HOBBIT WEEKLY

FOR YOUTH COACHES The week in youth football, picked for coaches



05

19 Oct to 25 Oct 2026

U9 to U19 rules
Same rules for every player, top scorer too

U11 three questions
Praise what produced the win, not the score

Growth spurt check
Sudden clumsiness and knee pain worth watching

Cover story Coaching · Aprende Entrenando

Plan the family meeting first

Set bench and stands roles before your first session

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Keep the Ball and the Player

Nine year olds stand in line waiting for a turn, the ball tucked under a coach's arm while the whistle decides who moves. We know that scene.

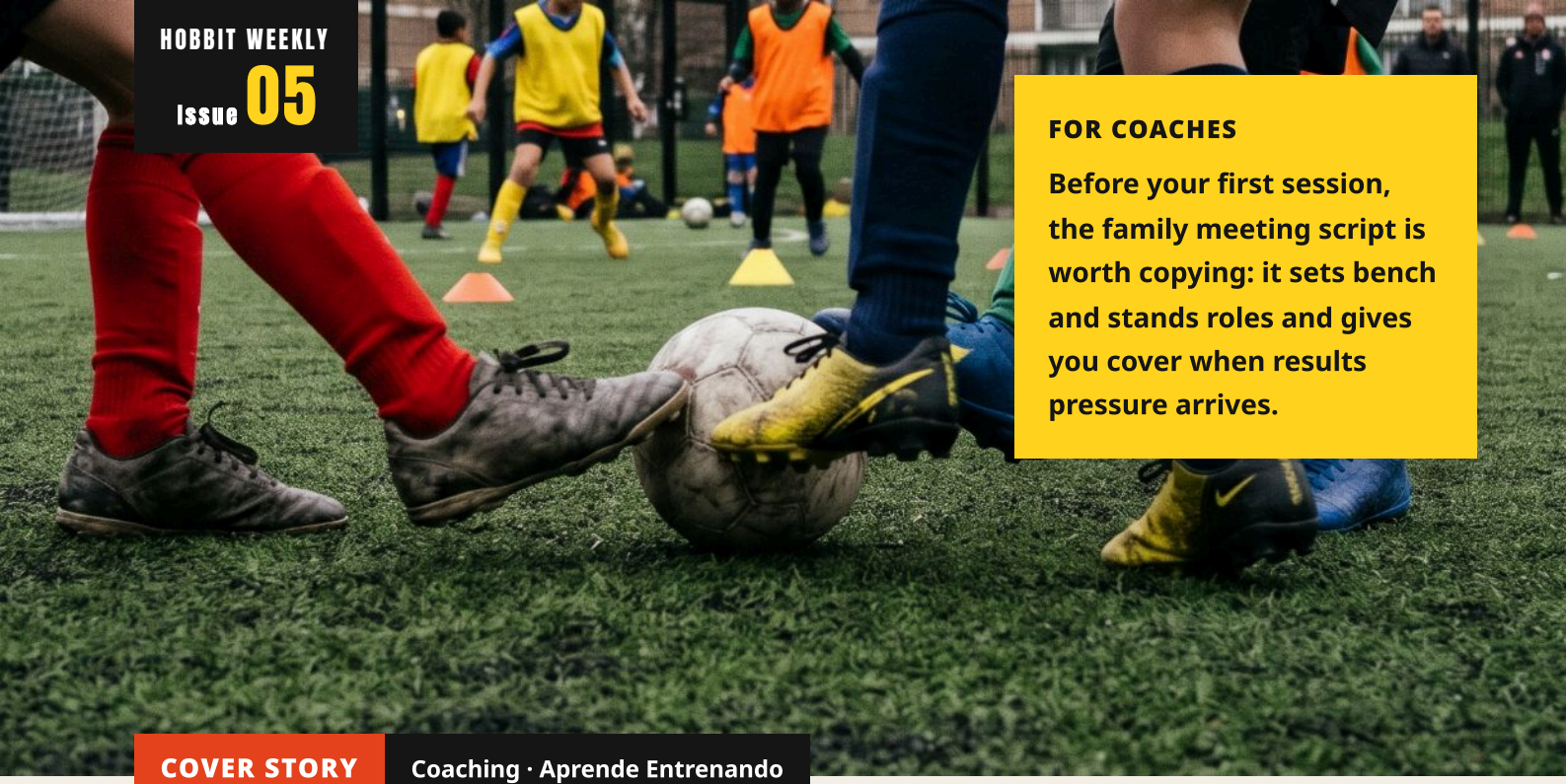
Across this issue, the same answer keeps coming back: put the ball in front of the child. The parent coach who keeps going because games and touches teach; the session where players move or are on the ball about 80% of the time; the 3v1 rondo chasing 12, then 15, then 18 passes.

We can also stop chasing the quick win. Praise what produced the 6-0, not the score.

What one drill in your next session could become more ball and less waiting?

The Hobbit editors

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FOR COACHES

Before your first session, the family meeting script is worth copying: it sets bench and stands roles and gives you cover when results pressure arrives.

COVER STORY · Coaching · Aprende Entrenando

01 Guide for the youth soccer parent-coach: Keys to coaching without dying in the attempt

75% of the coaches I work with at AprendeEntrenando start the same way: sitting in the stands watching their child's enthusiasm being mistreated. Excessive shouting, absurd tactical demands for seven-year-olds, eternal benches and coaches who confuse the under-8 age group with the first division. If you have decided to take the step to change that reality, this guide for the youth soccer parent coach will give you the structure your good intentions need so you don't crash at the first hurdle.

The metamorphosis: going from spectator to developer

Taking on the bench demands burning your fan role from minute one. In the stands you had the freedom to focus your gaze only on your child. On the field, your responsibility is divided equally among the 12, 15 or 18 children who make up the squad.

The most frequent initial mistake is treating the little ones as miniature adults. A child in the under-8 or under-10 stage does not process the game through rigid tactical schemes. Their brain needs to experience, make mistakes and have fun. Your success for the season is not measured by the trophies in the club's cabinets, but by how many children renew their registration the following year because they are still in love with soccer.

Adapt the demands to each development stage:

- Under-8 (8-9 years): Discovery of the game, basic coordination, maximum participation and zero pressure about the result.
- Under-10 (10-11 years): Individual technical mastery, understanding of elementary collective play and simple decision-making.
- Under-12 (12-13 years): Major physical changes, move to 11-a-side soccer, introduction of tactical concepts by lines and emotional management.
- Under-14 and Under-16 (14-18 years): Structured competition, high physical demands and consolidation of the game model without neglecting values.

The three deadly traps of the parent coach

Managing the "dad/gaffer" duality is the toughest psychological challenge you will face. Falling into any of these three traps will destroy the group's dynamic:

1. Over-demanding your own child

For fear that the other parents will accuse you of favoritism, you tend to be harder on your child than on the rest. You demand more of them, you scold them twice as much and you demand immediate maturity. This is devastating for the child. Your child needs to know that on the field they are just another player, but that when they get in the car you are their father again.

2. The "remote-control blackout"

Giving constant instructions at the top of your voice from the touchline while the match is being played destroys the player's autonomy. If you tell them when to pass, when to shoot and where to run, you are creating puppets who don't know how to think when the ball is burning at their feet.

3. Measuring progress by the league table

Winning 8-0 at the cost of giving four players leftover minutes is not developing; it is fooling yourself. If you sacrifice the individual development of the less gifted players to scrape three points in the under-10 age group, you are failing as a developer.

