



## SSA Under 12 Practice Structure

Players are continuing to develop technically and have a basic understanding of tactics and can anticipate the next play. Transition from offense to defense and defense to offense is beginning to be recognized. Players can be asked to play in a position but should be exposed to different playing positions throughout the season. Players are still in the “golden age of learning”. Players in this age can follow complex instructions, have enhanced tactical understanding (compared to younger players) and more importantly they now have the ability to come up with their own ideas of how to solve problems within the game. The improvements in a child’s cognitive and psychomotor abilities mean that coaches can, and should focus on teaching their players the key fundamental soccer techniques. Dribbling and passing are still high on the agenda. Players are sufficiently coordinated to work on feints and fast footwork. Players can also begin to combine passes with teammates to penetrate defenses. Receiving with deception is important to take the ball away from pressure. Juggling is and should be encouraged, especially in a player’s own free time. It is not a coincidence that every star player is also an accomplished juggler. Juggling helps players develop a feel for the ball, improve their first touch, balance and coordination, and confidence on the ball. Different shooting and heading techniques can be explored as players begin to be technically able to cross the ball in the air. Technical training is still extremely important. Working on technique in isolation without opponents, such as repetitions of unopposed dribbling or passing moves, should not constitute the only part of the technical content. Players need to practice technique against opponents. This will improve the transfer of skill to the game and will be more realistic, not to mention more fun for the players. A mixture of individual, cooperative and competitive activities should be used to develop technique. Fitness on its own has no place in the training program. Players at this age have not completed their growth spurt and many have not even started their puberty. This means that fitness work with players who have not yet matured physically has limited value since the neuromuscular system cannot yet handle full adaptation to fitness training. The fun games and activities will take care of the fitness needs of these players. Every moment in practice needs to be devoted to ball work.

### *Technical, Tactical, Physical, and Psychological Characteristics*

#### **Technical:**

- Increase technical speed
- Develop under pressure of time, space and opponent
- Technical competency has improved but is still extremely important
- “First touch” important for improving speed of play. Different surfaces, body position, on the move
- Passing with different surfaces and on the move. Proper timing, weight, accuracy and disguise
- Players should be encouraged to evade pressure and beat opponents to complement the passing game as team play emerges
- A variety of shooting techniques should be continually refined
- Juggling skills enhanced
- Heading at goal, away from goal, and passing can be explored. The timing of heading is important
- Tackling with inside and outside legs (relative to a defender), and sliding to maintain possession, pass, or clear

Goalkeeper - Set position, General handling, basic shot stopping, catching, ground balls, bouncing balls, mid-range balls, head height balls. Dealing with crossed balls (flighted and driven), Distribution, throws (roll, sling). All kicks (goal kick, punt, back pass)

#### **Tactical:**

- 1V1 to enhance ball mastery
- Small group 2V1, 2V2, 3V1, 3V2, 3V3, 3v4, 4v4
- Principles of Attack and Defense, and Transition further developed
- Play a variety of positions
- Players should be encouraged to identify their tactical situation as quickly as possible, by looking around and turning the body sideways on
- more formal combination play expected
- Playing with back to goal introduced
- Player’s decision making improved to understand the balance between shooting, passing and dribbling related to time, space, and position on the field

Goalkeeper - Basic communication, 1v1 principles, beginnings of support for defense

**Physical:**

- Some of the players have reached puberty. Girls, in general, arrive earlier than boys
- Coordination has improved
- Development of speed, strength, and agility
- Flexibility is important as it cuts down on injuries and increases range of motion

Goalkeeper - Goalkeeping specific stretching and flexibility. Beginning stages of foot work skills. Increase speed in short distances (18 yards)

**Psychological:**

- Although they are more serious with their play, they are still mainly involved because it is fun. Girls are more likely to play for friendship than for competition
- Most players are able to think abstractly and are thus able to understand some team concepts that are fundamental to the game
- Begin to develop the abilities to sustain complex, coordinated skill sequences
- Are able to attend to several tasks at a time
- They go in many directions
- Instruction needs to be enabling. Show them what can be done instead of telling them what not to do
- They are spending more time with friends and less time with their parents
- They are susceptible to conformity to peer pressure
- They are developing a conscience, morality and scale of values
- Players tend to be highly self-critical
- Encourage decision-making
- They are openly competitive. A few may foul on purpose
- They are looking towards their role models and heroes in order to know how to act
- They begin to compare themselves to peers in terms of soccer ability
- It still is 'cool' to be part of a team. It's not 'cool' to sit on the bench
- A positive and encouraging approach with late developers is crucial

Goalkeeper - Have fun. Encourage effort and determination. High repetition of basics for muscle memory

**Under 12 Practice Structure**

- Focus on 1 topic per practice session, e.g. session 1-dribbling, session 2-passing etc
- Split practice session into 4 segments of approximately 15 minutes
- For each segment select an activity from the U12 Practice Activities curriculum or US Youth Soccer U12 Manual/DVD
- Segment 1 – Technical Warm-Up – individual/pair activities related to practice topic, e.g. 1 player-1 ball, 2 players-1 ball
- Segment 2 – Small group activities, e.g. 1v1 to 4v4
- Segment 3 – Large group activities, e.g. 5v5 to 8v8
- Segment 4 – Scrimmage type activities
- Be prepared with an additional 1 or 2 activities that you can swap in if an activity isn't quite working out
- Give players a short water break after each segment
- Dribbling and dribbling moves, passing and receiving, shooting, are the main focuses
- Juggling and heading can be included
- Principles of attack and defense – roles of players (shown below)
- Team formation – ideal formation that team plays during scrimmages (shown below)

