

U8 Soccer Practice Plan: A Complete 60-Minute Session

8U

Practice Plans

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Tuesday night, 5:55 PM. Your first U8 player comes sprinting across the parking lot in a World Cup jersey two sizes too big, loses his ball, chases it down, grinning the whole time. Two more arrive thirty seconds later, arguing about the best goal of the tournament so far. Practice doesn't officially start for five minutes, but in every way that matters it already has. The question is whether you have something for those kids to do besides stand around — because at this age, a kid standing around is a kid drifting toward the playground.

Here's the direct answer: a good U8 soccer practice runs 60 to 75 minutes and follows a simple arc — an arrival activity kids can join the moment they show up, a dribbling-heavy warm-up, two or three short stations, and a 4v4 small-sided game to finish. Every player has a ball in their feet for most of the hour, because touches on the ball are the entire curriculum at this age. No laps, no lines, no lectures — if kids are standing still or listening to a coach talk for more than 30 seconds, the practice plan has failed them.

The Three Rules That Make or Break U8 Practice

Before the drills, the rules we never violate. **No laps** — running without a ball teaches nothing a 7-year-old needs and burns the energy you want channeled into touches. **No lines** — a line of five kids means four kids doing nothing; every activity below is designed so the whole group moves at once. **No lectures** — demonstrate for 20 seconds, say one cue, play. Kids this age learn through their feet, not their ears.

The deeper reason is developmental. Ages 6 to 8 sit inside the prime window for building fundamental movement skills — balance, coordination, change of direction — and the ball is just the toy that makes the repetitions fun. Our full guide to athletic development for ages 6–10 covers the science, but the practical takeaway for soccer is simple: maximize touches, maximize decisions, minimize standing.

One of our coaches spent years coaching Division II college soccer, and what surprised people most was how little instruction filled our U8 sessions. The line we heard constantly: you can spot which college players grew up in street-soccer environments versus drill-line environments within one training session — the street kids have touch, deception, and joy; the line kids have technique that falls apart under pressure. So we build U8 practice to look as much like street soccer as an organized hour allows.

Our 60-Minute Framework: - Arrival Activity: 8 minutes (rolling start) - Dribbling Warm-Up: 14 minutes - Skill Stations (3 stations): 18 minutes - 4v4 Games: 15 minutes - Team Huddle: 5 minutes

Setup takes ten minutes before the first kid arrives: scatter 25–30 cones, set up four small goals (cones work fine), and pump up spare balls. A bag of practice pinnies and a stack of cones is the entire equipment budget for this whole plan.

The Full U8 Soccer Practice Plan

Every activity below assumes one ball per player unless noted. If a kid shows up without one, hand them a spare before they reach the field.

Phase 1 — Arrival Activity (8 minutes, rolling start)

Step 1 — Gate Dribbling (8 min) Before practice, scatter 10–12 pairs of cones (gates, about 2 feet wide) across a 30x30 yard square. As each kid arrives, the only instruction is: "Grab a ball, see how many gates you can dribble through before I blow the

whistle." Kids who arrive at 5:50 start at 5:50. Add challenges as the group fills in: left foot only, sole of the foot only, count your gates and beat your own score. Coaching cue: "Little touches — the ball stays close enough to touch every step."

Phase 2 — Dribbling Warm-Up (14 minutes)

Step 2 — Body Part Dribble (6 min) Everyone dribbles freely inside the square. Coach calls a body part — "knee!" "elbow!" "nose!" — and every player stops their ball with that body part as fast as possible, then dribbles on. Sneak in real soccer surfaces between the silly ones: "sole!" "inside of your foot!" "laces!" Coaching cue: "Head up between touches — if you bump into a friend, your eyes were on the ball too long."

Step 3 — Red Light, Green Light (8 min) Classic game, every kid with a ball, dribbling from one end line toward the coach. Green light: dribble. Red light: stop the ball dead under the sole within one second or go back three steps. Add "yellow light" (slow, tiny touches) and "rocket ship" (big touch and sprint to catch up — their first taste of dribbling at speed). Coaching cue: "Stop the ball, not your feet — sole on top like you're squashing a bug."

Phase 3 — Skill Stations (18 minutes — three stations, 6 minutes each)

Split the group into three even teams and rotate every six minutes on the whistle. With one coach, run the 1v1 station yourself and let the other two run on autopilot — they're designed for it. Rotations are sprints with the ball, not walks.

