

**At Under 11 & Under 12**, children play 8 v 8 with goalkeepers on a field large enough to allow for forwards, midfielders, and now- backs. These positions define team shape relative to the ball as all of the players move up & down the field. When the team has the ball, everyone is on offense, and when the other team has the ball, everyone is on defense - including the goalkeepers in both instances.

We continue to teach shooting and passing, and receiving the ball on the ground and in the air. Our lesson plans develop individual soccer techniques in pairs, and we play 3 v 3 and 4 v 4 activities to introduce tactical complexities such as keeping a fluid team shape up & down the field, and combining passes in a continuous sequence.

On offense, the forwards and midfielders should be in the attacking half. The backs should be at least at the midline supporting the attack, and the goalkeeper should be out of the penalty area as a sweeper/keeper.

To keep shape, all players learn to transition quickly - mentally and physically - to defense. Even the forwards need to move to their half of the field to engage opponents, and be in position for the transition back to attack.

Team shape involves all of the players in the whole game which develops their decision-making to instantly choose whether to dribble, pass, shoot, run to space...based on what they see as it happens. For example:

- When bringing the ball upfield or transitioning from defense to attack, are there any teammates in a position for a long lofted pass or should the players retain possession with short passes and overlapping runs?
- When a ball is knocked into the defensive half of the field, who should go to the ball - one of the backs or the keeper?
- The players learn to communicate and coordinate their decisions among themselves while the ball is moving in play.
  - *NOTE - the players have to learn to make these decisions instinctively and instantly based on what they see at the moment. Please avoid the temptation to shout instructions such as, "Pass!" as this disrupts that trial-and-error process.*

We teach offside, and have full three-member US Soccer Federation certified referee crews to enforce all of the Laws of the Game. Indirect and direct and penalty kicks are awarded for infractions. Players are sent off if they receive a yellow card to regain their focus, and red cards (though rare at these ages) are issued if warranted with a minimum suspension of the remainder of the match and one more game.

With so much to teach, we focus on one skill each week to build their abilities through the season. We provide our volunteer coaches with lesson plans, so the players develop their abilities in a curriculum-based atmosphere. The weekly plans are designed so the coaches can use the later part of their session to address team-specific needs they've identified at the previous weekend game.

If your child has fun at practices and games, we've succeeded meeting the Number One reason children play games - to have FUN. Over the course of the season, we also see them begin to grasp the complexity of the game itself, and play a small-sided version of the full-sided game.

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