

Part 6

A Parent's Guide to U9/U10

12/23/2015

Created & Compiled for Arlington Soccer Club with Material From  
US Youth Soccer, US Soccer, Challenger Sports, Arlington Soccer  
Club and other youth soccer authorities.

---

*Special thanks to Paige Forster at Challenger Sports for her efforts in creating these age group guides.*

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	1
Priorities During Development .....	1
What Your Child Should Be Introduced To & When.....	1
Tactical Skills & Concepts List .....	2
Technical Skills List.....	2
Psychological/Mental Strength Skill List.....	3
Fitness, Ability & Health Skills List.....	3
Player Characteristics at This Stage .....	3
What Will Players Learn During U9/U10? .....	3
Why Now?.....	4
How Do the Skills and Concepts Focused on at the U9/U10 Age Group Fit into Long Term Development?.....	4
What Types of Activities Should Be Done At This Stage?.....	4
What are the Rules of the Game? .....	5
What is the Parent’s Role in Player Development at This Age?.....	5
What’s Next? .....	6
Conclusion.....	6

## Part 6: A Parent’s Guide to U9/U10

---

### Introduction

Young players are frequently introduced to skills and concepts that are often too advanced for their skill level and ability which results in an overload of information too early in their development as soccer players. As a result, players fail to develop the foundational skills that are required for future success. While players may be physically capable of executing more advanced, or “impressive” skills at a young age, they rarely develop the understanding and decision making that will allow them to use those skills effectively in later years. Additionally, by failing to focus on key developmentally appropriate skills at the time where a child is most receptive to learning those skills, we are creating holes in the child’s soccer foundation that are likely to create significant challenges down the road when the player is playing at a faster, more intense, and more complex level. Just like a house may look fine on a sunny day, cracks in the foundation will become extremely apparent when the house is exposed to a more intense environment.

By focusing on skills and concepts at the time when a child is naturally best prepared to learn them, we can maximize the efficiency of the learning process, ensure there are no gaps in the child’s soccer development, and ensure that each player experiences soccer as a fun and positive activity. Although it is fun to watch players demonstrate “advanced” skills, it’s essential that we all remember that successful player development is a long-term process, and players will learn the more advanced skills in due time. It is important that as parents you are well informed as to what your child should be learning and at what stage of their development they should be introduced to the various concepts and skills.

### Priorities During Development

At each age, children are particularly well equipped to learn certain skills. By teaching players these skills during the optimum window for their development, players are able to learn them in an efficient and effective manner. Additionally, teaching players the skills and concepts that they are best suited to learn allows them to naturally ingrain the cognitive, movement, and behavioural patterns into their play. The table below displays and what the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> priorities are for the U5/U6 age level. While the first priority is likely to be the focus of much attention, all of the elements will come into play in most practices.

1 <sup>st</sup> Priority	Technique
2 <sup>nd</sup> Priority	Psychology
3 <sup>rd</sup> Priority	Fitness
4 <sup>th</sup> Priority	Tactics

### What Your Child Should Be Introduced To & When

Below is a table of the skills and concepts that should be a main focal point in your child’s training session at the U9/U10 age. The tables focus upon Technical Skills, Tactical Skills, Physical Fitness, Ability & Health Skills, and Psychological Skill/Mental Strength Development.

Technical skills relate to a player’s technique when they are contacting (or about to contact) a ball. The focus on how a player controls (and propels) the ball with different parts of his or her body. Tactical skills are the decision making skills. They focus on cognitive knowledge and understanding of the game, and most importantly making decisions. Players must take in a lot of

knowledge and make quick decisions to be effective soccer players. At the youngest ages, simply being aware of the lines on the field is a complex tactical task. As players age, tactical skills will become much more advanced, including anticipating runs by fellow teammates, identifying space in which to run, and decisions about whether to dribble, pass, or shoot.

