



BEGINNER CATEGORY



The Beginner category represents, within the organisation chart of the federal juvenile structure, the apex of a pyramid called grassroots.

The cultural synthesis of this activity, must have as a common denominator some definitions or key words that must represent the guideline for those who deal with infantile sports training: play, fun, enthusiasm, passion, planning, athletic culture, professionalism.

For many young people football is not only the first love, but they also demonstrate a faithfulness unknown by those who practice most other athletic disciplines. In fact, from an investigation conducted by the Juvenile and Scholastic Sector of the FIGC, it clearly emerges that the 86,1% of 694 interviewed football players (11-18 year old) belonging to the main athletic clubs began to practice sports with football and have never committed to other disciplines. This percentage increases, furthermore, to 100% if the parents have completed elementary school, whereas it falls to 75% for those whose father has completed a degree. In relation to the Beginner category these results already allow us to formulate some practical considerations, but at the same time we must consider an important aspect that characterises football in this age group. We refer to the introduction of 11 versus 11, which continuously approaches more roles and the game to football that is practiced in championships. In synthesis, what does this information tell us:

- The sport for these pre-adolescents is almost totally identified with football,
- The parents that bring their children to football school, and more frequently those of a lower social cultural level, are particularly motivated to sustain the practice of football as the only sport,
- The instructors and coaches need to consider, in the organisation of activities, that for most children sport is characterised as the only-sport experience.

From the point of view of content and organisation methods of the training sessions it is therefore necessary to orient the sessions not only towards the acquisition of motory and technical-tactical competences that are specific to this discipline, but also to develop all those movement abilities that are not typically solicited by the game but that are essential to a global development of the young boy.

12.1

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO BECOME
A FOOTBALL PLAYER

The young beginners that participated in this investigation think that to become a football player at a good level the following conditions are very important: to have faith in oneself (it is very important for 85,5%), train a lot (78,7%), make sacrifices (70%),





know how to have fun while playing (56,7%), have people around them who believe in them (52,4%) and to have a good coach (50,6%). Therefore, we can see that already from the age of 11 these boys believe in personal commitment as the main element to be successful in football. It is interesting to note how these boys in lower middle school have quite a precise idea of what is important for a child who is beginning to play. We see that 81,8% think that it is very important to have fun, whereas it is less important to win many games (66,9%) and to cover a specific role on the field (47,96%). To have a good coach is very relevant for 53,3% of them. Other aspects that should be satisfied by the beginning of the game of football regard being inserted in a good group-team (47,5%) and to be followed by parents (34,7%). The specific aspects of the game of football, like learning the technique and learning how to be on the field and play all the time are considered as necessary but less important compared to those mentioned before. Finally, having a champion as a model is very important only for 21,4%: it seems, in a final analysis, that the general direction is to provide centrality to their person, instead of delegating merits and responsibilities to others.

12.2 THE MOTIVATIONS OF BEGINNERS



The Beginner group is characterised by a wide distribution of data that bring us to find nine motivational factors, compared to the seven factors found in older players. This largely depends on their cognitive and emotional development that does not allow them to respond to the 32 affirmations of the questionnaire in such a coherent way as the older ones.

The identified factors are the following:

1. Acquisition of status - it is composed by six reasons that identify the desire to become famous and popular with football. We find, therefore, that the sport already in younger players is seen in terms of social promotion and aspiration to reach the highest level of participation.
2. Extrinsic reinforcements - it is composed of three reasons: the first two are referred to the role carried out by the parents and the best friends in supporting them in their football activity whereas the third regards their desire to travel. The importance of the role of the most significant people for them in favouring athletic involvement.
3. Physical form - it is made up of three reasons that examine the role attributed to obtaining and maintaining physical form.

4. Ability - highlights the need to acquire and improve athletic abilities and to be part of a team.
5. Aspects of the competition - it is composed of the following reasons: compete, relationship with the coach, spending energy, being in shape and the pleasure that derives from action. Every one of these four motivational aspects are positively correlated to each other.
6. Friendship - regards the desire to be with friends and to make new ones, in addition to the reason related to doing something that you are good at. Therefore, at this age, to establish relationships of friendship is positively correlated with the perception of feeling competent in football.
7. Fun - it is made up of the following reasons: having fun, spirit of the group and the pleasure derived from challenges. In other words, having fun is associated with belonging to a group and with the perception of facing challenges that trigger emotions.
8. Group exercise - it is the combination of two reasons that regard the desire to do exercise and work in a team. Even in this, we find confirmation of the fact that in most young people the group is the essential mediator of fundamental motivational aspects.
9. Spending Energy - it is made up of three reasons; two refer to unwinding nerves and the desire to be enthusiastic whereas the third is related to the pleasure of being away from home. Even this motivational factor is characterised in terms of emotional satisfaction, which tells us that football activity can act as a catalyst for individual psychological energy.

In brief, one notices that young people at this age, as the older boys, practice football for a considerably vast group of reasons. Compared to football players of the football categories at a subsequent level, we see that the need to be part of a team, to work together and to have a team spirit, which make up the team factor, do not form a sole independent factor. In this sense, reaching athletic objectives of a team still does not seem to be a fundamental component in their way of experiencing football. In fact, every one of these three reasons is correlated to different motivational factors that regard athletic ability, having fun and exercising in a group. The cohesion of the team is not considered as an independent aspect from the others and it seems that the young boys do not consider it as an objective to pursue if they want to compete in a satisfying way. Vice versa, after 13 years, the cohesion of the team becomes a specific motivational, which is recognised by the boys as one of the essential elements that keeps them involved in practicing football.



