

THE MLU PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM

U8

INTRODUCTION

The mission of the MLU Player Development Curriculum is to enhance the soccer experience of young players and coaches within our club. The game is the best teacher and learning revolves around both playing the game itself and watching top class players.

The following curriculum has been designed using qualified coaches and teachers from the United States and Europe. We have created a progression for the soccer player based on the four pillars of the game: technical, tactical, psychological and physical.

The MLU Player development team is dedicated to providing the absolute best personal service to all our players and coaches with whom we work.

GOALS

There are four main pillars of soccer, which are evident at every level of the game – technical, tactical, psychological and physical.

Clearly there will be different emphasis placed on each one depending on the age and ability of the player in question.

The MLU Player Development series of curriculums for coaches will show a clear progression in each of those areas and define clear parameters on what coaches should be looking for in a particular age group.

It is also important that a coach has clear goals for himself / herself and for his / her team prior to working with any age group.

Technical

Dribbling:

- Ability to use the sole and laces of the foot
- Change of speed and direction
- Introduce turns and feints

Running with the ball:

- Push the ball further away from the body
- Keep your head up

Passing:

- Push pass with either foot
- Follow through

Control / receiving:

- Brings the ball quickly under control

Shooting:

- Keep your eye on the ball
- Use laces

Tactical

Basic 1 v 1

Coaches still do not have to focus on tactical considerations when working with this age group. Players will now be able to relate more readily to another player or a small group of players and will begin to understand some of the basics of space but they are not ready for any formalized tactical training. Coaches should use the playing time in their training sessions to introduce some of the basic rules of the game and to reinforce some simple tactical ideas, such as moving back and forward together.

Psychological

The main psychological goal for players at this stage of their development is still to have fun. They may have been playing soccer for as long as two years by this stage but coaches must remember that they are still very much in their development stage.

The role of the coach as a leader will take on greater importance for players at this age but the main focus is still on all the players looking forward to continuing their soccer education at the next level.

Physical

All players should receive all the conditioning they need within the structure of the training session. It should never be perceived as boring or as anything separate from the content of the session. Coaches should not set up any exercise, which is entirely focused on fitness. Exercises to improve balance and coordination are also appropriate.

Note to coaches

Remember your main goal is to allow players to develop in a low-stress, fun-filled environment. Here are some simple steps to follow in order to run a successful and fun practice.

- 1.) Keep things brief and simple. Remember players at this level have a very short attention span.
- 2.) Make things fun! Your energy and enthusiasm needs to come through in every practice.
- 3.) Use your imagination. A successful coach with this age range is one who can make his/her session relate to how the young player views the world.
- 4.) **ALL** players should be given plenty of opportunities to succeed and there should be sufficient progression throughout the session to keep **ALL** players motivated and challenged.

Remember to succeed in coaching players in this age range, you must have:

- **Patience** – they will not get things straight away.
- **Persistence** – sometimes, minor changes are all that is needed.
- **Flexibility** – recognize when something is not working and change it.
- **A sense of humor** – laugh with your players.
- **A very positive attitude** – give generous praise often.
- **And lots and lots of energy** – play with your players.

How to Organize a Training Session

Training sessions should be about one hour in length (1-1¼ hrs is appropriate).

Your session should be dynamic, fast moving and progressive. Each session should allow all players to touch the ball as often as possible and all activities should be geared towards fun.

Equipment:

Balls - All players should play with size 3 or 4 balls and there should be one ball per player.

Cones - Try to have plenty of colored cones at your disposal and use them. Clearly mark out the areas you want to use – younger players need plenty of visual clues and constant reinforcement.

Bibs - Try to have several different colored bibs at your disposal. Differentiate teams clearly to avoid confusion.

Field size - should be approximately 40 x 30 – smaller spaces will demand more touches on the ball.

Training Session Breakdown

1.)WARM-UP

10-15mins

Begin with a fun and enjoyable activity. This should prepare the players mentally and physically for the rest of the practice.

2.)FUN SKILL GAMES

15-20mins

These games are designed to be high energy, fun activities that reinforce the basic techniques.

3.)SMALL-SIDED GAMES

30-35mins

Each practice should always conclude with a small-sided game. The size of the field should be about 40 x 30 and the teams should be 4 v 4.

