

NEW Curriculum - starting in Spring 2015 - (U6 & U8 Recreation)

By: Terri Baker, Executive Director, Northern Utah United

New, for Spring 2015, we are rolling out a new curriculum for our U6 & U8 Recreational Programs. For the most part, the reaction to our new curriculum has been very positive, and we are grateful to those that have reached out to us with enthusiasm and support. We hope this document will help explain the curriculum for those don't understand it or that still have questions.

What is the New Curriculum?

For U6 & U8 teams, we will schedule your team for five Saturday games, and three Mid-week sessions during the season (in a few divisions, there may be teams that have four Saturday games and four Mid-week sessions).

During the midweek session, both teams will show up at the field and spend the first 30 minutes working together, and using specific soccer games and skills that can be found on the Soccer Tech site, teaching the kids new skills through dynamic activities and games that are specifically designed to be fun for the kids. We will let you know which activities we want you to focus on, but you can use any of the activities or skill sets from Soccer Tech that you would like to use (please stay within the appropriate age sets).

The second half hour will be spent as a "mini game" with four 6 minute quarters, and a 5 minute half time. For U8's we will provide a referee, for the U6's, both coaches will be on the field with the players to coach them, manage the time, and caution the kids against fouls.

The Saturday games will just be a game-day only

- U6's will play four 10 minute quarters and a five minute half time with no keeper, and the coaches on the field to manage time, substitutions and fouls.
- U8's will play 12.5 minute quarters, with a 5 minute half, a keeper and a certified referee on the field.

(For U10's, U12's, and U13-15's and U16 - 18's - It will be games only, except that you coaches will also have Soccer Tech at your disposal. We recommend that you use it to help you with your training sessions. It is a wonderful resource full of videos, drills, session diagrams, and objectives.)

For All - We encourage you to use the skill sets and coaching sessions outlined in Soccer Tech for your preseason and mid season training as well. It will make your season go much smoother, and you will see a dramatic increase in skills within your players and teams.

Curriculum schedule is as follows:

Choose any 2 or 3 of the activities from the listed sessions under the "Coach" tab for your mid-week training session. Again, both coaches will work together with both teams for the first 30 minutes during the mid-week sessions, the second 30 minutes will be a mini game or scrimmage -

For U6 Girls and Boys teams - First 30 minutes of the Midweek session -

Week of April 13 - 17th	- Soccer Tech U5 Session 1 and U6 Session 1
Week of April 20 - 24th	- Soccer Tech U5 Session 2 and U6 Session 2
Week of April 27 - May 1st	- Soccer Tech U5 Session 3 and U6 Session 3
Week of May 4 - May 8th	- Soccer Tech U5 Session 4 and U6 Session 4
Week of May 11 - May 15th	- Soccer Tech U5 Session 5 and U6 Session 5
Week of May 18 - May 22nd	- Soccer Tech U5 Session 6 and U6 Session 6
Week of May 25th - May 29th	- Soccer Tech U5 Session 7 and U6 Session 7

For U8 Girls and Boys teams - First 30 minutes of the Midweek session -

Week of April 13 - 17th	- Soccer Tech U7 Session 1 and U8 Session 1
Week of April 20 - 24th	- Soccer Tech U7 Session 2 and U8 Session 2
Week of April 27 - May 1st	- Soccer Tech U7 Session 3 and U8 Session 3
Week of May 4 - May 8th	- Soccer Tech U7 Session 4 and U8 Session 4
Week of May 11 - May 15th	- Soccer Tech U7 Session 5 and U8 Session 5
Week of May 18 - May 22nd	- Soccer Tech U7 Session 6 and U8 Session 6
Week of May 25th - May 29 th	- Soccer Tech U7 Session 7 and U8 Session 7

If you are a recreational Coach and you haven't signed-up for Soccer Tech yet, check your email for instructions on how to register. Email instructions were sent out on April 3rd. If you didn't receive the instructions with the registration password, please contact your area leader for instructions, or contact either Terri Baker at terribaker1@live.com or Katie Hollingsworth at ckhollings0513@msn.com. Make sure you include the information regarding which team you are coaching.*

Why did we decide to implement this new curriculum?

- Why Change? - We changed curriculum because we are a progressive organization which takes youth development and soccer seriously. We want to provide the best program we can for our community. We actively seek to be educated in the sport and in the healthy physical and psychological development of youth. We pay attention to the research done in the sport – good and bad – and format our program to the best benefit of the kids. There is a lot of research out there that shows that dynamic training is the best for our players, especially players under 12. We are hoping that by reformatting our program for U5 – U8 we are giving our players a pretty good jump start in skill development. We have spent thousands of dollars and a ton of research and time updating our recreational soccer program over the last few years to make it the best experience that it can be. Why? Because when you know better, you do better. We have replaced goals (smaller in many instances), made teams sizes smaller, utilized more small-sided soccer; are improving our referee training, and have now updated our U6-8 curriculum.
- Dynamic Play - Dynamic drills and activities, like those in soccer tech – are designed using age appropriate activities to teach good skills to our players, while giving them fun activities to do. This is the absolute ideal in Recreation: teach skills, have fun, participate! What is more fun for a 5 – 8 year old, telling them to stand in a line and have everyone dribble the ball down in the field in staid and non-dynamic drill formation – OR – putting them all in a

