

Kicking Is Not Soccer (KINS) Program

**KINS IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL
FOR GEORGIA SOCCER – YOUTH CLUBS**

**Georgia Soccer Coaching Program
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KINS PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

KINS stands for Kicking Is Not Soccer. It is a program for players U-5 through U-8. In Georgia soccer, these are the youngest, introductory ages of the Recreational Program. The Recreational Program is essentially the players' first experience with the game of soccer. It is this experience that can either hook the players for life, or turn them away. Players will continue playing soccer if they are having fun and are experiencing personal success. Hence, the Recreational Program's main philosophy is to create a fun filled, active environment, in which the players can improve and succeed.

The KINS Program's main objective is to promote and emphasize the skill of dribbling at the U5 through U8 age groups and discourage the aimless booting of the ball that is all too prevalent at these young ages. When young players are conditioned to just kick the ball forward as far as possible, their skill development is stunted, making it harder for them to reach their true potential. Dribbling is the foundation and preparation for all the other fundamental skills of soccer, such as controlling, passing, and shooting. Laying the proper dribbling foundation at the youngest years will enhance the players' ability to improve all the soccer skills. No matter what level the players will end up playing, recreational or select, they will derive increased pleasure from the game if they can control the ball better and become more adept at manipulating it. The spectators will also enjoy the game more if they can watch players who exhibit skill and creativity.

The program's second objective is to promote decision making by the players on the field and reduce their dependence on the adults for problem solving.

PILOT PROGRAM RESULTS

During the 2001/2002 fall and spring seasons, a KINS Pilot Program was conducted at four clubs (West Gwinnett U-7, Peachtree City U-7, Snellville P&R U-8, and Richmond Hill U-6/U-8). The purpose of the pilot program was to test the concept and gather information for this manual. The results clearly demonstrated that the KINS Program is a developmentally appropriate approach for U-5 through U-8 players. The level of play and comfort with the ball has improved noticeably and the frequency of aimless kicking became quite negligible. The coaches and parents were quick to embrace the program and the end-of-season feedback from the parents was extremely positive.

BENEFITS OF THE KINS PROGRAM

1. Improves the skill and enjoyment of the players, regardless of ability level.
2. Provides a built-in, on-going coaching assistance program.
3. Easier to enlist parents to volunteer as coaches.
4. Develops a club identity and club loyalty.
5. Raises the skill level at the Recreational Program.
6. Raises the level of the select program.

MANUAL'S ORGANIZATION

This manual is divided into two parts, the 'Implementation' part and the 'Education' part. Part One provides the step-by-step guidelines for the implementation of a KINS Program. It contains easy to follow steps, from appointing a KINS Program Coordinator to practice logistics. Part Two contains more in-depth explanations of the KINS philosophy and rationale. The material in part two can be used as handouts for parent and coaching education purposes.

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Step 1 – Appoint a Program Coordinator

The ideal candidate would be someone who has current or previous coaching experience at the U-5 through U-8 levels. Most parent coaches prefer to move up through the ages with their own kids. By doing that, they take with them all the hands-on experience gained, creating a perpetual steep learning curve for incoming coaches who need technical guidance. The Program Coordinator will need to be someone who is willing to stay with the U-5 through U-8 group to oversee the program and build a solid and permanent foundation.

The Program Coordinator should possess organizational and communication skills. He/she should have taken the ‘G’ and/or ‘F’ course. Possessing a higher license always helps, but since the U5-U8 levels require a specific coaching approach that is taught only in the ‘G’/‘F’ courses, the Program Coordinator should attend these age specific courses. Another coaching course that is very appropriate and therefore highly recommended is the National Youth License. Clubs can provide an enticement for the right person by paying for him/her to attend the National Youth License Course in return for accepting the job of KINS Program Coordinator. The National Youth License is the ideal preparatory course for anyone in charge of programming for beginner players.

The Coordinator is expected to be a constant presence during the practices and games to help facilitate the program and train and monitor the coaches. The suggested responsibilities of the coordinator will be:

1. Design the playing format
2. Design the practice format
3. Design the parent education program
4. Make sure all the coaches attend the state-run ‘G’ course.
5. Train, monitor and support the parent coaches
6. Appoint and work closely with age group commissioners (in large clubs)
7. Organize and/or conduct supplemental clinics
8. Create a list of suitable videos, books and activities for the coaches

If the Program Coordinator has a National Youth License or a USSF ‘C’ License, he/she would be the ideal person to instruct the ‘G’/‘F’ courses at the club. If a club already has a Director of Coaching, the club DOC can either assume the role of KINS Program Coordinator, or appoint someone else that fits the criteria. The Program Coordinator would then report to the club DOC.

Step 2 – Design the Program’s Playing Format

Georgia Soccer – Youth has established the playing rules for small-sided soccer and they are highly recommended for the KINS Program. The Georgia Soccer – Youth mandated playing numbers of 3v3 for U-5/U-6 and 4v4 for U-7/U-8, and no keepers, are ideally suited to the KINS Program since the main focus is dribbling. However, there are a number of variables that should be considered for inclusion into the game format to enhance the effectiveness of the program. For example, observations of games reveal that, when the coaches/referees enforce strictly the normal rules for out-of-bounds, throw-ins and goal kicks, the imposed stoppages are so excessive that the actual playing time amounts to no more than half the available game time. This reduces significantly the number of contacts with the ball in each game.