Stretching and warm-down are not important for players at this age but emphasizing good habits should be encouraged even at the earliest ages.

Small-sided Games – 4v4

Every practice should always conclude with a small-sided game. Remember that the game is the best teacher of all. These games should be a positive experience for all with the emphasis placed on having fun. Your main aim is to create a low-stress, fun-filled environment in which your players can develop. This should be the largest portion of your practice – about one half hour in length.

ORGANIZATION

- 1.) Field Size: 40 x 30yds
- 2.) Equipment: Use cones to clearly mark out the area of the field.
- 3.) Use upright cones or flags as goals and place them about 10 feet apart.
- 4.) Use bibs to avoid confusion amongst players.
- 5.) Play with a size 3 or 4 ball.
- 6.) Play 8-minute periods and then allow time for substitutions, water breaks, etc.
- 7.) Teams are not allowed to have a goalkeeper. Try to create the notion of a “keeper sweeper” the last person protects the goal without using their hands.

4v4 will promote players touching the ball and being involved as much as possible. Keep instructions clear and to a minimum and use your enthusiasm to keep all players motivated. Give the teams names and generate excitement without putting emphasis on outcome. Always stress the importance of fair play and sportsmanship and have the players shake hands/high five at the end of each game.

Initially the organization of the games will take a little longer but after a few weeks the players (and parents) should understand the set-up. You may then be able to add a little variety to these games by introducing some simple conditions:

- a) Play with a mini-ball
- b) All three players must cross halfway line for a goal to stand.

By the end of your session make sure that all your players have achieved some measure of success. Call the team in for a group huddle and say goodbye.

Find the

Skill: Dribbling

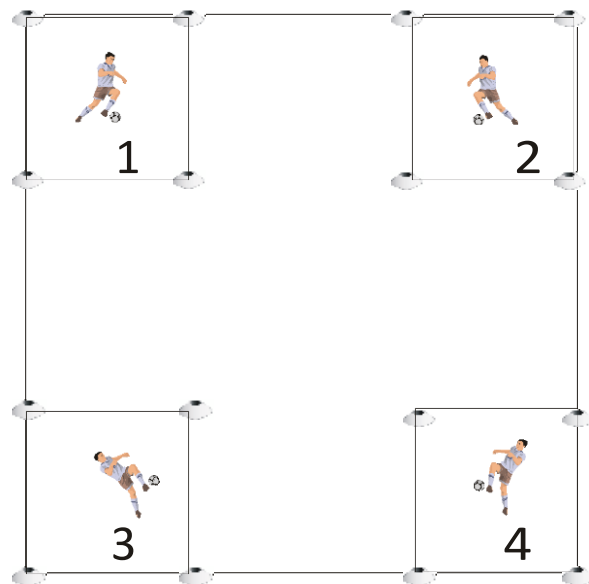
Number of Players Required: Full U-8 Team

Equipment: 12 or more cones to mark a grid and 1 soccer ball per player.

Grid Requirement: A 30 X 30 yard grid with 5 X 5 yard grids in each corner of the large grid.

Organization: Using cones layout a 30 X 30 yard grid with 5 X 5 yard grids in each corner of the large grid. Place one or two players (depending on the # of players you have at practice) in one of the corner grids, each with a soccer ball.

How the Game Is Played: The coach will designate a number 1 – 4 for each of the small grids. Each small grid will have at least one player who will be randomly dribbling within the grid. The coach will yell a number 1-4 and all players will dribble as fast as they can to the grid number that was called. The player who was playing in the grid that was called must dribble to any one of the three grids that are now empty. First player to the new grid wins. The coach assigning starting grids for all players restarts game.



