U13/U16 Practice Plans

Introduction to U13/U16

Adolescence can often play havoc with agility, coordination and balance and these skills may regress for a period of time until nature’s time for rapid maturation has passed. The physical changes that mark adults from adolescents will create wide ranges in the size and weight of players during the teen years. Girls will generally complete their growth spurts earlier than boys, although both sexes can experience periods of delayed growth as late as the early 20’s. Physical and psychological training, incorporating a wide range of performance factors, are essential components of a well-balanced training environment.

U13/U16 Coaching Themes: Large Group Tactics and Team Building
Young teenagers are not polished soccer players, and the expansion and refinement of their technical base must still be the primary focus of these important years. Coaching 11v11 team play will begin at the U13/U16 level, and patience will be required as the players’ physical and tactical dimensions adapt to the larger field size and increased numbers. Practice activities should be geared towards improving decision-making under pressure, while challenging players to solve small and large group problems quickly and collectively. As defenders become stronger, faster and more aggressive, attacking players will require sharper instincts for creating and using space, particularly, when playing with their backs to goal.

U13/U16: Team Building, Functional Training and Learning to Win
This is truly the beginning of the formal “teambuilding” years. As players begin to reach physical and technical maturity, training should seek to develop the skills specific to positional play and fitness becomes important as a means of achieving victory. Players’ strategic understanding of soccer must be expanded to help make them coach-independent. Appreciation of the various systems of play and the tactical applications of the laws of the game become important aspects of player development.

Practice sessions should focus on developing good technique while challenging the players mentally and physically. Stretching is mandatory for this age group. A simple and effective formula for 75min practice:
10min high output warm-up, 5min dynamic stretching
10min Technique and/or Strategy
15min 4v4 Small Sided Game emphasizing technique or strategy learned
20min 8v8 scrimmage
10min low tempo warm down, 5min deep stretching

Of course practice sessions will vary greatly depending on the skill and commitment of the players as well as the competitive level of the team. Regardless, the use of 4v4 games is one of the most effective ways to improve player’s technique and confidence. Keep the focus on fun, fitness, and getting everyone involved all of the time.
4v4 games designed to improve passing, dribbling and shooting skills

4 v. 4 The Basic Game

Size of Field

Depends on the age of players. Can vary from 30 yd. x 20 yd. up to 40 yd. x 25 yd. The goals are 8 feet wide.

The Team In Possession of the Ball

Can employ build-up by using the entire playing area in terms of length and width (spread out, possession).
Can learn and determine team shape, which, in a group of 4 resembles a diamond.
Can create goal-scoring opportunities by taking action either individually or collectively.

When the Other Team Has the Ball

The aim is to prevent goals from being scored by getting behind the ball and to regain possession of the ball.
Simple principles of defending are reinforced and amplified since there is no spare defender or goalkeeper.
Variations of the 4 v. 4 Game

Using slightly different sizes of goals, differing methods to score, and slightly altered size and shape of field can guide players to solve problems by emphasizing certain aspects of play.

Each team has a line to defend and attack.

Score a goal by dribbling the ball over any portion of the line that your team is attacking.

The size of the field is the same as a standard 4 v. 4 game, but it is turned sideways. The wider, shorter field allows for maintaining good shape (diamond), but also creates many good 1 v. 1 situations which challenges the player's dribbling skills.

Players need to evaluate and identify when to dribble and pass. This variation highlights: The correct attitude (when to take a risk aggressively) and the technical development and execution of dribbling.
4 v. 4 The Dribbling Game

The Game
Same field as the "Line Soccer" game, a wide, short field. teams can score in one of 2 ways. Passing into an open goal or by stopping the ball on the end line between the two goals they are attacking.

What The Game Incorporates
Vision
Changes in the direction and speed of play due to the shape of the field and presence of multiple goals.
Decision making skills because the player has a variety of options at his disposal (dribbling, passing, "shooting", changing directions)
4 v. 4 The Passing Game

The Game
Since the playing area is longer than it is wide, the emphasis is on creating length (height) in the game. In this game, there is a premium placed on playing the ball forward early. The ball can be played early:
To a target player who is coming back for the ball with a defender behind them (as shown in diagram).
To a player running forward away from the server.

Scoring
Stopping the ball anywhere on the line.
Passing the ball through an open goal.

This Game Emphasizes
Vision
Changes in direction and speed of play.
Appropriate use of firm touch.
Long and short passing.
Transitions

The Game
While one team attacks the large goal, the opposition attacks either of the two smaller goals. When the team scores in one of the two smaller goals, they must change directions and take a turn at attacking the larger goal.

This Game Emphasizes
Attitude and confidence that is essential for scoring goals. (Large net) Passing, shooting and dribbling skills required in the other 4 v. 4 games. Transition awareness since the team can attack quickly in the other direction.
Team shape and the roles of each player because when there is a transition, the back becomes the front and vice versa.

4 v. 4 The Shooting Game

The priority of this game is shooting and scoring. Since the field is wide and short, players should be looking to shoot almost whenever they get the ball. Regular 4v4 rules.
Change Soccer
Involves every player in a fun 2v2 or 3v3 or 4v4 half field game that emphasizes co-operation and skill development.

Organization
Group is split into two; if odd number, coach joins in or plays the strongest squad a player short.

