



# Fair Grove Soccer Academy

*Developing potential through the world's game*

*Sponsored by the Fair Grove Park Board*

## **U6-U14 Academy Curriculum**

The purpose of this curriculum is to help standardize “best practice” soccer training throughout the Fair Grove Soccer Academy. Please understand that every child varies in their development and these are strictly guidelines. Guidelines are meant to be flexible as all players of the same age are certainly not at the same developmental level. It is important we challenge all players at a level that befits their ability. The information is not solely based on observation and experience in soccer, but also on research and practice in psychology, child development, physiology, child education, and learning theory. This 6-week curriculum will be used by both the FGSA coaching staff in Academy sessions and team training as well as by our volunteer coaches in games and team practices. This curriculum has been developed to the standards and specifications of the Missouri Youth Soccer Association and the United States Soccer Federation.



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## U6 (Pre-K) Curriculum

### **Skill Priorities**

- Dribble with all sides of both feet
- Dribble out of trouble
- Dribble past someone
- Soft first touch

### **Pre-K 6-Week Training Plan**

- Week 1 – Soccer Basics
- Week 2 – Dribbling Basics
- Week 3 – Finishing
- Week 4 – Dribbling Out of Trouble
- Week 5 – Individual Defending
- Week 6 – Dribbling to Attack

Although sometimes we may mistake 5-6 year-olds for little adults, they are clearly not little adults. They have many years of childhood and development to enjoy before they are able to look at life in a similar fashion to adults. The reason for this is that they need time to intellectually, emotionally, and physically develop. Although we do live in the same world, when seen through our own eyes, the world both adults and children experience is quite different. In order to fully understand these wonderful children and to make practices run as smoothly and happily as possible, it is extremely important for us to understand the following characteristics about U6 children.

### **Typical Characteristics of U6 Players**

- *focused on themselves – reality to them is solely based on what they see and feel.*
- *unable to see the world from another's perspective – it is “the world according to me” time. Asking them to understand how someone else is seeing something or feels is unrealistic.*
- *everything is in the here and now – forget about the past and future, they live in the moment.*
- *heating and cooling systems are less efficient than adults – we need to give frequent*

*water breaks (every 8-10 minutes) or they may just run until they cannot run anymore.*

- *enjoying playing, not watching – they feel no enjoyment from watching others play when they could be playing too. Make sure every player has a ball in practice so every player is always playing.*

- *limited attention span (on average 15 seconds for listening, 10-15 minutes when engaged in a task) – keep your directions concise and to the point. When in an open environment, such as a park, their attention span will dwindle towards 10 seconds.*

- *effort is synonymous with performance – if they have tried hard, they believe they have done well. This is a wonderful quality and we should be supportive of their enthusiasm.*

- *active imaginations – if we utilize their imaginations in practice activities, they will love practice!*

- *look for adult approval – watch how often players look to you for approval or to see if you are looking. Also be encouraging when they say “Coach, look what I can do!”*

- *unable to think abstractly – asking them to think about spatial relations or runs off the ball is unrealistic.*

- *typically have 2 speeds -- extremely fast and stopped.*

- *usually unaware of game scores – we should keep it that way.*

- *often like to fall down just because it is fun – they are just children having fun.*

- *often cannot identify left foot vs. right foot – they know which foot they use most and if they point to their feet you can help teach them left and right.*



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## **U8 (Kindergarten – 1<sup>st</sup> Grade) Curriculum**

### **Skill Priorities**

- Dribble with all sides of both feet
- Dribble out of trouble
- Dribble past someone
- Shielding
- Soft first touch
- Introduce proper shooting technique
- Introduce passing

### **K-1<sup>st</sup> Grade 6-Week Training Plan**

Week 1 – Soccer Basics

Week 2 – Dribbling to Attack

Week 3 – Finishing

Week 4 – Passing and Receiving (ground)

Week 5 – Striking the Ball

Week 6 – Individual Defending

Although U8 children may begin to be far more physically and mentally advanced than U6 children, we must remain patient and not try to force them to develop too quickly.

Dribbling still needs to be the primary focus of our efforts, though passing and shooting should be introduced at this age as well. U8 players tend to work best when in pairs and we should allow them to work in pairs (coach selected) often. Similar to the U6 children, we need to make sure that fun is a central theme in practice. Player development will occur most appropriately and expeditiously if all players are enjoying themselves.

