

Game Day Management

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Game Day Management U-6

“Fun and physical literacy must be at the forefront of the soccer experience at this age. The emphasis should be on letting the children play (Snow, 2012, p. 55).” These should be unstructured pick-up style games. The game environment should be structured that everybody plays the whole game if they want to. The ‘us versus them’ mentality and outcome-based coaching must be avoided (Snow, 2012). The recommended format is 3 v. 3 (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Buren & Stringfield, 2008). In the 3v3 game U-6 players generally play 1v5. Since it requires the full attention of these children to control the ball they need to focus on the task and nothing else (Snow, 2012).

Pre-Game

The coach should arrive in time to check on environmental and field conditions. Safety in and around the playing area is paramount. As the players arrive the coach should check their equipment and make sure that everyone has enough drinking fluid to rehydrate during the game. No captains in the game.

Warm Up

Warm up is a commonly accepted practice before athletic events. Although, warm up is considered to be essential for optimum performance, very little scientific evidence supporting its effectiveness. Warm-up procedures are usually based on the trial and error experience of the athlete or coach, rather than on scientific study. The limited research that has been conducted has provided conflicting results (Bishop, 2003). Studies have found that certain warm up methods such as the FIFA 11+ neuromuscular warm-up program significantly reduced the overall rate of injuries in soccer (Owoeye, Akinbo, Tella, & Olawale, 2014; Zein, Kurniarobbi &

Agung, 2014). Zois, Bishop, Ball & Aughey (2011) identified that using small-sided games as warm up in soccer may increase performance. An extensive literature search did not reveal any data regarding the effect of warm up on child athletes' performance or injury prevention in children younger than 14 years of age. No specific warm-up activity, therefore, seems to be necessary in the U-6 age group. Age appropriate, individual game activities can be used preceding the actual game, but there is nothing wrong with starting to play without a specific warm up activity at this age.

The Game

Five and six year old children can perform one task at a time. Tactical knowledge is limited, they may not be able to decide which way to go with the ball (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Buren & Stringfield, 2008). The fun of the game is in the movement of the ball and the players. Coaches should help to keep the ball moving and the play going. Restart plays are unimportant and may be initiated by the coach distributing a new ball to players who have had less involvement in the game. During the game coaches should sit back, observe and encourage players. Praise the good moves and give a concise explanation of rules when necessary. Let the children play and have fun.

Instead of observing one half time, multiple breaks are necessary to allow for recovery. Children at this age tend to play at full speed for a short period of time, they need a short break to rest, drink and they are ready to go again (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Buren & Stringfield, 2008).

Post-Game

Shake hands with coaches, players and the referees.

Cool-down.

Rehydrate

Care for injuries

Ask them if they had fun!

Thank and dismiss (Snow, 2012; Snow, n.d.).

Game Day Management U-8

“Igniting a passion for the game must be the number one objective for coaches of this age group (Snow, 2012, p. 59).” Children at age seven and eight still play as individuals most of the time. The attention span is still limited. They are focused on the ball (Snow, 2012). Some players will reach the concrete operational stage of their cognitive development. Players begin to think beyond their personal needs. “From parallel play, as described in the U-6 age group, to learning to share with others, these milestones are passed by the end of this age. Thus, players need encouragement to share and approval for trying (Snow, 2012, p. 59).” There is more success encouraging players to pass the ball. The recommended match format is 4v4 (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Buren & Stringfield, 2008). The game environment should be structured that everybody plays the whole game if they want to. The United States Soccer Federation (n.d.) recommends no organized matches at all.

Pre-Game

The coach should arrive in time to check on environmental and field conditions. Safety in and around the playing area is paramount. As the players arrive the coach should check their equipment and make sure that everyone has enough drinking fluid to rehydrate during the game. No specific warm-up activity is necessary. No tactical instructions are necessary. Most players still play 1v7. Co-captains with responsibility in coin toss.