circle and telling them that they are all alligators, and that if they want to be the last alligator in the pond, they have to control the ball with only their feet, and use their ball to knock the other alligator's balls out of the circle. The last alligator in the circle with his/her ball wins this round. (Doing this a few times, gives multiple kids the chance to be the last alligator in the pond.) The kids in both activities are learning to dribble, but in the second activity, they are laughing, and switching directions, and learning to protect their ball while learning to aim and shoot and keeping the ball at their feet. They are learning, and developing good muscle memory-skills, but are having fun doing it. When they then get on a field in a game situation, they now know how to protect the ball, how to dribble, and how to change directions, etc. and they learned all this without realizing they were "Practicing" (a term with negative connotations to many kids).

- Benefits of working together - a positive national trend - Research has shown that there are many benefits for our coaches and young players to work and train together. Two adults or more is better than one – for many reasons, but a shared workload is easily one of them. There is the added incentive for both coaches to follow the program if they know they are going to have another coach there to work with, who is also prepared. This cooperation also will have benefits in keeping contention between coaches to a minimum on the pitch, and showing the kids, that while the other team is the opposition during a game situation, that does not mean they are the enemy. There are so many benefits to this style of practice / play that it would take a long time to enumerate them all, but the research and corroborating evidence is out there and easy to find. This is the new working model for recreational programs around the state and the country: a short training in which new skills are introduced, then a short game situation in which the players can immediately implement the newly learned skills. Is it a little more work for the coaches to learn the new drills? Yes, for some it may be, but our kids are worth it!
- Avoiding Dangerous Trends - We have been watching a very disturbing trend developing in youth sports throughout the state and country. The trend is a push for young player to compete and succeed and specialize in one sport or another at younger and younger ages. This is wrong! Study after Study shows us that children who are pushed to excel too young, burn out and develop an apathetic attitude toward setting goals and working toward achievements as teenagers; they become gun-shy about any situation where they might be thrown into unrealizable expectations, or setting goals that they might not achieve, and facing the potential disappointment from their parents and others. They get burned out and tired of the push to exceed, succeed – more, better, best! The players that are pushed too young tend to drop out of all organized sports and activities. What does this have to do with our curriculum? We have witnessed a growing number of parents seeking out "competitive programs or training" or "Private training" younger and younger, because they feel that their children are not learning skills in our rec programs. Some of these programs are reputable and try to develop in the right way, without pressure while making it fun, other's don't. The irony is that soccer players do not hit their prime until age 27, yet the societal trend is to make younger and younger players pick a sport, a position, and win, win, win! We will resist that trend, as it is unequivocally bad for youth development.

Ideally, we want kids to learn skills at a young age, but not to have to compete, or to train to become the best of the best of the best! We want them to reach out and try any and all

activities that they might be interested in, especially our recreational younger players. We want them to feel good about their own achievements, not because of the score, but because of their own competence, development, and success on the field (not on the score board). By ramping up our training in this specific way, we hope to meet the needs of our ambitious parents in a way that is NOT harmful – in fact it's fun – for their children. The longer we can keep our younger kids in a non-competition environment, the longer they stay in the sport (any sport) and the more likely they are to develop the healthy benefits of youth sports, such as learning to develop goals, work toward bettering skills, cooperation and camaraderie, creative thinking, structure, and living a healthy lifestyle – for life.

Bottom line:

If we can offer the kids a better experience, while teaching them better skills, then of course, that is what we should do! We are not a typical 'city' program that offers the bare minimum, giving the kids something to do, and to raising a little money for other city interests. More and more cities throughout this state are trying to organize their own city recreational programs as a profitable endeavor, but we can do better. We are a cooperative program across many cities, for the betterment of all of the players of all of the cities and for the expressed purpose of teaching soccer! We are dedicated to the needs of all of our players - small city or large - young or older - and by working together we can continue to offer programs for every child in our community. Our goal is to promote healthy lifestyles and youth development through building a love of soccer. We want this to be a good experience for all – kids and adults alike. We want soccer to be a healthy life-long activity in the lives of all of our program's participants.

Change is hard, and we know people often resist it, but this curriculum change is a win-win. We are giving the coaches the knowledge and fun activities to try, and giving them the autonomy to decide which ones they want to use. Many of our coaches have never touched a soccer ball, so this should be especially helpful for them. We are giving the kids fun activities to do, teaching creative play and skills, and cutting very little "Game time".

I encourage all of our coaches to give this an earnest chance. Watch the kids, and try to objectively measure the benefits and failures of the program and help us evaluate it. Evaluation of a new program's success can never be measured before it has been tried. If it doesn't work, we will look at new options. However, as soccer grows in the country and as time passes, we learn more about how to teach, and develop players in the sport...and like I mentioned earlier, now that we know better, we should do better.

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