Fitness is all about efficiency of movement. It does not merely include endurance and strengthening, but also the critical skills of balance, agility, quickness, and explosive power. Additionally, fitness includes injury prevention strategies, healthy responses to injury, hydration, and nutrition. Finally, psychological/mental strength skills focus on a player’s work ethic, source of motivation, sense of team, handling frustration, understanding of individual and group problem solving, and many other skills that play into a player’s character development. Players who are psychologically mentally strong are able to play against even the grittiest opponents without allowing the opponent’s play to get into their heads. Mentally strong players are also able to remain calm in difficult situations, such as penalty kicks in the final moments of a match. At each age group, players will be primed to learn different skills. During the U9/U10 age group, players are at the optimal stage of development to learn the following skills:

<b>Tactical Skills &amp; Concepts List</b>	<b>Technical Skills List</b>
Principles of Attack	Receiving
Penetration	Receiving a Ball on the Ground - Cushion
Support	Outside of Foot
Width	Instep
Principles of Defense	Receiving a Ball Off the Bounce - Cushion
Pressure	Inside of Foot
Support (Cover)	Outside of Foot
Attacking Runs	Instep
Checking Runs	Receiving a Ball Off the Bounce - Cushion
Overlapping Runs	Sole of Foot
Withdrawing Runs	Inside of Foot
Defending Runs	Outside of Foot
Tracking Runs	Shooting on the Ground
Marking Runs	Instep Drive
Covering Runs	Chip
Attacking Concepts	Passing on the Ground
Creating Width in the Attack	Instep Pass
Channel Concepts (Flank & Central Channels)	Crossing
Weak Side	Dribbling
Changing the Point of Attack	Turns
Thirds	Fakes
Triangle Shape	
Combinations	
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Attacker Roles	
2v1 Attacking	
Defending Concepts	
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Defender Roles	
1v1 Defending	

Defending in Pairs	
Distance, Angle & Support by 2 <sup>nd</sup> Defender	
Goal Side & Ball Side	
General Tactical Concepts	
Verbal & Visual Communication	
Small group shape in 2's and 3's	
Set Plays	
Playing on/around the Ball as a Group with a Purpose	
<b>Psychological/Mental Strength Skill List</b>	<b>Fitness, Ability &amp; Health Skills List</b>
Communication	Regular Warm Up
Fair Play	Cool Down
Groups of 3, 4, or 5	Nutrition
How to Play	Hydration
How to Win/Lose Gracefully	Fitness/Ability Skills
Increased Responsibility	Agility
Increased Sensitivity	Body Resistance Exercises
Parental Involvement	Endurance
Emotional Regulation	Range of Motion Flexibility
Focus for 1/2 game	Rhythm Exercises
Self-Motivation	

### **Player Characteristics at This Stage**

At U9/U10 children begin to have an increased attention span and are more inclined towards wanting to play rather than being told to play. In terms of psychology, children become more confident in themselves and their abilities at this age, and more eager to learn for the sake of mastery rather than for approval of others. Of course, they still thoroughly enjoy being praised for their accomplishments, particularly in front of their peers. The game becomes more competitive at this stage and players begin to realize this. You will notice that players become very team oriented, and will prefer team equipment and uniforms as this serves as means of belonging to a group. Finally, gross and motor skills become much more refined at this age and the training sessions will help to develop this further.

### **What Will Players Learn During U9/U10?**

One key objective is for players to learn the critical foundational soccer skills along with building overall sports skills. An emphasis needs to be placed on skill development at this age while using a games-based approach. Practice individual skills within individual and small group tactics. Playing at this age is still very important, so emphasis should shift toward enjoyable skill development through game like activities. These players start to move from the how (technique) to when, where, with whom and against whom. U9/U10 is the time to introduce basic combination play, wall passes and take-overs while concentrating on basic skills in cooperative play; i.e., passing, receiving, shooting. The key motivator in soccer is the ball; use it as much as possible in training sessions.

