

Gloucester Dragons Recreational Soccer



U5-6 Curriculum Guide

Introduction and Philosophy

Our philosophy at this introductory age is simple, namely to provide our young athletes the opportunity to get an “active start” in soccer in a supportive and rewarding environment that emphasizes fun and physical literacy development.

As such we want to see all of our players enjoying the game through learning, movement and PLAY, via age appropriate instruction in a non-pressure playing environment. Coaches and parents alike must understand and buy into this concept!

Our best advice to you is to keep your sessions simple, organized and Fun. We trust that this basic Curriculum Guide will help you accomplish this.

Please read and reflect upon the following characteristics of the U5-6 player in order to help you better understand the young students you will be teaching! Coaching at this stage of development will require some patience on your part, together with a small personal commitment of developing yourself as a coach/teacher. With that said, we can assure you that the rewards that come with working with this age group far outweigh any efforts on your part, so enjoy the beginning of your coaching journey!

Characteristics of U5 and U6 Players

- VERY short attention spans!!
- Can only deal with one problem at a time
- **May understand simple rules if they are explained clearly, simply and demonstrated! The majority of young children are visual learners and must “see” what they are being asked to do.**
- May or may not understand or remember some of the following:
 - What lines mean on a field
 - Boundaries
 - What team they are on
 - What direction they are playing in
- **Can be bruised psychologically very easily – so praise, don't criticize!**
- Need to be able to “play” without pressure – so extrinsic rewards (trophies, rewards, money from Grandpa for scoring goals) should not be offered. Generous praise will suffice instead!
- **Very “selfish”/ individually motivated (me, my, mine!). Do not have any expectation of players this age passing the ball or team play. (Explain this to your parents so they stop shouting “pass the ball” all game long)**
Are constantly in motion, but with almost no sense of pace. They will chase the ball until they drop so monitor this. As such, they are easily fatigued, but bounce back quickly!
- **Love running, jumping, rolling, hopping etc..... all the fundamental movement skills, so include these in every session!**
 - Catching and throwing skills are not developed at this point!
 - Can usually balance on their “strong foot”
 - Are generally “top heavy” and fall a lot!
 - Tend to cry almost automatically when they feel pain.

Curriculum – Our Basic Training Priorities

Technical

- Dribbling - understanding the four dribbling surfaces (instep, outstep, laces, sole)
- Dribbling – keep head up and be agile (stay on “balls” of the feet, NOT your toes)
- Kicking, Shooting and Basic Passing Technique – understanding how to kick the ball with instep, laces and toe (yes, I said toe!)
- First Touch – developing basic control of the ball
- Basic Turning with the ball (cuts and pull-backs)
- Basic Catching Techniques (self throw and catch)

Fundamental Movement Skills

- Running
- Balancing
- Jumping
- Rolling
- Hopping
- Skipping

Decision Making

- Learning direction (which goal are they attacking/defending)
- Learning how field boundaries work
- How to deal with balls rolling towards them
- How to deal with balls rolling away from them

Social

- Learning how to play in a group environment
- Learning Fair Play
- Learning how to share
- Learning how to deal with parental involvement (confusing mixed messages)
- Learning how to deal with emotions

Tactical Training

- The only tactic you need to worry about is that we are going this way!!



Session Planning

There is no utility in planning to have a highly structured session as it will not work at these ages. As such, my best advice is to keep things really simple. In fact, I would encourage you to repeat large parts of your sessions from week to week as repetition for children at this age helps them to learn and kids will be eager from week to week to “show you” what they can now do. “Show me” are words we should use often!

Also, please understand that at this stage your role is not so much to be a “coach” for the children to “learn soccer”, but rather to be more of a “facilitator” in getting them as many touches on the ball as possible in a fun and rewarding environment. Once you realize this and how easy it can be, it will be smooth sailing!

Some basics to every session

- Every child MUST have a properly inflated size 3 ball
- Every child should have appropriately sized shin pads! Too often kids get “hand me down” shin pads that look like hockey goalie pads, making it impossible to develop any touch on the ball!
- Every child should be present with a parent, or other relative for the “Mom/Dad and Me” portion of sessions
- Plan for 3 -4 breaks in the hour!
- Please No running laps (kids at this age do not need any warmup)
- Please No Line-ups whatsoever (it leads to boredom and fewer touches)
- Please No Lectures – they won't digest them anyway, so just let them play!
- Please don't look to control the players – just look to guide them.

