

This handbook is intended to be used in conjunction with the US Youth Soccer Small-sided Game Official's Classroom Instruction. This 30 minute class will be a review of all of the information in this handbook as well as tips on how to manage the game, recognize a foul and handle difficult situations. For more information on this Handbook and continuing your referee instruction, please contact your state association or US Soccer for information on the video, "The Myths of the Game."

**Special Thanks to the US Youth Soccer National Referee Committee**

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"The Game Within the Child"  
*Dr. Ron Quinn*

Characteristics of Under 6 & Under 8 Children and "Describing the Player" are excerpts from the US Youth Soccer Parent Coach Primer by:  
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## **Player's Code**

- Play the game for the game's sake.
- Be generous when you win.
- Be graceful when you lose.
- Be fair always, no matter what the cost.
- Learn and follow the Laws of the Game.
- Work for the good of your team.
- Accept the decisions of the officials.
- Believe in the honesty of your opponents.
- Conduct yourself with honor and pride.



### **Welcome to the World of Soccer...**

Soccer is a universal sport. Every country in the world plays it. You and your child are joining over 3,000,000 youth players of US Youth Soccer. Go anywhere and you will be able to play and to become a part of the local action.



## **"The Game in the Child"**

The youth soccer player is defined as any child from pre-school through adolescence. The GAME WITHIN EACH CHILD is at the center of all decisions and actions taken by the child, coach and organization. It is the ultimate goal of youth soccer development within the United States to unlock the game within each child to reach the child's full soccer potential.



## **Describing the Player**

Anyone involved in coaching youth sports must understand the fact that all children grow at varying degrees with regard to the development of their minds and bodies. Though we have a tendency to lump children together in our educational and sport activities, we must understand that the best way to characterize them is by their individual differences.

Children come to us at a chronological age of five, six, seven, eight or nine, which shows that they are similar in chronological age only. At the ages of five through nine, children are either filling or lengthening their bodies, and no group of them does either at an exact time. Further, the physical aspect is but one part of the differential in their growth since, as their bodies are growing and changing, so too are their thinking and psyche. We must be very aware and sensitive to their maturity and mental development. Through our understanding of this development, we can better set our level of communication. Some five year olds come with a very serious outlook on matters... while others are so frivolous, that from moment to moment, the passing of an airplane or a butterfly will completely capture their attention. That is not to say we stand around and wait for them to grow; it is to say that is the nature of the player with whom we are dealing.

Since we are discussing a team sport, the social development of these young people is also a consideration. Factors like family grouping and/or placement within the family, coupled with the varied experiences they have had, are influences on their social growth.

So the make-up of this person coming to us to become a soccer player is multiple and diverse. The intent of the previous discussion is to assist you in your observations and analysis of your players. Further, using the above as a frame of reference, you may feel more confident in training sessions with your players.

## **Characteristics of U-6 Children**

Let's now turn our attention to some more specific notions of the characteristics of this young person known as the "developmental player".

- Short attention span
- most are individually oriented (me, my, mine)
- Constantly in motion
- Psychologically easily bruised
- Little or no concern for team activities
- Physical and psychological development of boys and girls quite similar
- Eye hand and/or eye foot coordination most primitive
- Love to run and jump
- Prefer large soft balls and Nerf balls
- Catching skills not developed
- Can balance on good foot
- NO SENSE OF PACE (GO FLAT OUT)  
This refers to their racing around in games until complete exhaustion sets in, at which point they stop, breathe, then restart at a torrid pace again.

## **Characteristics of U-8 Children**

- Attention span beyond U-6 but still not extended
- Inclined more toward group activities
- Still in motion
- Still very sensitive. (Dislikes personal criticism in front of peers)
- Beginning to develop physical coordination (Most can ride two wheeler at this point)
- Still into running, jumping, climbing and rolling.
- More into the real game through imitation of big guys. (Sports heroes becoming important)
- STILL LACK SENSE OF PACE. (GO FLAT OUT)

Soccer is a sport that aids in psychomotor development of boys and girls.

## **Advantages of Playing Small-sided Games**

### **Benefits to the Child:**

- More time with the coach
- More practical space to be successful
- Increased number of contacts with the ball
- More actual playing time
- Energetic workouts due to playing both offense and defense
- Required to make more decisions
- Experience repeating game situations more frequently
- The work rate and involvement of a player stays consistent
- While learning both offense and defense, a player will become more complete and will understand more readily the roles and importance of teammates
- The smaller ball is lighter and more easily kicked, trapped, dribbled and passed.