## **Why Now?**

Physiologically U9/U10 players are children not adolescents. In fact peak athletic performance takes place in early adulthood. So for U9/U10 players, there is still a low ceiling to athletic performance. The adult concept of workrate is driven by the desire to win. Children like to win, but playing is more important they are engrossed in the process of play, not the outcome. Players at this age can understand the broad idea of effort, but the details are foggy. They continue to equate effort with performance regardless of the outcome.

The U9/U10 period is an exceptionally fertile period of growth, and it is essential that parents are supportive of their players budding creativity. Players at this age must be encouraged to try out their new skills in training sessions as well as games. This means that mistakes will happen, frequently, and will result in turnovers and goals. This is strongly preferable to having players who are more concerned about winning games and fearful of making mistakes. At the U9/U10 age group, players must build their ball skills and to do so requires many tries before they will likely experience success. Now is the time for those trials. As a parent, praise the effort at this age, not the result. Players should be encouraged to dribble and take on opponents as it is essential to the development of the one-on-one skills that one day will allow them to get past defenders.

## **How Do the Skills and Concepts Focused on at the U9/U10 Age Group Fit into Long Term Development?**

For U9/U10's, continue to build the player before the team. Stress individual development over team building. Remember, for the players, fun and enjoyment through play are still critically important. The philosophy of a club tends to drive how U9/U10 soccer is conducted. Because children at this age intentionally play in small groups, there can be too much emphasis on results as opposed to performance.

Players at this age are in their prime years for developing a sense of touch that will allow them to control the ball naturally. Additionally, players have begun to develop a clear ability to track a bouncing ball visually, and coordinate their motion to respond to that ball. They begin to be able to anticipate how and when to move in order to effectively stop a ball moving in multiple planes. Players must be encouraged to get as many touches on the ball during this fertile period as they possibly can. They should be encouraged to contact the ball with all surfaces of their foot as frequently as possible so as to develop a very natural touch on the ball. Eventually, these skills will allow them to control the ball quickly and effectively in fast paced game situations.

Some tactical ideas are emerging in their game, but their thoughts tend to be vague. You will likely witness your child's coach start to heavily utilize guided discovery, asking players questions as they guide them towards an answer. Coaches employ this method with U9/U10 players because it is both psychologically and cognitively beneficial. Players can now understand the concept of anticipation, and during the U9/U10 phase, this ability will develop resulting in considerably more play off the ball.

## **What Types of Activities Should Be Done At This Stage?**

The types of activities you will see at this age group will be somewhat structured with room to progress from simple to complex depending on the group's ability. Players will likely spend a

considerable amount of time with a ball at their feet during this phase of development. Additionally, activities will frequently require near continuous motion and agile movement both with and without the ball. At U9/U10 the sessions will be focused on trial and error and will look to the technical aspect of an action. For example, the coach may demonstrate how to strike a ball using your laces, talk about the technique of it, let the children go off and practice by having a fun session set up to challenge themselves. The primary activities will likely involve both maze games and target games. Small sided games will also play a large part in U9/U10s development.

### **What are the Rules of the Game?**

At the U9/10 level, teams play with five field players plus a goal keeper a lined 6v6 field. Games consist of two 30 minute halves with a 5 minute break for half time. The game is played with a size 4 soccer ball. At this phase, offside rules do not apply. On goal kicks or on goalkeeper saves followed by a goalie punt, throw or drop kick, the ball must touch the field or a player in the defensive end of the field. If the ball crosses midfield without touching the ground or a player, the opposing team will be awarded an indirect kick at midfield. Players must retreat to the half during a goal kick.

Players in the In-Town League, must stay on their feet at all times trying to gain possession of the ball, no slide tackles are allowed. Additionally, there are no penalty kicks in the In-Town League. Players who play on Select Teams, in the BAYS League, are permitted to slide tackle, however most coaches discourage this as few U9/U10 players can execute this move successfully. Additionally, BAYS permits penalty kicks per FIFA rules.