All sessions should Follow this basic format

1. Bring all players in and say hello! Get them excited about playing!
2. Move to the Square Dance-Ball Mastery Grid (See below) to work on the following.
 - a. Dribbling, stopping and turning with the ball using all 4 dribbling surfaces (10 Minutes)
 - b. Fundamental Movement Skills (Get creative) – 5 Minutes
3. Mom/Dad and Me Session OR Play a Small Side Game that is VERY simple to explain (some examples below)
4. Move to 3 v 3 Game Play



This Grid should be used in every single session! Each player **MUST have their own ball, and will look to get as many touches as possible with all four dribbling surfaces.**

Main technique to work on

4 Surfaces Dribbling - instep, outstep, laces and sole

Stopping the ball - Sole, instep and outstep and other body surfaces

Turning with the ball

1 v 1 Moves (very limited)

Fundamental Movement Skills (Running, Balancing, Jumping, Rolling, Hopping, Skipping) - With or Without the Ball

Coaching - Ask players "Can you do this?"

Some suggested Ball Mastery Exercises

- 4 surfaces Dribbling – can you try and use your instep, outstep, laces, sole?
- Animal Dribbling – can you dribble like a cheetah, an elephant, or tortoise!! (Allow the players to choose a few animals)
- Body Part Dribble – coach calls a body part and the player tries to stop ball with that body part (get creative!)
- Turning with Ball – “Can you dribble and turn with the ball using your instep, outstep or sole (pull back/drag – back)?
- Simon Says (but always have them moving when playing).

Introduce Cones Into The Grid



- How many cones can you dribble to in 30 seconds?
- How many goals can you score (between cones marked like goals) in 30 seconds?
- Can you try and pull back at each cone?
- Can we try and turn around the cones?
- Put extra balls on top of each cone – and ask the players to knock the balls off with their own balls by kicking them (like Marbles)
- How many cones can you pick up (or flip over) while you dribble your ball?
- Spread cones into lines of 3 and do some dribbling “circuits”

Introduce Nets on the Sides (or in Corners – or even outside the grid)



- Dribble and when whistle goes – go score a goal!
- Turn around two cones – then go score a goal!
- 60 seconds – can you score a goal on each goal (assistance needed by facilitator to get balls out of each net quickly)
- Dribble – make a “move” then go score on parents (in nets – passive resistance)
- Bounce the ball and, on coach’s command, throw the ball into a net!

Some Suggested Fundamental Movement Skills (Feel free to incorporate the ball)

- Can we hop on one leg? With two like a kangaroo? With two but with ball between our ankles?
- Can we balance on one leg? With ball in our hands? Can we bend and try and touch the ground while on one leg?
- Can we spin around on leg?
- Can we run really slowly? More quickly? Run out of the square as fast as we can and come back? Touch all four corners of square and meet in the middle?
- Can we shoulder roll on the ground and get up quickly?
- Can we throw the ball up in the air – clap – and catch it? Clap twice?
- Can we throw the ball high up in the air, let it bounce, and then catch it?
- Can we touch as many cones as possible in 15 seconds? Same but alternating yellow and red cones?
- Can we skip from cone to cone? Can we skip and try and bounce the ball?
- Can we skip and high 5 the other players?
- Can we try to carioca our feet as we move sideways?
- Can we balance the ball on our necks (hard but doable when they spread arms out like airplane and have some help from a parent)

- Can we “run”/shuffle with ball in between our knees?
- Yoga – can you try some kids yoga moves?
- Players on the ground – can you balance ball in between your feet and lift legs off ground? Can rollover with ball in between your feet?

Again – get creative and challenging. They will surprise you!!

Mom/Dad and Me Activities

Bringing in Mom and Dad is an excellent time to do one or more of the following:

- Introduce some basic passing and receiving activities
 - Basic pass and receive with no restrictions
 - Pass ball between Mom/Dad’s legs, run round and get it!
 - Insist player stop the ball and take a “clean up touch” before passing it back (plant foot beside ball – pass with instep)
 - Have Mom/Dad and player each set up a mini goal and have a shooting competition.
- Relays
 - Maximum of two players and two parents per team to maximize number of touches on the ball
 - Relays can include:
 - Dribbling the ball
 - Running with the ball (in hands)
 - Rolling or bouncing the ball in front of you
 - Skipping, Running, Hopping, Crawling!
 - Using some other aid (hula hoop, tennis ball, etc.)
 - Incorporate fundamental movement skills without the need to always have a soccer ball for each relay (Or combine both)
 - Piggy backs and “Fireman” Carries

Some Small Sided Games

- **British Bulldog (Modified)**

- Players try to dribble ball across grid without having ball kicked
 - Parents can be substituted in each role from time to time
- Do NOT make these elimination games! Keep kids involved at all times

- **Sharks and Minnows**

- Player dribble within grid and sharks try and kick the ball out
 - Keep ratio of approximately one shark per three minnows
 - Player can retrieve ball and re-enter grid
 - Play it for 60-90 seconds (then ask Sharks how many minnows they “ate”)
- Reverse roles

- **Tag**

- While dribbling the ball have players try and tag others (without leaving their own ball)
 - After set time ask how many players they tagged
- Avoid Freeze tag unless you condition it so the frozen player gets moving again quickly (e.g. – must do 5 “step-ons” to unfreeze yourself)

- **Hospital Tag**

- Same as tag in that each player dribbles a soccer ball and that they try to tag each other with their hands. In this game, each time a player is tagged he/she must place their hand on the spot on their body at which they were tagged.