Thinking about a group of children of 11-12 years that plays football in the various Beginner tournaments, conflicting images come to mind: one represented by the beautiful film “The Gladiator” by Ridley Scott, where gladiators fight and battle in the arena as defenceless instruments of amusement for the powerful; on the other a courtyard of a religious school, where possessed children challenge each other to the umpteenth endless match that in their imagination is worth the final of the Champion's League. This pictorial view is intended to accentuate on a reality that is often not appropriate for children. Without going into sociological dissertations which we are not prepared for, the influence of elite football on the environment of the juvenile athletic event, especially on the parents, sometimes produces, especially if the phenomenon is not mediated appropriately, some psychological issues.

The mystification of an environment, all too many times built to satisfy needs and comfort frustrations that are typical of adults, bring the children to take on unnatural behaviours (protesting against the referee, violence on the opponent, non-acceptance of technical choices of the coach) that bring on discomfort, a lack of serenity and finally a slow down to the technical training process. Furthermore the solicitations of a technical nature, reproduced on the basis of behaviour and didactical procedures that are typical of elite football, contribute to the generation of performance expectations. Our young people on the other hand need to measure their qualities in an environment that is free from external influences, where the expert guidance of the coach is exalted and appreciated for the constant interest that he generates, and the quantity of enthusiasm that he triggers, where spontaneity and freedom to make mistakes are accepted as a compulsory passage to improve in both a social and football context.

Only this way can we favour a non-traumatic access to a football dimension that is more linked to performance and the competitive result. Surely this age group, especially in the second year of activities, represents the beginning of a laborious process that invests the psycho-physical realm of the young boy, through mutations that will have significant repercussions on the quality of his performance. The coach will have to liaise often with children with movement difficulties, he will have to organise technical recovery phases, and

take care to wait for those who, not having had a precocious development, have difficulties in liaising in athletic terms with the more mature ones.

The variable that influences our didactical behaviour and team management cannot be the competitive result, because if this were the case we would leave more room for the children who, for example, as we have already mentioned, guarantee us good competitive results because they have a precocious biological age and physical maturity. By doing so we would neglect those children that, even if they are endowed with a good predisposition to football, have difficulties expressing it during the match, in relation to mainly physical aspects.

13.1 BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR PROGRAMMING IN THE BEGINNER CATEGORY

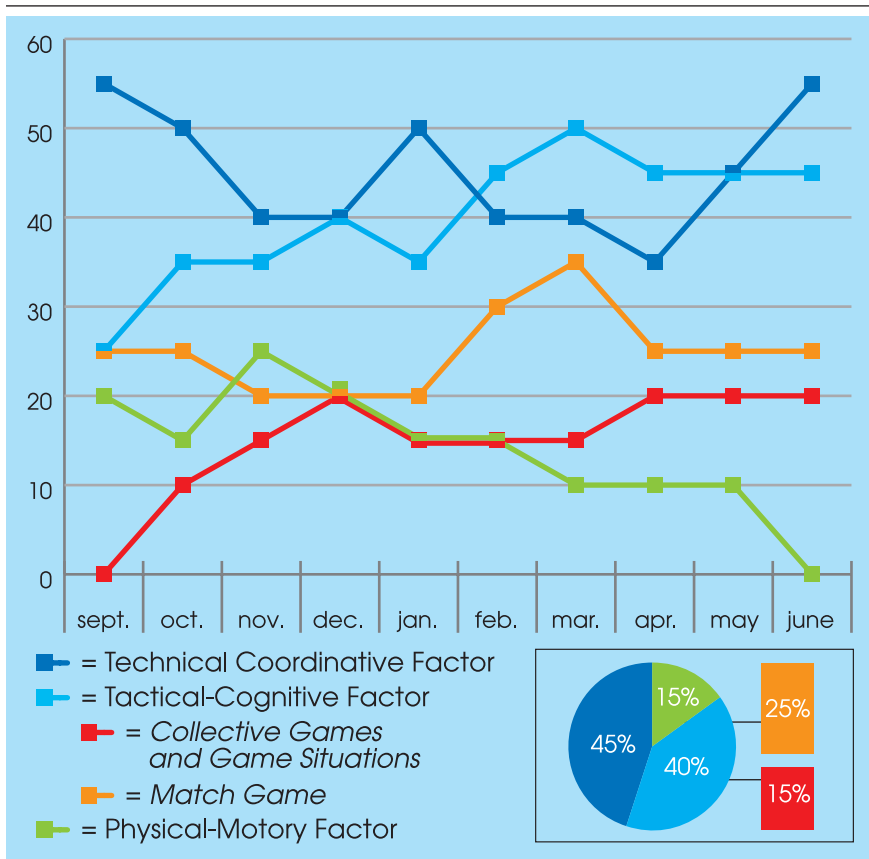


Planning, as we know, represents the itinerary that leads to the realisation of certain objectives which, still at this age, we refer to children of 10-12 years, need to be based on play, on an activity that will have to tend to the assimilation of certain behaviours but without accentuating demands and expectations of performance.