### **What is the Parent’s Role in Player Development at This Age?**

The role as a parent at U9/U10 is to continue to encourage and support the development of your child as best as you can. Encouraging creativity and risk taking on the field is paramount. Children who begin to worry about making mistakes at this age will be deprived of the opportunity to build key skills, particularly those related to dribbling and controlling the ball. The game becomes more competitive so you will have to deal with the ups and downs of your child’s emotions on and off the field, again in a supportive way.

The ultimate question at the end of every practice and scrimmage should be “did you have fun?” The answer should be yes. The most likely cause of a negative response will be that your child somehow felt their performance was inadequate. Asking questions about performance will further deepen your child’s desire to self-critique. Allow them to dictate and direct the conversation and continue your support by listening and highlighting any positives. One of the most powerful things a parent can do at this age is provide specific praise of a player’s efforts through comments such as “I loved seeing you working to take on players one-on-one with your dribbling skills, that was awesome.” Even simply telling your child how much you love to watch him or her play provides much needed support that he or she is doing well.

Ensuring that your child arrives at practice on time, with tied shoes, water, and whatever other supplies he or she needs is also a great way to support your child. Additionally, helping to ensure your child has all of his or her belongings, and does not leave the team area until all of the equipment is put away help to teach players key skills about teamwork and responsibility. It is the team – meaning every player and coach – who needs to be responsible for the equipment. As much as you may not enjoy waiting for your child to engage in this task of collecting and

putting away balls and equipment, it is essential that you are not only supportive but encourage your child to ensure everything is away before he or she leaves.

### **What’s Next?**

Beginning at the U11 age group all players enter the BAYS program where they travel to other towns to play teams of a similar age/ability and gender. All teams wear maroon Arlington jerseys. Teams at the U11/U12 age group play 8v8, with seven players on the field and one goal keeper per team. Additionally, the field size doubles and the goal size increases as well. The offside rule is also now in effect.

There continue to be two select teams per age group and gender. Players who try out and make Select Teams will typically play in BAYS Division 1 or 2. In the spring season beginning at U12, both Division 1 and Division 2 have playoffs for teams that qualify. Playoffs for successful teams run through the end of June, culminating in the Massachusetts Tournament of Champions – state playoffs. Players who do not try out or who do not make a select team will be placed on a Division 3 or Division 4 BAYS team. U11 teams and U12 teams in division 3 are eligible to participate in the BAYS President’s Cup, a single elimination tournament that leads to a championship.

Rosters for U11/U12 typically have 13-15 players. Teams practice twice a week and play 10 weeks of games on Saturdays. Boys play on Saturday afternoons, Girls on Saturday mornings.

### **Conclusion**

The U9/U10 age group marks a critical period of growth as players begin to experience significant physical and cognitive advances. Physically, players typically experience substantial gains in muscle mass during this stage, resulting in notable increases in strength and power. This is coupled with increases in speed of execution, endurance, and explosive power. As players enter U9/U10, they are beginning to master basic aspects of movement skills, including the ability to really control the ball with their feet while moving. Core technical abilities and tactical awareness begin to emerge and players begin to anticipate what might happen next during a game (aka think in advance of the ball). This is a fertile time for learning as players are beginning to develop self-awareness and are able to identify what they know and what they do not yet know.

By the end of this stage, players should be comfortable manipulating a ball on the ground using all surfaces of their feet, as well as quickly bringing a bouncing ball under control. They should be engaged in movements off the ball when they do not have the ball and should begin to understand the dynamics of moving the ball in patterns as a team. Anticipating the movements of both teammates and opponents will become more natural, and players will be able to control the ball while also being aware of options and obstacles. Crossing the ball and corner kicks will begin to appear second nature, with the ball making it not only into, but frequently across the goal box. The listed Principles of Play will be second nature by the end of this age group, and players should be able to successfully take on opponents in 1v1 situations using a variety of well executed turns and fakes. Many parents discover that by the end of this stage of development, their children now have the ability to take them on and beat them in a 1 on 1 game.