Variations: None

Mad House

Skill: Dribbling, Passing, Attacking, And Defending

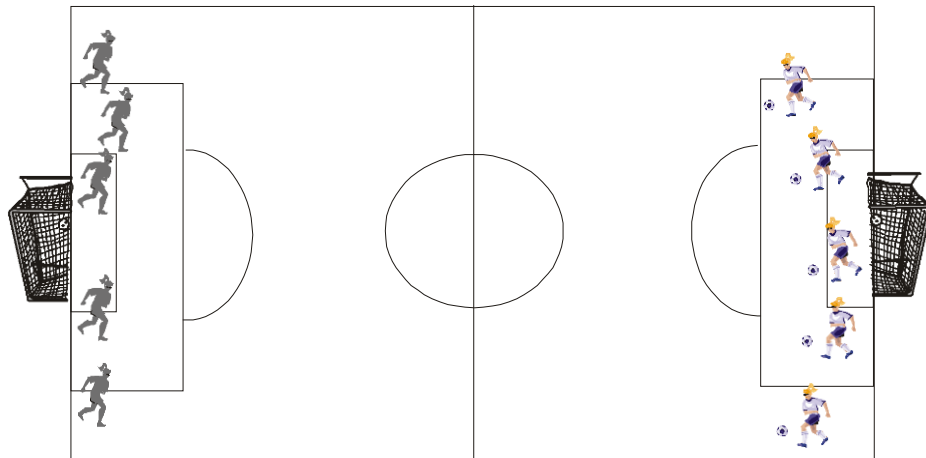
Number of Players Required: Full U-8 Team

Equipment: 1 soccer ball per player and a set of pennies

Grid Requirement: Full size U-8 soccer field

Organization: Using a full size U-8 soccer field, divide the team into two equal groups one of which will wear the pennies. Place one group on one goal line with a soccer ball at their feet and the other group on the other goal line. The coach will decide which group will have the ball first.

How the Game Is Played: Coach will direct which group has the ball first. The coach will yell, “go”. Group with the ball is on the attack the other group defends. Points are scored by shooting the ball into the goal at the opposite end of the field. If the defending group gets possession of a ball they go on the attack and try to score in the other team’s goal. Group that scores the most wins. Play the game 4 times.



Variations: Allow each player to have a ball.

Moving Marbles

Skill: Dribbling/Passing

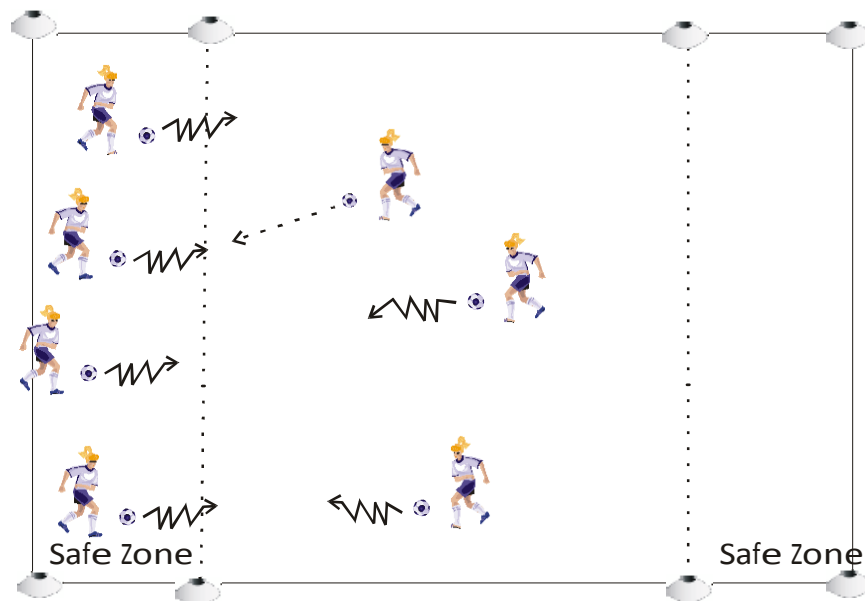
Number of Players Required: Full U-8 Team

Equipment: 8 or more cones to mark the grid.

Grid Requirement: A 20 X 40 yard grid

Organization: Using cones layout a 20 X 40 yard grid with a 5-yard “Safe Zone” at each end. Place three (3) shooters in the center of the grid with a ball at their feet. All remaining players, each with a ball is located in one of the safe zones.