**Principles of Attack (when team has ball)**

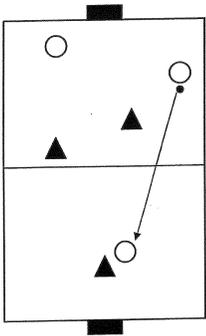
- 1<sup>st</sup> Attacker (penetration - dribble, shoot, pass)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Attacker (support - angle and position to help player with the ball)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Attacker (support and mobility - variety of different runs to create gaps in the defense)
- Depth and Width (spread the defense to create space)
- Improvisation (make attack unpredictable through creativity)

### Principles of Defense (when team doesn't have ball)

- 1<sup>st</sup> Defender (pressure - win the ball back as quickly as possible, or delay - gain time to organize the defense through appropriate pressure on the ball)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Defender (Cover for the 1<sup>st</sup> defender in an appropriate position to see teammate, ball, and opponent)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Defender (balance - positioning away from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> defender to cover vital areas)
- Compactness (keeping spaces between defenders as small as possible)
- Counterattack (win the ball and go to goal as quickly as possible)

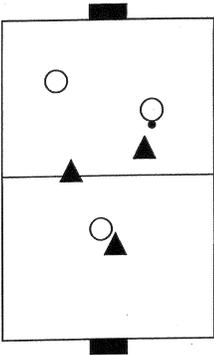
### Attacking and Defending Shape

#### 3v3 Attacking Shape



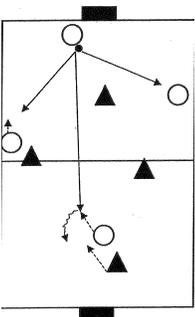
Team of O's have achieved good attacking shape (triangle) by providing length and width on the field. This shape also provides good support to the player on the ball. The close supporting player has taken a position slightly behind the player on the ball while the player in advance of the ball has pushed forward and is available to receive a pass.

#### 3v3 Defending Shape



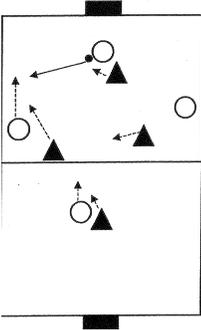
Team of "Triangles" have achieved good defending and starting positions. Pressure is applied to the ball while good cover and balance is provided by the remaining players. Notice the defensive position taken by the defender closest to the goal. The position taken is on the ball side of the opponent so that the defender may intercept a pass into the flank space first. The team of three provides good concentration and depth.

#### 4v4 Attacking Shape



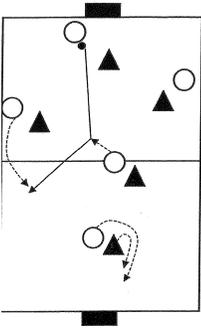
Team of O's have achieved good attacking shape (diamond) and are providing player on the ball with close support on left and right as well as player positioned deep in advance of the ball. Notice the number of passing opportunities provided. Players must achieve these "starting positions" early after recovery of the ball but once achieved they must "free" themselves from close marking by the opponent. Mobility by the individual players to provide good angles and distance of support is important to maintain possession. The through pass is a priority for the player on the ball to achieve.

#### 4v4 Defending Shape



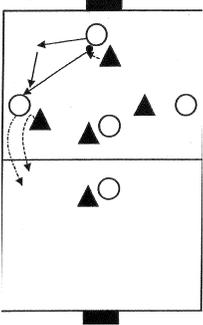
Team of “Triangles” have achieved good defending shape by putting immediate pressure to the ball and limiting the players option to play deep early. The remaining players have concentrated their defensive pressure in the area of the ball. Notice the balancing defender on the right side of the field who is squeezing toward the center. This is made possible by the closet defender immediately closing down the player with the ball and channeling the attacker to the other flank. Also notice how compact the defending team is from front to back.

#### 5v5 Attacking Shape



Team of O's have achieved good attacking shape and are able to provide the player on the ball with a central player in which to play through. Notice the space created in the center of the field by the flank players staying wide. This allows the player with the ball to play a through pass to the checking player. The deep attacking player makes a run away from the space that eventually the wide player will enter on the dribble. This run shows intelligent “playing without the ball” by creating space for the oncoming player by drawing the opponent away.

#### 5v5 Defending Shape



Team of “Triangles” have achieved good defending shape by pushing forward and pressing the attacking team in their half of the field. Notice the position of the central defending player to prevent the attacking team from playing through their central player as well as the flank defender tracking the opponent trying to run behind into space. Transition between attack and defense must be immediate in order to prevent the attacking team from penetrating quickly.

### Team Formation

The recommended formation for this age is a 3-line formation of 3 defenders, 2 midfielders, and 2 forwards. Therefore, 1 player in goal, 3 players as defenders (middle, right side, and left side), 2 midfielders, and 2 attackers. The reasons are as follows:

- The 3-2-2 formation closely replicates all the passing patterns and movement of the 11v11 game. Hence a better transfer of learning to the game
- The 3-2-2 formation replicates the modern style of play that starts with numbers up in the back and requires timely and intelligent runs from the back to create numbers upfront
- The 3-2-2 system has width and depth. The team will attack with at least 3 players with one of the midfielders joining the attack. A wide defender can also overlap, and the other defenders shift laterally to cover. If the central defender steps up, the remaining defenders pinch in to close the gap. These are exactly the type of movements that players need to learn in the modern game