



**NATURE COAST  
LIGHTNING**

**SOCCER CLUB**

**www.NatureCoastSoccer.com**

## **Player Development Guideline**

U11 & U12 Co-Ed Recreational Soccer



[www.naturecoastsoccer.com](http://www.naturecoastsoccer.com)

# Nature Coast Soccer Club Overview

Nature Coast Soccer Club (NCSC) is a non-profit youth soccer organization located in Citrus County, Florida. We offer play for recreational and competitive teams. Children can start with our club as young as four years old and up to eighteen years old. Our organization conducts their activities with the help of volunteers. Our recreational season starts in October. Our competitive seasons are August through October for our U15 – U19 teams, and October through March for our U10 – U14 teams. Our primary focus is on player development, having fun, and providing a safe environment.

Player Development – our goal is to teach the players how to play soccer to the best of their ability. To accomplish this all players are to be given equal playing time during games and attention during practice.

Having fun – the number one reason to play is to have fun. The number one reason not to play is that it's not fun. To promote fun we will encourage equal participation in practice and games, matching athletes' ability to their challenges, and by helping to set performance goals, rather than outcome goals.

Safety first – it is important to always make sure that a safe and age appropriate environment is set for games and practice.

## Player Development Guideline

**The goal of this document is to:**

Establish clear and age appropriate goals and objectives so our coaches, players and parents know what we are working toward  
 Establish objectives so coaches have a common understanding of which skills players should have when they proceed to the next age group.

Establish age appropriate priorities and focus areas in the four elements of the game (technical, tactical, psychological, and physical)  
 Ensure consistency among our programs so we're all teaching the same way and using the same vocabulary

Create confident coaches that are better prepared

# U11 & U12 Player Development

Typically a U11/U12 player that starts at age 10 will have 4 seasons of play before he/she move's up to U14's. A fall and spring season at age 10 in the U11 program, and the same at age 11 in the U12 program. Our goal is be to develop their skills so they are prepared to move up to the next level. We can't expect these young players to master everything below in a single season, but taught consistently from season to season they will get it over time. Keep this in mind as you read through this document.

## Key Objectives for the U12 NCSC Program

- Have fun (players, coaches and parents)
- Players should be sharing the ball
- Focus on intermediate skill
- Begin to focus on basic & intermediate tactics
- Individual, pairs and small group activities up to 4-6 players

## Transition Considerations

During the Fall, players typically move up in age groups so you will probably have a number of players on your team that have never played at this level before.

### U10's moving up to U11/U12's:

- Are playing on a much bigger field
- Are used to 7v7
- Have a positional understanding but not at this scale
- Have limited understanding of what the offside rule is
- Will physically be challenged by the larger field

## Typical Characteristics of U11/12 Players

1. all children are *maturing at different rates*
2. players need to warm-up and stretch - *muscle pulls and other nagging injuries are common otherwise*
3. players will typically understand *elemental abstract concepts and hypothetical situations*
4. they like to *solve problems*
5. peer evaluation is a constant
6. *egos are sensitive*
7. *coordination* may depend on whether or not they are in a *growth spurt*
8. *technique still needs to be reinforced constantly*
9. playing too much can lead to *overuse injuries*
10. playing too much and not feeling like they have a choice in the matter can lead to *burnout and drop-out*
11. this is the dawn of *tactics!*
12. keep asking the players to *be creative and to take risks* - we never want them to stop doing these things
13. ask for feedback from them - *they will tell you how things are going*
14. try to hand over *leadership and ownership* of the team to them
15. *keep it fun!!!*

# Player Development Objectives

This document will help to identify key objectives within the four key areas of player development. The priority areas will evolve for each age group progression. The key areas of player development across all age groups and levels are:



**Technical Development**– These are the skills used to play the game, i.e. the “fundamentals”. This includes things like dribbling, passing, shooting, receiving, tackling, juggling, heading, etc.