Non-negotiable pedagogical principles on the bench

To build a quality development environment, your working methodology must rest on solid pillars. Apply these principles in every session:

Equal distribution of minutes

In 8-a-side soccer (under-8s and under-10s), all children must play at least 50% of the match's total time. Rotations are planned during the week, not because of tantrums during the match. A child who only plays five minutes doesn't learn, gets frustrated and ends up leaving the sport.

Consistency between training and match

Don't ask for in competition what you haven't worked on in the weekly sessions. If during training you use small-sided games and leave freedom for dribbling, you can't shout in the match "get rid of it!" at the first mistake.

Pedagogical normalization of error

Error is the most powerful learning tool there is. When a player loses the ball by attempting a risky pass or by daring to dribble, applaud the intention. If you punish courage by sending the child to the bench, you will only produce frightened players who get rid of the ball.

How to design an efficient training session

Forget the endless lines of children waiting to shoot at goal. In youth soccer, the time of motor engagement (actual time the child is in contact with the ball or moving) should approach 80% of the session.

Structure your training sessions in three clear blocks:

1. Dynamic warm-up (15 minutes): Small-sided chasing games, modified rondo drills or ball-handling dynamics where everyone has a ball at their feet from minute one.
2. Main part (45 minutes): Design two or three tasks based on real game situations. Use ball possession drills, positional games or numerical superiority/inferiority situations (2v1, 3v2). Avoid tactical speculation; children learn to play by playing.
3. Cool-down and free match (15 minutes): Modify the rules of the final match to reinforce the goal of the day (for example: goals after a cross from the wing count double). Save the last five minutes to reflect with them on what they have learned.

Managing the sidelines: The pact with the families

A large part of the problems of a parent coach do not come from the children, but from the adults sitting on the sidelines. You must manage the expectations of those around you from day one.

Hold a team meeting before the first training session of the year. Set the rules with absolute clarity:

- The sidelines support, the bench directs: Giving tactical instructions to the children from the fence is forbidden. It creates short circuits in the player's head.
- Absolute respect for the referee: If parents protest at the referee, they damage the group's image and teach their children to look for external excuses.
- The car is not a press room: Ask parents to make the trip home a safe space. The first question to the child should not be "why did you lose?", but "did you have fun today?".

The true value of your work

Being the coach of your child and their teammates is one of the most rewarding experiences you will ever have if you approach it the right way. Ten years from now, none of these children will remember whether you finished fifth or seventh in your regional league. What they will remember forever is how you made them feel, whether you trusted them when they failed and whether you knew how to pass on the love for this game.

Take the whiteboard, prepare your tasks with rigor, be fair with the minutes and enjoy the process. Youth soccer needs fewer Sunday-obsessed strategists and many more parents willing to educate with the ball as an excuse.

Source: Aprende Entrenando · Translated from Spanish aprendeentrenando.com

THIS WEEK

02 Coaching U8 to U18

Youth soccer locker room management: A guide to leading groups and handling egos

> **For coaches** If your team selection follows training commitment, applying it to every player, including your top scorer, is what keeps the group on your side.

For years I have come across coaches capable of designing spectacular build-up plays, but who suffer hell when they cross the locker room door. The reality of the youth soccer bench forgives nothing: the best tactics board blows up when you lose control of the group. Knowing how to manage the locker room, lead the group and handle egos is the foundation for building a respectful, committed and competitive squad, from U9s to youth teams. If you intend to solve conflicts by imposing your authority with shouting, you will only achieve distance and distrust. Here I tell you how to take command, stay consistent and turn difficult individuals into players committed to the team.

Order and consistency: The foundation where respect is born

Many coaches think that managing the locker room means giving epic motivational speeches before a crucial match. I tell you from experience: that does not last even five minutes on the pitch. Management starts in the invisible work of every Tuesday and Thursday.

When you as a coach do not have a clear method, you transfer your own confusion to the squad. If you arrive at training improvising the session on the fly or trying to explain five complex tactical concepts at once, the player disconnects.

1. Absolute transparency in your decisions

If you determine that commitment in training decides the starting spot for the weekend, follow through without exceptions. If the top scorer of your U15 team arrives late two days in a row without justification and you start him on Saturday, you will have lost the respect of the locker room forever. Players forgive you for getting a tactical substitution wrong, but they do not forgive a lack of fairness.

2. Clear routines from the first day

Uncertainty creates disorder. Your players must know what is done when they arrive at the facility, how the equipment is set out, how the coaching staff is addressed and how the locker room is left when they finish. External order fosters mental discipline.

3. Brief and direct messages

In age groups like U11 or U13, attention span runs out quickly. If you give twenty-minute talks before going out to train, eighty percent of your players will be thinking about anything else. Say just enough, with energy and with a clear objective for the day.

How to handle egos in youth development age groups

In almost every squad you are going to find that player with superior talent who knows it and shows it with smugness, or the player with a dominant character who drags the group toward negative dynamics. In youth soccer, an oversized ego rarely comes from malice; it is usually a symptom of immaturity, insecurity or excessive pressure from the family environment.

The "star" player in U13 and U15

Never try to humiliate the most talented player in public to show who is in charge. If you expose him in front of everyone, you will turn him into a victim in the eyes of his teammates and you will break communication with him. The right strategy is one-on-one in private.

Make him understand that his quality is a responsibility toward the team, not a license to do as he pleases. Give him positive leadership tasks: "You have enormous quality to break a game open, but I need you to be the first to jump into the press after a loss of possession. If you do it, your teammates will kill themselves on the pitch watching you do it."

The negative leader who contaminates the locker room

Cut off at the root any gesture of contempt toward a teammate inside or outside the field of play. If you allow a player to reproach another for a failed pass with a gesture of indifference and you say nothing, you are validating that behavior in front of the whole group.

When you detect a toxic attitude, stop the drill immediately or speak with the person involved as soon as he steps off the touchline. The group needs to see that the coach protects the cohesion of the squad above any individual.

The player frustrated by minutes

Managing the one who does not play is the acid test of any coach. In the youth category, the bench stings more than ever. Explain your decisions based on collective performance and objective analysis, never on personal attack.

Tell him with absolute clarity which specific aspects of his game he needs to improve to earn the opportunity and praise him openly when you see progress in training. The substitute player must feel that he is still useful to the block.

The non-negotiable rules of the locker room

Filling the locker room wall with a printed list of twenty prohibitions is absolutely useless. Nobody reads them and nobody follows them. Establish four or five fundamental rules that everyone must memorize and respect from the start of preseason.

- Absolute respect for the group and the club staff: Anyone who disrespects a teammate, the coaching staff or the facility manager is left out of the squad list.
- Strict punctuality: The meeting time before training or the match is respected to the second. One person's lateness harms everyone's preparation.
- Care of equipment and facilities: Collecting the balls, bibs and cones is the responsibility of the entire squad, not just the newcomers or the youngest.
- Zero screens in the changing room: Mobile phones go in the backpack when you cross the changing room door and do not come out again until the talk after the match or training is over. The changing room is for looking each other in the eye and building team spirit.

Adapting leadership to the age group

You cannot lead a group of U9s the same way as a youth squad. You must adjust your communication to the maturity level of your players.

U9 and U11 (8 to 11 years old)

At these ages, the main focus should be on fun, learning and inclusion. Egos are usually a reflection of the parents' expectations in the stands. Your job is to put the result in perspective, rotate positions and ensure that everyone feels an important part of the group. The guidelines must be extremely simple and visual.

U13 and U15 (12 to 15 years old)

You enter fully into the adolescence phase. Insecurities appear, along with cliques inside the changing room and questioning of authority. Here you need to listen a lot. Show empathy for their personal problems, but keep the line of discipline firm on the pitch. Aim for them to understand the logic behind every decision.