13.1.1 THE TECHNICAL-COORDINATIVE FACTOR



Going into the nature of the activities to propose, referring to three factors that regulate football training, based on the indications given by the FIGC Football Scholl of Acquacetosa of Rome (GRAPH 5), we observe that an important component that could not be otherwise is represented by technique. We will never stop repeating ourselves on the fact that there should be a strict correspondence and continuity between the three performance parameters that must be shared, especially at this age, in the nature of the exercises that we suggest. In TABLE 13, we observe how didactical solicitation that invests the technical sphere must be proposed in order to realise an efficient action capacity, this happens through forms of movement that involve the senso-perceptive-coordinative area, as well as the cognitive-processing side. The specific didactical objectives must stimulate the acquisition of forms of movement (fundamental techniques) that need to tend to automation, to the fine coordination of the move, useful to take the attention off the equipment, to move onto taking



GRAPH 5 - ANNUAL DIDACTICAL PLAN - BEGINNER CATEGORY

in information from the environment. In other words to an even better ability to make their technical behaviour stable in the face of uncertainty and the precariousness of the situation, the objective and direction of a continuously evolving technical training (TABLE 14) The content of the activities must undergo a division into periods that takes the way the young person experiences football into account as well and his movement potential. In ILLUSTRATIONS 2 and 3 we illustrate the training itinerary of a group of beginners, regarding the technical-coordinative factor. One fundamental consideration we must make regards the accomplished ability of the pre-adolescent (11-12 years old) to objectively evaluate events, to place himself in a critical situation regarding his actions as well as those of others. The young player assimilates and defines the environment in terms of imagined and inferred events, in other words he begins in this period to acquire a certain intellectual autonomy that sees him as the forerunner of his learning process. The ability to formulate hypotheses, for abstract thinking, to retain



“FOOTBALL-TENNIS IS A VALID EXERCISE FOR ALL AGES”

concepts in his mind that he is able to translate in practice, bring the direction of the didactical model towards a “conceptual methodology”, which translates into the application of the movement pattern that defines the model of collective play. The preadolescent will have to acquire operational patterns or functional tactical units to be constantly linked to a situational

| Technical-Coordiative Factor | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| Variable | Objective | Exercises | Characteristics |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinative Solicitations | Automation of technical behaviours - correction of possible errors | Technical actions combining from and direction | Ratio with the ball 1:1 Didactical Stability |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporal pressure | Technical control in regime of rapidity | Relay games/chasing games with opponent | Few executive variables Create homogenous groups |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptive solicitations | Favour intake of information | Psycho-kinetic activities | Technical movements are regulated by the environment of unstable play |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive difficulties | Stabilise technical behaviour | Activities influenced by the movement of other players | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With opponent | Automation technical behaviour | Opponent that defends on the line | Semi-active |

TABLE 13 - Programme for Beginner category

Technical-Coordiative Factor

- Perfection of the individual technical gesture
- Stabilisation of the technical move in a situational regime
- Adaptability of the technical move according to the application of operational game patterns

TABLE 14

environment, providing a personal, creative and original contribution to the team's tactical project. The ability of individual and collective play has its genetic code in the ability of knowing how to functionally manage one's own technical behaviour. The technical action represents an evolution that it is in tight symbiosis with the evolution of the situation, it must therefore adapt itself, transform and conjugate itself "on-line" with the game.

13.1.2 THE TACTICAL-COGNITIVE FACTOR



The work load of training oriented towards individual and collective tactical training, represents a relevant overall quota of the training of a young football player, and in the

Running

- Guiding the ball, varying form, direction and rhythm
- Guiding action combined with other technical actions, in a regime of cognitive activation, with temporal pressure
- In a simplified situational regime with combination of movement with several players

Hit to pass

- Pass during movement, ball in movement, still target
- Pass during movement, ball in movement, mobile target
- Combining action to other forms of movement, a regime of cognitive activation, with temporal pressure
- In a simplified situational regime with a combination of movement with several players

ILLUSTRATION 2 - Technical-Coordiative Objectives

Hit to shoot

- Shoot to goal, varying form, direction and rhythm
- Shoot to goal with semi-active action of an opponent, with time pressure
- In a simplified situational regime with the combination of movement of several players

Catch Grasp Receive

- Receiving low and parabolic trajectories, oriented stops
- Dynamic receiving action followed by other forms of technical movement
- Reception in a regime of cognitive activation and time pressure
- Reception with a semi-active tackler

ILLUSTRATION 3 - Technical-Coordiative Objectives



“NATIONAL “SEI BRAVO A...SCUOLA CALCIO” EVENT AT THE FEDERAL TECHNICAL CENTRE OF COVERCIANO”

beginner level, as we have seen, it represents 40% of the total workload. This percentage is conceived as being strictly linked to the technical part, which takes on more and more significance as a tool to solve tactical problems.

As is clearly expressed in the above overview, the component that is aimed to build behaviours that are adapted to the game in the form of simple activities and not rigidly controlled, but takes on relevance in the grass-root categories. The structuring of more specific behaviours will be carried out when the performance needs, paired

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Running with the ball | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dribbling/search for the weak side • Search for free-space • Combining the action according to the movement of team mates |
| Hit Pass | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wall pass/give and go/give and cut • Zone passing • Play with support and change of front |
| Hit Shoot | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With a still or mobile goalkeeper • With lateral/frontal tackling opponent |
| Receive Stop Run/move | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With chasing/frontal opponent • Moving to receive • Concept of support • Movement to create space in width and depth |

ILLUSTRATION 4 - Tactical-Cognitive Factor (in ball possession)

Run and move

- Movements combined according to the position of the ball
- Defensive cooperation/ aids to marking and coverage
- Concept of zone/man
- Defensive movements/concept of positioning-marking-buying time-staggering-concentration

ILLUSTRATION 5 - Tactical-Cognitive Factor (in non-possession)

with a higher psycho-physical maturity will require a sharper specialisation and a higher ability of attention of the young player. As the technical component has its course in the beginner category, the tactical one also (ILLUSTRATION 4-5) possesses its didactical dynamism; it is understood how the concepts and the tactical behaviours need to be learnt mainly through an inductive methodology. The boys at this age are able to find behavioural responses that pertain to the situational problem; the coach produces the interest, and helps the team to find the most efficient solution, without directly intervening but by exalting the choices of the boys.

