

U-08 Coaches Handbook

Los Alamos Youth Soccer League

*Adopted by the LAYSL Board of Directors
2000-2001 Season*

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction / Background Information	2
II.	Team Management / Involving Parents	3
III.	Risk Management	4
IV.	Characteristics of U-08 Players	5
V.	Coaching Rationale	6
VI.	Practice Organization	7-8
VII.	Games / Scrimmages	9-10
VIII.	DOs and DON'Ts for Parents and Coaches	11
IX.	Age Appropriate Games	12-15

I. Introduction/Background

The Los Alamos Youth Soccer League (LAYSL) Board would like to thank you for volunteering to coach U-08 soccer. Coaches of U-08 LAYSL teams are expected to take the Youth Module I training supplied by the New Mexico Youth Soccer Association (NMYSA), our parent organization. This handbook cannot replace the Youth Module I training. The Youth Module is critical to ensure a positive and developmentally appropriate soccer experience for players of this age. Training courses will be scheduled periodically by the LAYSL Training Coordinator, and you are strongly encouraged to take this course (it may soon be mandatory).

At this age, the soccer experience can be a fun and exciting one, which will forever stimulate the child's interest in soccer. LAYSL's goal is to provide an exciting, FUN soccer learning environment for all children at the U-08 level regardless of their level of play. The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with the mechanism to organize activities and games that will allow all the players to learn some basic soccer skills and, most of all, have FUN. This age group has often encountered the problem of uneven games and an overly competitive atmosphere. This age group must stress skill development as opposed to competitive games. Doing this with many small-sided games will ensure skill development for those children who want to continue to play soccer, but also provides a FUN atmosphere for those children playing just for enjoyment.

There has typically been no mechanism to pass on knowledge to U-08 coaches from year to year. The long-term success of LAYSL depends upon what we do with the younger age groups. Towards this end this handbook will be updated each year with input from all U-08 coaches.

II. Team Management / Involving Parents

A team parent meeting at the beginning of each season is important in providing parents with your approach (philosophy for coaching U-08) and expectations. Make sure parents understand what you are trying to accomplish and how you will be going to go about it. Parents also need to know what to bring to practice, *e.g.* filled water bottle, sock-covered shin guards, no jewelry, etc. Discussing practice times and expectations for picking children up on time is also important.

It is imperative at this meeting that you as a coach get parents involved. This involvement will dramatically help you, but also children at this age really need parental encouragement and involvement. Each U-08 team must have one head coach, at least one assistant coach, and a team parent. An assistant coach is necessary with the simultaneous game format and to help with practices. Team parents are most useful in helping to control children and ensuring that none wander from the practice area. Team parents are also helpful in communicating scheduling changes and cancellations.

III. Risk Management

The LAYSL Board has adopted a set of guidelines to help reduce some of the risks associated with youth soccer. All coaches and parents should read and be familiar with these guidelines. Furthermore, it is very important that parents understand that there are inherent risks of injury in playing youth soccer. In addition to the risk management guidelines, with this age group, you as the coach must:

- A. Ensure a safe playing area with appropriate equipment; you have a duty to notice hazards and to do what you can to reduce risks.
 - 1. Ensure players wear shin guards (under socks) and remove all jewelry
 - 2. Note and remedy any dangerous conditions (*e.g.*, holes, sprinklers, goals); notify the LAYSL Fields Coordinator of any serious field problems
 - 3. Provide clear practice rules to avoid injury
 - 4. Call attention to all risks no matter how obvious
 - 5. Closely monitor weather conditions (*e.g.*, lightning) and assure proper clothing and contingency plans
 - 6. Do not allow children to climb on goals or other structures
 - 7. Ensure any splint / cast is properly padded
- B. Properly plan activities and teach age-appropriate skills
 - 1. Repeatedly warn players of dangerous risks and techniques
 - 2. Immediately stop reckless or overly aggressive behavior
 - 3. Develop a written practice plan
 - 4. Supervise the activity closely
 - 5. Provide proper instruction
 - 6. Provide frequent water breaks
- C. Determine limits of a player's ability to participate
 - 1. Adapt your practice plans to individual needs
 - 2. Solicit parental assistance
- D. Match size and physical ability of your players
 - 1. Modify practice when mismatches occur
 - 2. Know your players and their ability and coach accordingly
- E. Prohibit heading the ball and slide tackling
- F. Provide appropriate emergency assistance
 - 1. Consider having a cellular phone available
 - 2. Know and provide proper first aid