U17 and U19 (16 to 18 years old)

Management comes close to that of a senior team, but with a formative side that is still essential. The youth player seeks respect and demands solid tactical arguments. If you try to impose something "because I say so," you will lose credibility. Explain the tactical reason behind things, identify the natural captains and rely on them to maintain internal order.

Roadmap for getting an out-of-control changing room back on track

If you have taken over a team mid-season with bad dynamics or you notice that the group has slipped out of your hands in recent weeks, apply this sequence to regain control of the changing room:

1. Pause and self-criticism by the coaching staff: Analyze which limits you have failed to set or at what moments you have been inconsistent in your decisions. Change starts with your attitude.
2. Reset meeting: Talk to the squad with total honesty. Acknowledge the points where the team has lost its identity, set the new non-negotiable limits and make it clear that a new stage is beginning with no grudges held.
3. Short individual interviews: Talk alone with the players who carry the most weight in the changing room. Ask them direct questions: How do you see the team? What do you think we should improve? Ask for their explicit commitment to driving the project forward.
4. Immediate application of consequences: At the first breach of the agreed rules, apply the agreed consequence without hesitation. The group will see that the talk is completely serious.

Close the changing room door and start building

Youth soccer is played on the grass, but matches start being won or lost inside the changing room. If you manage to create a safe, demanding and fair environment, where every player knows their role and prioritizes the good of the collective over their own personal glory, performance will come as a natural consequence.

Take your folder, walk into the changing room with your ideas very clear and show your players that leading is not about shouting louder, but about guiding them with consistency and conviction every day.

Source: Aprende Entrenando · Translated from Spanish aprendeentrenando.com

03 Coaching U11

Post-match debrief in youth soccer 8-a-side: stop praising the win, praise what produced it

> **For coaches** Try setting one game criterion before your next match and asking your U11s those three questions after the whistle, win or lose, to keep the focus on the play.

After a 6-0 win, I praised my players for the score and for the goals. In the next match, there was no more playing. That is when I understood that what we celebrate after the final whistle shapes the next match.

The short answer: after a win in U11, children quickly forget how they played and how they should play. Only the score remains, and being fixated on the score slows their progress. The solution is not to remove the joy of winning, but to correct your end-of-match review: organize it around what has been worked on, not around the result. It is not easy, and we will see why, then how to go about it.

My mistake as a young coach: a 6-0, then no more playing

At the start of my coaching career, my team won 6-0. I praised the children for the win and for the goals scored. It seemed natural: they had won, they had scored.

In the next match, there was no more playing. Everyone was looking for their own individual relationship with the ball, with no collective intention. All the players wanted to score, or to make the move that leads to a goal, at the expense of the play.

The problem came from me. I had put too much emphasis on the success of the scorers. I had said nothing about the passers, nor about the midfielders who had won the ball and organized the play so that we could score those six goals. The children had perfectly understood what was valued. They did exactly what I had applauded.

Why the score slows progress in 8-a-side soccer

A score in U11 says little about the quality of the collective work. It depends on physical maturity, the level of the opponent on the day, a share of luck and the choice of play: a team that hoofs it forward can win by a wide margin without progressing.

Above all, what you praise, your players reproduce:

- If you praise the goal, they will look for the goal, alone if need be.
- If you praise the win, they will remember the score and forget the play.
- If you do not talk about the invisible work (winning the ball, the pass that starts the move, finding space), those who do it feel useless. In terms of retention, it is a real risk.

Common mistakes after the match

A common mistake is to improvise. Here are the most frequent traps:

- Talking about the score first: everything that follows takes second place.
- Praising only the scorers, the most visible, not always the most useful.
- Giving a different review depending on the result: we skim over it after a win, we analyze after a defeat. Children understand that analysis is a punishment.
- The speech that is too long: beyond three minutes, no one is listening anymore.
- Looking for culprits: naming a player's mistake in front of the group.
- Giving the review in front of the parents: the child protects himself and answers for them.

The real work: correcting your end-of-match review

One might say: "It is enough to praise something else." In practice, it is difficult, because the review comes at the worst moment:

- Emotions are running high, the children's as well as yours.
- The coach is himself caught up in the result. Wanting to win is natural, and we celebrate spontaneously.
- Time is short: the parents are waiting, the next match is approaching, the pitch has to be cleared.
- The reflex is established: the review is often an improvised speech, not a method.

To change, then, it is not about controlling yourself more. You need a simple framework, prepared before the match and applied the same way, whether the team wins or loses.

Before the match: a single criterion of play

Choose an objective linked to the week's session and announce it to the players: "Today, we are looking to play out short when the goalkeeper has the ball." This criterion serves as the basis for the review. Without it, you fall back on the score.

Here are a few criteria usable in U11:

Theme | Criterion announced to the players | What you observe

Playing out from the back | "We play out with short passes when the goalkeeper has the ball." | How many successful play-outs out of how many attempted

Playing forward | "We look for a pass forward before dribbling." | The ball carrier's first reflex

Support | "The ball carrier always has a passing option." | The number of players offering themselves

After losing the ball | "When we lose the ball, we all react together." | The team's immediate reaction

Collective play | "Before shooting, I look if a teammate is better placed." | Forced shots versus assists

Width | "We use the sides to move the play forward." | The occupation of the channels

Step 1: let it settle (1 minute)

No speech while emotions are hot. The players drink, catch their breath, gather in a circle. The emotion must come down before the words.

Step 2: three questions (1 to 2 minutes)

1. One thing done well against the day's criterion: "What did we do well from what we had worked on?"
2. One thing to rework: "What caused us problems?"
3. One teammate to thank: "Who helped the team without it being obvious?"

Let the children answer before you speak. Your role is to guide, not to comment in their place.

Part 3: one sentence looking ahead to the next session

Finish simply: "On Tuesday, we work on playing out from the back again." The review closes on training, not on the score.

Example dialogue after a match

Here is a typical exchange, to show what the review with U11s can look like.

> Coach: Before we talk about the score, we had a goal today. Which one? A player: Playing short. Coach: Yes. Does anyone have a moment when we did it well? A player: When Léo passed the ball to Sam. Coach: Léo, what did you see to make that pass? Léo: Sam was free. Coach: Exactly. And one point to improve?

If a child simply answers "We won!", welcome it without correcting them: "Yes, and I'm happy for you. And in what we had worked on, what stood out?" It takes a few matches for the reflex to change.

What I should have said after my 6-0

With what I have understood since, here is what I could have said: "Who won the ball before the first goal? Who made the pass that set up the second? Who made the run so that goal could happen?"

These three questions would have highlighted the passers and the midfielders, not just the scorers. They would have shown the children that scoring is the last step in a chain of which everyone is a part.

"Instead of..." / "Try...": the phrases to change starting Saturday

"Bravo, we won!" | "What did you manage to do today that we had worked on?"

"Well played, you scored!" | "I liked your pass before the goal. What did you see?"

"Too bad, we lost." | "What moment made you proud, even without the score?"

"Who missed that chance?" | "What can we try differently next time?"

"You didn't run enough." | "When did we struggle to make ourselves available to the player on the ball?"

"Bravo to our scorers!" | "Who allowed the team to play well without scoring?"

The child who cries after a defeat

First give them time to calm down, without a speech. Talk to them one on one, with a simple sentence about what they did well in the game, not about the result. The group review can wait.

The big win without the desired play

This is my 6-0 situation: the score is there, the play is not. You then have to have the courage to say: "We won, and it's not what we had worked on." The children understand it very well, provided you are not the first to celebrate the score.