*Along with making sure players have fun, skills is probably the most important area for youth players to focus on.*



**Tactical Development** – Tactics for youth soccer focuses largely on decision making, i.e. how players can make the correct decision given a particular situation. We should try to understand the progression of tactics and develop the players in the proper sequence, so that players are comfortable solving easier problems (1v1, 2v1) before they move on to solve more complex ones (4v4):



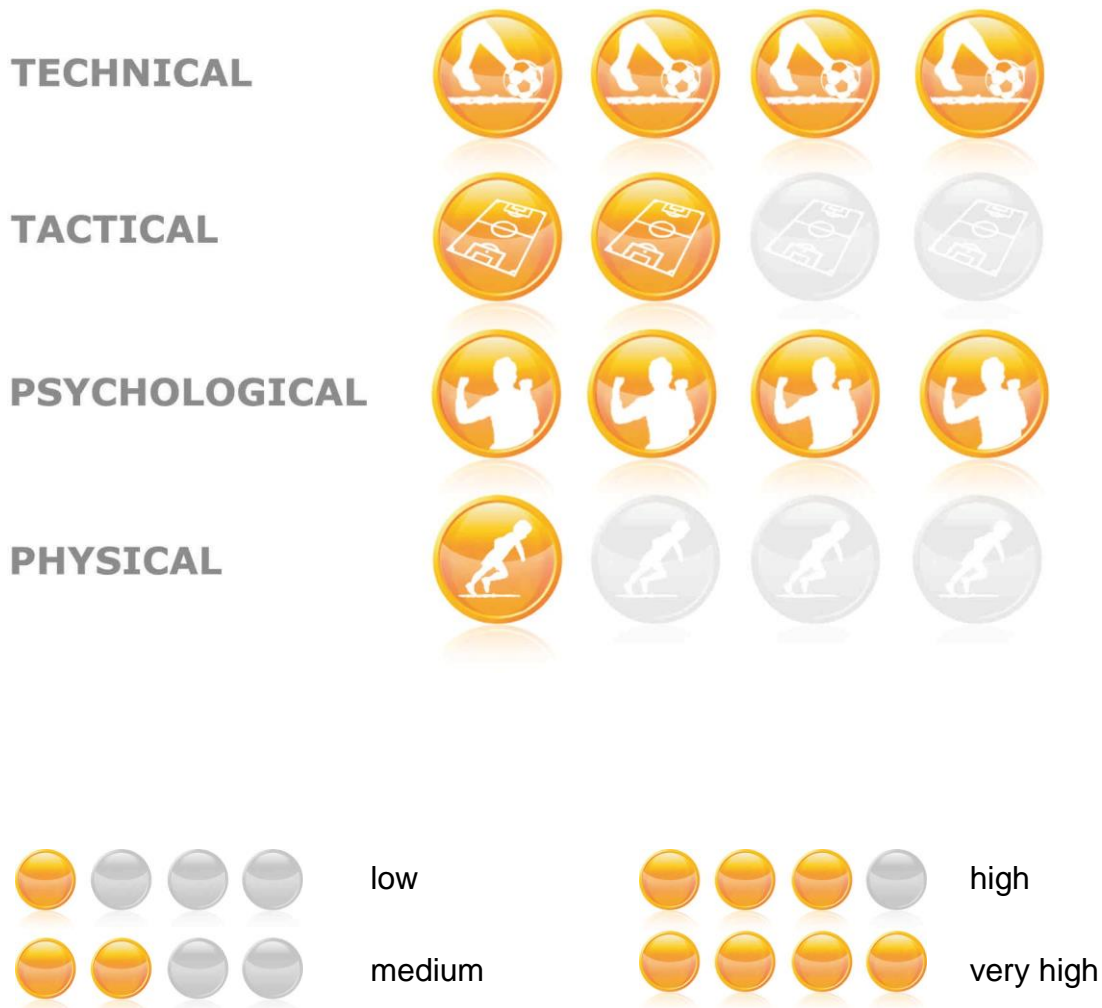
**Psychological Development** – For youth soccer, this relates to whether the player is having fun playing soccer, and other aspects such as how they deal with winning and losing, their level of motivation, and how they interact with teammates, coaches and their parents.



**Physical Development** – Fitness for youth soccer players can be largely achieved by just letting them play soccer, although some of the older age groups (U14 and maybe U12) may start incorporating speed and conditioning into practice games and activities.

## U11/U12 Player Development Objectives

The following key training priorities are recommended by US Youth Soccer for coaches of U11/12 players. A focus on helping players develop these skills and basic tactics (and not intermediate or advanced tactics at this stage) is critical as it will serve as the foundation for skills and tactics that will be introduced when these U12 players move on to the next age group.



Over the next few pages we will go into the specific elements within each area that players will be encouraged to learn before entering the next age level.



