



Tots Soccer

Coaching Handbook
& Parent's Guide



USA of Indiana

USA of Indiana provides the optimum soccer experience for families, coaches, and Central Indiana youth. The club offers a wide range of programs led by full and part-time professional management, in cooperation with paid and volunteer support staff. This model reinforces our commitment to develop programming and improve member experience. USA of Indiana provides children the opportunity to play soccer or referee at multiple skill and commitment levels while striving to continuously improve the quality of coaching and enhance the overall soccer experience for each player.

USA of Indiana is one of the largest youth soccer clubs in Indiana, owned and powered by an all-volunteer army of Soccer Moms, Soccer Dads, and other community leaders. It is a member in good standing and sanctioned by [Indiana Soccer Association](#), [U.S. Youth Soccer](#), [U.S. Soccer](#), [U.S. Club Soccer](#), and [FIFA](#), the world-wide governing body of football. The club serves 3000 players annually in Hendricks County, Marion County and surrounding communities and operates 100 soccer fields in six different formats of play (size) at four soccer complexes. USA of Indiana provides a positive youth development experience, and players of all ages and competition levels wear the USA of Indiana jersey with pride.

COMMUNITY BASED RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS

USA of Indiana operates its broad-based community recreational soccer programs for youth ages 3 to 12 in Avon, Brownsburg, and Indianapolis Pike Township each fall and spring. Players may choose to register and participate in fall or spring or both seasons. The Pike Youth Soccer Club community recreation program is a 30+ year partner of Indy Parks operating in several facilities including Mary & John Geisse Soccer Complex, Eagle Creek Park, and Northwestway Park. The Avon and Brownsburg community recreation program is owned and operated by USA of Indiana with teams participating at the Avon Soccer Complex and Brownsburg Soccer Complex.

COMMUNITY BASED SOCCER SELECT (REC PLUS) PROGRAMS

The USA of Indiana Rec Plus program for youth ages 13 to 20 is also community-based with teams forming in both Marion and Hendricks Counties in each fall and spring. Players may choose to register and play in fall or spring or both seasons. Soccer Select teams serve competitive players who desire a soccer experience with limited travel and modest tuition rates in the [WCSSF and NWMC](#).

COMPETITIVE TRAVEL PROGRAM

The USA of Indiana competitive travel soccer program fields age-based, gender-specific teams at a variety of levels of play for youth ages 7 to 20. Teams play in the league best-suited for the team, including [Indiana Soccer League](#), and the [Midwest Regional League](#). Most games are played in and around Indianapolis. Teams form annually each June for the Fall to Spring soccer year. Supplemental Tryouts may be held for players unable to attend June tryouts (players new to the area), as roster space permits. Supplemental Tryouts are also held in October for the High School teams (15U-19U) who play a spring-only season.

Children & Sports (Fact Sheet)

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Sports help children develop physical skills, get exercise, make friends, have fun, learn to play as a member of a team, learn to play fair, and improve self-esteem. American sports culture has increasingly become a money making business. The highly stressful, competitive, "win at all costs" attitude prevalent at colleges and with professional athletes affects the world of children's sports and athletics; creating an unhealthy environment. It is important to remember that the attitudes and behavior taught to children in sports carry over to adult life. Parents should take an active role in helping their child develop good sportsmanship. To help your child get the most out of sports, you need to be actively involved. This includes: providing emotional support and positive feedback,

- attending some games and talking about them afterward,
- having realistic expectations for your child,
- learning the sport and supporting your child's involvement,
- helping your child talk with you about their experiences with the coach and other team members,
- helping your child handle disappointments and losing, and
- modeling respectful spectator behavior.

