



***Long Term Player
Development Plan***



GUIDELINES for Youth Players U6-U18

The purposes of these guidelines are to provide coaches with:

- A long-term plan for player development for youth players U6-U18
- A baseline of expectations at each age group for coaches to organize their training around
- A club-wide plan that addresses player development in a stage by stage basis

It is important to note that each player is different. Players develop at different rates and times. Before the below guidelines are applied, first the individual player must be evaluated to determine a starting spot.

In organizing all training sessions, the below principles should apply to each training session.

1. Activities are developmentally appropriate
2. Coaches provide clear, concise, and correct information
3. Instruction is organized to move from simple to complex
4. A safe and appropriate training space is utilized
5. Decision making by players is required with activities
6. Activities have implications towards the game



U6

"Little Burners"

INDIVIDUAL PLAY

At this level, the primary concern of the adults is to facilitate activities that cater to frequent ball contacts and the development of basic motor skills. One player-one ball activities and various "fun games" are excellent complements to small-sided soccer games up to 3v3. The formation of teams is not recommended, with group activity "play days" replacing formal, structured play. All activities should include every player.

A black and white soccer ball is shown on the left side of the image, moving towards the right. Behind the ball is a large, bright orange and yellow trail of fire, suggesting speed and intensity.

U7-U8

INDIVIDUAL PLAY AND A LITTLE PASSING

The fascination for the ball, the desire to master it and the thrill of scoring goals provides the launching pad. The joy and pleasure of the game are best nurtured by encouraging freedom of expression and organizing children's play in small groups. The activities are best nurtured by allowing freedom of expression within small group situations. At this level, dribbling the ball is still the primary soccer focus, although passing can be expected and should be encouraged. Players will be much more aware of how to play soccer games and should be given more responsibility for making teams and rules and for keeping score. Games of up to 4v4 with no goalkeepers are excellent small-sided versions of soccer for these children and no formal teams should be created at this time.

Goalkeeping can be satisfied through "nearest the goal" or "no goalkeeper" rules, but should be decided by the participants. "Play Days" are recommended in lieu of league competitions, with activities designed to include every player. Small-sided soccer games should be the primary content of practice, with "fun games" designed to maximize ball contacts used in complement.

At the earlier ages, winning is not the primary emphasis of our program. At these ages individual skill development is much more important. MI Burn believes taking the short track to winning at the early ages may win games, but cheats players in their long term development. By stressing individual development, we will produce technically proficient players who can later be taught tactics.



U9-U10

INDIVIDUAL PLAY, SUPPORT AND BALL CIRCULATION, SMALL-GROUP TACTICS

The motivation to learn basic skills is very high at this age level. Children gradually begin to change from being self-centered to being self-critical and develop the need for group and/or team games. The game itself should be central to all skills training. Small sided games, which provide the right amount of pressure for the child's level of development are more appropriate. In addition to improving and refining individual play through technical repetition, small-group tactical awareness can be rapidly expanded. Games of up to 6v6 provide a natural balance between technical repetition and tactical complexity.

Granting players the freedom to creatively produce individual solutions to tactical and technical problems is a critical element of coaching. Improved vision and support are the tactical markers of this age, and improved ball circulation is achieved as players understand more about controlling and changing the rhythm of play. Goalkeepers should be frequently rotated.

At the earlier ages, winning is not the primary emphasis of our program. At these ages individual skill development is much more important. MI Burn believes taking the short track to winning at the early ages may win games, but cheats players in their long term development. By stressing individual development, we will produce technically proficient players who can later be taught tactics.

A black and white soccer ball is shown on the left side of the image, with a bright, orange and yellow flame trail extending from it towards the right. The background is dark, making the ball and the flame stand out.

U11-U12

INDIVIDUAL PLAY, SUPPORT AND COMBINATION PLAY, LARGE GROUP TACTICS

This is the “Golden Age of Learning”. Players yearn to improve, achieve, and be recognized as quality soccer players. Demonstrating is very important at this age. Players want to see success so they can intern emulate it. Activities should be game like with the appropriate amount of pressure. While still including significant periods of technical repetition and small-sided play to reinforce and refine the technical base, this is also an appropriate time to introduce and teach basic principles of play. The competitive structure will involve playing numbers of 8v8, 9v9 and 11v11. For the first time, players can appreciate the basic ideas of positioning and roles; meaning games involving possession in the midfield will be possible.

The early lessons of support and mobility can be expanded to evolve combinations in two’s and three’s, and defending can also become more coordinated as players learn to relate to each other in both attack and defense. Individual and group decision-making can be associated with purposeful changes in the rhythm of play, and movement away from the ball can become a critical element of problem solving. The careful introduction of activities designed to develop soccer-specific fitness find a foundation in this period.

A black and white soccer ball is shown on the left side of the image, moving towards the right. Behind the ball is a large, dynamic trail of orange and yellow flames, suggesting speed and intensity.

U13-U14

LARGE GROUP TACTICS, TEAM BUILDING

Adult standards and formal rules become the focal point during this period. Young teenagers are not polished soccer players, and the expansion and refinement of their technical base must still be the primary focus of these important years.

At U-13, patience will be required as the players' physical and tactical dimensions adapt to the larger field size and increased numbers. The pace of development quickens at this level due to the acceleration of physical and mental maturation. The demands of skill training as well as training loads should increase thus provoking improvement in mental toughness, concentration and diligence. Awareness of tactics within the game becomes an important facet of the learning process. Players tend to be self-critical, rebellious but have a strong commitment to the team. Practice activities should be geared towards improving decision-making under pressure, while challenging players to solve small and large group problems quickly and collectively. As defenders become stronger, faster and more aggressive, attacking players will require sharper instincts for creating and using space, particularly, when playing with their backs to goal.

Soccer-specific fitness activities should become integrated into an overall training and development plan, with caution advised with regard to over-training and burnout.

A black and white soccer ball is shown on the left side of the image, moving towards the right. Behind the ball is a large, dynamic trail of orange and yellow flames, suggesting speed and intensity.

U15-U16

FUNCTIONAL TRAINING, LEARNING TO WIN

This is a critical time in a player's development. Many stop playing due to other interests, lack of success, shortage of playing opportunities, and poor leadership. Players tend to be mentally tough, self confident, but with a need for attention and security. There is a need for team spirit, leadership and discipline within the team. This is truly the beginning of the formal "team" building years. As players begin to reach physical and technical maturity, training should seek to develop the skills specific to positioning. Training becomes more focused on functional (positional) play, and fitness becomes important as a means of achieving victory. Players' strategic understanding of soccer must be expanded to help make them coach-independent. Appreciation of the various systems of play, the study of individual and team tendencies, and the tactical applications of the laws become important aspects of player development.

A black and white soccer ball is shown on the left side of the image, moving towards the right. Behind the ball is a large, dynamic trail of fire in shades of orange, yellow, and red, suggesting speed and intensity.

U17-U18

THE ELITE STAGE

Fulfillment of a player's potential depends on his or her own efforts, the support of his or her teammates and the unselfish guidance of his or her coach. He/She must be exposed to a playing and training environment, which extends his/her mental, physical and technical capabilities to the limit.

He/She must have a sound understanding of the game's principles and concepts. Players should show emotional stability when confronted with pressure situations. Demanding and Challenging training sessions and matches are a must!