## U11/12 Technical Skill Priorities

Technical focus at U11/12 level should be a progression of those skills learned at lower levels plus the following:

### Field Play - Technical Skills:

- Dribble with all sides of both feet (inside, outside, sole)
- Dribble out of trouble
- Dribble past someone (feints, fakes, crossovers etc)
- Changes of direction and turns (pullback, inside/outside turns, cruyff turn)
- Speed dribbling in traffic
  
- Soft first touch
- First touch away from pressure
- Receiving the ball with all parts of the body
- Shielding – Players should develop proper technique to shield the balls from opponents
  
- Shooting with both feet (with inside of foot and laces)
- Shooting for power, for accuracy and volleying
- Introduce proper volleying technique
  
- Passing with inside and outside of both feet
- Passing to feet and passing to space
- Introduce chipping the ball
- Introduce long passes (using laces)
  
- Juggling with both feet and thighs (allowing one bounce between juggles if needed)
- Basic thrown-in technique
- Introduce proper defending technique
- Introduce block tackles
- Proper heading technique (attacking and defensive)
- Specific goalkeeping technique

*Players should spend equal time developing both feet – this is very important!!!*

### **Goalkeeping - Technical Skills:**

- Proper positioning (hands and body)
- Body position around the goal
- Ball distribution (throwing, rolling, punting)
- Basic diving from the ready position.
- Collecting balls from the attacking player's feet.

### **Continue to focus a fair amount of practice time on dribbling**

At this stage, players can be taught a number of dribbling moves that are used frequently in soccer, such as step-overs, scissors, cuts, turns and so on. We should continue to encourage them to be creative in their dribbling.

### **Incorporate other basic skills into practice sessions**

- **First Touch / Receiving:** Players should be encouraged to focus on developing a soft first touch when receiving the ball. Players should be familiar with the proper technique to receive the ball on the ground with both feet. They should also be able to receive balls in the air using both feet, thighs and chest. Players should also be shown how to receive the ball away from pressure.
- **Shielding:** Players should be familiar with the proper technique to shield the ball from opponents.
- **Shooting:** Players should be familiar with proper shooting technique (using their laces) and have plenty of opportunities to practice with both feet. Volleying can be introduced to older or more experienced players. Drills where players stand in lines and wait for their turn to shoot on goal are discouraged as this is not a realistic game situation and players spend a lot of time waiting for the ball. Instead, use small side games with large goals to encourage and emphasize shooting (see sample games / activities for examples).



- Passing: Players should be able to pass the ball with the inside and outside of their feet. They should also be able to pass the ball accurately over 8-15 yards and learn how to chip the ball. They should also learn about the difference between passing to feet and passing to space.
- Juggling: Players should continue to work on their ball juggling skills using both feet, thighs, and even their head.
- Defending Technique: Players should be shown the proper defensive stance and how to make block tackles. Poke tackles can also be introduced at this stage. Players should also be encouraged not to rush into their tackles but to be patient and wait for the right time to win the ball.
- Heading: Offensive and defensive heading techniques should be introduced at this stage.

**Perform basic skills under increasing pressure (i.e. less time and space)**

At this age group, players should continue to focus on improving their basic skills / technique (i.e. dribbling, passing, receiving, shooting, etc.) by trying to execute them under increasing pressure. The coach can increase pressure by reducing the playing area (i.e. restricting space), allowing fewer touches of the ball (i.e. restricting time), etc.



## U11/12 Tactical Skill Priorities

Tactical focus at U11/U12 level should still be at an introductory level. Problem solving and making decisions for themselves are critical tactical elements in young players. Below are some of the tactical skills to focus on at this age-level.

### Field Play - Tactical Skills:

- Short and long wall passes (also know as give and go or 1-2)
- Importance of the first touch
- Immediate transition from defense to offense or vice versa
- Attacking Concepts (possession and support)
- Role of the second defender (pressure and cover)
- Width and depth in attack
- Player movement on throw-ins
- Penalty kicks

Players should be exposed to these simple tactical scenarios and understand how to both attack and defend these game contexts.

- 1 v 1 (attacking and defending)
- 2 v 1 (attacking and defending)
- 2 v 2 (attacking and defending)

A lot of 1 v 1 duels should be incorporated into practice sessions to allow all the players to get plenty of opportunities to learn how to dribble past an opponent and how to stop one.

The basic roles of first and second attackers and defenders should be introduced through 2 v 1 and 2 v 2 games and activities.

**Introduce basic combination plays and attacking / defensive concepts**

At this stage, players should learn to combine with their teammates using short ground passes and wall passes. Overlapping and takeovers can be introduced to older or more experienced players. Players should also understand how to provide proper support to teammates with the ball and the importance of maintaining possession of the ball while attacking. On the defensive side, players should be familiar with the concepts of pressure and cover.