13.1.3 THE PHYSICAL-MOTORY FACTOR



Returning to the religious school image, which sadly doesn't exist anymore and therefore it is not worth going into the problem, the boys, when they play freely without too many tensions, expectations and awaited performance, rarely feel tired. Without wanting to idealise these moments too much, today it is necessary, seeing the needs of our young people, to administer a percentage of physical workload that is oriented to recovering a part of the locomotor deficit accumulated thanks to the hypokinetic characteristic of our time.

We advise exercises that aim to improve coordination and the reorganisation of movement patterns, influenced, especially in the second year of the category, by a growth in height that for some appears from one day to another. Suddenly, our boys seem clumsy, gauche in their movements, the ball doesn't respond to their commands anymore, they need a substantial technical review. It is therefore always preferable to use the ball, also to obtain organic-metabolic improvements; the content of the training session must, it is best to always repeat it, privilege activities that present a summary of performance factors: technical, tactical and physical. At the Federal Football School we have seen (experimental work on training methods - non published work - Roticiani, Lucarelli 2002) how the increase in aerobic potential of 11 year old boys, is

attributable to intermittent activities in 2vs2 situations, with a work/rest ratio of 10"/15" x 6 x 2-3 series (experimental protocol D'Ottavio et al. 1997), compared to an intermittent or continuous workload without the ball of the same duration. Work without the ball is obviously justified to qualify the neuromuscular component and it is advisable therefore to use low overs and obstacles, acyclical sprints and activities to improve the ability of reacting rapidly to environmental stimuli.

14 THE ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS AND THE DIDACTICAL- REGULATORY RULES THAT DISCIPLINE THE GAME IN THE BEGINNER CATEGORY

In this phase of Grassroots Activity, the boys now begin to face each other on the field using new and more complex rules, before being catapulted into professional competitions that come into play in the Very Young category. The difficulties that the boys may initially encounter are due, in most cases, to the inexperience and the incorrect information that they have received regarding the rules of the game and how to face competitive commitment. In the Beginner category the games are disputed through matches of 7, 9 or 11 players per team. Naturally, as we will see, the game modules have been designed by taking various aspects into consideration, first of all the cognitive, physical and technical-coordinative requirement and abilities of the children in the various age groups, proposing "football for children". Another factor we must not neglect, regards the fact of letting the all the children play more, in particular the smaller ones.

To put this principle into practice, the clubs are encouraged to organise, during the same competition, several games at the same time, therefore providing the possibility of letting all the available children play, even if it means to play with less players than expected (e.g. 6vs6) or making "mixed" teams, if one of the two clubs has more players on the list than the other. Therefore, in this category, it will be possible to organise two matches at the same time, in case of 7vs7 activity, but also 9vs9. But it does not stop here. In fact even the score system will be different: every time of play will be a game unto itself, therefore the following game fractions will start again at 0-0 and the new entries will have the opportunity to play with the right motivations, even if the preceding game fraction ends in disadvantage. The final score, therefore (even if there is no classification or ranking and publication of the results) will not be



the sum of scored goals, but the number of matches (game fractions) won. Another aspect of this category regards the gradual introduction of the off-side rule, which in 7vs7 and 9vs9 is valid from the limit of the opponent's penalty area, instead of the mid-field line. But let us go step by step illustrating the characteristics the game models with the possibility of further reading on the subject in the Official Bulletin n°1 of the Juvenile and Scholastic Sector, available on the website: www.settoregiovanile.figc.it.

14.1 7vs7



Regarding the beginner category, it seems appropriate to cite a few experiences from other European countries and other continents. In fact, in some tournaments at a local and international level, the organisation has provided that children of 10-12 years should meet with teams made up of seven players, naturally on smaller fields. This experience, that has also been reported in the recent UEFA seminar, organised in Coverciano and dedicated to grassroots football (biannual appointment for the fifty two Associated Federations), seems to have been extremely interesting. The game actions developed with more fluency so that the ball circulation and the precision of passes seemed significantly improved. The representative of the Scottish Federation, for example, spoke very well of this experience. Even there, children of this age also play with teams made up of 11 players.

After having made them play 7vs7 for a few months, they were asked if they had more fun playing this way: the reply was affirmative, so much so that they did not want to go back to playing with 11 players. Maybe certain experiences should be proposed more frequently, by integrating them in the didactical process as an alternative and integrative form of a game of 11 players. Effectively, to play 7 against 7 for the beginner category, as it also happens for adults, obviously entails completely different technical-didactical meanings compared to 7 vs 7 played at 7-8 years old. When we talk about juvenile football, it is consequent to think about an athletic activity that is adapted to the various characteristics that the children, of any age, present compared to adults. This happens in any case in all sports as the athlete in an evolutionary age, as we can define the period that goes from birth to adulthood (18-20 years), during this growing process is subject to multiple changes due to the biological impulse as well as the locomotor experiences the athlete has had.

