

Falcons United

U8 Player Development Curriculum

U8 soccer should be about falling in love with the game.

If we get this age right, everything later becomes easier.

If we get it wrong, kids quit.

At U8, soccer is not about:

- Winning leagues
- Positions
- Tactics
- Perfection

It is about:

- Joy
 - Confidence
 - Ball time
 - Movement
 - Friendships
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Falcons United U8 Mantra

More touches.

More smiles.

More confidence.

Program Overview

Age Group: U8

Primary Objective: Build confidence and enjoyment with the ball

Session Length: 60 Minutes

Game Format: 3v3 or 4v4

Season Length: 8–10 Weeks

Core Purpose of U8 Soccer

U8 soccer should help players:

- Enjoy the game and want to keep playing
- Become confident with the ball
- Develop coordination, agility, and balance
- Learn how to play with teammates
- Build social confidence and team belonging

If players do not love having the ball at this age, they are less likely to stay in the sport long term.

What Players Should Be Learning (Without Realizing It)

1. Love for the Ball

- Every player should have the ball at their feet constantly
 - Dribbling is more important than passing at this age
 - Encourage creativity over structure
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2. Confidence & Bravery

- Try moves
- Make mistakes
- Celebrate effort rather than outcomes

Mistakes are learning moments, not failures.

3. Basic Movement Skills

Soccer is the tool, but movement development is the goal.

Players should develop:

- Running
- Stopping
- Turning
- Jumping
- Balance

These skills create future athletes, not just soccer players.

4. Small-Sided Games

Recommended formats:

- 3v3
- 4v4

Guidelines:

- No permanent goalkeepers
- Rotate all players through roles
- Encourage constant involvement

Smaller games mean more touches, more goals, and more learning.

5. Social Skills & Team Belonging

U8 soccer also develops:

- Sharing
- Taking turns
- Encouraging teammates
- Listening to coaches

These social benefits are one of the most valuable aspects of youth soccer.

Coaching Standards at U8

Coaches SHOULD

- Use games rather than long lines
 - Celebrate effort loudly
 - Keep instructions short
 - Rotate players through all areas
 - Smile and play with the players
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Coaches SHOULD NOT

- Yell
- Over-coach
- Assign fixed positions
- Bench players for mistakes
- Focus on scorelines

If players are not smiling during practice, something should change.

Top 10 Skills to Teach U8 Players

1. Dribbling

The most important skill at U8.

- Keep the ball close
 - Use small touches
 - Encourage players to keep their head up when possible
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2. Stopping the Ball

Stopping the ball gives players control and confidence.

- Sole stop
 - Inside-foot stop
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3. Turning With the Ball

Players should learn simple turns to escape pressure:

- Inside turn
 - Outside turn
 - Pull-back turn
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4. Running With the Ball

Teach players to combine speed with control.

- Push the ball into space
 - Accelerate after touching the ball
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5. Basic Shooting

Goals create excitement and joy.

- Use the laces or inside of the foot
 - Focus on accuracy rather than power
 - Encourage frequent shooting opportunities
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6. 1v1 Confidence

Players should learn to attack defenders.

- Try to beat an opponent
 - Do not fear losing the ball
 - Encourage bravery over hesitation
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7. Basic Passing (Short & Simple)

Passing should be introduced but not forced.

- Inside-foot pass
- Short distances only

Reminder: Dribbling remains excellent at U8.

8. Receiving the Ball

Players should focus on control before action.

- Cushion the ball
 - Stop the ball before moving
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9. Shielding the Ball

Introduce protection of the ball.

- Body between ball and defender
 - Maintain balance
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10. Listening & Team Awareness

Beginning soccer awareness:

- Know where the goal is
 - Recognize teammates
 - Respond to simple coaching cues
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Skills That Should NOT Be a Focus at U8

Avoid emphasizing:

- Fixed positions
- Long passing
- Complex tactics
- Over-coached team patterns

These elements should be introduced later in development.

U8 Development Rule of Thumb

If an activity:

- Creates more touches
- Builds confidence
- Feels like a game

Then it belongs in U8 training.

U8 Skill Goal

Comfort and confidence with the ball.

Top U8 Training Games

These games keep players active and engaged while maximizing touches.

Red Light, Green Light

How it Works:

Players dribble on “green” and stop on “red.”

Teaches:

Control, stopping, listening

Why it Works:

Simple, fun, and low pressure.

Sharks & Minnows

How it Works:

Minnows dribble across the field while sharks attempt to steal balls.

Teaches:

Dribbling under pressure, shielding, bravery

Why it Works:

Players enjoy the challenge and stay active.

