

U7/U8 Fall Academy

I don't believe skill was, or ever will be, the result of coaches. It is a result of a love affair between the child and the ball" – Manfred Schellscheidt

The design of the U7/U8 Academy program is to develop those younger players who have the cognitive ability to follow direction independently and a desire to spend time developing their soccer skills with rigorous and fun training. The goal is to create an enjoyable and positive environment where players are challenged and developed to their highest potential.

The U7/U8 Academy program will provide professional training for players who seek something more than the training available at the recreational level. It will allow players to interact more with the ball as a result of the small sided games and will improve confidence and proficiency in playing the game. The focus will be on 1v1 development, creative attacking and decision making, willingness to take players on, mastery of the ball and most important, enjoyment of the ball.

The following are excerpts from the guidelines created by US Soccer for this age group:

- There should be a lot of playing with the ball in small numbers for relatively short periods of time. Give each player plenty of opportunities to experience the ball at his or her own pace. For example, organizing games where there are multiple goals and balls for the players to work with.
- A key focus for this age is to encourage players not to fear the ball. Give the players a lot of time with the ball with games where they are changing direction and how fast they run, dealing with balls on the ground and bouncing balls. Every player should look forward to opportunities to have the ball at his or her feet and to score. This will ultimately build their confidence.
- For most of the practice, each player should be actively involved with a ball. Generally there should be no lines, no laps and no lectures.
- You may want to introduce boundaries but don't allow the boundaries to hinder training time because the ball goes out of bounds.
- Encourage informal play without pressure to "perform".
- When addressing technique, consider that kids learn much by watching and copying.
- There should be no formal matches at this age. There is no need to keep score or even be very involved, except to enjoy the players, their effort and joy with the game. For this age group, games should only be seen as another fun activity that happens to include a soccer ball.
- Most of the information from coaches during this time will pertain to each player's individual relationship with the soccer ball – to want it, how to find it, deal with it, feel more comfortable with it, keep it close, etc.
- Remember that the level of skill and competence that a 9 year old exhibits is no indication of the skill and competence that he or she will exhibit at 16 or 18 years of age. You cannot predict which 9 year old will develop into a real player. Therefore, work to encourage all your players to be competent and comfortable with the ball. This will give all your players the same opportunity to reach their potential.

The **U7/U8 Academy** will accomplish these goals for our youngest players.

Format: Players will train twice a week and play 4v4 games on either Friday or Saturday. Training will focus on individual 1v1 ability, basic passing skills, basic striking skills with a major focus on the overall development of motor coordination and motor skills necessary for the holistic development of young players. The only emphasis on tactics will be applied through actual 4v4 play. The game will be the teacher rather than instruction from coaches because young players are not cognitively developed enough to understand the tactical aspect through verbal instruction. There will be 4 play dates with other academy clubs in the area. These will be on a full Saturday when players will play 3-4 games throughout the course of the day in a 4v4 format. Players may finish the season with an optional 6v6 tournament in December that will be at an additional cost to players who wish to participate.

Selection of Players: The U7/U8 Academy program is open to any player born between August 1, 2007 and July 31, 2009 who would like to be considered. Players who have not previously participated in the U7/U8 Academy programs must attend one day of the Preview held this year on May 11 or 13 for girls and May 12 or 14 for boys. The Preview is an opportunity for the coaches to determine if your child is developmentally ready for this kind of training and for your child to decide if they like this format and if they have fun.

Season: The U7/U8 Academy begins the week of July 27th and ends on December 11th. The optional 6v6 tournament will be held on December 12th for the girls and December 13th for the boys.

Cost: If registered during Early Bird Registration (February 1 to March 31), players will pay \$250 in basic registration fees with an additional \$300 for professional training and the additional costs of the extended season.