Step 4 — Station 1: Cone Slalom and Shoot (6 min) Three short slalom lanes of five cones each, ending 8 yards from a small goal. Players weave through the cones and finish with a shot, then immediately retrieve their ball and start a different lane — three lanes for three or four kids means nobody waits more than a few seconds. Coaching cue: "Little touches through the cones, head up at the cone, then one big touch and shoot."

Step 5 — Station 2: Sharks and Minnows (6 min) A 15x15 yard square. Every minnow has a ball; one or two sharks do not. Sharks try to kick the minnows' balls out of the square; a minnow who loses their ball becomes a shark. Last minnow standing wins, then reset with new starting sharks. This is shielding, scanning, and dribbling under pressure disguised as the best game ever invented. Coaching cue: "Put your body between the shark and your ball — be a wall, not a statue."

Step 6 — Station 3: 1v1 to Gates (6 min) Pairs in a 12x15 yard box with two cone gates at each end. One player attacks, one defends; the attacker scores by dribbling through either gate, which forces a choice — attack the open gate, not the defender. Switch roles every ball. Defender starts passive for the first two rounds if kids are struggling. Coaching cue: "If the defender goes to one door, take the other door."

Phase 4 — The Game (15 minutes)

Step 7 — 4v4, No Goalkeepers (15 min) Two simultaneous 4v4 games on 25x35 yard fields with small goals and no goalkeepers — the standard U8 format, and the single best teacher on this list. Coach restarts only: when a ball goes out, roll a new one in immediately so play never stops. Resist coaching during play; save one or two observations for water breaks. Every kid should touch the ball constantly — if one isn't, quietly roll the next restart to them. Coaching cue at breaks only: "When your team has the ball, spread out big; when they have it, get back between the ball and your goal."

Phase 5 — Close It Out (5 minutes)

Step 8 — Huddle and One Great Thing (5 min) Circle up, balls under arms. Name one specific thing each player did well — not "good job," but "Lena, you took the other gate when the defender cut you off, exactly what we practiced." Specific praise tells kids what to repeat. End with a team cheer and a challenge for home: ten gate dribbles through a doorway before next practice. Every kid leaves with a win.

A Quick Word on Heading

You'll get the question from a parent eventually, so know the rule: U.S. Soccer prohibits heading entirely — in both practices and games — for players U11 and younger. Nothing in this plan involves heading, and nothing at this age should. There is no soccer development cost to waiting; there is real risk in not waiting.

Adapting for 6 Kids or 12 Kids

This plan flexes without rewriting it. **With 6 kids:** skip the station rotation and run all three station activities as whole-group blocks back to back, then finish with one 3v3 game instead of two 4v4s — 3v3 actually gives each kid more touches anyway. **With 12 kids:** the plan runs as written — three stations of four, two 4v4 games — just recruit a parent per station; the station designs need a supervisor, not a coach. **Stretching to 75 minutes:** lengthen each station to 8 minutes and the 4v4 block to 20 — never add new activities; longer play beats more variety at this age.

One more adaptation note: if your group is fast and clean through the slalom station, the next progression is dedicated change-of-direction work — our library of speed and agility drills for young athletes has a half-dozen games that bolt straight into the station rotation.

Let Them Be World Cup Obsessed — and Multi-Sport

If your players are sleep-deprived from watching the World Cup this summer, use it instead of fighting it. Let them pick a player to "be" during the 4v4 games, let them celebrate goals like they're on TV, and watch effort levels jump. Obsession with the game is rocket fuel; your job is just to point it at touches.

What you shouldn't do is let that obsession become year-round, soccer-only training at age seven. The evidence is consistent that multi-sport athletes become better players — broader movement vocabulary, fewer overuse problems, longer careers in sport. The basketball season and the gymnastics class are helping their soccer. Protect them.

Run It, Then Make It Yours

The first time we ran this exact session, what struck us wasn't the soccer — it was the noise. Sixty straight minutes of laughing, arguing about sharks-and-minnows results, and begging to keep the 4v4 going past pickup time. That's the metric at U8. Touches build players, but joy builds players who come back — and a kid still playing at 12 passes every kid who peaked at 8.

Keep the skeleton — arrival activity, ball-each warm-up, stations, 4v4 — and swap games freely as you learn what your group loves. For more session plans, age-group guides, and drills as we publish them, our soccer coaching hub is the home base.