

A Soccer Parents Guide to Players Ages 5-7

By Brett Thompson, OSYSA Director of Coaching

Micro soccer includes players in the Under-5 through Under-7 age groups and for many of you this may be your first experience with organized soccer and we want to help you understand your child as they journey through soccer. The ultimate goal of youth soccer development in the United States is to unlock the game within each child to reach full soccer potential. The most important goal for Ohio South Youth Soccer Association is that your child has FUN!

There are three main areas of soccer development that occur in children and they are:

Psychomotor: Psychomotor development is the process of gaining physical skills as related to the mental ability of the child to recognize cues and respond with the correct action. In simpler terms, it is their movement development.

Cognitive: Cognitive development is mental development. This includes memorization, creativity, and problem solving

Psychosocial: Psychosocial development is the development of relationships with others from individual awareness to pairs to small groups to large groups. In the next couple of pages, we will examine characteristics of both Under-6 children and Under-8 children. This should help you understand why your child does certain things on and off the soccer field. There can be a plus or minus of 1-3 years in any area from chronological age based on the individual child.

PSYCHOMOTOR DEVELOPMENT FOR UNDER 6 PLAYERS

- Body segments grow at different rates and their center of gravity might be high which will cause a lack of balance as a result you may see them fall down for no apparent reason.
- The differences between boys and girls are very minimal
- The weight range for boys and girls is approximately 30-50 pounds
- The height range for boys is between 35 and 45 inches and for girls 37 to 45 inches
- Progress in motor development starts with the head and moves downward to the feet and from the center of the body outward

- Players are easily fatigued, recover rapidly. Their heart rate is around 90 beats per minute so players need breaks that are more frequent at this age.
- There is an increased use of all body parts.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR UNDER 6 PLAYERS

- Immature understanding of time and space relations (Out of bounds lines, Sense of how long a minute is, etc.).
- Only understand simple rules.
- Process small bits of information at a time, long sequential instructions are not processed.
- Tend to only one task at a time in problem solving situations.
- Beginning to use symbols to represent objects in the environment. They are still learning the shape of a stop sign for example, this is why there are no positions in micro soccer (*we would be wasting are time trying to teach them*).
- Play consists of a high degree of imagination and pretend activities.
- Players are very literal.

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FOR UNDER 6 PLAYERS

- They are developing self-concept, body awareness, and self-image through movement
- Players are egocentric, they see the world only from their perspective for example: A game of 4v4 is really a game of 1v7 as one player tries to keep the ball away from his or her opponents and teammates because unless they are touching the ball they do not feel like they are playing the game.
- Need generous praise and to be able to play without pressure from coaches and parents, positive reinforcement is very important.
- The influential person in their life is most likely their mother or significant parent.
- May verbalize team, but truly does not understand group or collective play, it is not part of their makeup.
- Effort equals ability, for example: If they tried hard, get all sweaty and have dirt on their knees, they think they played good.
- Their universe is simple such as me, my and mine an example of this is they know their house but not the neighborhood they live in.

PSYCHOMOTOR DEVELOPMENT FOR UNDER 8 PLAYERS

- Skeletal system is still growing; growth plates are near joints so injuries to those areas should be looked at carefully.
- Center of gravity is still high and still may fall down for no apparent reason but is getting better.
- Cardiovascular system is less efficient than an adult's system. A child's heart rate peaks sooner and takes longer to recover.
- Temperature regulation system is less efficient than an adult's is. Children elevate their core body temperature more quickly with activity and take longer to cool down than adults. They have no sense of pace.
- There is perceivable improvement in pace and coordination from U-6 to U-8, however the immaturity of a U-8's physical ability is obvious.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR UNDER 8 PLAYERS

- Have a real concept of fairness, rules, and boundaries.
- Limited ability to attend to more than one task at a time; the simple task of controlling the ball demands most of the attention as a result leaving little or no capacity for making tactical decisions. This is the reason we play with fewer players on the field.
- Concept of time and space relationship is just beginning to develop and will be limited by ability to do multiple things
- Limited experience with personal evaluation; effort is synonymous with performance. Still feel if tried hard that they played well

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FOR UNDER 8 PLAYERS

- Self-concept and body image are beginning to develop but are **very fragile.**
- Have a great need for approval by adults such as parents, coaches, and teachers.
- Easily bruised psychologically by both peers and adults, negative comments will carry great weight.
- Like to play soccer because it is **“FUN”**.
- Their universe is expanded to the neighborhood instead of just their house.
- True playmates emerge with the inclination toward small group activities.