Although this involvement takes time and creates challenges for work schedules, it allows you to become more knowledgeable about the coaching, team values, behaviors, and attitudes. Your child's behavior and attitude reflects a combination of the coaching and your discussions about good sportsmanship and fair play. It is also important to talk about what your child observes in sports events. When bad sportsmanship occurs, discuss other ways the situation could be handled. While you might acknowledge that in the heat of competition it may be difficult to maintain control and respect for others, it is important to stress that disrespectful behavior is not acceptable. Remember, success is not the same thing as winning and failure is not the same thing as losing. If you are concerned about the behavior or attitude of your child's coach, you may want to talk with the coach privately. As adults, you can talk together about what is most important for the child to learn. While you may not change a particular attitude or behavior of a coach, you can make it clear how you would like your child to be approached. If you find that the coach is not responsive, discuss the problem with the parents responsible for the school or league activities. If the problem continues, you may decide to withdraw your child. As with most aspects of parenting, being actively involved and talking with your children about their life is very important. Being proud of accomplishments, sharing in wins and defeats, and talking to them about what has happened helps them develop skills and capacities for success in life. The lessons learned during children's sports will shape values and behaviors for adult life.

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Coaching the 4U Player

Coaching children under four years of age presents some additional challenges due to their immaturity, short attention span, and less developed muscles. You will also need to deal with a great variation between personalities, physical size, and abilities. Your objective should be for all of the kids to have fun, make friends, and learn some soccer skills that will help them should they decide to continue to the next level. You should not expect everyone to listen to long lectures. Your goal is to introduce them to basic concepts like dribbling and kicking and make it enough fun that they want to keep playing as their bodies and minds mature. Go down to their level of thinking. Don't try to bring them up to yours. What was fun when you were four years old? The kid who is watching seagulls will say, you were the greatest coach in the world if he had fun. He will have fun when he kicks the ball or at least when he makes an attempt and gets praise instead of criticism.

Characteristics Of 4U Players

- 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. Need to be patient and laugh with them as they get 'lost' on the field.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often. Give hints, don't criticize.
- Need generous praise and to play without pressure. No extrinsic rewards (trophies, medals, etc.) should be given for winning.
- Prefer "parallel play" (Will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates. Thus, a 3 against 3 game is, in reality, a 1 against 5 game because they all want the ball at the same time).
- Very individually oriented (me, mine, my).
- Constantly in motion, but with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly.
- Development for boys and girls is quite similar.
- Physical coordination limited. Eye - hand and eye - foot coordination is not developed. Need to explore qualities of a rolling ball.
- Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc.
- Prefer large, soft balls.
- Catching and throwing skills not developed.
- Can balance on their "good" foot.

Things You Can Expect from 4Us

As coaches of these younger players there are things that we know that we can expect during training and games. If we know what to expect, we will be more effective in dealing with the hundreds of situations that come up. This will help us relax, and, in turn, allow us to enjoy the unpredictable nature of working with these children even more. Here are some of the things that we can expect.

- 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" it, they cannot or will not pass the ball.
- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field in need of a toilet.
- The only player to hold a position is the goalkeeper (if you play with one). 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.
- Several players will slap at the ball with their hands, 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 players' attention. By all means, stop whatever you are doing and go watch for a couple of minutes!
- During a season, you will end up tying at least 40 - 50 shoe laces.
- They will do something that is absolutely hysterical. Make sure that you laugh!

4U Coaching Rational

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.

With the above assumptions, let's look at some things that we can do to energize the 4U players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically sign up for next year!

- Each session should be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible. Involve the ball in as many activities as possible. Basic movements such as running, skipping, hopping, etc. need to be emphasized. If these can be done while kicking, catching, rolling, or dribbling a ball... all the better!
- Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!
- Remember, although they may have very similar birth dates, their physical and / or mental maturity may vary as much as 36 months.
- Plan for at least 4, 90-second drink breaks, especially in warmer weather. Their "cooling system" is not as efficient as in older players.

Practices

Keep things moving quickly. Participate in all of the warm-ups and drills. In fact, exaggerate your motions to illustrate the proper procedure. Do the actions at the same time as you are explaining a stretch or a drill (not after).

Have the kids hold a ball for the stretches where it is appropriate. This increases the fun and familiarizes them with the ball so they won't be alarmed when the ball comes their way on game day.