### **Benefits of the Small Field:**

- More efficient use of space
- Games can be played simultaneously across a full size field
- Children are physically more efficient in smaller space
- Takes less time to achieve goal or advance to goal, more successful
- Children are actively involved for a longer period of time

The game is simple and can be played without adult involvement. However, the games do have rules that players must learn to abide by.

### **Basic Rules:**

**Player Safety  
Player Fun  
Respect  
Sportsmanship**

*These basic rules apply to  
players, coaches, parents  
and spectators.*

## 3v3 Laws of the Game

Soccer has 17 rules called *Laws of the Game*.  
US Youth Soccer Guidelines for Under 6

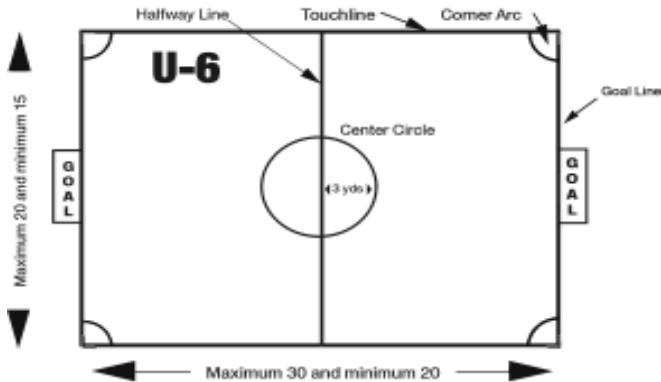
**1** The Field – flat, grassy field; its length no more than 30 yards nor less than 20 yards and its width not more than 20 yards nor less than 15 yards. The field will have distinctive markings called boundary lines. These lines make the field into a rectangle as diagrammed below. One additional line divides the field in half (the halfway line).

The purpose of soccer is to score goals so goals must be placed on either end of the field lengthwise. Goals can be two cones set a few feet apart or a more formal goal

that looks like a hockey goal (Six feet wide by four feet high) Cones, flags or discs can be used if goals with nets are unavailable.

**2** The Ball required – size 3. Larger balls are heavier and take the fun and safety out of the game. Make sure there are plenty of balls to go around – but only one is needed for the game!

**3** Maximum number of players will be determined by your local association. US Youth Soccer recommends that U6 play 3 v 3. Teams and games may be coed and EVERYONE plays a minimum of 50% of the game. Substitutions are allowed any time the ball is out of play. There are NO Goalkeepers.



**4 Players Equipment**-Players will want to wear a shirt, shorts, socks and a good pair of running shoes. Some may wear soft-cleated soccer shoes. Shin guards are required for safety reasons and should be covered by a pair of high socks. Clothing should not be restrictive.



**5 Officials**-(Game Manager, Coordinator, Observer, Director, Parent Volunteer/Coach) Your job is to keep the playing environment FUN, SAFE and focused on the child.

In addition you need to keep time, enforce the rules, stop and restart the game. When you stop the game because of a foul, ball out of play, goal or another reason, take the time to explain to the players why! This is their first experience with soccer, too, and the BEST time to educate all on the Laws of the Game.

**6 Assistant Referees**-Not used in the small-sided game.

**7 Duration of the Game**-Game length will be determined by your local association. Games for this age should last approximately 30-40 minutes.

US Youth Soccer recommends no more than 4 equal 8-minute quarters. This recommendation makes it easy for the coach to give each player equal time and allows rest between quarters. There should be a 2-3 minute break between periods for water and physical recovery.

*US Youth Soccer recommends substitutions between quarters to ensure that all players present play a minimum of 50% of the game.*

**8 Start of Play**-All players must be in their own half of the field with one team kicking off. Opponents must be 3 yards from the center mark at the kick off.

Before the game decide who will kick off to begin the game and then change the kick off team at the beginning of each quarter. Kick off is intended to ensure possession and must go forward to a teammate. The ball is not kicked to the other team.

**9 Ball In and Out of Play**-When the WHOLE of the ball goes over the WHOLE of a boundary line, the ball is out of play. Putting the ball back into play will be discussed later.

Remember, the FUN of the game is movement of the ball. When everyone has to stop to restart the game, the FUN has left the game for the moment. Try to keep the ball moving and not be too eager to call the ball out of play.

**10** **Method of Scoring**-A goal is scored when the WHOLE of the ball goes over the WHOLE of the part of the goal line defined by the cones or actual goal.

Scoring goals is possibly the MOST fun a soccer player has during a game. Give players every opportunity to score a goal.

**11** **Offside**-Offside is not used in the small-sided games.

**12** **Fouls and Misconduct**-Fouls can and will occur even at this level. All fouls shall result in an **indirect free kick** with opponents at least 3 yards away.

