and encouraging. Specific soccer related information should be limited to basic ideas (such as how best to keep the ball from running out of bounds to often). There should not be any discussions about positions or any other team concepts.

Progression of Practices:

- Experimenting with the ball (dribbling, juggling, anything using the ball, should be an activity that is fun for the kids) At practice ensure that there is one ball (properly inflated) per player
- Fun games (Sharks and minnows, Pac man, Stop and go, etc...)
- 3 v 3 game to goal (goal on both end lines for players to shoot at)

San Francisco Vikings Soccer Club

Technical/Skill Emphasis:

- Dribble with all sides of both feet
- Dribble away from defender and out of trouble
- Dribble around/past a defender
- Soft first touch
- Allow players to experiment with the ball

Tactical Considerations:

- Avoid tactical considerations at this age
- No emphasis on positions
- Limited instructions on rules – just get them going in the right direction

Psychological Emphasis:

- FUN! FUN! FUN!
- Exciting and positive intro to the game. Use parents to help
- No emphasis on winning
- Encourage trying over performing

Physical Considerations:

- Stay active. Any fitness should be as a result of playing the game
- Fun interactive activities which incorporate a ball will improve balance and agility.

Number of Matches per Calendar Year:

Children at these ages should be playing few organized games, about 8-15 per year. Playing with and against their teammates during practice times is sufficient and is to be encouraged.

Consider This:

"A child's biological age is an important factor determining age-appropriate tasks. However, the reality of Youth and Junior soccer is that, with emphasis on team play, match results, and competition, the American player is often graduating to the next level of soccer without having the proper tools. They are moving to this next phase of the game based on their biological age (their age in years), without regard for their "soccer age" (their level of soccer development). Coaches at the U-12 level for example, may voice frustration at their players' inability to "figure out" tasks and concepts, such as team possession and team defending. Consider a student in Trigonometry class who is being introduced to concepts like sine and cosine. Imagine how difficult this will be for the student to "figure out" if he/she had not been properly taught the fundamentals of math - addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The student might even understand some trigonometric concepts, but lack the basic tools to work out a correct solution. This student should not have been promoted to this next level of math. It is the same in soccer. The success of each new skill and concept is based upon skills and concepts already learned. The more comfortable a player is with the ball, the more options he/she will have to

San Francisco Vikings Soccer Club

solve each soccer challenge he/she faces." - U.S. Soccer

"Between the ages of 12 to 14, children often experience a physical growth spurt that affects their balance and coordination. Oftentimes, they gain physical strength and power, but temporarily lose agility and suppleness. As soccer players, this means potentially losing some control over the ball. If the technical foundation is not strong, soccer is no longer fluid and fun for those players. It is at this point that these players may move toward sports where it is easier for them to achieve some level of success - more traditionally American sports that demand "hand-eye" coordination such as baseball, basketball, and lacrosse. It is critical, therefore, that we ensure that the players are getting the necessary technical foundation at the younger ages. This may prevent the loss of players during the middle school years who are capable and athletic, yet lack the foundation to pull them through their temporary physical awkwardness." - U.S. Soccer