IV. Characteristics of U-08 Players

- Short attention span, not at a “competitive” stage
- Inclined towards small group activities
- Always in motion, constantly moving
- They want everyone to like them
- Beginning to develop physical coordination (*e.g.*, most can ride a two-wheeler)
- Different players will possess a wide variety of sizes, abilities, and physical coordination
- Starting to imitate older players
- Easily bruised psychologically—praise often and give hints; do not criticize
- Need generous praise
- Need to play without pressure
- No awards for winning, just for participating
- Very individually oriented
- No sense of pace; they go “all out” constantly; they are easily fatigued but recover rapidly
- Skeletal system growing rapidly, which often results in an apparent lack of coordination
- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed—make sure they get numerous and adequate water breaks
- Development for boys and girls are quite similar
- Limited understanding of personal evaluation—therefore, if they tried hard, then they performed well regardless of actual performance; they need to be encouraged constantly
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play, but may forget in the heat of battle
- Find it difficult to be aware of more than one thing at a time

V. Coaching Rationale

- Small-side (4v4) soccer is the best option for these players. Both the US National Men's and Women's teams train extensively using 4v4. It allows everyone to be constantly involved in playing. If it is good enough for Mia Hamm and Claudio Reyna, it should be good enough for every U-08 Los Alamos player.
- Because of rapid growth spurts at this age, children will go through periods where they lack coordination. Be patient.
- Passing is not an important part of their game; it is much more fun to dribble. Let them.
- Warm-up is beginning to become important at this age. Also, safety and preventative measures take on added significance.
- One hour twice a week is plenty of practice.
- Learning to control the ball is the main objective. Players need to touch it as many times as possible during FUN activities that will engage them.
- Incidental things are important. They are beginning to form habits which will impact their future participation. Ask them to care for their equipment (especially balls, and including water bottles), cooperate, listen, behave, and try hard.

VI. Practice Organization

- Practices should consist of age-appropriate FUN games and activities that encourage participation. Try to incorporate skill development into soccer related games.
- The coach must be a facilitator, a friendly helper, an organizer, and a stimulator, while being patient, enthusiastic, and imaginative.
- Practices should be no more than 60 minutes twice a week for this age group and organized in a progressive manner, *i.e.*, warm up, then individual activities, then group activities.
- Gear sessions around touching the ball as many times as possible. Involve the ball in as many activities as possible.
- Children play soccer to learn soccer; they learn by doing.
- If there is not enjoyment there is no learning.
- Keep things moving quickly and use activities that avoid lines.
- Have as many activities ready as possible in one hour. Emphasis needs to be on what is FUN.
- Participate in all warm-ups and activities. Have the kids hold a ball for the stretches to increase fun and familiarization with the ball.
- Exaggerate your motions to illustrate a technique or proper procedure.
- Soccer skills are most effectively developed in game-related situations; incorporate many small-sided games.
- Each practice should be used to teach one technique or skill, *e.g.*, shooting (kicking), passing, or dribbling. For example, a single practice should consist entirely of age-appropriate exercises and games to teach just dribbling, while a different practice would concentrate on just passing.
- Plan at least four 90 second water breaks.
- Practices should always end on a FUN, high-note so that the children do not want to stop and look forward to the next practice. Handing out a treat to each child at the end of practice with words of encouragement is always a nice way to end.