- Kicks or attempts to kick an opponent
- Trips or attempts to trip an opponent
- Jumps at an opponent
- Charges an opponent
- Strikes or attempts to strike an opponent
- Pushes an opponent
- Tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball
- Holds an opponent
- Spits at an opponent
- Handles the ball deliberately
- Plays in a dangerous manner
- Impedes the progress of an opponent

Soccer is a contact sport and each action is dealt with at the time it occurs. **Explain the foul in simple terms**, restart and let the game continue.

**13** **Free Kicks**-All free kicks will be **indirect**. That means that a goal may not be scored until the ball has been played or touched by a second player of either team. All opposing players should be 3 yards away.

**14** **Penalty Kick**-Not used in small-sided games.

**15** **Throw-in** Replaced by the kick-in. When the ball goes completely over one of the longer boundary lines last touched by a player on Team "A", a player on Team "B" shall kick the ball back into play.

This is football – let's play the ball with the feet and get comfortable with the ball. More touches means better technique!

**16** **Goal Kick**-If the team attempting to score a goal kicks the ball over the goal line outside the goal posts, the opposing team puts the ball back into play with a goal kick. The kick should be taken within 2-3 yards of the goal and opposing players must be 5 -6 yards away.

**17** **Corner Kick**-Use an indirect free kick with the opponent 3 yards away. If the team defending against a goal being scored, kicks the ball over the goal line outside the goal posts, the opposing team puts the ball back into play with a corner kick.

## 4v4

### Laws of the Game

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US Youth Soccer Guidelines for Under 8

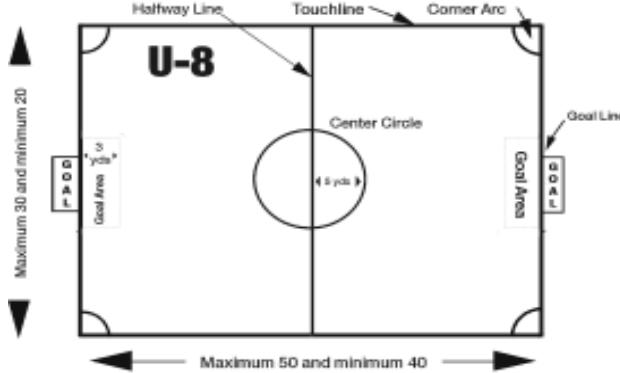
- 1** **The Field** – flat, grassy field; its length no more than 50 yards nor less than 40 yards and its width not more than 30 yards nor less than 20 yards. The field will have distinctive markings called boundary lines. These lines make the field into a rectangle as diagrammed below. One additional line divides the field in half (the half-way line). Goal Area: 3 yards from each goalpost and 3 yards out from the goal line. This goal area is optional.

The purpose of soccer is to score goals so goals must be placed on either end

of the field lengthwise. Goals can be two cones set a few feet apart or a more formal goal that looks like a hockey goal (six feet wide by four feet high). Cones, flags or discs can be used if goals with nets are unavailable.

- 2** **The Ball** required – size 4. Larger balls are heavier and take the fun and safety out of the game. Make sure there are plenty of balls to go around – but only one is needed for the game!

- 3** **Maximum number of players** will be determined by your local association. US Youth Soccer recommends that U8 play 4 v 4. Teams and games may be coed and EVERYONE plays a minimum of 50% of the game. Substitutions are allowed any time the ball is out of play. There are NO Goalkeepers.



**4** **Players Equipment**-Players will want to wear a T-shirt, shorts, socks and a good pair of running shoes. Some may wear soft-cleated soccer shoes. Shin guards are required for safety reasons and should be covered by a pair of high socks. Clothing should not be restrictive.



**5** **Officials**- (Game Manager, Coordinator, Observer, Director, Parent Volunteer/Coach) Your job is to keep the playing environment FUN, SAFE and focused on the child.

In addition you need to keep time, enforce the rules, stop and restart the game. When you stop the game because of a foul, ball out of play, goal or another reason, take the time to explain to the players why! This is their first experience with soccer, too, and the BEST time to educate all on the Laws of the Game.

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**6** **Assistant Referees**-Not used in the small-sided game.

**7 Duration of the Game**-Game length will be determined by your local association. Games for this age should last approximately 40-45 minutes.

US Youth Soccer recommends no more than 4 equal quarters. This recommendation makes it easy for the coach to give each player equal time and allows rest between quarters. There should be a 2-3 minute break between periods for water and physical recovery.

*US Youth Soccer recommends substitution between quarters to ensure that all players present play a minimum of 50% of the game.*

**8 Start of Play**-All players must be in their own half of the field with one team kicking off. Opponents must be 5 yards from the center mark at the kick off.