The defeat with good play

Say it clearly: "You did what we had worked on." This is the most useful moment to show that the play matters more than the score.

And the parents?

Parents copy your reaction. If you talk about the score, they will turn it into a big deal in the car. At the start of the season, explain in two sentences how you do the review and why: you want the children to want to progress and to stay.

The objections you are going to hear

"But the children want to win!" Yes, and that is normal. You do not remove the joy, you move it: you can be happy about a win without making it the measure of each person's worth.

"You're taking away competition!" No, you are educating it. A child who learns to progress enters competition with a better foundation than a child who has remembered only the score.

Practical tips for Saturday

- Write a single playing criterion in your notebook before the match.
- Do not talk about the score during the first minute of the review.
- Ask the three questions in the same order at every match.
- Name a player whose work does not show up in the statistics.
- Keep the same review, whatever the result.

Should you really never talk about the result in U11?

No. The score exists, the children know it. The point is not to make it the starting point or the criterion of value. You can mention it, then come back to what was worked on.

Praise the goal AND what made it possible: "Nice goal, and well done to the one who won the ball before." The chain matters as much as the finish.

What criterion should I choose if my team is very beginners?

Start with a simple, observable criterion, for example "look for a free teammate before shooting." One criterion is enough: a clear objective is better than five forgotten ones.

Does this method work in other age groups?

Yes, with adaptations. In U13 and above, the players can lead part of the analysis themselves.

Conclusion: the post-match review is the last exercise of the match

What you say after the final whistle is part of the session. My players remembered my applause for the goals, not my instructions during the week. If you value what was worked on, dared and built together, you get more than a result: you form players who love to play together.

Source: Josselin Lebreton · Translated from French josselinlebretoneducateur.com

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04 Safety and welfare

How Growth Spurts Affect Youth Soccer Players

> **For coaches** When a player suddenly looks clumsy or reports knee or heel pain after a heavy training week, treat it as worth watching rather than normal growing. Structured programmes such as FIFA 11+ Kids are cited as reducing injuries.

Authors: Adrian Oppong, MD and Stephen Stache, Jr., MD, FAMSSM

Youth soccer players can seem to change overnight. One season they look coordinated and confident, and the next they may struggle with balance, speed, or new aches and pains. For many young athletes, these changes are related to growth spurts.

Growth spurts are a normal part of childhood and adolescence, but periods of rapid growth can temporarily affect athletic performance and increase the risk of certain injuries. Understanding how growth affects young athletes can help parents and coaches recognize when changes are normal and when an injury may need attention.

How Growth Spurts Affect the Body and Performance

A growth spurt is a period when a child experiences relatively rapid increases in height and weight. Although growth occurs throughout childhood, the most noticeable growth spurt typically happens during puberty. Girls generally experience this earlier than boys, but the timing and rate of growth vary considerably between individuals.

During rapid growth, changes in bone length, muscle flexibility, and tendon tension can temporarily affect how an athlete moves. These changes may be particularly noticeable in soccer, where running, cutting, jumping, kicking, and changing direction place considerable demands on the lower extremities.

As athletes advance to higher levels of competition, their training intensity and volume often increase as well. When these demands coincide with rapid growth, some athletes are at greater risk for overuse injuries.

Parents and coaches may also notice temporary changes in coordination, balance, speed, or agility. As the body grows, athletes sometimes need time to adjust to changes in their size and movement patterns. Muscle tightness, particularly in the hamstrings, quadriceps, and calf muscles, may also develop.

These changes do not affect every athlete, and most are temporary. However, pain or a noticeable decline in performance should not automatically be dismissed as a normal part of growing.

Common Growth-Related Injuries in Youth Soccer

Several conditions are particularly common among active adolescents during periods of rapid growth.

Osgood-Schlatter disease is a common cause of knee pain in growing athletes. It develops when repetitive stress from the patellar tendon irritates the developing bone just below the kneecap. Activities such as running, jumping, and kicking can aggravate the condition.

Athletes typically report pain and tenderness just below the kneecap, sometimes accompanied by a noticeable bump. Symptoms often worsen during or after practices and games.

Sever Disease (Calcaneal Apophysitis)

Sever disease is a common cause of heel pain in young athletes. Similar to Osgood-Schlatter disease, it results from repetitive stress on an area of developing bone, in this case where the Achilles tendon attaches to the heel.

Athletes may experience heel pain during activity, limp after soccer, or notice increased discomfort following tournaments or periods of heavier training.

Growth plates are areas of developing cartilage near the ends of bones. Because these areas are still developing, they can be more vulnerable to injury than mature bone, particularly during periods of rapid growth.

Both repetitive stress and acute injuries can affect growth plates. Persistent pain, particularly when associated with swelling or difficulty bearing weight, should be evaluated by a healthcare professional.

Muscle Tightness and Tendon Irritation

Rapid growth can also contribute to changes in muscle flexibility and increased tension around joints. In soccer players, this may affect the hip flexors, hamstrings, quadriceps, calf muscles, and Achilles tendons. When combined with repetitive activity, these changes can contribute to discomfort and overuse symptoms.

Preventing Injuries and Knowing When to Seek Care

Although growth spurts cannot be prevented, there are several ways parents and coaches can help young athletes manage these changes and reduce injury risk.

Adequate sleep, hydration, and nutrition are essential for normal growth, physical performance, and recovery. Young athletes need sufficient energy to support both their developing bodies and the demands of training and competition.

Encourage appropriate conditioning

Dynamic warm-ups, strengthening exercises, balance training, and mobility work can help athletes maintain flexibility and movement control. Structured injury prevention programs, such as FIFA 11+ Kids, have also been shown to reduce injuries in young soccer players.

As athletes grow, it is important to balance training demands with adequate recovery. Playing on multiple teams, participating year-round, and competing in frequent tournaments can increase physical stress. Parents and coaches should pay particular attention to sudden increases in activity and allow appropriate time for rest.

Young athletes should feel comfortable reporting pain, fatigue, or changes in performance. Reporting pain early may prevent a minor injury from becoming a more significant problem.

One of the most important things for parents to understand is that pain is not always a normal part of growing. While occasional soreness after activity is common, persistent or worsening pain deserves attention.

Warning signs that should prompt medical evaluation include pain that continues despite rest, swelling, limping, difficulty bearing weight, pain that limits participation, or recurring symptoms after practices and games. Night pain, particularly when persistent or unexplained, should also be evaluated.

Many growth-related overuse conditions can be managed successfully with activity modification, rehabilitation, and gradual return to play. Early recognition and appropriate treatment can help prevent prolonged symptoms and unnecessary time away from soccer.

Helping Young Athletes Stay in the Game

Growth spurts are a normal part of athletic development, but they can create temporary challenges for young soccer players. Parents and coaches should recognize that every athlete develops at a different pace and that changes in performance are not always a reason for concern. However, persistent pain should never simply be dismissed as growing pains. With appropriate training and recovery, most young athletes can continue playing safely throughout these periods of rapid growth.

Source: Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer epysa.org

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05 Coaching U5 to U13

Realistically how long can I coach my kid's team

> **For coaches** At U6, keep it fun and give every child lots of touches on the ball. Try "shoot the coach": the kids dribble and try to hit you, and you fall down dramatically when hit.

My son is playing U6 rec this season and I'm considering coaching his team next season. I have zero soccer experience and I might watch 5 professional matches a season but I do practice with him in the backyard 4 days a week and he's seeing improvement from those practices. I often jump in at the beginning of practice and games and do some fun soccer games with the kids to get them warmed up while the coach gets there/ready. Should I give coaching his team a shot next season? At what age should someone like me bow out and let the more experienced coaches take over?