The first factor does not seem changeable as it refers to an individual genetic picture (hereditary), whereas the second can have a considerable influence on performance.

The action of both factors becomes positive if the appropriate synergies are determined, on the basis of the quality and the type of technical-didactical proposals, and if the interaction happens according to precise evolutionary stages. Various classifications are provided in the literature that deals with auxological issues (biological science that studies the phenomena of growth and organic development of the human being) regarding the phases of the evolutionary period, and more or less all of them agree on the recognition of the following periods:

- Pre-scholar phase or period (from 0 to 6 years)
- Pre-pubescent phase or period (from 6 to 11-12 years)
- Pubescent phase or period (from 11-12 to 13-14 years)
- Second pubescent phase or adolescent phase or period (from the end of the pubescent phase until 16-17 years)

However we must remember that the effective references to age does not always correspond to the biological ones, seeing as each individual has a genetic make-up that could differ from the general rules. In this case we talk about accelerated or late. This possible difference is more evident around puberty as this period entails a strong hormonal incretion that determines a just as strong turbulences on an organic and structural level (sexual identity, growth impulse, muscular strength, etc.) (TABLE 15).

Therefore the physical commitment will be different (especially

| Morphological functional and technical differences between the Beginner category and Very Young category | | |
|--|--|---------|
| 11-12 years old | 12-14 years old | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase of main increase in breadth • Accentuated development of coordination skills • Acquisition of complex movements • Phase of strong (functional) maturity of sensorial analysers (almost like adults) • Phase of strong stabilisation and increase of technical abilities • Predisposition to high frequencies and rapidity of movement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase of main increase in height • Phase of great sensitivity to physical training • Difficult phase for control over movement and technique • Phase of strong incretion of Testosterone and GH | |
| Variations in testosterone levels (ng/100ml) in infancy and adolescence | | |
| Age | Girls | Boys |
| 8-9 | 20 | 21-34 |
| 10-11 | 10-65 | 41-60 |
| 12-13 | 30-80 | 131-349 |
| 14-15 | 30-85 | 328-643 |

TABLE 15 - (from Weinec, modified by D'Ottavio 2004)

organic) and the participation in the game will also be different. The young boys of 10-12 years, with this method of comparison, are more involved in the game, the precision in kick-backs and throw ins of the goalkeeper becomes a lot more decisive and loosing a ball at mid field (in a smaller field) means to risk more compared to doing the same in a regular field with more players. In general, all the players need to pay more attention during the game to the mutation of events. This **greater cost** on the other hand creates more fun for the players (more involving in relation to the time of the match).

**INDEX OF PARTICIPATION TO THE GAME =
NUMBER OF CONTACTS WITH THE BALL/UNIT OF TIME**

In 11vs11, other than the fact that the children have less contact with the ball, there are less shoots and less goals, etc. etc., there are other and further limiting aspects to the learning process and the consequent technical growth:

- The tactical organisation tends to be less flexible (adult models)
- If the technical difference is obviously different between the two teams, in the weaker team the most active players will be the defenders; vice versa in the stronger team the attackers. In 7vs7 games this possibility is surely less accentuated as the tendency is to involve the whole team in attack as well as defence.
- Physical and technical incapacity to kick and therefore “dialogue” with the team mates that are relatively distant (>20-25m). This is also valid for corner kicks, penalties, rebound kicks etc.). Practically, the small football player, even if he had the necessary cognitive potential to find the tactical objective to carry out (i.e. change of play), the limits to muscular strength and the relevant integration of the quality of strength with the technical-coordinative factors would not allow him to express himself as he would have wished. In a smaller field this solution would obviously have been possible, seeing as there is a **greater coincidence** between the “supply of the game environment” (field and number of players) the potential performance of the child.

We also notice that the heart rate, registered on the same child in 11vs11 situations (large field) and 7vs7 (smaller field), is more or less identical. We can also detect a greater “technical quality” in 7vs7 situations with a similar effort and therefore a higher performance. As it is shown by a study carried out a few years ago (D'Ottavio, 1994), the area and the relevant trajectory of the child's movement at 11,6 years quantified during a game of the Beginner's

Championship played 11vs11 on a regular field is definitely more limited (restricted) compared to an adult player in the same role. These results were found with slight difference for all the other roles in the team (FIGURE 16). Trying to technically interpret the results, we found ourselves agreeing in finding a series of reasons behind these behaviours. In children at this age we remark:

- *Physical limitations* such as to not be able to broaden ones area of movement. This possibility may be strongly influenced by the **security-risk factor**, and the child (or the coach on his behalf) feels that a possible imbalance would not allow him to return (because of an incomplete bio-physical maturity) to the correct position of his role in the team.