There are ways to increase the actual playing time. The recommended method of running a game is the **‘New Ball Method’**. The next best method is the **‘Loose Boundaries Method’**. These methods are explained below.

New Ball Method

In this format, the coaches keep a bunch of balls with them during the game. Every time the ball goes out of bounds, one of the coaches shouts “New Ball!!” and throws a new ball into the field. The players respond by chasing the new ball and the game never stops. Actual playing time is almost 100% of game time. This method eliminates the endless stoppages for taking throw-ins, goal kicks, and corner kicks and increases dramatically the number of touches each player gets in a game. The only re-start stoppages are for kick-offs after a goal. This method is also great for getting the less assertive players into the action, by throwing the new ball towards them. Part Two of the manual has a more detailed explanation of the New Ball Method.

Loose Boundaries Method

In this format, the field boundaries are not adhered to very strictly and the ball is still in play even if it goes outside the sidelines and end lines. Only when the ball is kicked far away from the field that play is stopped to retrieve it. This method produces almost non-stop action with actual playing time close to 100% of game time.

There is absolutely no need to teach 5-7 year-olds how to take a throw-in. It is not a soccer specific skill but a hands-to-body coordination maneuver that all kids will eventually master on their own, as they grow older and learn to control their bodies. Once kids move into the U-10 program, strict adherence to boundaries and throw-ins can then be introduced.

Using Coaches to Referee Games

The KINS Program concept works much better when coaches are utilized to call the game instead of referees. The message that “results don’t count” is sometimes lost when referees are involved. Observations of both methods reveal that the presence of official referees adds a competitive edge to the game that is not desirable for these ages. Referees tend to call the games strictly and to the letter of the law. Coaches and parents are more inclined to react negatively to

‘bad calls’ by referees, which inevitably will occur. In clubs where the coaches act as referees, the atmosphere is much more low-key and festive. The coaches tend to display a greater spirit of sportsmanship and courtesy when they are calling the game. They usually call in favor of the other team in a conscious attempt to be unbiased. This sends the right message to the parents, who adopt a more relaxed perspective and are less inclined to worry about the result. In any case, the recommended methods of play (New Ball or Loose Boundaries) make referees redundant.

Field and Goal Sizes

Other considerations include the size of the field and the size of the goals. The Georgia Soccer – Youth rules allow a size range and some clubs end up using fields that are either too small or too big. It is advisable to get an experienced coach’s opinion on whether the field sizes are appropriate. It’s more art than science, but an experienced coach will be able to tell from watching the games and noting the number of times the ball goes out of bounds (too many times suggest the field is too small) and the level of exhaustion of the players (constantly out of breath suggests the field is too big).

Goal size is important as well. Too big and it’s too easy to score. When goals are too big, goals are even scored unintentionally, from defensive clearances. Oversized goals reward the long boot, which is opposite to the aim of the KINS concept. Since keepers are not used, it’s better to have the small goals, ranging in width from 2-3 yards.

Step 3 – Design the Practice Format

Volume of Activities

Young players are driven by a variety of reasons to participate in a soccer program and have different levels of motivation. Some players might just want to train once a week while others would practice every day if we let them. Clubs should build into their recreational programs some flexibility in order to meet every player’s appetite for the game. This can be accomplished by combining the regularly scheduled team practices with supplemental, club organized player clinics. Players can choose to attend just the team training or, if they are really keen, they can also attend the club clinics. The following volume of activities can be used, with each season containing 8-10 games:

U-5/U-6	1 practice/week	1 supplemental clinic/week	1 game/week
U-7/U-8	1 or 2 practices/week	1 supplemental clinic/week	1 game/week

Supplemental Clinics

The supplemental clinics do not necessarily need to be anything formal or super-organized. They can take the form of fun dribbling activities or simply a festival of pick-up games. The pick up game approach is highly recommended since players enjoy playing more than anything, especially if the adults step back, don't interfere, and let them play. They will also get plenty of touches on the ball in small-sided pick up games. The Program Coordinator can use cones to split an area into small 2v2 or 3v3 fields and randomly divide the players who show up into teams and let them play.

Practice Structure and Organization

Practices should last 45-60 minutes for U-5/U-6's and 60-75 minutes for U-7/U-8's. The practices should comprise 3-4 activities of around 10 minutes each and finish with a scrimmage. All the activities should involve dribbling. Each player should have a ball at practice.

The Program Coordinator should provide all the coaches with activities on a regular basis. He should monitor the sessions and help any coaches who are struggling to make the activity work. For the program to run effectively, teams should all train at the same site and at the same time. Large clubs that cannot fit all the teams into one site at one time can plan a practice schedule that brings a group of same age teams together in, say, one hour shifts. If necessary, it's quite possible to fit two teams on each game field. Each team can occupy one half and finish with a scrimmage across half the field or scrimmage against the other team.

Quite often, teams are missing players who don't show up to practice. Sometimes a couple of coaches are not able to make it to practice. In these instances, two teams can join and practice together. The Coordinator can help facilitate such adjustments or step in for a missing coach.