Pirates (Steal the Treasure)

How it Works:

Players attempt to steal balls from other players' islands.

Teaches:

Ball protection and awareness

Why it Works:

Creates controlled chaos that develops real skill.

Cone Knockdown

How it Works:

Players dribble and shoot to knock over cones.

Teaches:

Dribbling and shooting accuracy

Why it Works:

Targets make the activity exciting.

Obstacle Course Dribble

How it Works:

Players dribble through cones, gates, turns, and mini goals.

Teaches:

Control and coordination

Why it Works:

Feels like play while building mastery.

Freeze Tag (With a Ball)

How it Works:

Tagged players freeze until a teammate frees them.

Teaches:

Awareness and teamwork

Why it Works:

Combines movement and social interaction.

1v1 to Mini Goals

How it Works:

Players attack or defend small goals.

Teaches:

Confidence and attacking mindset

Why it Works:

Feels like a real game without pressure.

Clean Your Backyard

How it Works:

Two teams clear balls into the opponent's area.

Teaches:

Passing, shooting, and movement

Why it Works:

Fast-paced and energetic.

Dribble & Score

How it Works:

Players dribble from different angles and finish.

Teaches:

Running with the ball and finishing.

Small-Sided Game (3v3 or 4v4)

How it Works:

No fixed positions and minimal coaching interruptions.

Teaches:

Decision-making and creativity.

This is where real learning happens.

How to Run U8 Sessions Correctly

Session Guidelines:

- Activities should last 5–8 minutes
- Every player should have a ball whenever possible

- Celebrate effort loudly
 - Avoid long lines and lectures
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U8 Practice Formula

Game → Skill → Game → Skill → Game

If practice feels like recess with soccer balls, you are doing it correctly.

Standard 60-Minute Practice Format

10 minutes — Fun movement game
15 minutes — Skill-based game
15 minutes — Skill progression
15 minutes — Small-sided game
5 minutes — Celebration and water break

U8 Weekly Progression Plan

Week 1 — Ball & Fun

Theme: Comfort with the ball

Skills

- Dribbling freely
- Stopping the ball

Activities

- Red Light / Green Light
- Ball Tag
- 3v3 Free Play

Coach Emphasis

“Keep it close”
“Have fun”

Week 2 — Dribbling Control

Theme: Close control

Skills

- Small touches
- Sole stops

Activities

- Sharks & Minnows
- Obstacle Course Dribble
- 3v3 Game

Coach Emphasis

“Little touches”

“Eyes up”

Week 3 — Turning & Changing Direction

Theme: Escaping pressure

Skills

- Inside turn
- Pull-back turn

Activities

- Gate Dribbling
- Pirates (Treasure Game)
- 3v3

Coach Emphasis

“Turn away”

“Protect it”

Week 4 — Running With the Ball

Theme: Speed with control

Skills

- Push ball into space
- Accelerate after touch

Activities

- Dribble & Race
- Cone Knockdown
- 3v3

Coach Emphasis

“Big touch, then run”

Week 5 — Shooting & Scoring

Theme: Love scoring goals

Skills

- Shooting accuracy
- Finishing opportunities

Activities

- Dribble & Shoot
- Hit the Targets
- Small Goal Games

Coach Emphasis

“Shoot when you can!”
“Celebrate goals”

Week 6 — 1v1 Confidence

Theme: Be brave

Skills

- Attacking defenders
- Trying moves

Activities

- 1v1 to Mini Goals
- King of the Ring
- 3v3

Coach Emphasis

“Try to beat them”
“Mistakes are okay”

Week 7 — Passing Introduction

Theme: Sharing the ball

Skills

- Inside-foot pass
- Short distance passing

Activities

- Pass Through the Gate
- Clean Your Backyard
- 3v3

Coach Emphasis

“Pass if you want”
“Dribbling is still great”

Week 8 — Receiving & Control

Theme: First touch

Skills

- Cushioning the ball
- Stopping before moving

Activities

- Receive & Turn
- Freeze Tag (with ball)
- 3v3

Coach Emphasis

“Control first, then go”

Week 9 — Review & Freedom

Theme: Confidence and creativity

Activities

- Player favorite games
- Free play
- Fun challenges

Coach Emphasis

“Play your game”

“Be creative”

Week 10 — Festival Week

Theme: Celebration

Activities

- Small-sided games
- Fun competitions
- Scrimmages

Coach Emphasis

“You’ve improved”

“Soccer is fun”

Falcons United U8 Mantra

More Touches.
More Smiles.
More Confidence.