Top replies, most upvoted first

- (+31) Here's the thing, you keep coaching and you'll be that more experienced coach. You coach until you don't have anything to teach (easy to avoid this with all the videos/books out there on coaching), or you get tired of it. So long as there's a need and you can fill it without it taking the joy out of the sport for you/your kid, keep coaching.
- (+15) If it’s just rec you can just do some research and the kids, parents, and organization will be lucky to have you at any age.

- (+10) At this age, you are totally good. I did the same thing, never coached before. All they need to do is have fun and get lots of touches on the ball. Sharks and minnows, stop/go, little scrimmages... Quick tip: one thing they'll love is "shoot the coach." They dribble and try to shoot you with the ball, you dodge. When you get hit, fall down as dramatically as you can. I guarantee you they will laugh their little butts off.
- (+6) I think at age 13+ for a kid, they benefit more from serious/trained coaches.
- (+5) The thing about children at this age group is that you need no soccer knowledge to be an excellent coach. At this age, the game can be the teacher.
- (+3) Rec soccer with dedicated parent coaches served my kids well up through U12. U13 when they made the jump to paid coaches. Neither kid wants to play beyond high school, so I'm not really a parent who sweats the acronym league they are in. If that is important to someone, I think they should put their kids in academy programs with paid coaches at U10.
- (+3) It;s really a function of how much time and effort are you willing to put into learning the game and to what level your kid gets to. It also depends on what you current base is as a leader and a coach. If you are a good communicator, can already create a long term plan, Create daily and weekly plans to achieve long term plan, and most importantly control you emotions. You will be a step ahead. It will be more challenging if you have not lead a group before and have not done soccer. I started with a good leadership base; but knew zero about soccer. I spent 20 hours plus a week learning the...
- (+2) Obviously tons of variables here - but my hipshot is about U11-U12. At that point - you are going to need some additional help (assistant coach) or making sure you go up and get something maybe more serious than a grassroots license. Again - if you are playing in a lower tiered league or it's more just for bonding and fun - then nothing to worry about.
- (+2) If he's in rec, you care about the other players/your community, and you don't get too worked up about wins and losses, you keep coaching as long as you want to. And, if you ever get to the point that you feel like you need to know more or do more, there are ways to handle that. You can train yourself through online courses. You can go watch higher lever teams. You can recruit a more knowledgeable co-coach. And, if you do get to the point that you are unsure you want to keep coaching...join the board and volunteer to help run things.
- (+2) Yes. Volunteer next season. Even officially help the coach out now whenever they need. Most youth coaches have little to no coaching experience other than maybe starting with an older child. If your league/club somehow ends up with too many coaches (unlikely at that age), then decide if you want to step out or not. When they child gets older, like U10 or up, if you're feeling in over your head the decide what you want to do based on her level of play and available coaches. Your child will love that you're coaching as well.
- (+2) I made it to U14 as a bball guy

- (+2) I had near zero soccer experience when I started coaching my daughter at U5. I did it because no one else volunteered and I largely coached it like it was hockey. I just basically kept progressing through licensing and training courses as she got older and coached her until she was U9. It wasn't because I was incapable of coaching any longer but my daughter and my assistants daughter profiled as the two best players on the team and their behavior with us was much more "dad" than soccer coach. They were way more locked in with the technical trainers than we could get them to do during practice...

Source: r/youthsoccer · 58 comments reddit.com

FROM THE COACHING COMMUNITY

06 Coaching U9 to U10

3-2-1 build out

> **For coaches** Spread the back three wide with the middle defender dropping next to the keeper, and keep the two midfielders staggered rather than side by side.

Hey coaches

I'm thinking to switch my bu10 team to 3-2-1. What are some good build out patterns that you have successfully used? I've done 2-1-3 exclusively for 3 years now so I'm familiar with strategy there. But 3-2-1 is new to me so just trying to learn. Thanks!

Top replies, most upvoted first

- (+10) Play a 2-3-1. Playing 3-2-1 makes it harder for you to build out, since there are fewer forward passing options. Also, your goal keeper is likely directly behind your CB, which reduces their usefulness as passing options. 2-3-1 means your back two can split wide in possession, allowing the GK to form a back three with them. You've now got 3 midfielders to pass to (rather than 2). It also makes you defensively more sound, as the back 2 should play like CBs (conversely, in a back 3, the LB and RB often end up pushing up like attacking fullbacks, leaving your one CB alone),. and your CM can...
- (+3) Here's my 3-2-1 treatise. https://www.reddit.com/r/youthsoccer/comments/1udgscp/the_benefits_of_the_321_formati Big thing is we emphasize our outside backs are wingbacks and the push up and carry the ball. Other wingback rotates to cover, so functionally always a 2-3-1 in attack. Our buildouts were simple and effective with the goalkeepers trained to read the defense. ST is always holding 2 CBs as high as possible, showing to the side the ball is on. We have names for all the plays and the GK can call them. 1) Wingback carry. One MF down line, one central. Wingback takes space. 2)...

- (+3) 3-2-1 is going to be a more defensive shape but if you have talented LB and RB can be a valuable learning formation for wingers and also teach kids the importance of the center of the pitch. Versus a 2-3-1 your CMs will be 2 v 1 versus the 2-3-1's CM. Just make sure that RB and LB get forward to help progression
- (+2) An advantage of the 3-2-1 is that the LB and RB get more freedom to be creative on and off the ball than the CB's in a 2-3-1 during buildout and throughout the game thanks to frequent 2v1 opportunities. For example, when the LB gets the ball from the keeper, they can execute a wall pass with the LCM to advance up the wing. Another option is to send a pass down the line for the LCM while the LB rotates to replace the LCM in the middle, pushing up to support the attack from there. The LB can also just dribble up the wing if given the space. That's just a few of the things that they can do in...
- (+2) Honestly I think it's a good switch. You'll concede less and building out gets way easier. Main difference from 2-1-3 is you've got fewer guys up top, so the outside backs have to push up once you're past their first line. A few things that should work with this change 1. Spread the back 3 really wide, with the middle guy dropping next to the keeper. Gives the GK easy passes. 2. Don't let the 2 mids stand side by side. One drops in to get the ball, the other stays higher. 3. If one side gets crowded, pass it back to the middle defender and switch to the other side. Kids pick this up fast. 4....
- (+2) Is your team decent though where they can play the ball to the goalie? If so consider a 2-3-1.
- (+2) I prefer the 3-2-1 formation if your players or team is "struggling" or doesn't have good quality all round. For build out, my approach has been CB to RB or LB, depending on what side of the goal the GK is kicking from. The LB or RB receiving the ball has to stay wide, outside the box, some few steps away from the side lines. This gives them width to receive the ball. Option 2 is CB to MF, if you have a MF that's good on the ball. At training, I would place cones to show each player where they should be during kick off. If you have a CB with big kicks, he can also go over the pressing...
- (+2) Awesome. I'm just contrasting goal kick strategies. I usually teach my centerbacks to play tight so they have time to assess and make a pass. However in a 3-2-1, I assume the backs should be playing wider. So just thinking through best plays where they don't get pressured so fast they immediately lose the ball.
- (+1) I would take more advantage of the build out line. Keep your outside defenders back, even with the goalie, this way they have more time to make a decision on the play. If you play them closer to the build out line an aggressive team with a good high press will either take away their options or simply take the ball. Even then they will most likely have two touches including the pass. Start both your midfielders on the build out line about a third of the field in on each side. Whatever side your ball goes to that midfielder goes to the side line area to receive the pass. Generally, the player...