How the Game Is Played: Players in the “Safe Zone” try to dribble the length of the grid to the other “Safe Zone”. The Shooters can prevent dribblers from reaching the other “Safe Zone” by knocking their ball out of the grid with a passed ball. After a player’s ball is knocked out of the grid they become a shooter. The last player remaining wins. Players dribble between “Safe Zones” until one player remains.



Variations: None

Musical Balls

Skill: Dribbling

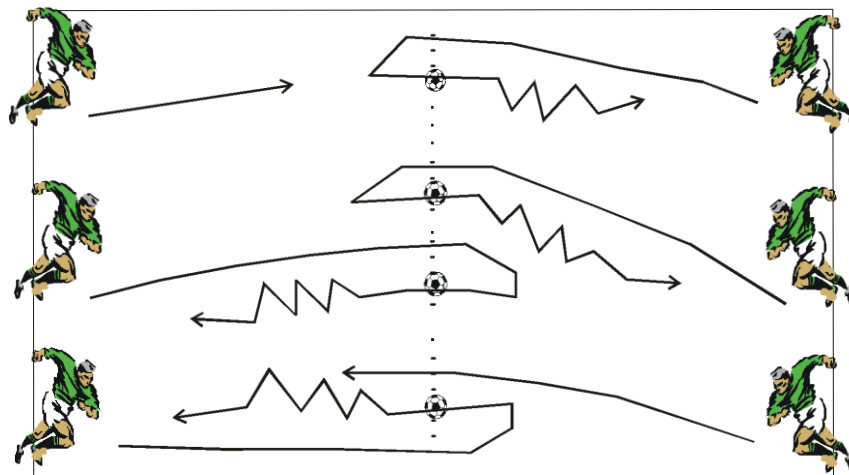
Number of Players Required: Full U-8 Team

Equipment: 6 – 8 soccer balls and 6 cones

Grid Requirement: A 25 X 40 yard grid

Organization: Using cones layout a 25 X 40 yard grid, divided by a midline. Divide the team into two equal groups and place one group on each end line, facing the center of the grid. Place balls along the midline (two fewer than the number of players).

How the Game Is Played: The coach will yell, “go”. Players from both sides rush to the midline and compete for possession of a ball and attempt to return to their end line by dribbling. The players who did not get a ball will try to steal a ball from someone from the other team and return it to their end line. Game is over when all the balls have been dribbled and are stopped on an end line. Play the game 5 times.



Variations: Keep reducing the number of balls and player (those who didn't get a ball) so that the last round is 1 v 1 with one ball on the midline.

My Buddy

Skill: Passing

Number of Players Required: Full U8 team

Equipment: 12 or more cones to mark grid and goals. Group the players in pairs, 1 ball for every pair.

Grid Requirement: 20 X 20 yard grid

Organization: Create a 20 X 20 yard grid marked with cones. Create 4 or 5 goals that are arbitrarily placed in the grid. Group the players in pairs and with 1 ball for every pair.

How the Game Is Played: Both players in the pair will move to a goal with one of the players dribbling to one of the goals in the grid. When the pair gets to a goal they then pass the ball through the goal 3 times to score a goal. Pairs move throughout the area until they have completed all the goals in the grid. If another pair is at a goal, players must go to a goal that is vacant.



Variations: Left foot passing only, right foot passing only.

SAMPLE SEASON PLANNER

| Week | Theme | Warm-up | Skill Builder | Skill Game | Small Sided Game |
|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Week 1 | Dribbling/ Turning | Lose Your Shadow | Musical Balls | Gate Keeper | 4v4 |
| Week 2 | Passing | Space Invaders | My Buddy | Team Tackle | 4v4 |
| Week 3 | Shooting/ Finishing | Knock Down | Accurate Shot | Shoot or Miss | 4v4 |
| Week 4 | Ball Control | Body Parts | Zigzag Ball | Quick off the Mark | 4v4 |
| Week 5 | Receiving/ First Touch | 3 Way Control | Find the # | 3v1 | 4v4 |
| Week 6 | Defending 1v1 | Catch Me | Mad House | 1v1 to Cones | 4v4 |
| Week 7 | Attacking 1v1 | Tag | Going to Goal | Superman 1v1 | 4v4 |
| Week 8 | Passing/ Movement | Moving Marbles | My Buddy | End Zone Soccer | 4v4 |