The Game

The goal is to get the players into the game as soon as possible. New arrivals can join the game on the fly. Restart plays can be official, but there is nothing wrong with the coach passing a new ball to those, who had less touches and less involvement in the game. The important thing is to have everybody play and have fun. Coaches should sit back, observe and encourage players. Praise the good moves and give explanation of the rules when necessary.

Half Time

Relax and hydrate. Care for any injuries. No need for speeches or tactical discussions. Praise what was good and give advice to individuals regarding technique as necessary. Limit the amount of time speaking to players. Think about their age. They cannot listen for too long. Get the players back to the game as soon as possible.

Post-Game

Shake hands with coaches, players and the referees.

Cool-down.

Rehydrate.

Care for injuries.

Ask them if they had fun!

Thank and dismiss (Snow, 2012; Snow, n.d.).

Game Day Management U-10

This is the age of entrance into life. Nine and ten-year old children are working on developing a sense of competence and industry (Erikson, 1993). They want to play and some of

them are becoming more serious about soccer. Their association with their team becomes significant. Some of these children are beginning to move toward the formal operational stage of their cognitive development. They can follow more complex instructions and solve higher-level problems. Improvements in memory reflect a child's increasing fund of knowledge and experience. Children in this age group can focus and stay on task longer. They are starting to recognize when and where to move with and without the ball (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Buren & Stringfield, 2008). Coaches should encourage children to try their best, as they understand the idea of effort, although they continue to associate effort with performance regardless of the outcome (Snow, 2012). The recommended playing format is 6v6 including a goalkeeper. The United States Soccer federation recommends few organized matches per season with little or no travel. Rosters should be small enough to allow near 100 percent game time to everyone.

Pre-Game

The coach should arrive in time to check on environmental and field conditions. Safety in and around the playing area is paramount. As the players arrive the coach should check their equipment and make sure that everyone has enough drinking fluid to rehydrate during the game. Warm up can be introduced as a formal activity with small group possession or directional games. Dynamic stretching can be used to promote the development of good habits for the future. Co-captains. The coach can teach the players why they might choose one goal to attack for tactical reasons. Captains can be encouraged to give positive reinforcement to teammates during the match (Snow, 2012). Small group tactics that were practiced before can be discussed as long as the discussion is developmentally appropriate. This is a good time for guided discovery. What do we do when in possession? What do we do when out of possession? Team rituals? Let them do it.

The Game

Nine and ten years old players should always play at least 50 percent of the match. Players should be exposed to each position on the team, including goalkeeping (Snow, 2012). “Players should be encouraged and praised for playing on both sides of the ball, which is attacking and defending. All players should recover to help defend after losing possession of the ball. Similarly, all players should look to contribute to every attacking play, even when their role is as the supporting last defender (Snow, 2012, p. 65).” The coach should sit down, watch, and let the players do most of the talking during the match. “The coach should speak up to praise them for doing something well and for trying what they have been taught in training sessions (Snow, 2012, p. 69).” Let them make decisions and let them be creative. Let them make mistakes.

Half-Time

Relax and hydrate. Care for any injuries. Get away from the parents and sidelines. Get down to their level and be sure players are not distracted. This is another good time for guided discovery. How did we do when in possession? How did we do when out of possession? What can we do better? Tell me and show me when you go back to play. Discussion should be a dialogue between players and coach and it should be short. The kids want to go back to play. “What is the last thing done by the team before retaking the pitch? (Snow, n.d.).”

Post-Game

Shake hands with coaches, players and the referees.

Cool down.

Rehydrate.

Care for injuries.

Very brief positive highlights by the team or by the coach. What did we do well today?

Any player of note.

Remind players to hydrate, eat and rest.

Ask them if they had fun!

Thank and dismiss (Snow, 2012; Snow, n.d.).