Avoid drills with line-ups. Try to incorporate skill development into soccer-related games. They each should have the ball at their feet almost all of the time. Success is related to the attempt not the outcome. As a coach you must get excited about the attempt, not the outcome (if the attempt is genuine the outcomes will continually get better). This is difficult, because we as coaches (and parents) are conditioned to see the end results.

At this age, there is less emphasis on progression than with older groups because they are too young to put several moves together successfully and they will get bored if there is not much variation between drills. Skills should be broken down into smaller components. For example, passing may be learned by one kid rolling the ball to a passer, who tries to pass it back. Then have the kids slowly push the balls with the inside of their feet and finally have them pass it back and forth at regular speed.

Typical 4U Training Session

Here are some items that should be included in a 4U training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that may or may not involve the ball. They can chase their ball as it is thrown by the coach, bringing it back with different parts of their body. Or, they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball. "Soccernastics" activities are very appropriate, like: rolling the ball with the bottom of their feet, with their elbows, backwards, with the back of their neck while holding on to it; throwing it up and catching it; keeping it up with their feet while sitting.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1 v.1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or "Red Light - Green Light", or a game where players are trying to knock their ball through gates. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "loser sits".

PLAY THE GAME: Move on to the real game, but, make sure it is a 2 v. 2, 3 v. 3, or 4 v. 4 game. Switch the game every 5 minutes or so. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. It is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

Appropriate Training for 4U

1. "Try this" activities may include, but are not limited to stretching, twisting, jumping, balancing.
2. Dribbling the ball with their feet, have the players stop the ball with various parts of the body such as foot, back, belly, knee or bottom, while the ball is on the ground on command.
3. "I can do something without the ball, can you?" such as skipping, then kids lead. Moving to "I can do something with the ball, can you" such as tossing the ball and catching with clapping or footwork on the ball. As before, give the lead to the kids as the challenge increases.

Ball Gymnastics

Definition: **Any fun, warm-up activity with a ball.**

Purpose: Used for warming-up, introducing the theme of a practice, and introducing the idea of warming-up, preparing for physical activity.

Emphasis: FUN, with secondary consideration on developing balance, coordination, quick movements, and building confidence in handling a ball. NO TEACHING, these are fun activities intended to provide movement exploration and self-discovery.

INDIVIDUAL BALL GYMNASTICS

1. Throwing ball up in the air.

- throw ball up and catch, without moving feet.
- throw ball up and over head and catch behind back.

2. Weaving ball in and around and through legs.

- standing with legs apart, roll ball in a figure around and through legs.
- again, but legs together, rolling ball in circle, small then larger circles.

3. Standing with ball on ground in front

- one foot on ball, alternate feet, toe tapping on top of the ball. Coach can lead, so players must keep their heads up and watch the coach and not the ball.
- ball in front, jump over ball, turn, face ball again and jump over.
- standing with ball beside, jump over ball side to side.

4. Sitting, legs straight.

- roll ball around in a circle around feet then behind back, keeping legs straight.
- again, but with legs apart.

BALL GYMNASTICS WITH A PARTNER

1. Standing, facing each other, approx. 1 yard apart.

- toss ball back and forth.
- roll ball back and forth.
- one player tosses the other rolls, later change.
- these exercises can also be done sitting or lying on stomachs.
- one player turns and faces away from partner, with legs apart rolls ball between legs to partner, turn to receive ball back.
- pass ball back and forth using only inside of either foot.

2. Standing, facing each other, players both holding the same ball between them.

- kneel down then sit down without letting go of ball, once both are sitting have them stand again. Partners can try this three to five times. Speed up and slow down commands can also be used.

4. Pass and fetch.

- both partners stand facing each other, one holds a ball, for thirty seconds the player with the ball drops the ball in any direction, the other player quickly gets the ball and gives it back to partner, who then drops it again in another direction. After 30 seconds players switch roles.

4U Practice Ideas

Ball Retrieve

Each player has a ball. The player hands the coach their ball. The coach then tosses the ball away and the player must retrieve the ball as quickly as possible, bringing it back to the coach anyway they want. The players are encouraged to bring the ball back a different way each time.