Before the game decide who will kick off to begin the game and then change the kick off team at the beginning of each quarter. Kick off is intended to ensure possession and must go forward to a teammate. The ball is not kicked to the other team.

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**12** **Fouls and Misconduct**-Fouls can and will occur even at this level. All fouls shall result in an indirect free kick with opponents at least 5 yards away.

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**17** **Corner Kick**-Use an indirect free kick with the opponent 5 yards away. If the team defending against a goal being scored, kicks the ball over the goal line outside the goal posts, the opposing team puts the ball back into play with a corner kick.

## **Adult Participation**

1. Provide transportation to and from practice and games ensuring that the player is prompt not only in arriving but also in departure.
2. Stay and watch practices as well as games and lend the young players your support in a positive manner. Do not point out their mistakes leave that up to the coach, but dwell on their accomplishments as well as their efforts.
3. If unable to attend the practice or game, encourage child not to talk with or leave practices or games with strangers.
4. Ensure child brings equipment to and from all soccer games and practices when appropriate.
5. Be available to kick the ball around with your child when you are invited to do so.
6. Avoid material rewards. Build an attitude of "*the rewards lie in the fun of being able to play.*"
7. Be a good listener. Make players feel important and let them know that they are contributing to a team effort.
8. Be positive. Never criticize. Suggest an alternate way if they are not performing correctly. "*Hey, that is pretty good, but why don't you try it this way.*"
9. The overall purpose is to enjoy the game and the opportunity to be with your child at the field of play.
10. **ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO BE A CHILD.**

## **Player's Rights**

1. The right to decide when to participate in soccer.
2. The right to play in every game. At younger ages, every child should have an opportunity to play at least 50% of every game. No child should have to stand and watch at practice.
3. The right to participate at a level that corresponds to each child's maturity and ability.
4. The right to be taught the fundamentals of soccer.
5. The right to participate in a safe and healthy environment.
6. The right to not hear disagreements with the coach or officials from adults. They do not belong on the soccer field. Questions, input and positive suggestions should be voiced to the coach and/or club in an adult atmosphere. (The youth player should not be present.)
7. The right to play as a child and enjoy participation in the sport.

## Ready To Begin?

### Before the game starts, ask the opposing coaches:

1. Duration of the game?
2. Quarters or halves?
3. When will they make substitutions? Remind them it should take place when the ball is out of play.

### Before the game starts, talk to both teams:

1. Let them know who you are and what you will be doing during the game.
2. Do a coin toss – the team winning the toss chooses the goal they will defend; the other team kicks off.
3. Remind them that soccer is FUN and safety is your primary concern.

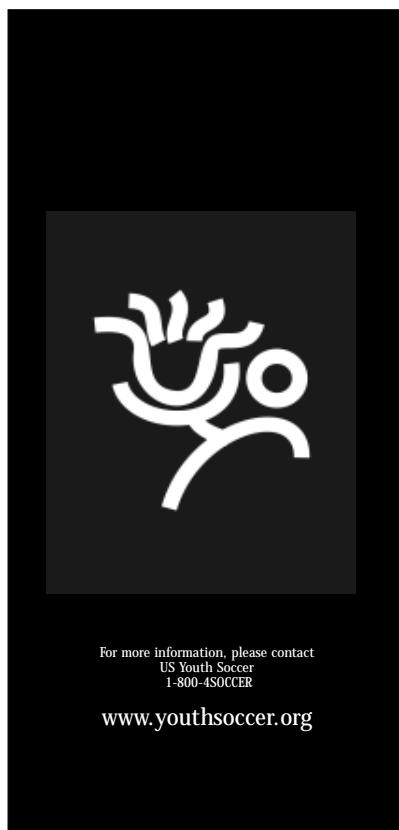
### Start of Play:

1. Both teams should be in their own half of the field
2. Ball is in the center on the halfway line.
3. Opponents of the team kicking off must be 3 yards for U-6 or 5 yards for U-8 from the ball until it is touched by the kicking team.
4. Tell the teams to wait until you whistle or signal.

### Game:

1. After the ball is in play you follow play close enough to see what is going on but not so close as to interfere with the players.
2. If the ball goes completely over one of the longer boundary lines you whistle to stop play and indicate that the restart will be a kick in.
3. If the ball goes over the shorter boundary line (goal line) and no goal is scored, the restart will be either a goal kick or a corner kick – remember Law #16 or #17.
4. During play if you see a player carelessly commits one of the fouls in Law #12 you whistle to stop play, explain to the offender what was done wrong and let the opponent restart play with an indirect free kick from the spot of the foul.
5. At this level of play, clumsiness, inexperience, lack of skill and eagerness are the most common fouls.
6. Use your watch to keep track of time and stop play when time runs out.





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