- Team identity is limited.
- They want everyone to like them.
- The influential person in their life is most likely their father or significant parent

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U5 AND U6 GIRLS AND BOYS

Roster Size: 6 players

Number of players on the field: 3 players (3v3)

Duration of Game: Four 8-minute quarters

Field Size: 25 yards by 20 yards

Ball Size: # 3

Goals: Micro Size (Nothing greater than 4x6)

Rules:

No Goal Keepers

No throw-ins, kick-ins only

No direct kicks and no penalty kicks

No referee, one coach or facilitator on the field to act as referee

No scores or standings should be kept in this program

Shin guards must be worn at all games

Equal and fair playing time for all

No slide tackling allowed

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U7 GIRLS AND BOYS

Roster Size: 8 players

Number of players on the field: 4 players (4v4)

Duration of Game: 4 twelve-minute quarters

Field Size: 40 yards by 30 yards

Ball Size: # 3

Goals: Micro Size (Nothing greater than 6x12)

Rules:

No Goal Keepers

No throw-ins, kick-ins only

No direct kicks and no penalty kicks

No referee, one coach or facilitator on the field to act as referee

No scores or standings should be kept

Shin guards must be worn at all games

Shin guards must be worn at all games

Equal and fair playing time for all

No slide tackling allowed

CARE AND PREVENTION

It is possible that an injury could occur to your child while playing soccer. The first line of defense in the treatment of athletic injuries is prevention so try and keep these ideas in mind:

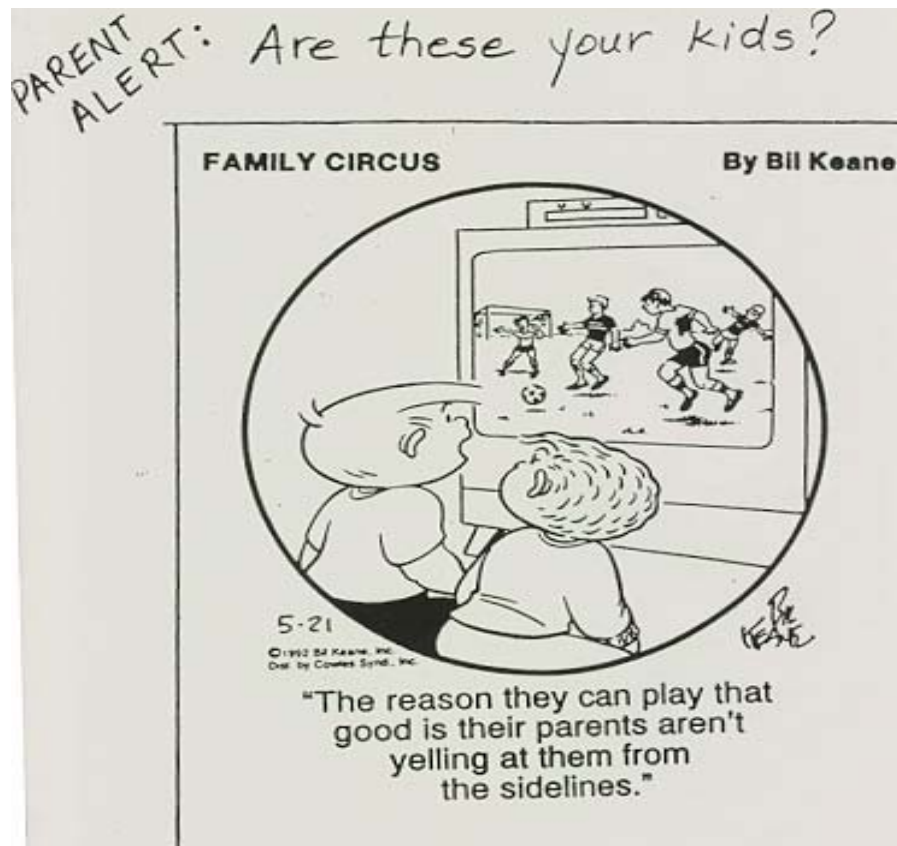
- Always have your child wear shin guards.
- Never let your child wear jewelry to play.
- Make sure their shoes fit properly (resist the urge to buy them too big!) Also, have the proper shoe for the surface, which for younger players may be tennis shoes.
- Make sure your child takes water to the games and drinks it!
- Use a proper pre-season screening program by qualified personnel.
- **Let your child's coach know if your son or daughter has a medical condition or requires use of an inhaler or medication!**
- If your son or daughter does get hurt remember treatment should include:
- R.I.C.E. (**R**est– remove them from the game/practice, **I**ce – Apply ice to injured part for 20 minutes, **C**ompression – apply a compression bandage, **E**levation – elevate the injured part).

TRUTH ABOUT CHILDREN AND SPORTS

Fun is pivotal; if it is not “fun”, young people will not play a sport. Skill development is a crucial aspect of fun; it is more important than winning even among the best athletes. The most

rewarding challenges of sports are those that lead to self-knowledge. Intrinsic rewards are more important in creating lifetime athletes than are extrinsic rewards.

You and your son or daughter is at the beginning of a wonderful journey through your local OSYSA organization. If you need any help along the way, please do not hesitate to contact us! We will leave you with a cartoon that reminds us all to let our children enjoy the game!



Recommended reading:

The cheers and tears, a healthy alternative to the dark side of sports today

Author Shane Murphy, Ph.D.

Sources: Peak Performance by Dr Ron Quinn, USSF National Youth License