Example Practice Schedule

Practice 1—Theme: Dribbling

- (1) Warm up—1 ball per player.
- (2) Stretch upward with ball over head, reach for the sky with the ball.
- (3) Stretch side to side with the ball over head.
- (4) Roll ball between legs in a figure eight; reach with ball back between legs.
- (5) Touch-Touches (pass the ball from inside of the left foot to inside of the right foot, repeat from side to side), count out loud until 10 or 20.
- (6) Tap-Taps or Hat Dance (lightly touch ball with the bottom of right foot then with left repetitively, ball should remain stationary), count out loud until 10 or 20.
- (7) Dribble 10 yards and return using inside and outside of foot.
- (8) Break (water); set up cones for next set.
- (9) Relay Races (1 ball per player). Set up two sets of cone courses that players must dribble through. Do a couple of non-competitive races first. Evenly match the two teams. Exercises should avoid lines, but this is one case where they move through quickly.
- (10) Sharks and Minnows or Freeze Monster (1 ball per player). Set cones in a large area (circle or square). Players dribble within the area keeping the ball close, using the inside and outside of their foot, and avoiding other players. After a few minutes the coach and one or two additional adults become the sharks and try to make the minnows change direction while dribbling. Freeze monster is the same approach, but player freezes when touched by the monster until all players are frozen.
- (11) Break (water); set up cones for next set.
- (12) Red Light Green Light. Children's game, but with soccer ball. Players need to start and stop on command and control the ball. Stress dribbling technique and stopping and starting with the left or right foot.
- (13) Break; set up cones for next set.
- (14) 1v1 Dribbling. Two players one ball, the player with the ball attempts to dribble around the other player to cross a line. Match players for ability.
- (15) Break; set up field for 4v4 scrimmage.
- (16) 4v4 game stressing dribbling (1 ball). Set up small field with small goals with cones. Two points for dribbling through the goal and one point for shooting through the goal.

VII. Games / Scrimmages

- 4v4 is the ideal size for this age group. Children naturally learn by the constant repetition and frequent ball contact in this game.
- 4v4 is the USYSA recommendation for youth players in this age group. This game provides more touches on the ball, limits bunching of players, provides more space, more actual playing time, a more energetic experience, requires more decision making, and requires players to play both offense and defense.
- 4-a-side provides the basic elements of soccer without the complications of position play.
- 4-a-side provides more playing time and a simpler substitution pattern.
- Play lots of small-sided games in practice; a small-sided game maximizes involvement in real soccer situations.
- Coach or coaches should be on the field at all times during practice, but quiet with the sole job of substituting players during games.
- USYSA mandates no keepers at this age group.
- Placing players specifically on defense or in front of the goal defeats the purpose of the 4v4 game.
- Remember the objective—HAVE FUN!!!

4 v 4 Simultaneous Games Format

Los Alamos Youth Soccer League, Summer 2000

Why This Format? Last year (1999-2000 season) we had general agreement that small-sided games worked best for the kids. But having only 5-7 kids on a team was a problem. Practices could be boring, especially if some kids were absent, not enough socialization, not enough new friends, and we needed too many coaches. It also didn't utilize our limited practice fields very well. To try to solve those problems, but still keep the benefits of small-sided games, Tom Hart, Director of Recreational Coaching for US Youth Soccer, was contacted. He replied that all local organizations faced those same problems when adopting the small-sided game format.

The answer was to have larger teams but play two games at a time. Furthermore, the recommended format for U-08 and U-06 soccer games had been modified. The new format was developed by Dr. Dave Carr based on children's developmental studies. The underlying principle is that first- and second-grade children are not adults, and the soccer that adults play is not the kind of game kids of this age are developmentally suited for. They will be soon enough, but they aren't ready yet. Dr. Carr, working with other soccer coaches and developmental specialists, put together a "kid's soccer" that lets kids learn soccer without the formality and structure of the adult game. This game is designed to "flow" without all the interruptions and "points of order." That can be taught at a later age.

Kids play sports to have fun. When there are too many rules and too much to remember, it isn't as much fun. Soccer is a "player's game"—the more the kids work with the ball, the more fun they'll have, and the more likely they'll return next year.

4 v 4 Simultaneous Games Format

Field Two fields with 5 yards between fields. Teams stand in the zone between the fields. Small goals are used.

'No Man's Land' A 5-yd arc in front of each goal. Players can only go there if the ball goes in first. Same penalties as for the 'exclusion zone,' indirect kick and goal kick.

'Out of Touch' Every ball over the end line is a goal kick regardless of who kicks it out. Kick ins and/or dribble ins replace throw ins on the sidelines. The ball is put into play quickly by the team that did not play it out of bounds.

'No designated defenders' No goalkeepers, no score keeping, and all goals should be celebrated. Keeping kids back as defenders defeats the purpose of this format. The recommended format is a diamond moving back and forth over the field.