Step 4 – Pre-Season Coaches Meeting

Once the coaches are recruited, the Coordinator should meet with them to explain the program philosophy, rationale, and logistics. The Coordinator should prepare them not only to coach their team, but also train them to deal with the parents and provide them with the necessary resources to educate the parents. This is a very important meeting. It needs to be well planned and cover all the essential components. The following items should be covered:

- a. **The KINS rationale – why emphasize dribbling** (see Coaches Handout #1 in Part Two).
- b. **The second objective – develop players' self-dependence.** The measure of a good coach is in the amount of instructions his/her players need. If the players do not need constant instructions from the coach, it's a clear indication that the coach is doing his job. If the players need the same volume and type of instructions in the last game as in the first game of the season, this clearly suggests that the coach did not teach the players anything. Coaches of beginner players have a tendency to constantly tell them where to stand and what to do. This

conditions the players to become robots and discourages them from thinking for themselves. Before you know it, the season is over, and the players still do not know where to stand and what to do. This is a classic ‘catch 22’ situation. Coaches become convinced that the players cannot function/be successful without their instructions, not realizing that they themselves are the culprits. If, by the last game of the season, the players adopt the right positions and do the right moves most of the time without any help from the coach, he/she can be considered a successful coach.

- c. **The learning stages for dribbling** - The learning curve of the players can be divided into four stages: **1) develop the mindset for dribbling** by replacing the instinct to boot the ball with an inclination and a fascination for a soft first touch; **2) learn to dribble in a straight line** by propelling the ball forward with the ‘laces’ within the natural running motion and keeping the ball close to the body; **3) learn to change direction** by chopping the ball (cutting turn) with the inside of the foot and using either feet to accelerate away; and **4) become multi-directional** by chopping the ball with the inside or outside of either foot, accelerating in any direction, using body to shield the ball, and adding fakes to repertoire. The coaches should be made aware that although some players will improve rapidly, most of the players will progress very slowly through the stages, especially since there is only one practice session per week and the seasons are short. Only a handful will reach the fourth stage by the time they graduate to U-9, provided they started the program at U-5 or U-6. But everyone will improve over time if the KINS foundation is ingrained in the players from the outset.
- d. **The relationship between dribbling and passing** - There is a strong correlation between the ability to dribble and the ability to pass. The coaches will notice that the best dribblers in their team are also the best passers. This is because both of these skills require the ability to shift body weight quickly from one foot to the other and balance on one foot while propelling the ball with the other foot. Also, once a player becomes a good dribbler, he/she automatically starts to look up and survey the field in between touches. This validates the sequence of learning to dribble before learning to pass.
- e. **Rules of the game** – New Ball Technique or Loose Boundaries Technique (see handout in Part Two).
- f. **Practice format** (see step six).
- g. **Practice activities** - The ‘G’ course manual is the best source of activities for the KINS Program. The Coordinator can distribute to the coaches a handout with a compilation of dribbling activities derived from the ‘G’ and ‘F’ course manuals, as well as from other sources. Another useful source for dribbling activities for young kids is the book “The Baffled Parent’s Guide to Great Soccer drills”, by Tom Fleck and Ron Quinn, published by Ragged Mountain Press/McGraw-Hill.
- h. **Lines of communications.**
- i. **Pre-Game warm-up.**

The Pre-Season coaches Meeting should also include a clinic component, in which the Coordinator can demonstrate all the recommended activities, using the coaches as players. Each activity should be given a name if it doesn’t have one already. This will make it easy for the Coordinator to communicate instructions to the coaches during the practices, by referring to activities by name and saving the need to demonstrate them again.

Step 5 – Design the Parent Education Components

Educating and keeping the parents informed in a proactive way will go a long way towards getting the parents' cooperation and reducing potential problems. The Coordinator should institute a well-planned process of disseminating information to parents.

Pre-Season Club Wide Parent Meeting

This can take the form of a jamboree or a cookout. The club could do a dispersal draft at this meeting, issue uniforms, schedules, etc. The Coordinator could address the parents to explain the KINS philosophy and distribute handouts (see parent handout #2 in Part Two).

It's important to educate the parents about the benefits of the program and get them to buy into it. The parents should be made to understand that the benefits manifest themselves over the long term. The KINS Program is not a quick-fix method designed to improve a team's chances to win games. Game results are misleading and irrelevant at this stage. The teams' win-loss record is cast at the draft process before a ball is kicked in earnest. Whichever coach is lucky enough to get the athletic 'studs' will win most of the games, regardless of which program is used.

Pre-Season Team Parent Meeting

Each coach should hold his/her own parent meeting at the start of the season, to foster camaraderie and go over any issues specific to the team. This is a good time to reinforce the KINS concept and make sure all parents' questions or concerns are addressed.

Newsletters and Progress Reports

Periodic newsletters are always a great method for communicating to the parents. The Coordinator can distribute progress reports on the program at mid-season and at the end of the season, for distribution to the Club Board, the coaches and the parents. The progress reports can focus on the positives of the program, such as the improvement of the players, the great attendance and the gradual disappearance of the aimless booting.

Step 6 – Conduct and Organize the Practice Sessions

The level of involvement of the Coordinator during the practice sessions will depend on the size of the club, the expertise of the Coordinator, and the experience of the individual team coaches. In small clubs, where the total number of players present at the site at any one time is between 20-40, the Coordinator can assume an active role, like a clinician, and actually train all the players together, using the team coaches as assistants. This can be done at every session or at some of the sessions.

In large clubs, where the number of players is not conducive to a single clinician approach, the Coordinator can assume a supervisory role. The team coaches can be given a practice plan at the

start of each session, listing the activities for the day, or they can be allowed the freedom to choose activities from the handouts given previously as they see fit, as long as the activities are appropriate. The Coordinator monitors the activities and offers suggestions and feedback as needed.