Game Day Management U-12

12-year-olds are entering the formal operational stage of their cognitive development. Players can use more abstract thought and coaches can expect their players to understand the game and use teammates to help solve problems. They can structure thoughts, actions and perform complex tasks. They should be able to run, perform skills and think at the same time (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Buren & Stringfield, 2008). “Childhood proper comes to an end. Youth begins (Erikson, 1993, p. 261).” Still within the learning to train stage, the U-12 age group is in a critical transition period. “The objective is to learn all of the fundamental soccer skills (Snow, 2012, p. 70).” Players should continue learning the principles of attack and defense, and coaches should provide opportunities for players to experience a variety of positions. Learning the principles of attacking, defending, possession, penetration, combination play and the improvement of small group play is the goal (Snow, 2012). The recommended game format is 8v8, including goalkeepers. The United States Soccer Federation (n.d.) recommends matches no larger than 9v9.

Pre-Game

The coach should arrive in time to check on environmental and field conditions. Safety in and around the playing area is paramount. As the players arrive the coach should check their equipment and make sure that everyone has enough drinking fluid to rehydrate during the game. Warm up activities and dynamic stretching are now part of the routine before the game. Starting line-up and substitutes are announced. Positions and tactics should not be over-emphasized, but developmentally appropriate tactical discussion may now include formation, set pieces, field conditions, wind and the effect of sun or floodlights. The team should discuss individual and small group roles and responsibilities. One captain with vice captains.

The Game

U-12 players have to become familiar with the offside rule. New tactical decisions, such as switching the point of attack, have to be made. More emphasis must be placed on team shape and a balance. Players have to be able to attack or defend together. Tactically, small group defending and attacking, as well as playing on and around the ball as a group, verbal and visual communication must be learned. During the match coaches should observe more and talk less. Games are opportunities to teach. The coach should be there for the team to encourage and help solve soccer problems.

First Half

Observe and analyze. Give the players time to settle into the game. Check if the players are properly matched up with their opponents. Are attacking and defending principles being followed? Do the players transition quickly and effectively? Is any adjustment needed? How are the players performing individually? Do they understand and carry out their individual roles? How do the players react to their opponents, climate and field conditions; pressure, tight marking

and referee calls? Is the goalkeeper connected to the team? How does the goalkeeper interact with teammates? Does the goalkeeper act as the last defender and the first attacker (Snow, n.d.)?

Management of the technical area: Interact with substitute players. Keep them busy. Ask questions. Hand out tasks, for example to watch opponents. What do they do well and what mistakes do they make? Prepare for water break.

Half-Time

First relax and hydrate. Care for injuries. Discussion should be a dialogue between players and coach and it should be short. This is a good time for guided discovery. How did we press? Did we get compact when defending? How was our possession? How was our penetration? How was our transition? Does anything need to be adjusted? The coach should limit the amount of time speaking to the team, as age appropriate. The coach should talk to players individually as needed. “Adjustments to formation, team tactics or individual assignments must be within the understanding and capabilities of the players. Be realistic (Snow, n.d.)!

Second Half

Are the players properly matched up with their opponents? Are the changes we made working? What did the opponent change if anything? Is any adjustment needed? How are the players performing individually? Is anyone getting tired? Is any substitution needed?

Post-Game

Shake hands with coaches, players and the referees.

Cool down. Static stretching.

Rehydrate.

Care for injuries.

Brief positive highlights by the team or by the coach. What did we do well today?

Any player of note.

Remind players to hydrate, eat and rest.

Ask them if they had fun!

Thank and dismiss (Snow, 2012; Snow, n.d.).

What can coaches do to make the game more enjoyable for the players?

1. Teach fair tactics.
2. During matches, leave the tactical decisions to the players.
3. Concentrate on coaching.
4. Stay calm.
5. Always be positive and be a role model of fair play.
6. Set high standards for themselves, the players, the officials and the parents.
7. Provide good behavior guidelines to parents.
8. Be firm with parents.
9. Communicate.
10. Enjoy the work. Enjoy the game. Strive to win (Snow, 2012).

References

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