The 'Draw' Quarters and after goals are scored results in a 'draw' method of putting the ball back in play. One player from each team faces each other with both feet on the ground. The ball is between them and on the signal (whistle or ref yells 'draw') they try to draw the ball backwards to their teammates using the bottom of the foot. It initially gets them into possession mode and eliminates the 'kick off' which doesn't make sense for this age.

'On the fly' 1-for-1 substitutions One kid comes off and then, **and only then**, another kid goes on, as the game goes along. No child should have to wait more than a couple of minutes to play. As kids get tired, and they will quickly, give each a short break. They recover quickly and then put them back into the game. Make sure they are going in the right direction. Coaches should try and let everyone have equal playing time.

Dr. Carr advocates a warm-up where everyone gets to interact with a ball for 10-15 min before the game begins.

Coaches should use this format to create balanced games—stronger players vs stronger players, etc. If there are only 10 players on one team maybe a 3v3 game on one field and a 4v4 on the other would be better. Be sure to keep at least 3 subs. If kids are playing in both games it should be more difficult to determine a 'winner.' Coaches should use this fact to discourage scorekeeping. Lots of scoring on both sides is encouraged.

The only other NM organization presently using this format is High Noon Soccer League (the Las Cruces youth soccer organization). In two years, they have doubled their rec program, from 300 to 600, on kids telling other kids.

References:

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VIII. DOs and DON'Ts for Parents and Coaches

DOs

- DO get the appropriate (Youth Module I) training and license
- DO stress having FUN
- DO offer suggestions and advice
- DO offer considerable praise and encouragement
- DO award participation
- DO involve parents
- DO use the 3 C's when providing instructions—clear, concise, and correct
- DO practice the 4 C's of coaching—competence (developing skills), care (show them they have value beyond soccer), confidence (develop the belief that the child can do a skill), and commitment (will be developed in the child in the other three things happen)

DON'Ts

- DON'T shout negative comments to any child
- DON'T keep score or award winning
- DON'T allow lopsided games
- DON'T shout instructions at the player with the ball; he/she has enough to worry about
- DON'T shout instructions like send it, boot it, or kick it—allow the child to practice good decision making and ball control
- DON'T get upset if they don't pass—let them dribble
- DON'T place one player directly in front of the goal during a scrimmage or game—this defeats the purpose of small-sided games
- DON'T use the 3 L's—lines, laps, and lectures

IX. Age-appropriate GAMES

Run and Shoot

Line near the center of the field facing goal; use two lines and two goals to keep time in lines to a minimum. Have a player from one line start to move towards the net and feed the player the ball. The player dribbles toward the net and shoots. Move quickly through the line. Get parents help collect balls and keep kids moving through the lines.

Monkey in the Middle

All players form a circle and choose a Monkey to be in the center. The players forming the circle pass one ball among them while the person in the center tries to gain control of the ball. When this happens, the person in the circle who last touched the ball goes to the center.

Cone Soccer

Play 1v1 with one player against one player; each has a cone as a goal. Match skill and size. Every player is involved; no one stands and watches. This promotes a lot of dribbling and switching match-ups assures no one being outmatched.

Ice Monster

Mark off area (circle or square) and let the coach be the “Monster.” Players with balls dribble within the area. The “Monster” attempts to touch players, who “freeze” when touched. Player is also frozen if ball goes outside the area. Players can become “unfrozen” when touched by an “unfrozen” player.

Numbers

1v1 dribbling skills. Divide players into two groups given each player in each group a number. Attempt to match size and skill for the same numbers. Make two very wide goals with cones. Players spread across each goal line. Call out one (or more) numbers and players play 1v1 or 2v2 with the remaining players defending the goal along the goal line. Coach throws out the ball and play continues until ball goes out of play or one team scores.

Red Light Green Light

Players line up with balls and dribble on green light instruction by coach. Players must stop on red light with control of the ball. Play continues until players pass the coach.

Cops and Robbers

Have players line up with balls. These are the robbers. Two more players are the cops and face the robbers near the middle of the field. Robbers attempt to dribble to the other side with the cops attempting to take the ball away. If the robber loses the ball, the player goes to jail until only two robbers remain. These two robbers become the cops for the next game.

