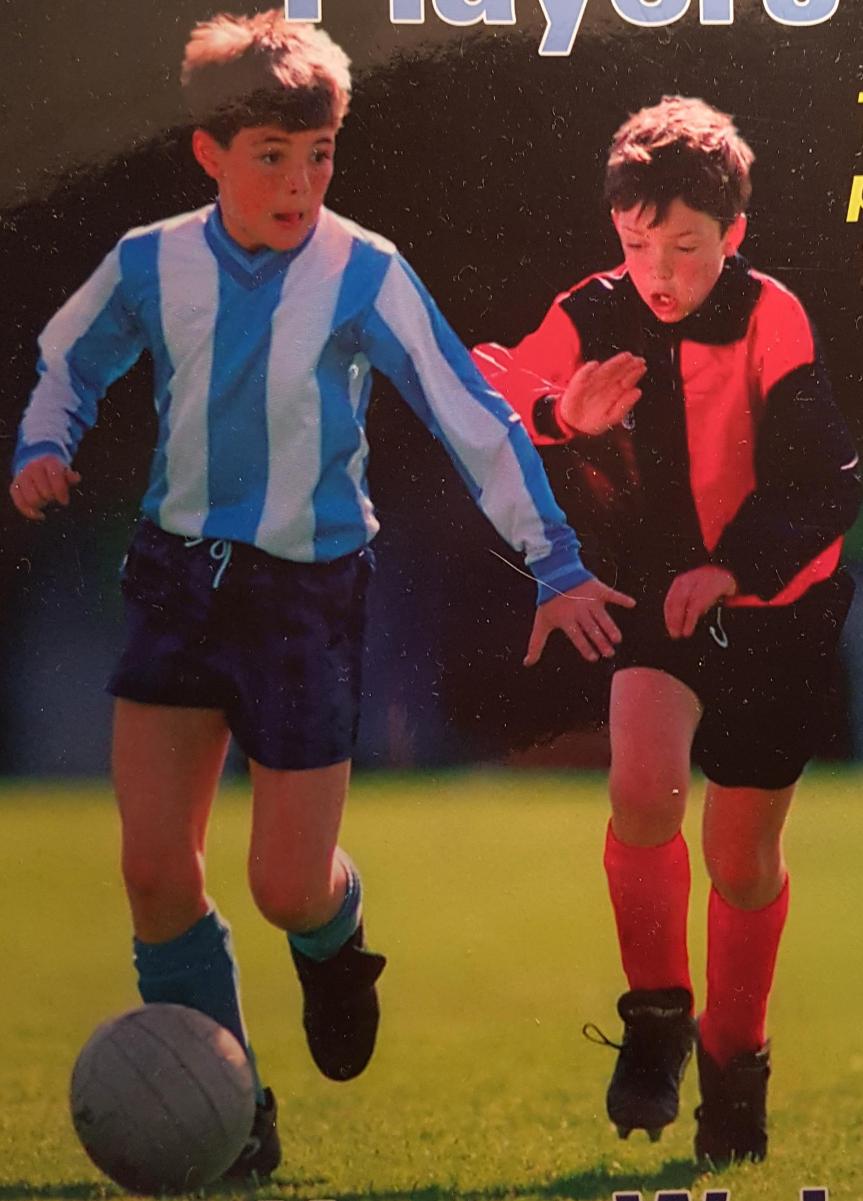


# Developing Youth Football Players

***Tap the full  
potential of  
your young  
footballers***



**Horst Wein**

**Level 1**  
(generally for boys and girls 7 years and up)

Games for basic  
abilities and  
capacities

Juggling and  
balancing  
the ball

Dribbling  
games

Games in  
the maze

Passing, receiving  
and shooting  
games

Tackling  
games

Multi-lateral  
games

Football decathlon

2v2 triathlon

**Level 2**  
(generally for boys and girls 8 years and up)

Games  
for  
mini-football

Games for basic  
abilities and  
capacities

Simplified games  
for 2v2 with  
corrective exercises

Preparatory  
games for  
mini-football

Testing an  
individual's  
playing capacity

Mini-football 3v3  
without  
goal-keepers

Mini-football 3v3  
with  
goal-keepers

Mini-football  
pentathlon

3v3 triathlon

The Football Development Model contains individual exercises and simplified games as well as collective and complex game situations

## Coaching Players Aged 5 and 6

Football clubs should have a school of initiation for children under the age of 7 that functions as a 'sport kindergarten' for players prior to football school.

In these programs, young players would be exposed to a great variety of recreational and motor activities. This training would have the purpose of overcoming motor deficiencies and any delays that players displayed in their coordination or the control of their body as well as in their understanding of the parameters of space and time. Here the popular daily games that previous generations enjoyed in the street, the patio or at the neighbouring park would be practiced. Consider the expert opinion that future generations may be condemned to a progressively sedentary life farther away from a healthy and natural atmosphere. Yet with a programme tailor-made for young children, the negative effects of living in a modern society, with computers and televisions, would be reversed. To allow 5- and 6-year-old boys and girls to grow healthier and to be naturally more athletic, children have to be exposed to physical activity at least twice per week for the following reasons:

- To recognise their bodies, to know the structural and functional possibilities and limitations of their whole bodies, as well as in each of its parts, to be able to consolidate a varied repertoire of basic motor abilities: to roll, to drag, to sit up, to stop, to walk, to raise, to descend, to run, to throw, to jump, to climb, to slide, to push, to kick.
- To develop their psychological and social state by means of popular games such as relays, runs with a variety of obstacles and tag games; to practice basic motor skills by means of exercises with a partner with and without a ball; to build up confidence in themselves and in their physical possibilities; to learn to communicate and to express themselves verbally and with gestures; to integrate into and cooperate with small groups; to appreciate the pleasure of physical activities; to learn to take care of their bodies and respect the bodies of others; and to know and to take care of their surroundings.
- To know how to orientate themselves in space while being aware of their closest surroundings using movements such as up and down, ahead, behind, close, far, between and around as well as notions of relative time such as fast, slow, at the same time, after, and notions of rhythm and the combination of several movements.
- To have some visual experiences of the ball's movement. They must learn, with a great variety of stimuli to correctly evaluate the speed of the ball, the highest point of its flight, the possible place it will land, the spin that has been given to the ball, the bounces of different kinds of balls on different surfaces. A well-organised school of sport initiation would possess balls of various materials, sizes, weights and elasticity.
- To dominate and control the ball better until they have mastered ball skills and, for those children who practice at home, aspire to become a 'magician of the ball'.
- To learn by means of a great variety of stimuli to confidently handle not only the ball on the ground and in the air but also to simultaneously control their bodies. At this point, the ball becomes the young players' best friend.

As the players in this age group learn to control their bodies and the ball, they should regularly do the following in their practice routine:

1. Dribble the ball
  - with the right and left hand;

- with a high bounce that is controlled to reach shoulder height, the height of the hip or the knee and in mixed combinations;
  - with half and complete turns;
  - letting it bounce through separated legs forward and backward;
  - with a hand or a foot whilst balancing one extra ball on the nape of the neck;
  - with one foot and another one with the hand; and
  - letting two balls bounce simultaneously, touching them with both hands at the same or different moments so that they remain in motion.
2. Pass the ball between two or more individuals with different techniques
- with a hand in a frontal shot;
  - from one hand, over the head, into the other hand;
  - letting it bounce with one hand against the ground;
  - like a discus throw or shot put;
  - with two hands like in basketball;
  - as though performing an official throw-in from the competitive football game;
  - with the back to the partner, throwing the ball with two hands over the head; and
  - passing it through separated legs to the partner behind as in a relay.
3. Receive and then control a ball thrown into the air with two hands
- with either foot on the ground, at hip height, level with the head and over it;
  - with different surfaces of the foot on the ground or at the height of the hip;
  - with the thigh, the chest or the head, allowing two touches before the ball must be perfectly controlled;
  - with and without having to first perform a 360-degree turn; and
  - from a sitting position on the ground,
  - whilst the ball is still in the air, the standing player has to receive and return a ball thrown from a partner.
4. Mini-volley, with two or three players in a team, using the passing technique of handball.

Once an acceptable level of control and coordination in the fundamental motor skills is achieved, first without and later with the ball, and once they have reached the age of 7, the children of the school of sport initiation may enter the football school of their club or municipality. Here their trainers expose them not only to other basic motor activities but also to a great variety of fundamental technical-tactical situations of football as described in this book.

## Coaching Players Aged 7 to 9

Once the 5- and 6-year-old boys and girls have completed their first organised motor experiences and practiced some fundamental football-specific exercises in the sport

kindergarten, they are ready to be exposed to the first two levels of the Football Development Model. From the age of 7 upwards, our aim is to introduce young boys and girls step by step to the game of football and foster their interest in this sport. However, before coaches can apply the games and exercises at these levels, they must be aware not only of the specific characteristics and needs of players of this age group but also of some important game alterations to allow better learning. Finally, they must take into consideration some general rules that will stimulate a child's talent.

Children aged 7 to 9 have some significant characteristics:

- They lack fine motor skills.
- Their movements are usually whole-body actions with little accuracy.
- They have short bursts of energy and enthusiasm.
- They are still developing coordination and they are still clumsy.
- They play or participate for fun and for enjoyment.
- Their actions are not yet automatic or programmed.
- They are unsure what actions lead to success at a skill.
- They see every detail as being important.
- They are uncertain in their actions and in how to achieve desired outcomes.
- They lack a clear idea or model of a new skill.
- They cannot follow too many instructions or handle too much information at one time.
- They are unable to use feedback effectively.

By being aware of these traits, coaches can tailor their teaching to meet young players' characteristics and needs. The table on page 29 lists additional characteristics of young children and coaching strategies that should meet the youngsters' needs.

## Coaching Players Aged 10 and 11

The third level of the Football Development Model further develops players' technical and tactical abilities and capacities through a variety of simplified games for teams of three players and later for teams of four players. In addition, level 3 presents a specialised training programme for developing young goal-keepers. Before putting these programmes to work, however, coaches should understand a little more about players.

Coaching players aged 10 and 11 years old is a very important part of the development process. These players are at a stage where they are becoming more independent and self-reliant. Coaches need to be aware of this and adjust their coaching style accordingly. It is important to remember that these players are still developing their technical and tactical abilities, so coaches should focus on providing them with opportunities to practice and refine these skills. Additionally, coaches should encourage players to take ownership of their own development and to set personal goals for themselves. This will help to build their confidence and motivation.