Obviously, a certain amount of tact and common sense is required within the milieu of adult supervision and education. The onus is on the Coordinator to earn the respect and cooperation of the coaches by the way in which he/she treats them.

The KINS Program format lends itself to developing a cadre of qualified volunteer coaches. There is no need to hire paid staff to coach the U-6/U-8 teams. It's better to work with parent coaches who will eventually form the backbone of your club. However, if a club can afford to hire a paid expert for the position of KINS Program Coordinator, the benefits can be enormous. A paid staff, whether part-time or full-time, can be held more accountable, will be more motivated to succeed, and will more readily have the respect of the volunteer coaches.

Step 7 – Monitor the Games

Once the season begins, the Coordinator can glean much information from the games. He or she can observe the games to evaluate the progress of the players, to make sure that all the coaches are in sync with the program's goals and are encouraging the players to dribble at every opportunity. The Coordinator can monitor the behavior of the parents and be available to answer any questions. The club should empower the Coordinator to deal with unruly parents according to the club's policy. Thankfully, it is highly unusual for parents at these ages to be difficult to handle.

Another feature of the game day that deserves serious attention is the pre-game warm-up. The Coordinator should teach the coaches to conduct a warm-up that contains plenty of dribbling opportunities for the players. The warm-up should resemble a practice. Dribbling activities, combined with shooting, is the ideal preparation for the game. It gets the players moving and emphasizes the desired technique. Line-ups that involve a lot of standing around and just shooting on goal are not recommended.

In short, observations of games will provide clues as to the most effective activities for future refinement of the program. The more experienced the Coordinator, the more insight will he be able to gather from the game, which in turn will help guide and improve the program.

Step 8 – Evaluate the Program

An evaluation of the program should be done at the end of each season. At the very least, a coach's meeting and a parent survey should be organized. Each coach could hand the parents a survey at the second-to-last game and ask them to complete and return it at the last game. The survey should ask questions that relate to the quality of the experience, parental perception of program effectiveness, players' enjoyment level, and suggestions. The survey responses should be anonymous and could also be mailed to the club.

Another great way to both evaluate the program and demonstrate the success is to tape the first game and the last game of the season and watch the difference in skill level. It's not necessary to tape each team. The Program Coordinator can arrange to tape just one or two teams and use these tapes to demonstrate the players' progress. The tapes can also be used at the start of the following season, to show the coaches correct and desirable players' responses to situations in the game, as well as incorrect and undesirable responses. For example, showing footage of a player running towards the ball and kicking it with no purpose, to demonstrate undesirable action, and showing footage of a successful dribble or an attempt at dribbling, to demonstrate the type of action that should be encouraged.

Another way to monitor the success of the program is to define a measurable goal and monitor it. For example, since we are trying to eliminate aimless kicking of the ball, we can measure success by counting the number of times per game players run up to the ball and just kick it. This number should become smaller as the season progresses. The Program Coordinator can arrange to count the aimless kicks at a few randomly selected games at the start of the season and repeat the test at the end of the season to compare.

One important measurement that can reveal a lot about both the success and the enjoyment level of a program could be a count of the number of touches each player has in an average game. This measurement will demonstrate the effectiveness of the 'New Ball Method' of running games. Measurements that are NOT appropriate to monitor are game results or timed tests, such as a dribbling speed test. These types of tests favor the players who physically mature early, have no long term relevance, and could send the wrong message to coaches and parents.

A word of advise here. Once the players start to dribble more and experience some success, it becomes tempting for many coaches to conclude that the emphasis can now shift from dribbling to passing. It must be underscored that dribbling takes many forms and involves very complex body movements. Players need to acquire the ability to dribble '360 degrees', meaning they have to learn to cut and maneuver the ball in any direction, at speed, using the inside and outside of both feet. It takes many years to master the skill of dribbling and one or two seasons will not be enough, even for the most gifted players. For this reason, dribbling must be emphasized for the duration of the most crucial formative years, the U-6 through U-8, at the very least.

PART TWO

Handouts for Educational Purposes

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COACHES' HANDOUT

Skill Priorities for U-6/U-8 players

By far the most important skill for beginners is the skill of dribbling. Young players need to learn to dribble within a variety of playing situations, such as dribbling forward unopposed, changing speed and direction, shielding the ball from opponents, dribbling past an opponent, and using dribbling to get away from pressure. **The ability to dribble is absolutely critical since dribbling is the foundation and preparation for the other fundamental skills of soccer, such as controlling, passing and shooting.** When players are receiving the ball and making the preparation touches prior to passing or shooting, they are essentially engaged in a mini-dribble. A limited ability to dribble leads to a limited range of passing or shooting. The ability to dribble also helps maintain possession of the ball. It's not unusual for players to find themselves in a game situation where dribbling is the only viable option to get out of tight pressure and maintain possession.