Camp Town Races

Players line up on one end of the field with balls. At signal they take off dribbling to the goal and shoot on the goal. Players retrieve ball from the goal and dribble to the starting end, shooting into the goal. The first to finish is the winner.

Pirate

Like Sharks and Minnows, but with one "Pirate."

Kickout

Everyone dribbles ball within a circle or square while trying to kick the other player' ball out. Player must protect own ball, working on shielding and control. Player cannot kick another ball out unless their ball is in the area.

Egg Hunt

Players line up on line and coach scatters balls (eggs) around the field. The goal serves as the basket at the opposite end of the field. The object of the game is to get the eggs in the basket as quickly as possible.

Marbles

Every player has a ball with two groups at opposite ends. Place an unusual color ball in the middle (as the marble). Players try to move the marble to the other teams side by striking the marble with the ball. After the game starts, players can use any ball.

2v1, 3v2

Uneven number games encourage team play and passing.

Keep Your Yard Clean

Create a neutral area between the two teams on the field where no player is allowed (1 or 2 yards). Each player starts with a ball at their feet. On command, each team tries to keep their side of the game free of balls by kicking their balls to the other teams side. After some amount of time, stop the game and count balls. Variations include 1) using only player's left foot, 2) dribble the ball around a cone in their side then kick, and 3) throw the ball to the other side.

Gates

A gate consists of two cones spaced 2 steps apart. Two players per gate and one ball per group. The first player must play the ball on the ground through the gate to the second player. Second player must receive the ball and play back through the gate within two touches. The game can continue until the ball does not go through the gate or for a time limit with score keeping.

Dribbling Fitness

Four teams at each corner of a square with balls in the middle. The object is to get the four balls back to your team's corner. Only one ball can be moved at a time and the ball must be dribbled back to the corner. For the younger players the ball can be carried to the corner initially.

3v3 with Multiple Balls

Set up a 3v3 game with goals. Have coaches and parent quickly return balls into play when kicked out. Also try using 2 or 3 balls during the game.

Two-sided Goals

A 2v2 game played with the goal as two cones. Players can score on the goal from either side. The game is continuous and is best played for 2 to 3 minutes.

Sit Down

An even-sided keepaway game. When a player loses possession he/she sits down until their team regains possession of the ball. In this manner the controlling team always has a one player advantage. Make three consecutive passes equal to a goal.

Running Bases

Set up a square playing area with the corner areas being the base. Players attempt to dribble their ball from base to base without being tagged. If they get tagged, they exchange places with the tagger. Players are safe in any of the four base areas. Only one player is allowed in a base at a time. If a new player enters a base, the old player must leave.

Protect the Cone

Define a square space with four teams and each team defending three cones on one side of the space. All players have a ball. Players either attack the opponent's cones while controlling their own ball, or defend their team's cones while controlling their own ball. The cones must be knocked down with the ball. Teams must stop attacking when their cones are all down.

Steal the Bacon

Two teams with each player having a designated number. Two goals are set up in about a 30-by-30-yard field. All players line on the endline and run from the endline to play. Coach calls out the numbers of the players to play and serves in the ball. The coach sends an additional ball in when the ball goes out or a goal is scored. Players not playing retrieve the balls or can serve as support (can have the ball passed back to them). 2v2 or 3v3 works best.

Three Ball Keep Away

Two teams of equal numbers and three balls. On signal from coach, players try to possess as many balls as possible. The team with two balls when the coach stops play wins that round. Play several rounds.

Dribble to Score

Dribblers (two or three at a time) try to dribble through three zones of defenders. Defenders must stay in their zones and try to kick any ball they intercept out of bounds. As soon as first dribbler is through a zone the next in line starts. After beating the last defender the dribbler must shoot on a goal.

Bees

Set up area (each player 1 ball) and have players dribble within the area while buzzing like bees. After awhile, have coaches (or parents) walk inside the area. The bees are to sting the big people with the ball (pass or shot). The need to keep looking for a target and hitting it.

Wave Game

Set up a 20 x 20 area with all the players with a ball at one end. Their job is to dribble inside the square to the other end. The coach is in the middle to try to kick the ball out of the area. If a player loses their ball, they help in the middle. All players start at the same time as a wave.