- (+1) Good choice. I have to make some assumptions on how you will play, so let's go with: mids both play centrally, and outside backs attack if the ball is on their side of the field, and get back when it is not. Buildout looks pretty similar to what you do already. Your outside backs will split, just like your center backs used to. The center back can either stay short, or move upfield in the same way your mid used to. Look for your outside backs to dribble, or combo with a center mid for a give and go. Your lone forward can take opportunistic shots, but I'd look more for someone who can hold up...
- (+1) OP why are you switching? Think 2-3-1 is the best for development. The defenders and wings approximate what they will be doing on a bigger field later. (See Coach Rory for a more detailed explanation) Plus it is easier at U10 for two defenders (rather than 3) to coordinate on pushing up, staying pinched, press and cover
- (+1) Yeah. I think it's more of an experiment. My team was placed in the highest division this year and we're getting smoked every game. A few of my boys just haven't developed enough to play at this level so frankly looking for ways to do less damage. However, most of my team is very competent at defense. So thinking to switch to a more defensive layout where I'd have at least two defenders back even when one of the defenders pushes up to attack. I can leave some of my weaker players as mids since frankly they were never getting back to help on defense in a 2-3-1. Just want to try it out to see...

Source: r/SoccerCoachResources · 21 comments reddit.com

ON THE PITCH

07 Coaching

Taught directly by a coach who has guided numerous J.League players! Training to learn the secrets of stopping, kicking, and carrying the ball that increase your options in matches

> **For coaches** The three checkpoints give you simple cues to call out in your own rondo: place the first touch where you can pass both ways, carry out if the defender is close, and release first time if you can.

Mori experienced national championships at the Inter-High and the Prince Takamado Cup while at Tokushima Municipal High School, then went through Keio University before playing for Kawasaki Frontale.

After retiring, he was involved in launching the same club's academy, and after Kawasaki Frontale, the Nagoya Grampus top team and Tokyo United FC, he now manages Nankatsu SC U-15.

How do you get players to demonstrate the "stopping, kicking, carrying, facing forward and positioning" learned in the first part in situations where opponents are present?

In the second part, we do training in stopping the ball, facing forward and carrying it, and a 3 v 1 rondo. (Text by Tomoyuki Suzuki)

Your position is also a "position from which you can carry"

The first menu of the second part is "tag." Receiving a pass from diagonally behind, the player faces forward, watches the tagger's movement, dribbles the ball and aims for the goal.

The rule is that the tagger can start moving the moment the receiver touches the ball, and if the receiver carries the ball into the square area before being tagged, it counts as a point.

Coach Mori explains the aim of the training as follows.

"Stopping the ball is not only for kicking it, it is also for carrying it. Your position is a position from which you can kick, and also a position from which you can carry. If you can accurately demonstrate all your skills, you should never be caught by the tagger."

During the training, for players who could not stop the ball completely and let it move, he stopped the play and spoke to them.

"If the ball rolls away, the tagger can close in from that direction and tag you. If you stop the ball firmly in the middle, you can respond no matter which side the tagger comes from."

Coach Mori then demonstrated how to dribble.

"Once you have created a state where you can go either way, don't let the ball get away from your body. Let's make it so you can break through with the feeling of holding the ball in your hand."

Coach Mori's way of teaching by showing a model is sure to be a reference.

Connect "stopping, kicking and carrying" in 3 v 1

Next is a 3 v 1 rondo inside a square. With a restriction of two touches or fewer, the player who loses the ball goes in the middle. The goal is 12 passes, and as they connect, the number increases to 15, then 18.

"What matters here is the stopping, kicking and carrying, and the skill of receiving, which we have practiced up to now. If you can demonstrate these accurately, the ball will start to circulate."

While showing the connection with the previous training, Coach Mori organized three criteria for decisions.

- If you stop the ball, place it in a position from which you can kick either way
- If the defender is close, carry the ball out yourself
- If you can play it without carrying, play it with one touch

For the outside players without the ball, he asked them to create passing lanes in positions where they do not overlap with the opposing defender.

Think from one touch, and be accurate without rushing

However, if players are too conscious of stopping the ball, they give the opponent time to close in. The players increasingly had passes go astray because the opponent was close, or hit the ball against the opponent.

"You can just move the ball before the opponent closes in. Try thinking from one touch. It doesn't have to be one touch every time, but just being conscious of it makes the ball move more easily and makes it harder for the opponent to intercept."

In the final stage, when mistakes continued in a rush, he gathered the players and explained the reason while demonstrating.

"The reason you rush is that the ball doesn't stop, and the passing lanes disappear. That is exactly why you should do each play accurately."

That concludes the training.

Finally, Coach Mori gave advice to the readers of COACH UNITED ACADEMY: "In any training, what matters is not just the setup, but what you are asking for and what you want the players to acquire. For that, I think it is important how you approach them, including demonstrations."

"I would be happy if you enjoy the children's changes and growth while working on your daily coaching," he concluded.

Training for stopping and kicking to expand your options in matches.

It is easy to incorporate, so it should be possible to carry out regardless of age group.

[Instructor] Kazuya Mori / Played for Tokushima Municipal High School, Keio University and Kawasaki Frontale, and experienced national championships at the Inter-High and the Prince Takamado Cup during high school. After retiring, he was involved from the launch of Kawasaki Frontale's academy and started his career as a coach. He mainly coached junior youth, and has coached J.League players and Japan national team players who are still active today. After Kawasaki Frontale's top team, Nagoya Grampus's top team and Tokyo United, he now manages Nankatsu SC U-15 while coaching as the representative of MORI FOOTBALL ACADEMY.

Source: サカイク · Translated from Japanese sakaiku.jp

08 Coaching U6 to U9

Community football coach training course kicks off, Magic Moves Programme 2026

> **For coaches** If you work with girls this age, the course's festival-day planning and its focus on fun over results are the parts you can borrow for your own sessions.

On the morning of October 23, in Can Tho, the VFF, in coordination with the Can Tho Football Federation and related units, held the opening ceremony of the community football coach training course under the football development program for girls aged 6 to 9 in 2026, Magic Moves, supported by UEFA/AFC.

Attending the opening ceremony were Mr. Do Minh Truong, Chairman of the Can Tho Football Federation; Mr. Nguyen Hoang Chuong, representative of the Department of Education and Training of Can Tho City; and representatives of the Can Tho City Sports Training and Competition Center. On the VFF side was Mr. Luu Quang Dien Bien, Head of the Grassroots Football, Training and Member Organization Department. The course instructors are former national women's team player Do Thi Ngoc Cham and Mr. Huynh Viet Nam. The course has 32 trainees from primary and secondary schools in Can Tho City.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Mr. Do Minh Truong, Chairman of the Can Tho Football Federation, expressed his appreciation that the locality continues to take part in community football development programs, following the community football project supported by Norway. Mr. Do Minh Truong highly valued the VFF's choice of Can Tho as the first locality to implement the community football coach training program under the women's football development project for the 2024-2027 period, and expressed the hope that the trainees will effectively apply the knowledge they are equipped with to create magic steps together with the girls, contributing to promoting the development of women's football in the future.

On behalf of the VFF, Mr. Luu Quang Dien Bien thanked the Can Tho Football Federation for coordinating the organization of the course, contributing to implementing the program and developing the women's football movement for children in the locality.

Mr. Luu Quang Dien Bien said that with the desire to create more opportunities for girls aged 6 to 9 to become familiar with and experience football from their earliest years, the VFF has implemented the women's football development program since 2024 with the support of UEFA and AFC. On October 15, the VFF held the launch ceremony of the program with the message "Magic Moves", expressing efforts to bring football closer to girls and at the same time create a foundation for the long-term development of Vietnamese women's football.