Three players from each team play as fielders. Two or three players on each team are collective goalkeepers; positioned no more than 2-yards off each goal line. Goalkeepers keep arms linked together. They are not allowed to handle ball. Goals count only below knee height.
Coach shouts "Change!" and on-field teams run back to goal line, without touching the ball again, to become the goalkeepers.

Goalkeeping teams become the on-field teams and move quickly to win possession.

Coach shouts "Change!" at any time.

Make goals wide enough (5m or more) so that it's not too difficult to score. Any major infraction means a free shot from the halfway line, with no goalkeepers.

**Teaching Points** Encourage players to pass frequently in order to create scoring chances.
Encourage goalkeeping team to move sideways together, as a wall.
Defenders should help each other and stay on their feet as much as possible.

**Target** To outscore the opposition.
Speed Training: Shuttle Sprinting and Collect the Ball

Set out a grid 10 X 20 yards using disc cones in 2 or 3 lines. The distance between the cones should be 5 yards. Place 4 balls at cone E at the opposite side of the grid to the players.

Basic Game
The players stand behind cone A and on 'GO' the red and yellow players run to collect a ball from E and dribble it to a cone A through D.

- Which cone is first is the player’s decision, but at the end of the sequence, each one A through D must a have a ball.

- When all balls are placed, the player runs back to the start and touches the hand of the next player.

- The next player works in reverse and dribbles each ball back to cone E.

- Repeat until all players have had a turn.

Variations

1. Team Challenge. If you have even numbered teams, make it a race so that each player needs to collect one ball from E and take it to another cone A-D, next player must take another ball from E and take it to one of remaining cones A-D. Once all balls are placed the order is reversed so that balls are returned to E.

2. Weave. Make players weave through cones before getting a ball from E.

3. Donkey. Make players do 3 donkey kicks each time they get a ball from E.

4. Backed Up. Same as basic game but players sprint forward to E, dribble or run backwards from E.
A FEW MORE 4V4 GAMES.

THE PLAYMAKER GAME
Technique – passing and receiving
Insight/communication (lots of decision making - concentrating on a midfield playmaker)
Pitch size 40 x 20
4v4 + one extra player who plays for the team is possession
Standard 4v4 pitches and goals.
Players kick the ball onto the pitch when out of play. Younger players can also dribble the ball onto the pitch
The extra player who plays for the team in possession wears a different colored bib. For a team to score a goal the play MUST go through the ‘playmaker’.
This game allows the ‘playmaker’ to see lots of the ball and to make many decisions. It is this repetition that will improve passing, receiving and decision-making.

SANS FRONTIER GAME (No lines game)
The pitch is still marked out with cones but the length is shorter than normal at 30 meters.
The rules are simple; the ball is never out of play so even if it behind the goal, play continues, like in Ice Hockey.
The game is very fast paced with plenty of 1v1s and the children are very creative and love to be able to pit their wits in a new situation.

THE SPURS GAME
In Hunter Davies fantastic book about the Tottenham Hotspurs, The Glory Game, he describes a training ground game used by the late coach Nicholson where four teams play on the same pitch scoring into two goals.
Pitch: 40 x 20
Teams: 4 teams of 4 (red, blue, yellow & orange) + two keepers
2 footballs – different colors
Teams can either dribble or pass the ball onto the pitch
Reds play blues with one ball and yellows play orange with the other ball.
Reds and yellow are scoring into one goal and blues and oranges score into the other goal.

What you have is two different games on the same pitch
Great fun
Players have to get their heads (vision) up to see who is on their team, who is the opposition and which ball is being used for their game
Improves technique in a very tight space
Improves communication – you must talk to each other as the pitch is chaotic
Keepers need to be alert as there are two balls on the pitch so they have two balls going at them at once.
THE SNOOKER GAME

This game is similar to the standard 4-goal game but has the added challenge of accuracy when finishing.
Technique – passing, dribbling and accurate finishing – the game requires a cool head when finishing.
Pitch size 40 x 20 with a 5-meter exclusion zone at each end
4v4 with 4 goals
To score a goal a player must be outside of the exclusion zone and kick the ball so it hits one of the balls in the zone, which in turn knocks (pots) the ball in to one of the goals (pockets). If both balls go into the goal it is worth 3 goals. The stationary balls should be about 1-2 meters from the goal line depending on age and ability.
You can put the stationary balls on a marker cone for the younger kids. You can also add more balls for younger kids.

THE 5 MINUTES TO GO GAME

Divide team into two groups. Tell one side that they have a 2-1 lead with 5 minutes left to play, tell the other side that they are down 1-2 with 5 minutes left to play in the match.
You then ask the two teams to have 2 minutes to talk among themselves about how they are going to play those 5 minutes.
Then go to each group and get them to tell you.
Things to consider if team that is down by a goal go all out to get a goal they may leave room at the back and if they concede another there may be no turning back.
Like wise if the team with the lead try and hold onto their lead and fall back that will invite the other side to attack.

At the end ask them if their plans worked.
Insight – Working as a team, communication
4v4 no keepers
Standard game 4v4 game.
Players can either kick or dribble the ball onto the pitch when it has gone out of play.
This game is excellent for getting teams to work together, to see the bigger picture and for better communication.
The most important element of planning practices for teenagers is to ensure that the training is both fun and challenging. This is age where players choose whether to continue with the sport and learn to play as an adult or to move on to another activity. Once the players stop learning and/or stop having fun they will quit.