Camp Town Races

Line up all the players on one end of the field. They each have a ball. On the whistle, they all dribble to opposite end, shoot ball into goal, get ball out of goal, and run back and finish with a shot on opposite goal. The first one to finish is the winner. Ask them "Who is going to win the race?" They all learn to say "The player who can dribble it the straightest!" A variation is to start half at one end and half on the other. This teaches them to try to do it fast while maintaining possession. This drill also helps players deal with the balls that pop out of the bunch.

Edge of the World

Each player has a ball in a confined area. Players start at one end of the area and pass their ball to the other end line. They must run after their own ball and control it before it "falls off the edge of the earth." The challenge is to get as close to the line as possible without going over.

Egg Hunt

Have more balls than players. Have the players line-up across one end of the field. Take their balls and spread them out around the field. These are the eggs. At the other end of the field is a goal called the "basket". Blow the whistle and turn them loose. The object of the game is to get all the "eggs" in the basket as quickly as possible. They are all on the same team, and aren't allowed to take a ball away from another player. Time them to see how fast they can accomplish the task.

The kids really like this game. The more balls (eggs) the better. You should see them score, and turn around and go back for more balls.

Find the Coach

This activity is similar to the Retrieve Activity, where the coach has each player hand him/her a ball, which the coach then throws in random directions for the players to retrieve and return to the coach in many different ways. However, in each manner of returning the ball, the coach remains stationary. Find the Coach becomes a more complex activity for two reasons:

1. Each player must dribble the ball back to the coach with their feet.
2. The coach does not stand in one spot as he/she moves in all directions within the space provided for the activity.

By doing so, players not only dribble with speed to get back to the coach, but must dribble with their eyes up.

Gates

Place cones three yards apart as small goals or 'gates' randomly spaced in a 30 x 30 yard area. Each player has a ball. On the signal, players must dribble their balls through as many gates as possible in 60 seconds. At the conclusion, ask the players "How many gates did you dribble through?" Then pose the next challenge: "Can you go again and improve your last try?"

I Can Do Something, Can You?

This is a fun, creative and empowering activity. The challenges from the coach can be with and without the ball. Examples:

The coach says, "I can do something without the ball, can you?" and begins skipping, at which time the players skip in a random fashion within a defined area. The coach then repeats the challenge and demonstrates another movement. Hopping, running, clapping, walking backwards, whatever you can think of. You can introduce the ball as the kids get the hang of it. (Another variation would be a game of Simon Says with and without the ball.)

Ice Monster

Mark off an area for the game to be played and select one kid to be the "Ice Monster". Have the rest of the kids (each with a ball) dribble around within the area. The "Ice Monster" attempts to touch each player's ball, at which point that player "freezes" with their foot on the ball. If a player's ball goes out of bounds, they also freeze. The last remaining unfrozen player gets to be the new Ice Monster for the next round.

"Keep Your Yard Clean"

Here is a game that involves kicking and is a good example of parallel play. It involves all players on the team at one time, but they are all acting as individuals during the game. This allows for individual differences in skill. The game is simple, fun, and easy to adapt to account for team size and experience.

THE GAME:

- Create a 'neutral area' between the two teams where no player is allowed into. This area can be as small as one yard and as big as 10 yards wide. The width is determined by how far the players can kick the ball.
- Each player starts with a ball at his / her feet.
- On command, each team tries to keep their side of the game free of balls by kicking their ball over to the other team's side.
- After an appropriate amount of time (when the balls become too scattered, or the players are losing focus), call the game and count which team has the most balls on their side.
- Distribute the balls evenly for another try if the players are still interested.

Kick out

Everyone dribbles and shields their ball within a circle while trying to kick everyone else's ball out, and simultaneously to protect their own. You can't kick someone else's ball out if your ball isn't in the circle. If your ball goes out, you have to leave the circle. It gets down to two kids in a duel. The coach may participate to keep the game from becoming too competitive, as the ones eliminated early may feel bad.