According to Mr. Luu Quang Dien Bien, the program does not focus on competition results but concentrates on igniting the love of football, giving the children happy and positive experiences, while gradually developing movement skills and basic football skills. After the course, the trainees will return to their schools and localities to directly guide and organize training activities for girls.

"I hope that each trainee will become a positive core, contributing to spreading the spirit of 'Magic Moves', bringing football to more and more girls across the country," Mr. Luu Quang Dien Bien emphasized.

Sharing at the ceremony, former national women's team player Do Thi Ngoc Cham, an instructor of the course, said the program aims to create a useful and healthy playground for girls to come into contact with football early, train their physical fitness and develop life skills, thereby contributing to discovering and nurturing young talents for the country's football.

With nearly 20 years of playing experience and 10 years participating in community football activities, Do Thi Ngoc Cham expressed her desire to share the knowledge and experience she has accumulated with the trainees, helping the teachers confidently implement community football activities at the grassroots level, igniting passion and spreading the positive values of football to girls.

On behalf of the trainees, class monitor Le Nguyen Hai Dang thanked the project and the VFF for their attention and for creating conditions for the trainees to be equipped with additional knowledge and skills serving teaching work and the development of women's football in Can Tho. The trainees committed to actively studying and absorbing knowledge to apply it effectively in practice after the course ends.

The training course takes place over 3 days, from now until October 25, in Can Tho. The trainees will be equipped with knowledge on the principles of community football coaching, the SMILES principles, the STEPS method, along with discussion sessions on the barriers girls face when participating in football, preparing lesson plans for football festivals, assigning responsibilities and tasks for the festival, and more. At the end of the course, the trainees will be granted a certificate of completion by the VFF.

Source: VFF · Translated from Vietnamese vff.org.vn

09 Safety and welfare

Who is on the SafeSport Database? Safer Sport Starts with Awareness

> **For coaches** Before you bring in a new coach, volunteer or club, a quick name search adds one more check alongside background and criminal record checks.

Who is on the SafeSport Database?

How the SafeSport Database Helps Protect Athletes

Before choosing a youth sports league or hiring a coach, make checking the SafeSport Database part of your athlete safety routine.

What Is SafeSport's Disciplinary Database?

The SafeSport Database is a national list of adults who are currently restricted or banned from participating in U.S. Olympic & Paralympic sport for abuse or misconduct. The SafeSport Database is also called the Centralized Disciplinary Database or CDD.

The SafeSport Database is:

- Updated in real time . The database includes every adult currently under certain restrictions or sanctions. This means it is always changing as new individuals are added and others removed.
- Easily searchable . Look up individuals by name, sport, city, or state.
- Free and available for all to use . The database is available for anyone to access.

From elite competition to grassroots playing fields, SafeSport's database was created to increase transparency and raise awareness about individuals who are currently restricted from sport.

By searching the database, you'll learn of adults in your community who are either under temporary restrictions pending a SafeSport investigation, or who have been sanctioned for violating rules set out in the SafeSport Code .

Whether you're a parent, sport administrator, athlete, youth-serving program, or another individual with a stake in safety, you can search the database to learn if anyone you know has been restricted by SafeSport.

To use the SafeSport Database, search by name, sport, city, or state in the top search bar. You can also sort by date or apply filters.

Check the database before:

- Registering your child with a sport or other youth-serving organization

- Hiring a coach or staff member
- Selecting a training facility, league, or club
- Bringing on a volunteer

Searching the database can trigger many feelings.

Run a Search: For Safety in Sport and Beyond

Even if your sport, league, team, or organization is not affiliated with the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement, we encourage you to use the SafeSport Database, alongside other safety screenings, like background checks and criminal record checks, to help safeguard your community.

If you notice that someone listed on the SafeSport Database is participating in sport or if you have reason to believe they are violating a restriction, make a report . Together, we can prioritize awareness to make sport safer for all.

Source: U.S. Center for SafeSport uscenterforsafesport.org

RESEARCH AND DATA

10 Research

Player Development in Brazilian Soccer: between social vulnerabilities, educational gaps and structural challenges

> **For coaches** Worth reading before your next academy meeting: it asks whether your club handles school and football as competing demands or as one development plan.

Brazilian soccer has historically established itself as a global reference in producing talent, above all for the technical quality of its athletes. However, the transformations of contemporary soccer have significantly expanded the demands related to development. Beyond the technical and physical components, the game increasingly demands tactical intelligence, reading ability, decision-making, discipline, autonomy and cognitive, emotional and social competencies.

These aspects related to the athlete's behavior on the field are also associated with their development process off it. In this sense, a perspective of integral development is defended, understood as the development of the young person not only in their technical and physical capacities, but also in their cognitive, emotional, social and educational aspects.

The realization of this perspective still faces important obstacles in the Brazilian context. The development model remains crossed by historically consolidated conceptions that, although naturalized in the daily life of soccer, need to be problematized in the face of the contemporary transformations of the sport.

In this context, three recurring perspectives are discussed as problematic: the association between social vulnerability and a greater predisposition to sporting success; the conception of formal education as a secondary plan in the athlete's trajectory; and the valuing of immediate results in the youth categories to the detriment of long-term developmental processes.

1. Social vulnerability as a supposed advantage for success

An idea historically present in the imagination of Brazilian soccer associates poverty, economic hardship and social vulnerability with greater motivation to achieve sporting success. In this perspective, the athlete coming from more vulnerable contexts would possess a greater "hunger to win," while young people from families with better socioeconomic conditions would have less willingness to face the difficulties inherent to development.

This interpretation shifts structural social conditions, such as inequality, poverty and the absence of rights, to the core of individual characteristics related to motivation, determination and sporting capacity.

There is, in this conception, a first contradiction: conditions such as good education, family structure, adequate nutrition, housing and professional prospects beyond soccer correspond to rights that should be assured to all children and adolescents. Vulnerability should not, therefore, be understood as a positive attribute or a necessary condition for the production of great athletes.

The association between poverty and sporting success also produces a second fragility. When the main motivation built during the development process is the transformation of the family's financial reality, professional success itself can remove from the athlete that which functioned as the main motivating element.

Upon reaching professionalization and improving the socioeconomic conditions of their family, the young person needs new objectives capable of guiding their trajectory. If dimensions such as education, autonomy, life project, career management and emotional development have been neglected, the athlete may encounter difficulties in redefining their objectives and sustaining a high-performance career.

The responsibility placed on children and adolescents also deserves attention. In many families, the expectation of professionalization reorganizes entire family projects, with changes of city, abandonment of jobs and concentration of resources on the young person's sporting trajectory. The athlete thus comes to carry early the responsibility of transforming their family's economic conditions.

Soccer possesses an undeniable potential for social mobility, especially in vulnerable communities and territories. The problem arises when vulnerability ceases to be a condition that needs to be faced and comes to be interpreted as a competitive advantage or necessary fuel for development.

2. Education as a "plan B"

Another recurring perspective consists of understanding formal education as an alternative in the case of failure in a sporting career. In this logic, studying would be important mainly because the majority of young people in the youth categories will not reach professional soccer.

Although apparently valuing education, this understanding positions it in a secondary manner in the development process.

In the daily life of youth soccer categories, the relationship between school and soccer is often marked by conflicts. Training sessions, matches and trips compete with school schedules, while competitions held during the week can cause several consecutive days of absence. The expansion of full-time high school education adds new challenges to reconciling sports training and schooling.