Aside from the fact that dribbling forms the foundation for all the other skills, there are many other reasons why we need to focus on dribbling at U-6/U-8. First of all, it takes years to become a comfortable and confident dribbler. Players have to learn to combine body control, agility, coordination and balance with the mechanics of dribbling and the sooner they start, the better. Secondly, the process of learning to dribble involves trial and error. At first, the players' rudimentary attempts at dribbling will often result in failure as they discover the contrast between a soft touch and a hard touch on the ball. The players will slowly develop a 'feel' for the ball as they experiment at controlling and propelling it. Young players don't get easily discouraged if they fail. Players of this age do not possess the analytical thought process to look back or think ahead. They live for the moment, in the here and now, and the fact that the last time they tried to dribble it didn't work will not even enter their minds. But if we wait for the players to mature before we emphasize dribbling, many of them will lose their confidence if they do not succeed and will become reluctant to dribble. Thirdly, In 3v3 and 4v4 play, the fields are so small that dribbling is always an option since the ball is always just a few yards away from shooting range. Once the game moves to the larger-sized fields, dribbling becomes less effective on it's own and must be combined with passing to get the ball from point A to point B. And lastly, it's better to go through the process of trial and error when game results are not important and standings are not kept. At the U-10 and older ages, game results assume more importance, making it hard for the parents and coaches to show patience and tolerance for mistakes, and putting added pressure on players to 'get rid of the ball' rather than risk losing it. Once games become competitive, the resultant environment is not ideal to start learning how to dribble.

Most parent coaches reading this section will probably agree that dribbling should be a priority. The challenge is to find a way to implement this priority into the real life dynamics of your typical U-6/U-8 program. How can the clubs do it?

As mentioned in the previous section, most coaches and parents of beginner players unknowingly emphasize the wrong skills. In typical U-6/U-8 club play, the players are encouraged by both the parents on the sidelines and the coaches to 'boot' the ball up the field.

Shouts of “get rid of it!” and “kick it!” are all too common. The further forward a player kicks, they louder the cheers. Players are so indoctrinated to ‘kick it forward’ that very few of them dare to get out of pressure by dribbling. The reality is that players are controlled like puppets by the adults to such an extent that they are not thinking for themselves, and are afraid to do anything but kick the ball. Even throw-ins are routinely thrown straight to the other team by confused players who are conditioned to play the ball forward, no matter what. The kick-offs are no better, with players kicking the ball straight to the other team, American football style. Players, who clearly have plenty of time on the ball with no pressure anywhere near, are still kicking it forward without any thought or skill. And this type of mindless play is usually not corrected by the parent coaches and is allowed to occur time and again.

What the coaches must do is encourage the players to dribble, dribble and dribble. Their first touch must be a soft one. There should be very little coaching done by the coaches, just the occasional reminder to “dribble” and, when close enough to goal, to “shoot”. The shout to “kick it” should never be hollered by the adults. Dribbling out of pressure should be the emphasis for these age groups. Results don’t count and ‘booting it’ should not be an option. The players must be allowed to be creative, and to solve the problems of pressure and space by themselves, using dribbling techniques. Passing is an impossible technique to master for players who cannot dribble. The better players, once they learn to dribble out of tight areas, will be able to create space for themselves with the dribble and will then start to look up and pass the ball. But that will come by itself. Success at the U-6/U-8 ages is measured by how many times a player can dribble past opponents since game results are not important.

The coaches’ approach to the pre-game warm-up should also change. No more the traditional line drills where the coach serves one ball at a time to a line of players who shoot on goal. Instead, the players should all have a ball each and dribble inside their half, using fun types of dribbling activities, to prepare them for the game. The club DOC can prepare a sheet of pre-game warm-up activities that every team must do prior to kick-off.

To summarize, if we want our players to fully master the art of dribbling, the following conditions must exist: a) they must start learning to dribble early; b) we must provide ample opportunities for dribbling in practices and games, and c) we must create the right game environment where players are not afraid to dribble. The following guidelines are recommended for the skill priorities at the U-6/U-8 ages:

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Skill Priorities</u>
U-6	Dribble out of trouble Soft first touch No kicking allowed except when shooting on goal
U-8	Dribble out of trouble Soft first touch No kicking allowed except when shooting on goal Introduce passing only to the players who can dribble out of trouble

Coaches need to reduce the number of unnecessary stoppages in play. For example, there is no need to stop and correct every time a throw-in is not done properly. For some reason, parent coaches have a fixation on teaching players how to take a throw-in. There is absolutely no reason on earth for U-6/U-8's to rehearse throw-ins in practices or games. Why is it so important for the players to do proper throw-ins at U-6/U-8? All the players will eventually learn the throw-in technique over time by themselves. It's like walking. We don't teach toddlers to walk - they learn it instinctively by trying and falling. The players will learn to take a throw-in in time without the need for us to stop games and teach it. Every minute of the game should be spent playing, with as little interruption as possible.

Parents' Role

The parents must understand the skill priorities and embrace the program structure, if it is to succeed. Clubs should prepare a handout that deals specifically with the U-6/U-8 priorities. The handout should include the rationale behind the priorities and explain to the parents how they are expected to behave on the sidelines. As mentioned before, we feel that the clubs need to be firm and clear about their expectations of the parent's behavior. The handout should clearly state what is and isn't allowed on the sideline, and use the field marshals to monitor and enforce these rules.

