



## Developmental Needs for U8 and U9 Players



**Key Ingredient:** Introduction of new skills and allowing players more freedom to try new things. Encourage the players to create more, to use other players on the field to help them score a goal.

Players at this age are like sponges - they want to learn and like to be shown all sorts of new tricks, moves, and different ways to play with the ball. They enjoy seeing a player do something and the challenge of trying to do it themselves. This is a perfect opportunity for coaches to expose players to different skills and challenge them to perform them (without any pressure). Players can also begin to understand the meaning of “teammate” and can use each other to help achieve a goal of scoring or defending in numbers. Activities in practice should still involve all of the players and it is important for all players to have a soccer ball, but now you can introduce larger numbers to the game and encourage players to use each other on the field. Since you want to allow the players to play the game, always try to end your practices with the game - allow the players to play freely in a 4 v 4 or 5 v 5 situation that is similar to the real game - that is why your players come to practice! Here are some objectives to help you develop your players:

1. Encourage players to be creative with dribbling and demonstrate new ways to dribble, trap the ball, etc. Work on the development of good technique when performing these activities.
2. Demonstrate the use of shape and support in attack (triangles with 3 players, diamond with 4 players) and the idea of width and depth (length) to create good spacing for players on the field. Show them this during dead ball situations, such as throw-ins and goal-kicks.
3. Introduce the role of the goalkeeper and include all the players in learning some of the basic skills - Shot-stopping, body behind the ball, catching the ball and simple distribution.
4. Revisit the basic rules of the game and improve the technique of throw-ins and free kicks.

Continue to work on the individual skill of each player and encourage them to try things on their own or work away from soccer (juggling, passing against a wall, play with friends). As players develop their technical ability and comfort when around the ball, they will become better players and able to perform quicker than others. You should still be only practicing once a week, but you can increase the amount of practice time to 60-75 minutes. Remember to continue to encourage free play, but try to focus on the improvement of skill while still having fun. Keep all the players active in practice and have fun yourself!