Obviously, if tagged a third time, players have no more hands to cover those spots, so they must go to the hospital to see the doctor. The coach acts as the doctor and performs a magical task (pretend) to heal all the little soccer players so they can continue playing the game.

- **Traffic Lights**

- All players dribbling in Grid (do not play this game static!)

- When coach says —red light players must stop ball and put foot on top of ball.
- When coach says —yellow light, players must dribble very slowly.
- When coach says —green light players dribble fast.
- Coach controls this game with frequency of light changes and variety of changes.

Once players catch on to this game, add light of other colors and affix different actions to them. (i.e. purple light = hop back and forth over ball, orange light = run around the ball, black light = dance, blue light = hide behind the ball etc. etc.)

- **Freeze Tag (and Variations)**

- Break up the group into two teams. Everyone must dribble his or her soccer ball, but one team tries to tag (freeze) the other team. If they do tag a player on the other team, that player must freeze, place their ball above their head and spread their legs. Another player on their team must kick his/her ball through the frozen player's legs to unfreeze the teammate (Coach can magically unfreeze anyone to ensure they do not stay frozen for long).

If all players are frozen, game ends and the frozen team become the taggers. Otherwise, stop game after a few minutes and have team reverse roles. (*NB: The Coach can be also the freeze monster*)

- **Kangaroo Jack (and variations)**

- All players except two or three begin with a ball. Players without balls are kangaroo jacks and must hop like a kangaroo and try to tag players. If a player gets tagged, he/she becomes a kangaroo as well until all players are turned into kangaroos

- **Ball Tag**

- Similar to other tag games except players try to tag others with their soccer ball instead of their hand. Have them keep count of how many times they kick their soccer ball and tag another person (Instruct them not to kick the ball too hard)

- **Capture the Balls (Generally played in a square grid)**

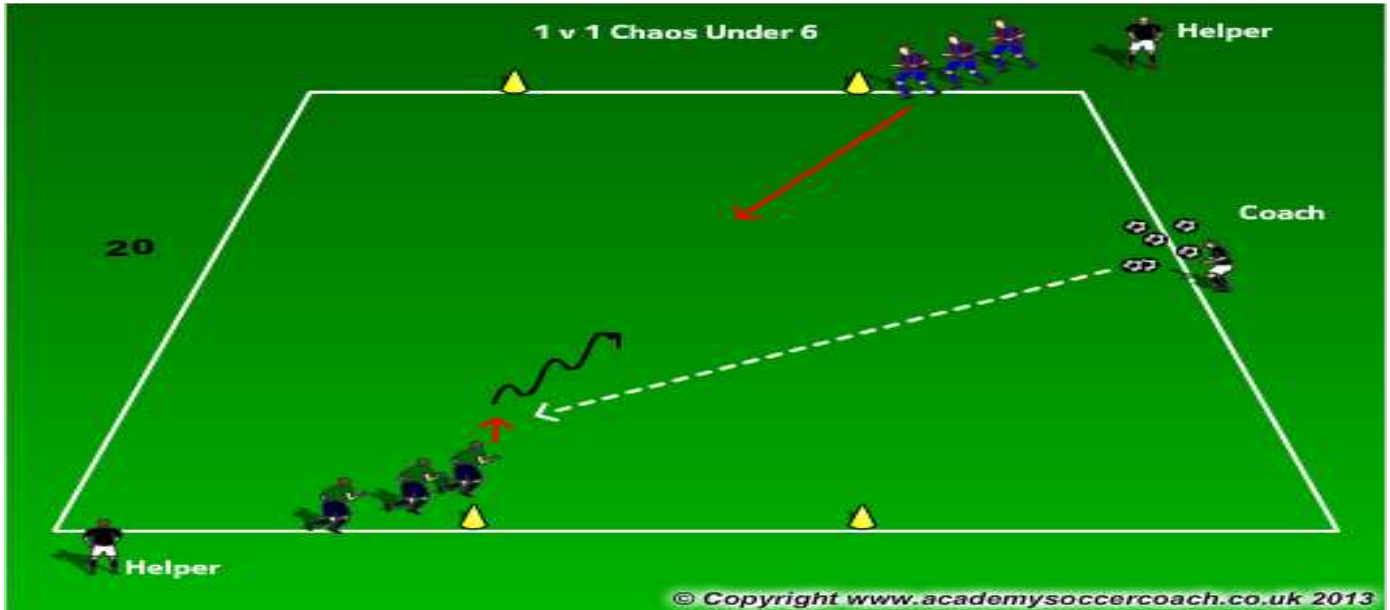
- Set up three or four —home bases (squares) in corners with cones roughly 2-3 yards wide. Break up the players into teams and have each team get together in their home base. Place all the balls in the center of the space between the home bases.