One of the main problems with parents at games is that they sit too close to the field. Their proximity to the players gives them too much of a presence which, in turn, impacts the players' behavior, response and performance. It's very hard for parents to resist shouting instructions to the players because beginner players are visibly unsure of themselves and naturally make a lot of mistakes. Children aged 4 to 8 are naturally dependent on their parents for many of their daily needs. This dependency spills over into youth sports, manifesting as parental coaching from the sidelines. The players themselves will tend to look to their parents for help since they are conditioned to be dependent on them. **Therefore, another important objective of the U-6/U-8 programs should be to wean the players out of their dependency on their parents' help during games.** This is so very crucial for the development of soccer players. We all know that soccer is a players' game, meaning that it's the players who must make the decisions on the field. In soccer, coaches have a lot less influence and power during games than in some of the other traditional American sports. Soccer players must learn to think for themselves, and the sooner they learn to stand on their own feet, the better. Since results do not matter at these age groups, no one should be overly concerned if players make mistakes that lead to goals. Parents and coaches must resist the urge to tell their players what to do. The following guidelines are recommended for U-6/U-8 game set-up:

- 1) **The fields to be laid out in such a way that keep the parents about 20-30 yards from the sidelines.** This can be easily done using special lines or ropes beyond which parents cannot encroach. We all agree that most players want their parents to be at the games, watching them play, and we realize that having the parents sit by the sidelines seems so nice and cozy. But keeping the parents some distance away from the action will enhance the players' sense of freedom and ease most of the intimidation any players might feel when

the parents are right on top of them. And the parents can still enjoy watching the game. What we lose in coziness we gain in giving the players more independence.

- 2) **The parents should not coach the players.** All they should be allowed to do is cheer good plays by their team but they should also be encouraged to politely applaud good play by the other team.
- 3) **Parents must never tell the players to “kick” or “boot” the ball.** As discussed in the section on the skill priority, kicking the ball needs to be discouraged. The parents will need to be prepared to accept that a lot of the dribbling attempts will be unsuccessful and that, nevertheless, they will have to bite their tongues and let the players try again and again.
- 4) **The coaches should also keep their instruction to a minimum** and let the players understand that they must make their own decisions on the field and that it's OK to make mistakes. The coaches should stand on the sideline and only enter the field if absolutely necessary. It must be remembered that we are trying to help the players grow out of their dependency on the adults. The coaches should encourage dribbling out of trouble and discourage kicking.
- 5) **All this information should be conveyed to the parents in a meeting and using a handout.** A sample handout for this purpose is included in the section on dealing and educating the parents.

PARENTS' HANDOUT

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS AT THE U6 & U-8 LEVELS

TO: Parents of U-6/U-8 players

FROM: Club Director of Coaching

RE: **KICKING IS NOT A SOCCER SKILL** - Program Design and Parents' Role

The purpose of this letter is to outline our special program, specifically designed for the U-6 & U-8 players. The program is called: "KICKING IS NOT A SOCCER SKILL". We would like to explain to you the skill priorities and program objectives for your child, the program's format, and your role within the program.

Skill Priorities

The technical objective of the U-6/U-8 program is to teach players to dribble. Dribbling is the foundation skill for all the other skills and must be taught first. Aimless kicking will be discouraged by the coaches, as it develops bad habits and has no long-term benefits.

Field Layout

You will be asked to sit about 20 yards away from the sidelines during games in an area designated as the Parent's Area. The objective here is to give the players a sense of freedom, encourage the players to think for themselves and wean them out of their dependency on the adults.

We ask that you:

- 1) Refrain from coaching. Leave the coaching to the coach.
- 2) Do not tell the players to 'kick it' during the games or the practices.
- 3) Avoid encroaching beyond the parent's designated area until the game is terminated.
- 4) Feel free to cheer and applaud. This is NOT Silent Weekend! But no negative comments and absolutely no coaching. And, please, applaud good plays by the other team too.
- 5) Exhibit good sportsmanship and make the other team feel welcome.

Please refer to the attached handout for a more detailed rationale of our program. Feel free to speak to me if you have any questions or concerns. I hope your child and you have a nice season.

KICKING IS NOT A SOCCER SKILL – PROGRAM RATIONALE

Skill Priorities

Everyone knows that the game of soccer has a number of basic skills, or *techniques*, that players have to learn, such as dribbling, receiving passes, making passes, shooting and heading. Players also have to learn to make good decisions during the game, such as when to dribble, when to pass, and to whom to pass. These players' decisions are referred to as *tactical* decisions.

The first principle of soccer development is that players should master the basic techniques before they can learn the tactical side of the game. **Technique before tactics!** Think of techniques as vocabulary, and tactics as the grammar rules for forming sentences and paragraphs. Now, imagine a young immigrant who arrives in America without a word of English. It's pretty obvious that before we can teach this immigrant about the rules for joining nouns, verbs, and adverbs to form a sentence, we have to give him a chance to accumulate enough vocabulary. The bigger his vocabulary, the better will he be able to use grammar to articulate his thoughts.

In terms of soccer development, your child is just beginning his/her 'schooling'. We use the word 'schooling' here because there are many similarities between a regular school and a youth club, which can be considered as essentially a soccer school. In fact, as you might have already noticed, throughout this letter we will be using many analogies from real life schooling and the principles of growing up to explain the rationale behind the program.

As far as techniques are concerned, some techniques should be taught before others. The first technique that children should learn is **dribbling**. The ability to dribble is absolutely critical since dribbling is the foundation skill and preparation for all the other fundamental techniques of soccer, such as receiving, passing and shooting. When players are receiving the ball and making preparation touches prior to passing or shooting, they are essentially engaged in a mini-dribble. Young players need to learn to dribble within a variety of playing situations, such as dribbling forward unopposed, changing speed and direction with the ball, shielding the ball from opponents, dribbling past an opponent, and dribbling to get away from pressure. A limited ability to dribble leads to a limited range of passing or shooting. There are also times in the game, when the player with the ball has no passing options and the only way out of tight pressure is to dribble.

