4-6 YR OLDS MENTAL AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Posted by STLCoach - 18 Feb 2010 03:44

The physical and mental characteristics of four to six year old soccer players
Generally speaking, players up to the age of six are:

Easily distracted and have a very short attention span, typically only a few seconds. So you must play games that are easily explained and have very simple rules, like Sharks and Minnows. If you launch into a lecture or try to get them to play games that can't be explained in about twenty seconds you must expect your players to look like they are ignoring you. Their short attention span also means that you need to prepare several games for four to six year olds to play. When I coach children in this age group I plan for a new game every ten minutes.

Single minded. They can only consider one problem at a time. So coaching sessions for players up to the age of six need to focused on a single topic. If you want to practice the push pass, for example, don't get sidetracked into shooting practice.

Psychologically fragile. Four to six year olds have delicate egos that are easily damaged. Never criticise such young soccer players and make sure you give lots of praise for effort, not just achievement.

Not motivated to play soccer by external factors and they react poorly to pressure. So try to view matches as just another practice session (and try to get your parents to do the same). The word 'winning' should not be in your vocabulary and please don't give medals or trophies for 'player of the match'.

Solo players. Your pre-schoolers will play on a team but are not really part of the team. So in practice sessions you may think you are playing 4v4 but really it's 1v7! The same goes for matches.

Egocentric. Everything is 'me', 'mine' or 'my'. Sharing doesn't come naturally so try to use games that require one ball for each player or games that require the active participation of all your players at the same time. Games such as 'Blob Tag' (see below) are ideal.

Constantly moving. Very young soccer players can't pace themselves, they will run until they drop. Fortunately, they also recover rapidly so make sure you plan for lots of drinks breaks.

Limited in terms of their physical coordination. They are still learning how objects in their world react to them and their hand/eye/foot coordination is not developed. Their catching and throwing skills are

undeveloped so they will struggle to play games like netball.
If you keep these mental and physical characteristics in mind when planning your coaching sessions you will avoid 95% of the 'discipline' problems that beset so many coaches.

However, we must remember that sometimes kids will be kids and there will be days when you really can't do anything with them. If that happens, don't overreact, just accept it as inevitable part of youth soccer coaching. Have a drinks break, set up for a game you know they will enjoy and try again next week!

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4-6 YR OLDS Coaching pre-school children

Posted by STLCoach - 16 Jul 2010 03:24

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Coaching pre-school children? This is for you
1. Do pre-school children live in a parallel universe?
You need to approach the coaching of two- to four-year-olds in a completely different way to coaching older children.

Children who have started school are learning to listen and concentrate when adults are talking. Two- to four-year-olds do not have this skill. They exist in a unique world that is not easy for adults to break into.

Sitting them down and explaining what you want them to do (even in the simplest of terms) just won't cut it. You have to show them and make them want to copy you (see point 8, below). And you need the help of their most significant others - their carers/parents.

2. Parental involvement is key
Coaching pre-school children is labour intensive. Try not to have more than eight children to a coach and make good use of the one resource that most coaches ignore - the parents/carers who bring their children to practice.

Each player should have an adult partner who works with them for the duration of the teaching element of your sessions. This has three benefits. First, it keeps the children engaged while you work your way around the group checking each child's progress. Second, it engages the parents and makes them feel important. Third, it allows you to set soccer 'homework'.

3. Set homework
Practising at home between training sessions is very important. Ask your players and their parents to spend a little time working at home on the skills you show them in practice. This will accelerate the learning process dramatically.

4. Session length
Keep practice sessions short - 45 minutes is long enough. Any longer and you risk tiring out your players and making them fractious.

5. Don't just teach them soccer
Soccer coaching presents many enrichment opportunities. Colours, numbers and social skills can be taught very easily at the same time as soccer techniques, so why not do it?

Ask the children about the colour of the cones, how many toes they have, the shape of a ball, or the need to say 'thank you' when you give them something. Parents will really appreciate this 'added value'.

6. Rules
In pre-school coaching, as in all youth soccer coaching, you need to have rules. Children like to know what they should and shouldn't do, and they feel more comfortable when they know what will happen if they step over the line.

Older children should be involved in the creation of the rule book. But this isn't possible with younger children. So I have just one rule. If I raise my hand, the children should stop what they are doing, pick up their ball up and listen to me.

Parents should be made aware of this rule and told that if their child becomes disruptive, it's best they take them away from the group until they think they are ready to rejoin.

7. K.I.S.B.R - Keep It Simple But do it Right.
Work on one skill at a time and don't move on before all your children can do it correctly. The following example, for instance, is the process for teaching pre-schoolers how to kick a ball with their toes:

You demonstrate the skill with an assistant holding the ball still in front of you.
Ask for a player to come to the front and show the group how to do it. Encourage a big round of applause for the brave volunteer!
Send the children away with their adult partner to practise.
You work your way around, checking that toes are pointed at the ball and the children put their foot back on the ground between each kick. Make sure they kick with their left and right foot.
Then play a simple game that involves kicking a ball (there are lots of those on the footy4kids website!).
Always praise correct technique and/or effort.

8. A suggested practice session format
Sit in a circle with the children/parents and talk about the session objective.
Although they don't need it, it's good practice to begin with a warm-up. Sing a song with actions or just sit and wiggle your arms and legs.
Practise the skill of the day using K.I.S.B.R
Have a lot of drinks break (small children don't have very efficient cooling systems).
Play a game - although young children do like repetition, you need to have a number of short games at your disposal. Once again, there are plenty to choose from on the footy4kids website.
Include work on co-ordination. For example, get your players to dribble a ball with their toes then, on your command, stop and stand on one leg, or hop, skip and jump. You can also practise colour recognition by holding up a coloured cone instead of giving a verbal command.
Finish with short 3v3 or 4v4 matches. Make a big fuss of anyone who uses the technique you have been working on. Recognition is a powerful motivator.
Gather everyone together. Ask if they had fun? Ask if they have learned anything? Then send them home, smiling!
Coaching pre-school children can be very rewarding. They are easy to please and will try really hard to please you too. Just keep it simple, embed one technique at a time, set homework, play lots of games and involve their parents from the start.

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