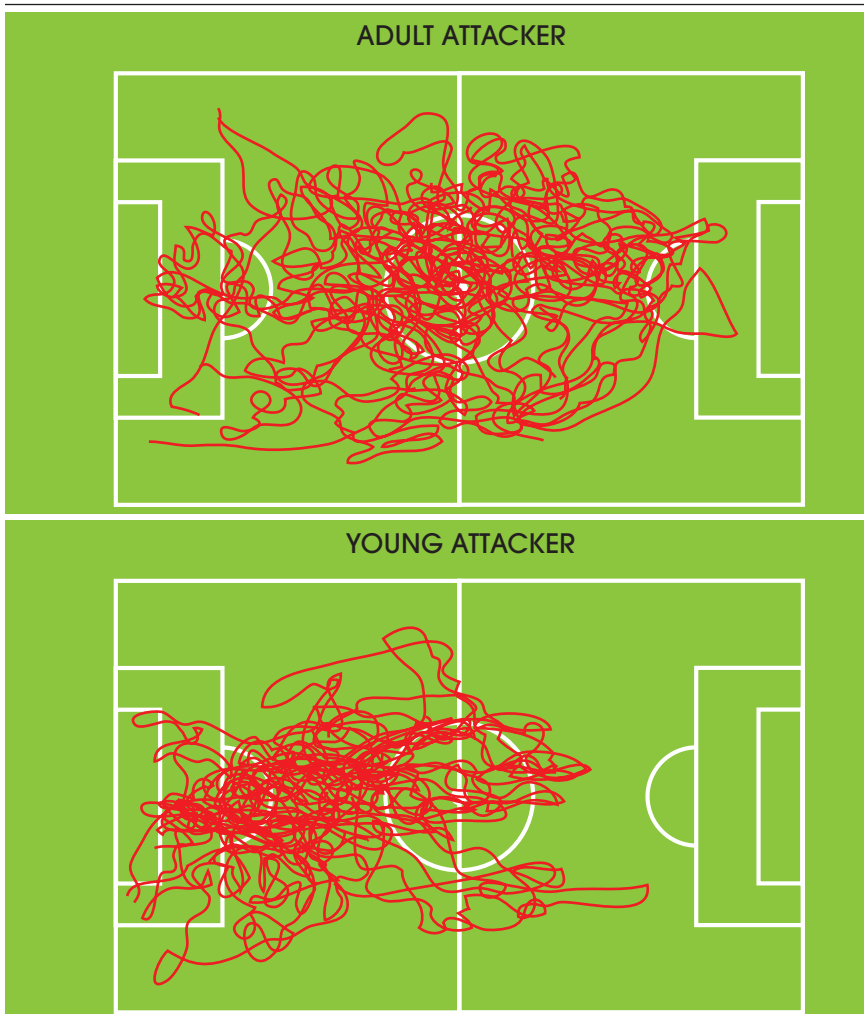


FIGURE 16 - Area and trajectory of movement during a game, comparison between young and adult attacker. (D'Offavio, 1994)

- *Cognitive limitations* as the child at this age does not have the possibility of analysing game situations that are relatively far away. The **technical area of interaction** (social) is more contained compared to adults, in fact dialogue is more frequent with players that operate in adjacent areas.
- *Processing limitations*, due to the difficulty in controlling several variables at the same time. The large field with 11 players per team theoretically entails **more interaction-interference** compared to the smaller situation. The child furthermore tends to deal with the elements of the game situation through serial processing, meaning one after another. The holistic view (global) of the problem, reduces itself and is enclosed around the child's technical centrality.

These aspects underline the main reasons for which a team of children formed by 11 players, really represents a group that is made up of many sub-units that operate to solve their own contingent problems, only marginally considering - only by the most gifted players- the problems that regard the whole group (team). The game will forcibly seem slower, seeing as the manoeuvres are articulated without sudden changes, because of the abovementioned limitations.

Years ago, trying to find quantitative answers to the problems of structural down-sizing of the playing field for children in football matches, an attempt was made to redesign the goals for the three grassroots categories (little friends, cubs, beginners).

The parameters that were taken into consideration were **height and vertical jumping capacity**. Through mathematical procedures of comparison between children and adults regarding these factors and the official dimensions of the goals (2,44x7,32m), it was possible to hypothesise three different sizes, which were surely closer to the morphological and functional characteristics of children in this age group (D'Ottavio, 1996).

Considering, therefore, that one of the previously listed limitations that characterises the 10-11 year old child is the **strength of a kick** in its various technical expressions such as the pass, the launch, the cross, the shoot, the corner kick, rebound kick etc., in order to find the measurements of the field that were ideal at this age. We tried to take this factor into consideration. The data we used was collected from various Italian as well as foreign studies. The data on the children concerns the experiments carried out in the Federal Football School of Acquacetosa in Rome.

Maximum speed of the ball (average parameters) in adult players 100km/h

Maximum speed of the ball (average parameters) in 11 years old children 58km/h

Regular field length 110m

Regular field width 70m

Using the mathematical procedure of proportions:

For the length

$$100:110=58:x$$

$$x=110 \times 58 / 100 = 63,8 \text{ (m.)}$$

For the width

$$100:70=58:y$$

$$y=70 \times 58 / 100 = 40,6 \text{ (m.)}$$

The ideal size for beginner category field is therefore: **65x40 metres**

These measurements, which correspond more or less to the dimensions of the field used for the cub category (1/2 transversal field), can be used, at least until the initial phase of the beginner category, continuing to play with 7vs7 players.

However we must bear in mind another aspect, which has a considerable influence on the execution of the actions on the field.

We refer to the parameters of **density of play**. This represents the **ratio between game area and the number of players** on the field:

- If the density is **greater**, and the distances between team mates and opponents are closer, the player during the game is more solicited at a cognitive and technical level (anticipation, decisions, technical execution etc.). Basically action times become more restricted.
- If the density is **less** on the other hand, the player will theoretically be more facilitated in his action on a spatial-temporal level in the processing phase as well as the executive phase.