Monkey in the Middle

All players form a circle and choose someone (the "Monkey") to be in its center. The players forming the circle pass one ball among them while the person in the center tries to gain control of the ball. When this happens, the person in the circle who last touched the ball goes to the center. Some level of competitiveness develops but never on an individual basis and the "losers" quickly get a chance to redeem themselves.

Pirate (or Monster)

A keep away game. Coaching points: concentrate on the player's close dribbling and screening techniques. Everybody inside a circle (center circle is fine) with a ball. One player without a ball is the Pirate. Everybody starts dribbling around. The Pirate player tries to steal a ball from any player and pass it out of the circle - now, the two players are Pirates and go after the others...then three, then four. Finally only one player is left with a ball. He/she becomes the Pirate the next game.

Variation: Bomber. Just like above except the "IT" player has a ball and tries to roll/throw it at the other player's and knock their ball out of the circle.

"Red Light...Green Light"

Here is a game that should be familiar to most U-6's. Again, the game is fun, simple to set up, and has direct application to the game. The skill that it is targeting is dribbling.

THE GAME:

- Each player has a ball, except the one player that is designated as the "light".
- Lines from start to finish should be approximately 20 - 30 yds.
- Players start from the line opposite the "light".
- The "light" then turns away from the group shouting out "GREEN LIGHT". At this signal, the players start to dribble towards the "light".
- When the "light" turns back around, calling out "RED LIGHT", players must freeze their bodies and their ball.
- If the "light" catches players or a ball still moving, that player must take 5 steps back.
- The first player to cross the line where the "light" is standing is the winner and becomes the new "light".

You can start the game without using balls for younger players, then have them roll the ball with their hands, then use their feet.

Shark and minnows

Teaches kids with the ball to shield it from an opponent and teaches kids without the ball how to take it away from an opponent. Use pylons to create a 15-yard square. One player, the shark, starts outside the square without a ball. All other players, the minnows, start inside the square with a ball. When the coach yells, "Shark's getting hungry!" the shark starts running around the outside of the square and the fish start dribbling around inside the square. When the coach yells, "Shark attack!" the shark enters the square and has 30 seconds to send as many balls as possible outside the square. When a ball leaves the square for any reason, the corresponding fish must leave the square and stay out until the coach gives the "Stop!" command at the end of the 30 seconds. A fish has done well if he/she is still alive. The shark has done well if few fish survive. Choose a new shark and play another round until every player has been the shark once.

Teach the parents

During the last practice of the season, have a scrimmage between the parents and the players (with the coaches helping the players). This serves a couple of purposes. The kids love this game. They get a chance to show their parents what they can do and they enjoy beating their parents. (The parents never win, the coaches make sure of that....) Also, since many of the parents have never played soccer, it shows them how difficult the game really is. The hope is that a parent may now think twice before "yelling" at a child for missing an "easy" shot in a game. Everybody seems to enjoy this scrimmage.

Toes

Toes is a creative body awareness and challenging activity. Players are sitting down and holding their toes. Through all of the instructions, players must not let go of their toes.

Suggested challenges:

- (a) Can you make one leg longer than the other, without letting go of your toes?
- (b) Can you make the other leg longer, without letting go of your toes?
- (c) How wide can you make your legs, without letting go of your toes?
- (d) How small can you make yourself, without letting go of your toes?
- (e) Can you make yourself as large as possible, without letting go of your toes?
- (f) Can you make yourself as narrow as possible, without letting go of your toes?
- (g) Can you get your feet higher than your head, without letting go of your toes?
- (h) Can you place your feet behind your head, without letting go of your toes?
- (i) The grand finale: Can you stand up and walk, without letting go of your toes?

Just plain GAMES!

For warm-ups, play games that are not soccer related, but promote physical activity and are a lot of fun. Simon says, freeze tag, team tag, take-away, etc. Remember that the kids aren't showing up to play soccer; they're showing up to have fun. Have fun with them.

If lightning is seen, the fields MUST be cleared until there is 15 minutes with no lightning. NO EXCEPTIONS. The shelters and buildings are not grounded, so please seek shelter in your vehicles.