Aside from the fact that dribbling forms the foundation for all the other skills, there are many other reasons why we need to focus on dribbling at U-6/U-8. First of all, it takes years to become a comfortable and confident dribbler. Players have to learn to combine body control, agility, coordination and balance with the mechanics of dribbling and the sooner they start, the better. Just like any complex bio-mechanical skill such as skating or gymnastics, the later you start, the harder it is to achieve perfect form. Secondly, the process of learning to dribble involves trial and error. At first, the players' rudimentary attempts at dribbling will often result in failure as they discover the contrast between a soft touch and a hard touch on the ball. The players will slowly develop a 'feel' for the ball as they experiment at controlling and propelling it. Young players don't get discouraged easily if they don't succeed. Players of this age do not possess the analytical thought process to look back or think ahead. They live for the moment, in

the here and now, and the fact that the last time they tried to dribble it didn't work will not even enter their minds. But if we wait for the players to mature before we emphasize dribbling, many of them will lose their confidence if they do not succeed and will become reluctant to dribble. Thirdly, In 3v3 and 4v4 play, the fields are so small that dribbling is always an option since the ball is always just a few yards away from shooting range. Once the game moves to the larger sized fields, dribbling becomes less effective on it's own and must be combined with passing to get the ball from point A to point B. And lastly, it's better to go through the process of trial and error when game results are not important and standings are not kept. At the U-10 and older ages, game results assume more importance, making it hard for the parents and coaches to show patience and tolerance for mistakes, and putting added pressure on players to 'get rid of the ball' rather than risk losing it. Once games become competitive, the resultant environment is not ideal to start learning how to dribble.

Kicking is NOT a Soccer Skill!!!

Most coaches and parents of beginner players unknowingly emphasize the wrong skills. In a typical U-6/U-8 club play, the players are encouraged by both the parents on the sidelines and the coaches to 'boot' the ball up the field. Shouts of "get rid of it!" and "kick it!" are all too common. The further forward a player kicks, they louder the cheers. Players are so indoctrinated to 'kick it forward' that very few of them dare to get out of pressure by dribbling. The fact is that the players are asked to execute a skill (kicking) that they would automatically learn anyway as they grow up, even if they didn't play soccer. If you don't believe it, just go outside to your back yard, place a ball on the ground, take a few steps back, run up to the ball and kick it forward. I am willing to bet you that, even if you never played soccer in your life, you would still succeed in kicking the ball forward. Your kick might look awkward and your movement lack grace, but you still would manage to kick it forward.

The reality is that players are controlled like puppets by the adults to such an extent that they are not thinking for themselves and are afraid to do anything but kick the ball. Even throw-ins are routinely thrown straight to the other team by confused players who are conditioned to play the ball forward, no matter what. The kick-offs are no better, with players kicking the ball straight to the other team, American football style. Players who clearly have plenty of time on the ball with no pressure anywhere near, are still kicking it forward without any thought or skill. And this type of mindless play is usually not corrected by the coaches and is allowed to occur time and again. The end result is that we are 'coaching' the skill of dribbling OUT of the players. We take away the natural 'comfort' with the ball - forever!

Let's be frank here. The underlying issue has to do with how you, the adults, look at the game and analyze it. It's fair to say that you all accept that results at U-6 and U-8 do not matter and that there is no need to keep standings. But you also instinctively know that the easiest way to get the ball from point A to point B is to kick it in that direction. It's hard for you to watch your child lose the ball in front of his own goal and for the other team to score. So, the next time your child has the ball in his/her half, you can't help it and shout "kick it!". But every time they kick it, they lose another opportunity to learn to dribble. The buzz word of our program is: 'Soft first Touch'. Every time your player goes to the ball, his/her first touch on the ball should be a soft one, meaning, NO KICKING!

Some of you might ask “but what about passing?” Isn’t soccer a team game and passing a fundamental team skill? **Passing** implies an intention by a player to direct the ball accurately towards a teammate. It implies decision making. Do not confuse passing with kicking. Kicking means using the feet to propel the ball in a certain direction. You will not see any passing in a U-6 game, and very little in a U-8 game. Passing is simply beyond the ability of U-6 and most U-8 players. In terms of the level of difficulty, **kicking** is the easiest to learn, **dribbling** is next, and **passing** is the hardest to master for young players. Think of dribbling as ‘passing to oneself’. If players cannot pass to themselves, how can they be expected to pass to a teammate 15 yards away? What young players do is actually kick, not pass, and the cheers they hear from you when they kick only serve to reinforce this bad habit.

For this reason, we ask you to **stop shouting to your players to Kick the ball**. If game results truly don’t matter, no one should be overly concerned if a player tries to dribble and loses the ball. First touch must be a **SOFT TOUCH**.

Weaning Young Players Out of Adult Dependency

Now that we explained the program’s skill objective for your child’s technical development, we would like to make you aware of another important objective, in the area of decision making. Children aged 4 to 8 are naturally dependent on their parents for many of their daily needs. This dependency transfers into youth sports, manifesting as parental coaching from the sidelines. The players themselves will tend to look to their parents for help since they are conditioned to be dependent on them. Therefore, another important objective of our U-6/U-8 program is to wean the players out of their dependency on adults during games. This is so very crucial for the development of soccer players. We all know that soccer is a player’s game, meaning that it’s the player who must make the decisions on the field. In soccer, coaches have a lot less influence and power during games than in some of the other traditional American sports. Soccer players must learn to think for themselves, and the sooner they learn to stand on their own feet, the better. Since results do not matter at these age groups, no one should be overly concerned if players make mistakes that lead to goals. Parents and coaches must resist the urge to tell their players what to do.