The ideal scenario, in our opinion, sustaining a didactic method that tends to promote variety as well as the quality of the experiences, should be to be able to exercise through both didactical situation. If we calculate the two densities of play shown on the regular field with 11 players per team, and the density shown in smaller situations (65x40m with 7 a side) we will have:

Density in regular situation $110 \times 70 = 770 / 22 = 350$ sq m per player (therefore less density)

Density in smaller situation $65 \times 40 = 2600 / 14 = 186$ sqm per player (therefore more density)

The first situation is articulated through a slower game in general, and **favours the development and above all the application of basic techniques in game situations**. The second, favours an **improvised game**, and is a lot closer to the performance of higher levels. Surprisingly, as it is difficult to imagine, in *beginners* playing 7vs7 in a smaller field, some characteristic features of the game emerge more

than in 11vs11 situations in a larger field. Adults, effectively, even if they express themselves in a game context with minor density, this factor only represents one theoretical index, as the density becomes drastically higher because of the greater action area covered by each player (i.e. very shallow teams on a longitudinal and transversal level). As we have already seen, (figure tracing trajectory of movement) in children at this age this characteristic is not yet present. In light of the above, in the 7-a side formula, we will have to take the following further considerations into account:

- Specific selection of smaller goals in vertical and horizontal dimensions (especially guaranteeing the security factor seeing as the positions in the transversal field could become stable)
- Regulations that provide for teams of at least 14 players: this means that by playing two games at the same time (use of two _ fields in a transversal way) we will involve 56 (14x4) children at a time. In 11vs11, even if we contemplated teams of 20 players each, we would have, during the same time of play, 40 children involved. About 28% less.
- On the basis of the above, in the introductive phase, and of the indications in the guide, regarding the experimental activities conducted on smaller field or with less players, we can conclude by stating that what counts in the training phase of a young football player is not the time of play (theoretic), but the actual time he has played (time in contact with the ball).

14.2 9vs9



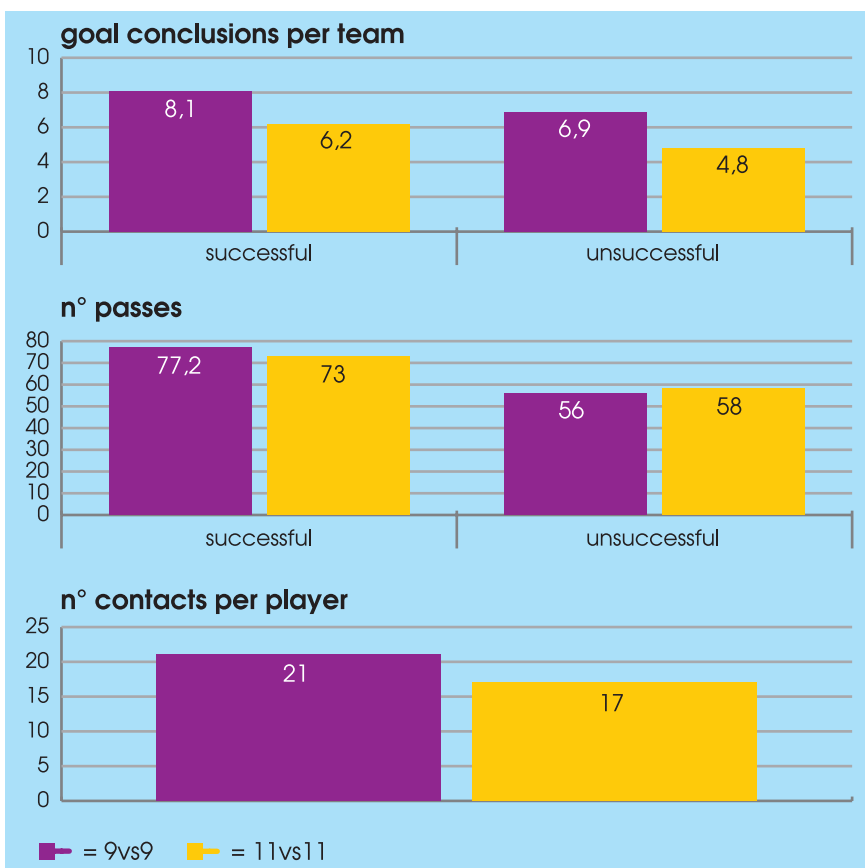
In order to guarantee a gradual training process to the young football player, appropriate for his age, an intermediate game model was inserted between 7-a side and 11 - a side, ensuring, therefore, a match with adequate difficulties for the age of the young player on the level of organisation of play, on a technical and tactical level and on a physical level, thereby softening possible issues that may arise in the passing from 7 to 11 players.

In the consequent observations and research, which aimed at verifying the hypothesis and thereby the ideal field dimensions, we acted on quantitative variables such as the dimensions of the field and the number of players. We observed several significant indices in various situations of play (7vs7, 7vs7 in a larger field, 9vs9 in 7vs7 field, 9vs9 in larger field, 11vs11 in regular field), comparing them with the parameters shown in official 11vs11 matches. The results obtained showed results that comforted the initial hypothesis regarding the

technical-tactical solutions that the children involved in the game find during play (successful passes, wrong passes, number of threatening actions, dribbling, etc.), as we can see in GRAPH 6. Furthermore, experiments were carried out with 9vs9 matches that were articulated at the same time on two fields side by side, placed transversally within a regular field. These activities, relived also at an international level through participations to activities proposed by the French Federation, have given satisfying results on a technical-didactical level, as well as in participation, given the possibility of letting 18 young players play at the same time in smaller fields.

14.3 FIRST CONTACT WITH THE RULES OF 11 - A SIDE FOOTBALL

The young player, having carried out the didactical itinerary with the various models of matches, competes in matches that provide for 11 players per side on larger fields.