### **Typical Characteristics of U8 Players**

- *tend to play well in pairs – unlike 6 year-olds, these children enjoy playing in pairs. Try to set up the pairs yourself to control the games and manage the personalities.*
- *are now able to take another's perspective – they now have a sense of how other's are feeling*
- *still unable to think abstractly – still do not have this capability, be patient.*

- *heating and cooling system still less efficient than adults – still make sure to give frequent water breaks.*
- *still much prefer playing to watching – keep everyone active during practice and remember, no lines!*
- *limited attention span (on average 15-20 seconds for listening, up to 20 minutes when engaged in a task) – this may vary greatly on any given day depending on school, diet, etc. Try to get a gauge each day and do not fight crankiness*
- *have an understanding of time and sequence – they now understand “if I do this, then that happens.”*
- *many have incorporated a third or fourth speed into play – not all players, but many players now have incorporated a speed or two between stopped and as fast as possible.*
- *extremely aware of adult reactions – be very aware of your verbal and nonverbal reactions, as they look for your reaction frequently.*
- *seek out adult approval – be supportive when they ask about their performance or try to show you skills. They very much need reassurance and you need to help build their confidence to try new things at this age.*
- *begin to become aware of peer perception – a social order is beginning to develop. Be sensitive to this.*
- *wide range of abilities between children at this age – children all develop at varying paces. You may have an 8 year-old who seems more like a 10 year-old and one that seems more like a 6 year-old on the same team. Your challenge to is to manage this range in your practice in a way that challenges each player at a level that is reasonable for that player.*
- *some will keep score – the competitive motors churn faster in some than others. Surely some parents are fueling the motors with their own. Regardless, we do not need to stress winning and losing at this age. Results should not be important at this age.*
- *beginning to develop motor memories – by attempting fundamental technical skills they are training their bodies to remember certain movements.*
- *less active imaginations than U6 players – still have active imaginations by adult standards, but some of the silliness that 6 year-olds allowed will not be appreciated by this group. Still use their imaginations, just watch their reactions to games to read how far you can go with things.*



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## **U10 (2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade) Curriculum**

### **Skill Priorities**

- Continue with dribbling foci from U8
- Passing with inside and outside of both feet
- Shooting with both feet---using laces
- Receiving the ball with all parts of body
- Heading

### **Tactical Priorities**

- Basic Attacking Ideas
- Basic Defending Ideas
- Comprehend 1 v 1 concepts
- Comprehend 2 v 1 concepts
- Introduction to 2 v 2 concepts
- Comprehend roles of 1st and 2nd defenders
- Comprehend roles of 1st and 2nd attackers

### **2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade 6-Week Training Plan**

Week 1 – Soccer Basics

Week 2 – Advanced Dribbling

Week 3 – Finishing

Week 4 – Passing and Receiving (ground)

Week 5 – Passing/Striking Balls Through the Air

Week 6 – Heading and Receiving from the Air

As we move up the age ladder from the U8 level to the U10 level there are many differences we must attend to in order to provide an optimal experience for young players of this age. However, there are also many similarities. Just as in parenting, it is important to be consistent in coaching and we must make sure that we follow a progressive trend of development for young players. To this ends, we need to continue to focus on technique during our practices, as we did at the younger ages. Creating environments in which players get maximum repetitions of technical skills is key. Players at this age should still work on ball mastery and demonstrate growing familiarity with a ball at their feet.

### **Typical Characteristics of U10 Players**

- *attention span lengthens from U8---they start to show the ability to sequence thought and actions.*
- *they start to think ahead and think “If this, then that”.*
- *they are more inclined towards wanting to play soccer rather than being told to play.*
- *demonstrate increased self-responsibility – bringing a ball, water and all gear should now be their complete responsibility.*
- *they start to recognize fundamental tactical concepts.*
- *children at this age begin to become aware of peer pressure.*
- *players greatly affiliate with their team or their coach—“I play for the Tigers” or “I play for coach Amy’s team”.*
- *players at this age are extremely rule bound—remember each rule you create is the equivalent of a bar in the prison in which you would like to live.*
- *there is a wide continuum of maturity evident on most teams this is still a crucial age for technical skill development.*



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## **U12 (4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade) Curriculum**

### **Skill Priorities**

- Continue with all U-10 foci
- Speed Dribbling in Traffic
- Ability to chip the ball
- Accurately play long passes
- Offensive/Defensive Heading
- Power/Accuracy Shooting

### **Tactical Priorities**

- Communication
- Basic Support Positions
- Receiving the Ball Away from Pressure
- Combination Play
- How and when to switch the point of attack
- Pressure v Containing
- Proper 2 v 2 roles
- Introduction to all roles in 3 v 3

### **4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Grade 6-Week Training Plan**

- Week 1 – Attacking on the Dribble
- Week 2 – Passing and Receiving (ground)
- Week 3 – Passing and Receiving (air)
- Week 4 – Individual Defending
- Week 5 – Team Attacking
- Week 6 – Team Defending

The period this age group is entering is often referred to as the dawn of tactics. Typically players of this age begin to understand the basic tactical situations of the game and are more aware of movement off the ball and the reasons for tactical choices. Problem-solving becomes systematic and these players tend to learn quickly. Children of this age typically are beginning to develop abstract awareness, so they can understand coaches when we talk about space and runs off of the ball. However, just because they understand these basic tactical concepts does not mean we should focus on these concepts entirely. Players are still developing technically at this age, especially as they go through growth spurts and awkward phases.