One of the main features of youth soccer is having the parents sit very close to the field. We realize that it all seems so nice and cozy to sit by the sidelines. But sitting so close to the players gives the parents too much presence, which impacts the players’ behavior, response and performance. If we want to give the players a sense of freedom and the ability to make their own decisions, we need to physically step back. This is why we ask you to sit some distance from the field, where you can still enjoy watching without your presence intimidating the players. What we lose in coziness, we gain in giving an invaluable sense of independence to the players.

Individual Concept vs Team Concept

As parents, naturally you are mainly concerned with the welfare and development of your child. When your child goes to school, you are really only interested in how he/she is progressing in school. Do you really care how the class is doing as a whole? As long as your child is doing well and the teacher is keeping pace with the required academic standards for his/her age, you are happy. You don’t go around boasting that your child’s class average was higher than the

class next door. The class concept in school is seen as a logistical convenience where children of like-age are grouped together to learn academics and social skills within the dynamics of a group. Nothing more, nothing less.

The same concept should be applied to youth sport. Just like a classroom, a youth team should be seen as a convenient way to group players of similar age and ability together, to learn how to play soccer, as well as develop social skills. Nothing more, nothing less.

But parents and coaches seem to have a hard time accepting this notion. They let the team concept take over and become the focus of the soccer activity. It's no longer "my son is going to play today". It's become "OUR TEAM is playing against THEIR TEAM today".

People want to be part of a team. They feel safe and comfortable. There are many positives in a team environment, such as building lifelong friendships, sharing common goals, learning to trust and depend on others. But when the team assumes too much importance or consumes your life, it can lead to tension and conflicts. Games become more stressful. The mood of the family unit for the rest of the day hinges on the game result. 'What's best for the team' overrides what's best for the individual players. The negative aspects of the team concept manifest themselves in many ways: The amount of playing time players get, rivalry between teams spilling over into arguments and even hostility, coaches fighting over players, referee abuse, etc.

As parents, you should only be concerned with one thing: Is your child having fun? And is he/she being given the opportunity to play and learn the game? How the team is doing has absolutely no impact on the future well being of your child. Mia Hamm is not playing for the National Team because her U-10 team won the state championship. She is in the national team because she has developed into a skillful and athletic player. Your child might develop into a high level player or he/she might not. A lot of this depends on the genes and is pre-determined before your child was even born. As long as he/she is having fun and developing a lifetime habit of healthy participation in sport, that's all you can ask for. Remember: The team is there to serve your CHILD'S needs. Your child is not there to serve the team's needs. If the team's performance produces strong emotions in you, you need to step back and take a deep breath and suppress these emotions. **The team is just a logistical expediency to engage a bunch of kids in play. Nothing more, nothing less. Tomorrow, your child will be part of another team.**

Parents must beware of coaches who seem intent in building a 'dynasty' at these young ages. If a coach approaches you with the intent to recruit your child into his/her team because "He wants to build a strong team", you should question his agenda. The chances are he/she will emphasize the wrong type of development and training. The chances are that he/she will replace your child down the road when a better player crops up.

NEW BALL METHOD

The idea behind the 'new ball method' is to keep the flow of the game constant and increase the number of ball touches by all the players. The 'new ball method' eliminates restarts such as throw-ins and corner kicks and keeps the ball in play continuously. Restarts might be important to the game results at the highest level of play, but they have no relevance or developmental benefits at the U-6 or U-8 level. Since the objective of the KINS Program is to teach players to dribble, every aspect of the traditional game that reduces the opportunity to dribble is removed.

The basic principle of this method is that, when a ball goes out of bounds, the coach throws a new ball into play. Experiments with this method, conducted at Richmond Hill SA in 2001/02, found that the players caught on to the method very quickly and loved it. The parents and coaches at Richmond Hill embraced the concept as soon as they witnessed it first hand. The experiments also proved that, on average, players' ball touches increased two and threefold. This was determined by counting the number of touches per player under the traditional rules and comparing to the number of touches under the 'new ball method'. Tracking the amount of actual playing time revealed that the ball was in play for only 45% of the time under the traditional rules, and almost 100% of the time under the 'new ball method'.

To implement the 'new ball method', use either one coach, or two coaches, to throw the balls. If using two coaches, each coach should be in charge of half a field. The coach(s) should hold a number of balls, ready to be thrown, one at a time.

- When a ball goes out of bounds, the coach yells "new ball!" and throws a new one in. The players will learn quickly to react to the new ball.
- Always throw the ball into the unoccupied space. Players will learn to move towards the ball. Do not throw the ball too high in the air since the players are not yet skilled enough to control a bouncing ball.
- Coaches can also use this method to get the non-assertive players involved, by throwing the ball towards them. This will help bring them out of their shell. If the players are really shy, simply place the ball at their feet.
- If one team is dominating the game, the advantage can be shifted to the other team by throwing the ball accordingly.
- This method can also be used to break up a 'beehive'. If all the players are bunched up around the ball, shout "new ball" and throw one into the open space.
- Remember to always praise the players for every attempt. Keep them excited and motivated.

This method will speed up the game, will produce more goals and more excitement. For more information or assistance in implementing it, please contact the State Director of Coaching.