**Goalkeeping - Tactical Skills:**

- Calling for the ball when receiving with defending players
- Communicating with the other players on the team during the game



## U1/12 Psychological Development

Psychological focus at U11/U12 level is a major priority. Fostering an environment where our players can grow in confidence, try new things and have fun whilst doing it are critical to developing well rounded players.

- **Keep it fun and enjoyable!!!** This will help foster a desire to play (intrinsic motivation)
- Build confidence
- Encourage imagination and creativity
- Foster our players to be part of a team
- Promote independent decision making
- Promote problem solving
- Encourage player to learn to deal with winning / losing
- Encourage players to watch games on TV
- Increase Demands
- Maintain Discipline

### **Keep it fun!!!**

One of the most important aspects of psychological development for young players in the U11/12 age groups is for them to have fun. This is the age group where many players decide whether they want to continue playing soccer. For most of them, if they are not having fun, they will most likely drop the sport. As a coach, you should strive to create an environment where the players, parents and you, the coach, are all having fun.

### **Allow the players to make mistakes and encourage them to make their own decisions**

As players progress to U12, they play on larger fields and dribbling may not always be the best option. Players will need to start understanding when to dribble, when to pass and to whom, and when to shoot for goal. At this stage, they will often choose the wrong option, but as coaches and parents, we need to be patient with them and encourage them to make these decisions independently, especially during games. Aimless kicking or “booting” of the ball should not be encouraged.

At this age, the players are aware of the score and many parents and coaches are paying more attention to the results. You will start noticing many coaches and parents yelling directions from the sidelines. We should remind ourselves and the parents of our players that improving their play and having fun are the main objectives. As far as possible, we should refrain from yelling directions to the players during games, as it will hamper their ability to make decisions independently.

### **Reduce player dependence on adult guidance through “Guided Discovery”**

In practice sessions, coaches should try to allow players to make mistakes and ask players how they could do things better and guide them to the correct answers, rather than telling the players what to do. This will help the players’ ability to solve problems and reduce their dependence on adults for guidance during games.

### **Teambuilding**

U11/12 players recognize the fact that they are part of a team and they associate themselves with their team. This is a great opportunity to continue teaching young players about the value of teamwork and what it means to be part of a team (i.e. trusting your teammates, not criticizing them, etc.). Certain fun teambuilding activities can be done during some practices, especially in the beginning of the season when players may not be familiar with each other.

### **Establish and maintain discipline**

At this age group it is a good idea to establish some team rules at the beginning of the season. The coach should also set up penalties for not following these rules. It is a good idea to inform parents of the team rules and penalties. The coach should ensure that he or she applies these rules fairly and consistently if they are broken during the season.



## U11/12 Physical Development

Physical development is not a high priority for U11/12 soccer. Encouraging all players to play and participate and give their best is really all that's required.

- Just play soccer
- Introduce stretching (static and dynamic) in some practices
- Proper warm-up, cool-down and stretching

In terms of fitness, there is no need for players in this age group to run laps or sprints. Relay races with the ball and 1 v 1 duels are good exercises for building fitness while working on ball skills. But for the most part, just let them play soccer and soccer related games and activities during practice sessions. At this age group, proper warm-up, cool-down and stretching is important to reduce the likelihood of injuries. You should incorporate light stretching after a warm up activity to start all practice sessions and before games. A cool-down activity followed by light stretching should be at the end of each practice session and after every game.

## U11 & U12 Player Development Overview

The period this age group is entering is often referred to as the dawn of tactics. Typically players of this age begin to understand the basic tactical situations of the game and are more aware of movement off the ball and the reasons for tactical choices. Problem-solving becomes systematic and these players tend to learn quickly. Children of this age typically are beginning to develop abstract awareness, so they can understand coaches when we talk about space and runs off of the ball. However, just because they understand these basic tactical concepts does not mean we should focus on these concepts entirely. Players are still developing technically at this age, especially as they go through growth spurts and awkward phases. It is quite common to look out at a U12 field and see players that are physically the size of adults. Yet, other U12 players appear as if they could still be in the 3rd grade.

These children are all growing at different rates and undergoing physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. The average age for the beginning of pubescence in girls is 10 years old with a range of 7 to 14; for boys it is age 12 with a range of 9 to 16. As coaches, we need to be sensitive to these changes and their social implications when coaching this age group. Some players may pick up skills quickly, where as others may struggle. However, it may be the case that this is simply the result of differences in maturation. In a year, the slower developer may surpass the player who developed earlier. For this reason we need to be patient and keep open minds about all players through these years. They are aware of their struggles more than anyone else as peer evaluation is omnipresent at these ages. When we see them struggling, it is important for us to help them and to keep the game fun.

