

Increasing “Gender (Athletic) Differentiation”
Buddy-Buddy behavior (w/ Coach)
Team Success Important

Skill Differentiation - high
Seeks approval

Age Group Dynamics

Under 12/14

By the Under 12–14 level, you’re really starting to see “**real soccer**” take shape. Players are combining skills, strategy, and teamwork—and games can actually be quite exciting to watch. Here are 10 fun things to look for that will help you enjoy what’s happening:

- **Formations Become Visible:** Teams may line up in shapes like 4-3-3 or 3-5-2. You’ll notice players holding positions and the team moving as a unit.
- **Off-the-Ball Movement:** Some of the smartest play happens away from the ball—runs into space, overlapping teammates, and creating passing options.
- **Purposeful Build-Up Play:** Instead of just kicking it forward, teams may pass out of the back and build an attack step-by-step.
- **Switching the Field:** Watch for players passing the ball across the field to the opposite side to find open space—this shows growing tactical awareness.
- **Defensive Team Shape:** Defenders work together now—holding a line, marking players, and stepping up as a group.
- **Communication is Constant :** Players are talking a lot more—calling for the ball, organizing defense, and encouraging each other.
- **Set Pieces Matter:** Corner kicks, free kicks, and throw-ins start to have real strategy behind them.
- **Speed of Play Increases:** Decisions are quicker—players have less time on the ball and must think fast.
- **Physical and Emotional Intensity:** Games become more competitive. You’ll see effort, frustration, excitement, and determination all show up.
- **Individual Style Emerges:** Players begin to develop identities—playmakers, defenders, scorers, leaders. You can start to see what kind of player your child might become.

At this age, the game becomes a mix of **skill, teamwork, and strategy**. If you focus not just on the ball but on movement, communication, and decision-making, it becomes a much richer (and more fun) experience to watch.