Moreover, sporting talent can produce different levels of institutional tolerance regarding academic performance. The greater the sporting expectation placed on a given athlete, the greater the tendency may be to relativize their educational difficulties.

However, gaps in school education do not affect only those who will leave soccer.

Contemporary soccer has become progressively more complex. Tactical development requires the ability to interpret spaces, understand roles, anticipate behaviors and make decisions quickly. Off the field, the athlete needs to deal with nutrition, sleep, contracts, financial resources, communication, social media, career planning and, in many cases, adaptation to other cultures and languages.

Technical excellence alone no longer guarantees the ability to respond to all these demands.

In this sense, education and sports training should not be understood as competing trajectories. Education is not only a preparation for an eventual career outside soccer, but a relevant dimension for the very development of the high-performance athlete.

International experiences demonstrate different possibilities of integration. Germany, Spain and France developed models that, although distinct, articulate sports training, formal education, cognitive development and psychosocial support at different levels. In Germany, for example, the overhaul carried out after the unsatisfactory results of the early 2000s involved regional development centers and elite soccer schools integrated with educational training.

It is not a matter of reproducing foreign models uncritically. Brazilian soccer culture has its own characteristics and historically relevant ones, such as creativity, improvisation and technical quality. However, preserving this identity does not mean remaining tied to processes that no longer fully respond to the demands of contemporary soccer.

3. Immediate results as a measure of training success

The third problematic perspective concerns the excessive valuing of competitive results in youth categories.

Competition is an important part of sports training. The problem occurs when winning championships comes to guide decisions that should prioritize athlete development in the medium and long term.

In this context, youth categories end up reproducing some of the pressures characteristic of professional soccer without necessarily having the same support structure. The need for immediate results favors constant replacement of athletes, releases, signings of players considered more ready and reduction of the time available for adaptation and development.

Since there are no specific periods for admission and release of athletes in youth categories, changes can occur at different moments of the season. For children and adolescents, these decisions can mean returning to their city of origin, a new change of residence, school interruptions, broken ties and subsequent joining of another club.

Thus, apparently simple institutional processes can produce significant impacts on the trajectories of young people.

The logic of results also interferes in the transitions between categories, especially in the stages close to professional soccer. Instead of respecting individual processes of maturation and adaptation, clubs may opt for athletes more prepared to respond immediately to competitive needs.

However, establishing processes capable of preparing players to reach professional soccer in the best possible conditions should constitute the main objective of youth categories. From this perspective, the quantity and quality of athletes developed, their capacity to adapt to high performance and the sustainability of their trajectories are indicators as relevant as, or more relevant than, winning competitions during the training process.

The transition to the professional level also requires special attention. Success can produce abrupt changes in a young person's life: a significant increase in income, public exposure, growth on social media, harassment by different agents and new responsibilities. An athlete who has not developed sufficient emotional, social, educational and behavioral resources may face difficulties precisely at the moment when they achieve what they were sportingly prepared for.

The three perspectives analyzed converge on the same question: the Brazilian model still struggles to understand athletic development as a multidimensional, long-term process.

Holistic development presupposes offering conditions for children, adolescents and young people to develop their sporting abilities without neglecting educational, social, emotional and family dimensions. This requires adequate housing and food structures, school monitoring, medical, psychological and social support, financial and civic education, career planning and strengthening of family ties.

It also requires multidisciplinary teams integrated into the routine of youth academies. Social workers, psychologists and pedagogues should not act exclusively in resolving emergency situations of a behavioral, disciplinary or socio-family nature. Their participation must extend to planning and strategic decisions related to the development process.

In February 2026, the Brazilian Football Confederation established, through Ordinance PRE No. 02/2026, a Working Group to evaluate and propose improvements to the youth academy development model. Among its objectives are the reorganization of calendars and age groups, integration between athletic development and education, definition of minimum infrastructure and qualification criteria, and construction of mechanisms for monitoring and protecting athletes.

The initiative shows that the need to revise the model has already reached the institutional agenda of Brazilian football. However, effective changes demand qualified participation from the different areas related to holistic development and the ability to move beyond a perspective centered predominantly on the athletic and competitive dimensions.

In this sense, local initiatives can also point to possibilities. In the State of Ceará, an articulation is under development between Ceará Sporting Club and the State Department of Education for the recognition of football development as technical-professional training within High School. The proposal seeks to bring athletic development closer to the school workload, facilitating compatibility with full-time education and expanding the clubs' educational responsibilities.

The construction of alternatives of this nature reinforces the need to understand school and football not as competing institutions, but as spaces that can share responsibilities in the development of young people.

Brazilian football remains capable of producing athletes of high technical quality. However, the contemporary transformations of the sport show that technical talent alone does not meet all the demands of high performance.

Rethinking development requires breaking with perspectives historically taken for granted. Social vulnerability must not be used as motivational fuel; education cannot be reduced to the status of an alternative for those who do not reach professionalization; and the competitive results of youth academies must not take precedence over long-term development processes.

Holistic development requires the articulation between technical, tactical, cognitive, educational, emotional and social development. This implies expanding the clubs' responsibility, strengthening integration with families and educational institutions, and including professionals from the psychosocial and educational areas not only in responding to emergency demands, but also in the strategic dimension of development.

Public authorities and regulatory bodies also bear responsibility in this process. In addition to establishing standards, it is necessary to build permanent monitoring and oversight mechanisms that ensure adequate conditions of education, psychosocial protection and human development.

The challenge, therefore, is not to abandon characteristics historically associated with Brazilian football, but to create conditions so that creativity, skill and talent can develop in a model compatible with the demands of contemporary sport.

The development of athletes must be understood as a structural, long-term investment. More than preparing players to win competitions in the youth academies, it is necessary to form individuals capable of reaching professional football in better conditions to sustain their careers and, equally, to offer development conditions to those who will follow other paths.

Overcoming these weaknesses requires recognizing that the development of Brazilian football and the human development of its athletes are not competing objectives. They are parts of the same developmental process.

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Source: Universidade do Futebol · Translated from Portuguese universidadedofutebol.com.br

11 Research

Coaching Youth Athletes With Attention-Related Challenges: A 25-Year Scoping Review of Literature

For coaches If a player in your group struggles to hold attention, the routines and clear, multi-part instructions here are worth trying in your next session.

This scoping review examines the extent, nature, and key findings of literature related to coaching youth athletes with attention-related challenges, including attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Guided by Arksey and O'Malley's methodological framework, database searches across SPORTDiscus, PsycInfo, and Web of Science identified 13 relevant peer-reviewed articles published between 2001 and 2025. Findings indicate that research in this area remains limited and fragmented, with a reliance on practical/applied literature and small clusters of contributing authors. Across studies, attention-related challenges are described using varied and often broad terminology (e.g., attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and hidden disabilities), which complicates the translation of findings into practice. Thematic analysis revealed five categories of coaching strategies: environmental and structural organization, behavioral support and reinforcement, communication and clarity, instructional representation and differentiation, and strategic planning and pedagogy. Common strategies included the use of predictable routines, positive reinforcement, simple and clear communication, and multimodal instruction. Many of these strategies align with principles of Universal Design for Learning, suggesting a transferable pedagogical framework for inclusive coaching. Overall, the findings highlight the need for more empirical, sport-specific research and coach education initiatives to better support youth athletes with attention-related challenges.

Source: International Sport Coaching Journal journals.humankinetics.com

HOBBIT WEEKLY

Ideas you read, used in your next session.

Tell Hobbit your team's age and what you want to work on this week, and it writes a complete session from one sentence, with a diagram for every drill.

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