

Discovery Phase Summary
for u8 and u9s
Presented by Chris Jarrett
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- Discovering one's (im)possibilities through trial and error
- Natural development: "learn FOOTBALL by playing football"
- No 'coaching' but organising fun football exercises
- Replicating the 'street / park football' environment of the past
- Emphasis on building a love of the game

Under 8s and under 9s are still considered to be in the "Discovery Phase" of the Building Blocks of the National Football Curriculum. It is however a big step up from u6s and u7s with lots of new things to discover: The size 3 ball remains but the fields and goals are bigger, there are more players, positions for players including goalkeeping, there are throw ins, corner kicks and a whole lot more.

Coaches for these age groups can easily fall into the trap of thinking that this is starting to resemble adult football. Yes there is more structure to the game but the focus is on encouraging and developing individual skills and a love of the game rather than team tactics. What the weekend game does provide is the opportunity for players to practice their skills in a game setting and to self-discover their possibilities (and impossibilities) through trial and error.

Children at these u8 – u9 ages:

- are still ‘clumsy’ (lack fine motor skills), because they are still developing their coordination
- have a short span of attention and are quickly and easily distracted
- are ‘self-centred’ and not yet able to really work together (you can encourage team play as long as you are aware that it may be developmentally impossible for them – so show understanding and patience)
- play or participate for fun with short bursts of energy and enthusiasm
- are unable to handle a lot of information (instructions / feedback)

However, whilst the u6 – u7 children are only just learning to master the ball (i.e. discovering how to control that rolling and bouncing “round thing” with their feet) the u8 – u9 children should be beginning to act purposely with the ball (the ball heads in the right direction by design rather than fluke). In addition to having more purpose with the ball at their feet, children should begin to practice and demonstrate improving **technique** for controlling and moving the ball (inside of the foot versus toe punts and crocodile traps). They should also be able to roughly maintain a 1-3-3 formation or at least be able to focus on being an attacker or defender.

Training still centres on “organised fun football exercises” which facilitates kids learning to act purposely ball. Activities are designed to be fun whilst developing effective techniques for:

- Striking the ball (kicking and passing the ball)
- Running with the ball at speed (and keeping it in the field of play) or 'dribbling' (in tight areas)
- 1v1(moving around a defender or moving to a player with the ball to block or dispossess)

The maximum safe workload for U/8’s and U/9’s is two weekly training sessions of 45 - 60 minutes and one game during the weekend. The expectation at our club is for players and coaches to commit to 1x 45 - 60 minute training session per week (rather than just arrive at weekend games).

A training session for children in this age consists of 3 components: The Beginning, The Middle and The End. I’d also suggest just a 5 minute wrap up / cool down:

1. **The Beginning** (approx 10 -15 minutes). The purpose of The Beginning (better known as the warm-up) is to get the kids in the right frame of mind and activate their bodies. It’s unnecessary to run laps around the field and do stretches to achieve that: all sorts of relays and tagging games with and without the ball are much better (more specific, more fun) and also help develop the children’s basic coordination.
2. **The Middle** (approx 15 -20 minutes). The Middle is the section of the training session where we conduct fun football exercises such as dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.
3. **The End** (approx 20 minutes). The last part (The End) is allocated for playing all sorts of Small-Sided Games.

My suggested **training schedule for 2018** utilises the “model sessions” provided by:

<http://www.ffacoachingresource.com.au/the-building-blocks/the-discovery-phase/session-listing/?cid>

Week 1	Striking the ball - Session 1
Week 2	Running with the ball - Session 1
Week 3	Striking the ball - Session 2
Week 4	1 v 1 – Session 1
Week 5	Striking the ball - Session 3
Week 6	Running with the ball - Session 2
Week 7	Striking the ball - Session 4
Week 8	Running with the ball - Session 3
Week 9	Striking the ball - Session 5
Week 10	1 v 1 – Session 2
Week 11	Striking the ball - Session 6
Week 12	Running with the ball - Session 4
Week 13	Striking the ball- Coaches pick of elements from Session 1 & 2
Week 14	1 v 1 – Coaches pick from elements from Sessions 1 & 2
Week 15	Striking the ball- Coaches pick of elements from Session 3 & 4
Week 16	Running with the ball - Coaches pick of elements from Session 1 & 2
Week 17	Striking the ball- Coaches pick of elements from Session 5 & 6
Week 18	Running with the ball - Coaches pick of elements from Session 3 & 4

At this age I’d suggest that the “Coaches Pick” should be selected from the elements that the kids had most fun with e.g. the beginning activity from session 2, with the middle activity from session 3, and ending with the game from session 1 (which was a long time ago and is new again).

Training should be undertaken with size 3 balls only. Heading the ball is not required in this game format and should be actively discouraged due to the risk of injury to children.

With u8 and u9’s aim to develop a good kick with the dominant foot and to be able to control and pass the ball with both feet. If you can achieve this at the end of 2 years I reckon that you’ve done well.

Game day / Instructing Referee

On game days, particularly for u8's the coach will be on the field (in their own team's half) as an instructing referee. This is to assist with the flow of the game and provide basic guidance to maintaining a 1-3-3 formation (young children may struggle with knowing their left and right and being an attackers or defenders). The challenge for coaches (and parents) is to avoid becoming "puppet masters": "come back, move right, watch your player, run now, shoot now etc". While teams at this age tend to be very disorganized, the organized team with the puppet master pulling all the strings will usually win. But this is a **non-competitive age group**. The weekend game is for having fun with their mates and building a love for the game. Let the kids play. They will learn football by playing football.

At our club, regardless of age group, each child should get equal game time. For u8s and u9s it is also very important for both skills development and for players to begin to understand team play and develop a basic understanding of tasks in various positions **that all players play all positions** i.e. first half they may be a left back, next half a goalkeeper, next game they might start as striker.

I avoid ever keeping scores and never talk about winning or losing. If people become overly exuberant with scoring goals and winning it also sets up disappointment with goals scored against and "losing". As a coach please be encouraging and patient. Praise effort, not talent. At this age there is still limited game insight and on-field communication (which is the void puppet masters try to fill) so there will still be lots of individual play. But remember that this is still a "discovery phase" and players need the freedom to learn to make their own decisions, to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes: discovering one's (im) possibilities through trial and error.

References / resources

<http://www.ffacoachingresource.com.au/about-the-curriculum/the-discovery-phase/>

<http://northernswfootball.com.au/coach-headquarters/>

Football for Kids eBook: https://issuu.com/northernswfootball/docs/football_for_kids_ebook

Consider taking the opportunity to undertake a MiniRoos Certificate. This is a very practical course of only 1 ½ hours duration which is advertised throughout the year via our club and the websites above.

Please feel free to contact any of executives of the club for assistance with coaching or to me directly. We thank you for your support of the club and our beautiful game. Whist coaching kids in this 8 – 9 year old age group can be challenging it should also be a lot of fun.

Regards,

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