Why Movement Experiences at U6 Impact a Soccer Career

FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS
Readiness for Soccer

“Readiness for sports is the match between a child’s level of growth, maturity and development, and the task demands presented in competitive sports.”

Robert M. Malina, Ph.D.
Foundational Skills

- During the childhood years of soccer the general progression of the child’s experience with the ball is for the U6 age group ~ manipulating the ball, for the U8 age group ~ propelling the ball and for the U10 age group ~ mastering the ball.

Dave Simeone, Technical Director for Space City Football Club
Physical Education in many U. S. schools has been greatly reduced or eliminated. So private sports clubs must now take on the additional role of P.E. teachers. This component in the player development scheme is most important in the players’ preteen years. Teaching soccer skills, rules and strategies are not enough to meet the needs of the developing player.
Components of Physical Fitness

- Balance
- Agility
- Eye/Foot & Eye/Hand coordination
- Endurance
- Flexibility
- Strength
- Speed
- Acceleration
- Power
- Body Composition (leanliness vs. fatness)
Components of Physical Fitness

- These components are important for soccer players’ development.

- Different components are emphasized at different ages.

  - Balance – Coordination – Agility are vital with the U6 and U8 age groups.
Eye/Foot & Eye/Hand Coordination

- Prior to age 9 visual tracking acuity is not fully developed. Players have difficulty accurately tracking long kicks or the ball off the ground.
Eye/Foot & Eye/Hand Coordination

Beginning at approximately age 10 the visual tracking acuity achieves an adult pattern.
Foundational Skills

- The foundation to ball skills is physical education. Motor skills (physical movement/body mechanics) are refined from early, gross actions to highly coordinated and complex movements. Movement is the collective action of the muscles and tendons to move the ligaments and bones. Gross motor skills refer to movements of the entire body or major segments of the body. Fine motor skills refer to movements requiring precision and dexterity, such as manipulative tasks done with the feet or hands. Basic motor patterns of the body are established in the gross motor phase and motor skills emerge in the fine motor phase.
Foundational Skills

- Athleticism and technique from one age group are utilized to build more advanced skills later in the continuum. It is important to note that a deficit in one stage of the development process will tend to influence acquisition of more complex skills.

Development Stages – Dr. Erik Erikson
Foundational Skills

- Before a player can be expected to learn ball skills the child must first be under control of the body. This growth in athleticism, from gross motor skills to fine motor skills, is a long term growth process. It is imperative for children to acquire a base of general balance, coordination and agility before soccer skills. How can coaches expect them to control the ball before they can control their bodies? So it is essential that youngsters be exposed to movement education. This requirement is of primary importance to the youngest players and ball skills are of secondary importance. Running and jumping are the two most often executed movements in soccer.
Motor Patterns / Motor Skills

- Motor Pattern – basic movement involved in the performance of a task. The emphasis is on the movement composing the task.

Fundamental Movement Patterns

- Locomotor – body moving through space, such as walking, jumping, hopping, etc
- Nonlocomotor – specific parts of the body are moved, such as pushing, twisting, etc
- Manipulative – patterns in which objects are “moved”, such as catching, passing, dribbling; and other activities involving propelling and receiving the ball
The often overlooked crucial movements

Running & Jumping
Running & Jumping

- Basic running mechanics must be taught and reinforced as part of movement education in the U6 and U8 age groups.
Coaches must note that a player’s running style will change in the match when in contact with the ball or opposing players or when reacting to the movement of teammates or opponents.
Teach jumping to improve performance and to reduce the possibility of knee injury. The jump can occur from a stationary position or while on the move.
Foundational Skills
Foundational Skill

- Equipment can expand the number and type of activities that can be done to improve fundamental motor movements.
Activities are the cornerstone to training session whether for physical fitness, ball skills or tactics. They aid the coach in laying a solid foundation of all of the components of fitness.

Foundational Skills
Foundational Skills

Body Awareness activities are core components.

Activities with or without the ball enhance movement.
Objective

to provide an all around athletic experience.

✓ **Activities**
that emphasize basic coordination and fitness

✓ **Games**
and activities that incorporate agility...running, hopping, turning and jumping
Economical Training

- Combines more than one component of soccer into the training session
- Combine fitness training with the development of ball skills
- This makes the best use of the players’ and coach’s time
Foundational Skills

- A youth soccer coach should be able to observe a player’s movements and assess the quality of those movements, which in turn affect the caliber of ball skills. It stands to reason that as athleticism grows within a player then too the odds for good performance of ball skills increase. This means for the soccer coach ball skills and physical education go hand in hand. One must be able to observe and assess motor movement when children play soccer.
Stage 1 kicking motion – gross motor stage

Foundational Skills
Developmental Sequence

- All physical tasks have a developmental sequence on the pathway to achieving adult patterns.
- Achievement of milestones cannot be predicted based on age, size, weight or strength. Rate of mastery of skills varies widely.
- From infancy, development progresses from head to arms to trunk and then to legs.
Warm-Up & Cool-Down

- Rhythmic and Range of Motion exercises
- Use the ball as much as possible
- Gradually increasing the tempo of the activity raises the heart & breathing rates – reverse for the cool-down
A variety of coaching methods must be used to accommodate different learning styles.

Principles of Learning Motor Skills
Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Whole–Part Learning
  The complexity of the skill to learn and the player’s ability determines whether it is more efficient to teach the whole skill or break the skill into component parts.
Principle of Interest
A player’s attitude toward learning a skill determines for the most part the amount and kind of learning that takes place.

Principles of Learning Motor Skills
Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Distributed Practice

In general short periods of intense practice will result in more learning than longer, massed practice sessions.
Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Practice
Practicing the motor skill correctly is essential for learning to take place.
Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Skill Specificity
  A player’s ability to perform one motor skill effectively is independent of his/her skill ability to perform other skills.
Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Transfer

The more identical two tasks are the greater the possibility that positive transfer will occur. Practice conditions should match the conditions in which the motor skill is going to be used.

Game-Like Activities
Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Feedback

Internal and external sources of information about motor performance are essential for learning to take place.
Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Variable Practice

Block practice aids performance while variable practice aids in learning. Variable practice causes an increase in attention.
Principles of Learning Motor Skills

- Principle of Skill Improvement

The development of motor skills progresses along a continuum from least mature to most mature. The rate of progression and the amount of progress within an individual depends upon the interaction of nature and nurture.
Foundational Skill

Why Movement Experiences at U6 Impact a Soccer Career