

## What Did I Get Myself Into? U5 Age Group Characteristics & Skill Priorities

It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 6 years old, in general, do not do so by their own choice. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives.

Some key characteristics you can expect from U5 players are as follows:

- Short attention span.
- Can attend to only one problem at a time.
- May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- May or may not understand or remember: what lines mean on the field; what team they are on; what goal they are going for. We need to be patient and laugh with them as they get 'lost' on the field.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often. Positive, positive, positive
- Need to play without pressure. No extrinsic rewards (trophies, medals) should be given for winning.
- Prefer "parallel play". Will play on a team but will not really engage with their teammates.
- Very individually oriented (me, mine, my).
- Constantly in motion, but with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop.
- Physical coordination is limited. Eye-hand and eye-foot coordination is not developed.
- Love to run, jump, roll, hop. Can balance on their "good foot".
- Catching or throwing skills are not developed.

Based on the above there are some things you can expect during your weekly sessions:

- Most players cry immediately when something is hurt. Some cry even when something is not hurt.
- No matter how loud we shout, or how much we "practice", they cannot or will not pass the ball.
- Don't even consider teaching positional play.
- Twenty seconds after the start of a game, every player will be within 5 yards of the ball.
- Most players will touch the ball or pick it up. Several parents will yell at them not to do that.
- A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get 99% of the player's attention.
- During a season, you will end up tying at least 40-50 shoelaces.
- They will do something that is absolutely hysterical. Make sure that you laugh!

With the above assumptions here are some things you can do to energize your U5 players

- Each session will be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible.
- **NO LAPS, NO LECTURES, NO LINES.** You will lose your team if you follow this approach.
- Training should last no more than one hour due to fatigue and attention span considerations.
- Encourage your children to bring their own ball.
- Team play and passing is an alien concept to these players because they know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they often will steal it from their own teammates.
- Plan for at least four 90 second drink breaks, especially in warmer weather.

Always remember that the #1 reason why the kids quit playing soccer by the age of 13 is in their words: "It wasn't fun anymore". Keep in your mind that the #1 reason why kids participate in organized youth soccer is: "To have fun!" To be successful as a coach at this level, continue to look for opportunities to make your practice fun in the eyes of your players. Don't be afraid to ask your players and parents what the kids like and dislike about practice and give them some input on which games are played at practice. Always have a positive fun attitude during practice and do not take yourself too seriously, and your team will have a fun season.



## Cheat Sheet to Saying, “Great Job!” from the Soccer Classroom

As soccer coaches, we’re always trying to provide inspiration and encouragement to our players. Unfortunately, we can end up sounding like a broken record. Finding the right words to individually and enthusiastically tell your players that they’re on the right track can be harder than you think. We prefer to mix a bit of humor into our encouragement as it brings a smile to player’s faces too.

Here’s our Soccer Classroom Cheat Sheet to Saying, “Great Job!”

1. Now that’s what I’m talking about!
2. Atta [Boy/Girl]!
3. You got it—you got it!
4. That’s awesome
5. Spot on
6. Well done
7. Keep the pace
8. You’re thinking better than Einstein today
9. Great move – you should be on Dancing with the Stars
10. Way to go – even Simon would applaud you!
11. That’s A+ work today, [insert player name].
12. Board the plane because that’s first class!
13. Does anyone know this player? Because last week, [player name] couldn’t do this – well done!
14. Amazing everyone. Simply amazing.
15. Astonishing – Have you been practicing?
16. Incredible – that’s how to make it happen
17. Marvelous – I knew you could do it
18. Miraculous – I knew going to church Sunday would bring this team around. Thank you Jesus
19. Mind-blowing how fast you’re picking this up.
20. Astounding – I don’t believe what I just saw!
21. Wondrous – the Gods have touched upon your Golden Feet
22. Outstanding – we’re on the path to success today
23. Terrific – you’re smarter than a fifth grader
24. Stupendous – best work I’ve seen from this group
25. Superior work – do you think the other team is working this hard?
26. That’s the way—Uhhuh,Uhhuh—I like it—Uhhuh,Uhhuh!
27. That’s much, much better.
28. Keep working on it – you’re making phenomenal progress
29. I like it – that’s the way it’s supposed to be done!
30. Messi couldn’t have done it better himself