On the coaches command the teams are free to gather as many soccer balls as they can into their home base. Players cannot use hands and there is no pushing each other or sitting/laying on the balls. Teams try to gather as many balls as possible into their home bases.

Teams can steal balls from each other's home bases. Coach calls time and counts up how many balls are in each space to determine a winner.

- Variations include using hands only, mandating skipping etc...

- 1 v 1 Chaos/Get Outta Here



1 v 1 Chaos (or Get Outta Here)

Coach plays ball to a player in line who attacks the goal while the player at the opposite defends. 1 v 1 battle ensues until someone scores, the ball goes **WAY** out of bounds or coach yells "Get Outta Here".
 (Helpers help remind the players when they are up next and/or keep the ball in play from time to time when needed)
 (Coaches - Do NOT play the ball into the middle for kids to run to as it results in more collisions than 1 v 1 battles)

Coach can have two battles (max) going at a time (Chaos) forcing the players to be aware of their surroundings and get their heads up.

Make the goals large to give the players more opportunity to score. Coaches may choose to have 4 goals (2 on each side) instead OR simply make crossing the end line a "goal".
 You may get a parent involved from time to time as a "passive" goalie as well.

****Celebrate ALL goals**
**** Ensure the same match ups are not repeated too often**

The Game

It is integral to understand that the goal of the "game" is to provide all players with an opportunity to play and succeed in a slightly more structured environment. As such, a chat with the facilitator/coach of the squad you are playing "against" is always in order so that you can collectively find ways to ensure that each child has an opportunity to be "successful" each night.

Needless to say, "success" has nothing to do with which swarm of five year olds happens to score more goals than the other on a given night, but should be measured in many other ways. Each game I would ask you to ask yourselves a couple of questions and reflect on some of the following so that we continue to create the environment weekly that we all want our kids to be part of.

- Did each player manage to get touches on the ball during the scrimmage? Did we help in that respect by creating opportunities for that to happen?

- Did we ensure that all the players get maximum time on the field?
- Did we make the environment positive in allowing the players to make most of the decisions? Or did we tell them what to do with each touch of the ball?
- Did we sit idly by and allow the parents to play the game for their children with their sideline joysticks or did we ask them to get on board in allowing their children to play the game themselves?
- Did we keep the flow of the game going to ensure maximum touches or get caught up in allowing balls to go out of bounds too often and wasting time on dead ball situations (kick ins, goal kicks etc....)
- Did we adapt games to ensure our environment provided more opportunities for success?

In that regard, here are a few suggestions that might help achieve some of our primary goals at this age group. Always have a chat with your colleague from the other squad in order to agree on things prior to the “game”. Also, tell the parents what you are doing as, sadly, some will be on the sidelines wanting their team to “win” and may get confused when the “rules of soccer” are not being followed.

- Can we keep the ball moving as much as possible during the course of the game?
 - Coaches can act as “bumpers” and knock the ball back in play when it is going out of bounds.
 - Coaches may choose to actually keep the ball in play and “change the point of attack” to get an otherwise disengaged player involved in the play.
 - A ball may go out on one side and the coach on the opposite side may play a ball in from that location to help disperse the swarm.
 - Can coaches play the ball back in and help create breakouts to allow players to run more freely with the ball “out of the pack” from time to time?
 -
- Can we create bigger nets on occasion to allow for more goals and celebrations?
- Can we balance our squads out when it is obvious that one is quite dominant?
- Can we alter the way kids score?
 - Two nets instead of one?
 - Hitting a row of cones with the ball?
 - Knocking a ball off of a cone on the end line?
 - Running the ball across the end line and stepping on it?
 - Having parents stand across the line with legs open to act as live nets?
 - Use your imagination – as the opportunities are endless.

Again, as coach-facilitators use your creativity to create an environment that will be fun and challenging to all, but that will also maximize the opportunity for all players to succeed. After all, this is a recreational activity and we will lose children from the sport if they are constantly on the outside looking in, and not being given the opportunity to succeed!

Enjoy your summer and thanks for giving your time to our most precious resource, our children

Michael D. Lanos, BA. LL.B, CLU, CFP, MST, DAD
 Ottawa Gloucester Soccer Club - Club Head Coach and Technical Director
 NSCAA Premiere, Canadian National B License, NSCAA Advanced National, NSCAA Director of Coaching
 Ontario Soccer Association Learning Facilitator

"A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove...but that the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child."

