U14 General Characteristics:

Mental/Psychological (Cognitive)

* Crucial period for learning; will ask questions
* Initiation of thinking as an adult in the adult environment—more players, larger field, adult ball, adult rules
* Improved ability to sequence thought and actions and perform more complex tasks—can anticipate possible outcomes based on the recognition of visual cues
* Ability to use more abstract thought to meet the demands of the game
* Ability to use more of their teammates to solve game problems

Physical (Psychomotor)

* Continue to gain tremendous amount of physical strength, endurance and power (related to body size and muscle mass)
* Can expect them to execute passes successfully, and can strike ball with ample distance and directional confidence
* Flexibility training is key to prevention of injury
* More confident with physical technical demands above their waist (receive with chest, head ball)
* Goalkeeping skills are becoming refined
* Children continue to be in growth spurts
* Overuse injuries occur when age appropriate development is ignored
* Height range for girls is 5’3” or more and weight ranges between 105 and 115 pounds
* Height range for boys is 5’3” and up and weight ranges from 105-125 pounds
* Some boys are just reaching puberty, with a growth spurt that affects balance and coordination; gain strength and power but temporarily lose agility and suppleness

Social (Psychosocial)

* Gender differences are more apparent
* Whether a child enters puberty early or late has important psychological implications regarding relationships with their teammates
* Spend more time with their friends and less time with their parents
* Children tend to conform to peer pressure
* Becoming more outgoing and confident, love competition
* Values impact their ethical and moral behavior on and off the field

Components of the Game for U14 Players (in priority order):

**Technical**: Dribbling to penetrate, to possess, feints with the ball, receiving air balls with all parts of body, heading to score, pass, and clear, finishing, passing with deception, crossing, short/long/bent balls, introduce slide tackle (constructive to win ball, destructive to breakup play); goalkeepers work on footwork, throwing, kicking, diving, angle play, parrying, and boxing

**Psychological**: Teamwork, confidence, increase demands, intrinsic motivation, sportsmanship, creativity, emotional management, mental toughness, handling stress in the game, training activities should be competitive with winners and losers

**Physical**: Conditioning, speed, strength, power, aerobic and anaerobic exercise, proper warm-up and cool-down

**Tactical**: 1v1 through 4v4 attacking and defending, reinforce the principles of play, train with uneven numbers to foster proper decision making when numbers up and numbers down, increase tactical speed (small sided games), encourage risk taking in proper areas of the field, verbal and visual communication and cues for all players, half-time analysis, beginning to identify potential roles, all should have more than one role, be comfortable in more than one position, begin to focus on the relationship among the different lines of the team (keeper, backs, midfield, and forwards), encourage goalkeeper to be part of the attack, commanding the 6 yard box by the goalkeeper, far post play by the goalkeeper, saving penalty kicks, simple set play patterns, speed in setting up walls

Coaching Tips:

1. Coach is a patient, strong, and motivating leader
2. Coach has ability to understand and demonstrate technique
3. Coaches provide environments/activities conducive to problem-solving and decision-making by the players; use guided discovery method applied to both individual and small group tactics
4. Teach all principles of attack and defense
5. Sessions should have a technical and/or tactical theme (dribbling and/or 1v1 decision-making)
6. Sessions should involve fun and imaginative game like activities as well as technical and tactical repetitive activities
7. Sessions must include activities that transfer to the adult game—adult standards and formal rules apply
8. Coaching on tactical application of technique and functional training (position specific)
9. Small-sided directional games (4v4m 5v4, 5v5, 6v5, 6v6, 7v6, 7v7, 8v7, 8v8, 9v8)
10. Remember to encourage an environment in which players are free to learn and experiment without fear