It is quite common to look out at a U12 field and see players that are physically the size of adults. Yet, other U12 players appear as if they could still be in the 3rd grade. These children are all growing at different rates and undergoing physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. The average age for the beginning of pubescence in girls is 10 years old with a range of 7 to 14; for boys it is age 12 with a range of 9 to 16. As coaches, we need to be sensitive to these changes and their social implications when coaching this age group. Some players may pick up skills quickly, where as others may struggle. However, it may be the case that this is simply the result of differences in maturation. In a year, the slower developer may surpass the player who developed earlier. For this reason we need to be patient and keep open minds about all players through these years. They are aware of their struggles more than anyone else as peer evaluation is omnipresent at these ages. When we see them struggling, it is important for us to help them and to keep the game fun.

### **Typical Characteristics of U12 Players**

- *all children are maturing at different rates.*
- *players need to warm-up and stretch---muscle pulls and other nagging injuries are common otherwise.*
- *players will typically understand elemental abstract concepts and hypothetical situations.*
- *they like to solve problems.*
- *peer evaluation is a constant.*
- *egos are sensitive.*
- *coordination may depend on whether or not they are in a growth spurt.*
- *technique still needs to be reinforced constantly.*
- *playing too much can lead to overuse injuries.*
- *playing too much and not feeling like they have a choice in the matter can lead to burnout and drop-out.*
- *this is the dawn of tactics!*
- *keep asking the players to be creative and to take risks---we never want them to stop doing these things.*
- *ask for feedback from them---they will tell you how things are going.*

- *try to hand over leadership and ownership of the team to them.*
- *keep it fun!!!*



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## **U14 (7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> Grade) Curriculum**

### **Skill Priorities**

- Continue with all U-12 foci
- Speed Dribbling in Traffic
- Ability to chip the ball
- Accurately play long passes
- Offensive/Defensive Heading
- Power/Accuracy Shooting

### **Tactical Priorities**

- Communication
- Support Positions
- Movement off the Ball
- Combination Play
- How and when to switch the point of attack
- Pressure v Containing
- Systems of Play
- Understanding all roles in 3 v 3 to 6 v 6

### **Elite 6-Week Training Plan**

- Week 1 – Attacking on the Dribble
- Week 2 – Passing and Receiving (ground)
- Week 3 – Passing and Receiving (air)
- Week 4 – Individual Defending
- Week 5 – Team Attacking
- Week 6 – Team Defending

Players in this age group should already have a grasp of basic tactics and have the ability to analyze simple and complex tactical situation during full-speed game situations. Typically players of this age are more aware of movement off the ball and the reasons for tactical choices. Problem-solving becomes systematic and these players tend to learn quickly. Children of this age typically are beginning to develop abstract awareness, so they can understand coaches when we talk about space and runs off of the ball. However, just because they understand these basic tactical concepts does not mean we should focus on these concepts entirely. Players are still developing technically, especially as they go through growth spurts and awkward phases.

It is quite common to look out at a U14 field and see players that are physically the size of adults. Yet, other players appear as if they are still much younger. These players are all growing at different rates and undergoing physical, mental, emotional, and social changes, and changes and differences between boys and girls become extremely apparent. The average age for the beginning of pubescence in girls is 10 years old with a range of 7 to 14; for boys it is age 12 with a range of 9 to 16. As coaches, we need to be sensitive to these changes and their social implications when coaching this age group. Some players may pick up skills quickly, where as others may struggle. However, it may be the case that this is simply the result of differences in maturation. In a year, the slower developer may surpass the player who developed earlier. For this reason we need to be patient and keep open minds about all players through these years. They are aware of their struggles more than anyone else as peer evaluation is omnipresent at these ages. When we see them struggling, it is important for us to help them and to keep the game fun.

### **Typical Characteristics of U14 Players**

- *all players are maturing at different rates.*
- *players need to warm-up and stretch---muscle pulls and other nagging injuries are common otherwise.*
- *players will typically understand elemental abstract concepts and hypothetical situations.*
- *they like to solve problems.*
- *peer evaluation is a constant.*
- *egos are sensitive.*
- *coordination may depend on whether or not they are in a growth spurt.*
- *technique still needs to be reinforced constantly.*
- *playing too much can lead to overuse injuries.*
- *playing too much and not feeling like they have a choice in the matter can lead to burnout and drop-out.*
- *keep asking the players to be creative and to take risks---we never want them to stop doing these things.*
- *ask for feedback from them---they will tell you how things are going.*
- *try to hand over leadership and ownership of the team to them.*

- *Winning becomes an important part of the game for many players, but balancing that competitive nature some players may display with the desire of other simply to have fun is important.*