

# CHARACTERISTICS OF 6 - 12 YEAR OLD SOCCER PLAYERS

## AGES 6 TO 8...THE WONDER YEARS

- Attention span is not at a "competitive" stage
- Inclined towards small group activities.
- Always in motion: scratching; blinking; jerking; rocking....
- **Easily bruised psychologically. They will remember negative comments for a long time. Shout praise. Give "hints".**
- They want everybody to like them.
- Developing physical confidence.
- Starting to imitate older players or sports heroes. Want the same "gear" as them.
- Lack sense of pace. They go flat out until they drop.
- Skeletal system growing rapidly. Often results in apparent lack of coordination.
- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed. Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. Make sure that they get adequate water breaks.
- Limited understanding with personal evaluation. "If they try hard, they performed well" regardless of the actual performance. Thus, they need to be encouraged constantly, and asked, "Now, can you do this?"
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play, and remembering what goal they are going for... but, in the heat of battle, they will sometimes still forget. They still find it difficult to really be aware of more than one thing at a time.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT**

Six, seven and eight-year-old players are a bit more compliant than their U-6 counterparts. They will be able to follow 2 or 3 step instructions and are starting to have a good understanding about what it means to play a "game". They are also starting to cooperate more with their teammates. In fact, they now will recognize that they even have teammates by the fact that they occasionally, and I

mean occasionally, will pass the ball to a teammate, on purpose. Often, they will repeat the phrase "I can't do that!" But, will quickly run to you to show you that they can, even when they only think that they can. Some other things that you can expect to happen during a season with this age group are:

- There will be at least 200-300 falls during the season, but now they will usually pick themselves back up.
- The puddle in front of the goal is still too tempting to resist.
- Some of the girls are a lot tougher than the boys.
- They will still want to wear a training bib, even when the color is identical to their shirt.

**It will be impossible to remember who is whose best friend as you try to make up teams.**

## **AGES 9 AND 10...TURNING THE CORNER?**

- Gross and small motor skills becoming more refined and reliable. Boys and girls begin to develop separately.
- Ability to stay on task is lengthened. They have the ability to sequence thought and actions.
- Greater diversity in playing ability and physical maturity.
- Skills are emerging. Becoming more predictable and recognizable.
- Some children begin moving from concrete thinking to abstract thinking.
- Able to pace themselves, to plan ahead.
- Increased self-responsibility. They remember to bring their own equipment.
- Starting to recognize basic tactical concepts, but not exactly sure why certain decisions are better.
- Repetition of technique is very important, but it must be dynamic, not static.
- Continued positive reinforcement needed.
- Explanations must be brief, concise, and mention "why".
- Becoming more "serious". Openly, intensively competitive, without intention of fouling.
- Still mostly intrinsically motivated. " Peer pressure starting to be a factor.

- Adult outside of the family may take on added significance.
- Prefer identification with a team. Like to have good kit, equipment, balls.
- More inclined towards wanting to play instead of being told to play. Will initiate play more.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT**

Some coaches say that the 9 and 10 year-old players are beginning to "turn the corner" and starting to look like real soccer players. However, games are still frantically paced and unpredictable for the most part. These players are starting to find out how much fun it is to play the game skillfully, but they will still stop and laugh if the referee gets hit in the backside with the ball during a game. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They start to understand offside, but still forget themselves when the goal is in front of them.
- They will really beat up on each other during practice... especially boy's teams.
- During a game, the parents will scream out "HAND BALL" or "COME ON REF, CALL IT BOTH WAYS" at least fifteen times.
- They might cry after the game if they loose, but will forget it if you ask them if you want to go out for burgers and fries.
- You might actually catch them practicing on their own without you telling them to do so.
- Their parents are telling them to do one thing during the game, you are telling them another thing, but what they end up doing might be what their friend is telling them to do.
- You will see a pass that is deliberate. You might even see a "back pass"!

## **AGES 11 TO 14**

### **TRAINING**

Boys and girls at this age ...

- "Shoot up" in height when they enter puberty. This rapid growth creates an imbalance between the length of their torso and legs;

- Often find it difficult to move around in a fluid manner because of the physical changes they are experiencing
- On the other hand demonstrate greatly improved strength and speed.

## **CONSEQUENCES**

- The basic technical principles need to be adapted to this greater swiftness.
- Their ability to grasp concepts means: they can be taught more demanding tactics.

Fitness and stamina are improved, primarily through playing. Training should occasionally be supplemented by simple circuits; jumping exercises, games and exercises to improve reaction and acceleration.

## **PLAYING**

Boys and girls at this age ...

- Playing in a competitive team, i.e. in a group which shares the same objectives, norms and interests, find the "security" which they lack or consciously reject in other areas of their lives at this time. Psychological insecurity is stabilized merely by belonging to a team;
- Can also perform more specific tasks within the team because they have a better grasp of the game.

## **CONSEQUENCES**

- The recognition by teammates and coaches of the importance of individuals' performance in the team's success helps to boost young players' self-confidence. Each player must be given tasks geared towards his particular strengths without limiting individual initiative, creativity and enjoyment of the game.
- Main emphasis during games on the use of space and the careful build-up of play.

## **CARE**

Boys and girls at this age ...

- Distance themselves further from adults, looking to establish their own fixed place in the world;
- Are often prone to considerable mood swings and inconsistency in their performance during this orientation phase;
- Receive support from their friends and peers during this somewhat insecure process of "finding themselves."

## **CONSEQUENCES**

- Players at this age must be shown how to be independent and share responsibility.
- However, coaches must not issue all the orders, plan and organize everything, block out criticism. Instead, their main job is to encourage the youngsters to find their own solutions and develop their own ideas.

Each player must be allocated suitable responsibilities.