

U6 Player Development Program FAQ's: Spring 2015

Q: What are the changes to the U6 Division Format?

A: For U6 we are evolving to an “academy” style for training, coaching, and game play. This generally means practices will be conducted for the entire U6 division 2 nights per week, simultaneously for all players and coaches. Coaches will work according to a common lesson plan on practice nights and players will move across “stations” to participate in drills that are meant to enhance basic soccer skills while also having fun.

Game days will be on Saturday mornings at 10 am. The players will all participate in small sided games and be divided among the coaches within the entire player pool each week.

Q: Why is SCSA moving to an academy format?

A: The academy format is proven to be the best method of teaching and learning the game of soccer across all levels of skill and athleticism. Virtually all countries that have succeeded in developing players and teams to top levels of competition employ academy youth development structures. The USSF (the entity that governs U.S.A. soccer from World Cup down to the Youth level) strongly recommends soccer associations in the U.S.A. adopt academy style development. Highly-successful youth associations and clubs feature academies as well.

Q: Why does the academy style work? Why is it better than the traditional team formats like we see in Little League baseball, Pop Warner football, and basketball?

A: Academy works in soccer because soccer is unique and very different than traditional American sports. Notice how important a player’s hands are in the three other sports. Use of our hands and developing hand-eye coordination is constant and always present in our day-to-day lives. By contrast the daily use of our feet and foot-eye coordination is very limited. So the journey to become a skilled, well rounded soccer player is at times very difficult and always very long. Teaching and learning “the fundamentals” and “basics” should begin at an early age. It is critical for the youngest players to have access to good coaches and proper instruction from the very beginning of their developmental journey. The foundation for their growth and progress in the game must be set and must be solid if they are to build upon it in later years.

Academy instruction and development will ensure all players are given access to good coaches and vital instruction from the age of 5 onward. It will ensure our coaches are aware of what must be taught and the proper way to teach it. From the advanced player to the player who is not naturally gifted, **all** will benefit by being taught the basics in a highly organized, established model and by being challenged at their proper pace.

Q: The prior team format worked well for me and my child, why are we moving away from it?

A: While we are always proud of our collective success and the experience we have all created within SCSA, we also have to look to the future with an eye toward how things can improve even more.

At times we struggle with providing the best experience across the broad spectrum of our teams, coaches, and players. As a primarily volunteer recreational organization, it can be difficult to provide an even performance level of coaches and players to our association participants. This struggle can manifest itself in numerous ways including lopsided scores, uneven competition, advanced players being under-challenged, and beginning players becoming discouraged by a lack of success. Where an SCSA family may enjoy one fantastic season where they benefited from experienced, talented coaches and players, in another season the circumstances and enjoyment level may be much different. The academy format is intended to reduce the negative or mediocre seasons while preserving the positive experiences for all.

Q: It seems that in some ways the academy will make things “more fair” for more participants, but if my child / coach / team are already advanced, will it slow their development by moving to this structure?

A: The academy will provide a structure where the players will be challenged at the right pace and with the best set of challenges given their present state of skill, athleticism, and experience. The advanced player, who is (currently) ahead of the average, will be brought along at a faster pace and often matched with players that are on a similar level. This will benefit them by providing an appropriate degree of challenge.

Similarly, players who are not (yet) advanced in their skill levels will be taught according to their current needs and matched with players that will challenge them without utterly dominating them.

Q: Will my child still have fun?

A: Of course. The main goal of U6 and below soccer is to teach the kids to love the game. If it isn't fun for the children, we will lose them for soccer – potentially forever. If we make it fun, we may win another soccer player, parent, coach....for the future. Teaching soccer while fostering fun are the primary goals of our U6 Academy.

Q: My child prefers / needs to bond with a smaller set of peers and coaches. Will this become too impersonal for him / her to make friends or support their social needs?

A: It is true that the players are likely to interact with a broader set of coaches and kids under this format vs. simply staying with a single team and coach. While in some cases this may be a large benefit, for others it may pose a bigger challenge.

Many of the academy coaches will be our more experienced coaches who will have already encountered all types of young players. Coaching curriculum and our coaches' demeanor will be geared toward the tender age of our academy kids. Where a parent has specific concerns or child-specific information to share please contact the Academy Director early on in the season and we will work out arrangements to

meet our children's needs. Again, the academy is meant to provide instruction at each players' pace. Some degree of flexibility and customization is expected where needed.

Q: Will we still play games?

A: Yes. Saturday mornings will be game day where we simultaneously play games on all four U6 fields. Children will be matched with and against different kids throughout the session. Under this format it is more possible to ensure the players are not over or under matched. In addition they should get more actual game time on the field as well as more chances to touch the ball in a game setting.

Q: Will we still get a uniform and pictures?

A: Yes. We will have a scheduled picture day as we normally do. The players can wear their uniforms to Saturday game sessions. Teams will be distinguished by different "penny" colors handed out by the coaches.

Q: Has this set up ever been tried before?

A: Aspects of this have been attempted by SCSA in the past. The recent week long camp put on by the Association in Summer 2014 is an example. The camp was a success and our feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

As stated before, academy style development is very well established globally. The top clubs in the U.S., including our local Louisville based clubs, teach entry-level soccer under an academy arrangement.

Q: Who made the decision to install this structure?

A: The SCSA Board of Directors voted to implement an Academy development program in the U6 division effective in the Fall 2014 season.

Q: Our family's interest in soccer at the moment is very casual. Will this structure be too serious for us?

A: The structure is intended to make things less serious in many ways, but also to set the foundation well for later years and later age divisions where the competition and intensity increases. The pressure on U6 coaches and players to "win" will be greatly decreased. Players will be matched according to their current level of ability which will assist those who are just beginning in their development. At the same time, the emphasis on the development of skills vs. winning games or dominating peers will prepare the players for the future age group play.

Q: I am a competitive parent / player / coach / sibling / guardian. Part of what lead us to the association was the chance to compete and experience the thrilling successes and failures of competition. Is this Academy structure going to water things down too much?

U6 is primarily about setting the foundation for the players' future success in the game. We focus on teaching them to love playing soccer; teaching them basic skills and how to develop future skills. It is not

aimed at competitive games and proving the dominance and brilliance of the coach and player. Typically the limited group of the fastest and the most athletically gifted players dominate the U6 small-sided games regardless of coaching or team efforts. These facts and concepts can be very difficult to grasp when you first enter youth soccer. It is much easier to recognize when you've been through more of the full cycle of age groups. (U6,U8,U10,U12,U14....and beyond)

Rest assured you will still be able to recognize player success and development through this structure. There will still be thrilling moments and times of challenge for all of the kids and parents in the academy.

Also you can be confident that the 'competitive fires' will still be burning when you and your child reach later age divisions. The Academy will have your player best prepared to compete and succeed at the phase where the scores and wins & losses have more actual significance. It will also still be a ton of fun!

Q: Is this permanent?

A: The Academy format will be attempted this season and likely for a few more to give it a chance to show results. If successful it may expand into higher age divisions. If it is deemed to not be the best for the Association, the Board will implement changes.

Q: Who do I contact if I have questions?

A: Mike Heuglin, President of the SCSA