GRAPH 6 - 9vs9 compared to 11vs11

There will therefore be various spatial and temporal references, various spaces in which to work and greater dimensions of the goals to defend or to score. Therefore we find ourselves in the position of having to understand, and above all to solve, game situations linked to the rules of 11 - a side football, such as off-side and back-pass to the goalkeeper, which are part of the so-called "tactical knowledge" of the football player (see subparagraph "Cultural considerations and references" of paragraph "tactical components").

14.4 11 VS 11 ON A SMALLER SIDE ON A SMALLER FIELD

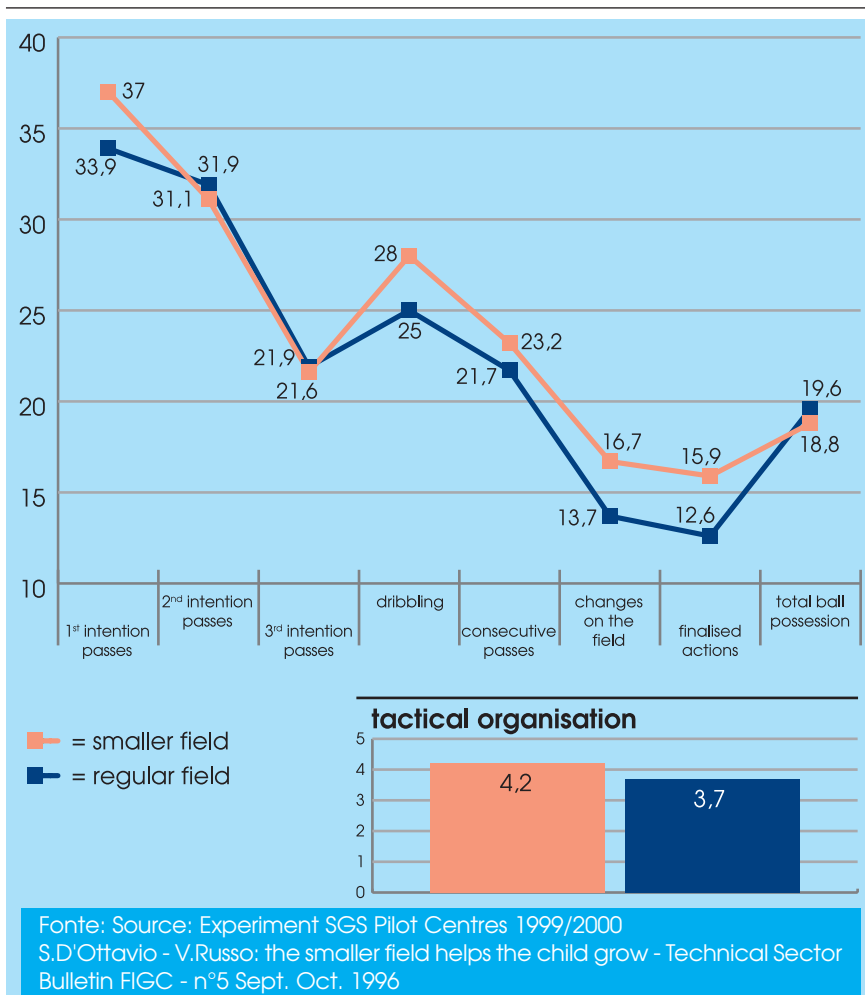


One of the discomforts we can easily note in the first approach of young players facing a regular field, is their difficulty in finding their orientation with the different spatial parameters, with the greater distances to cover or to "control". Many times in fields on the outskirts of town we observe children in the beginner category that can not correctly organise themselves in covering a certain role. Probably the spaces seem too vast and the parameters inadequate. From here, the study of a new structure of the area according to the number of players on the field. The study contemplated a match situation that increased the technical and cognitive difficulties, compared to the preceding model, but that maintained a certain degree of ease in adapting to a new organisation of players on the field. GRAPH 7 describes the results of an experiment that compared boys from the 1st year beginner category in 11:11 play on a smaller field and on a regular field. As we can see, in the game on a smaller field there are more goal conclusions, more first intention passes, more dribbling, as well as a better organisation of the players on the field.

14.5 THE "FAIR PLAY" TOURNAMENT



The Juvenile and Scholastic Sector, in the attempt of promoting and developing a correct concept of athletic culture, for a few years now has established a Beginner Tournament formula called "Fair Play", in which the behavioural rules observed by the single actors of the game are very important, be they young players, coaches, managers, club or parents, at various levels. The peripheral Committees lay out rankings on the basis of certain requirements that they consider for example the organisational



GRAPH 7 - Comparison between 11-a side football on a regular field and smaller field - Beginner category 1st year (11 years old)

aspect of the club (i.e. presence in meetings), the participative aspect (number of players that play in each game or participation of girls), etc. However, also positive aspects are considered, like incorrect behaviour and the non-regular use of players enrolled on the lists of the competition.

14.6 THREE TIMES OF PLAY AND COMPULSORY PARTICIPATION IN THE COMPETITION

Here also, like in the Cubs category, the matches are disputed in three times of play, which give the coaches and the children to play more and communicate more constructively with two intervals.





All the enrolled participants, in fact, must take part in the competition for at least one of the three times of play an a conspicuous part of play in one of the following ones, in abidance of the provisions of C.U.n°1 of the Juvenile and Scholastic Sector and in the Chart of Children's Rights. Because even in this category, even if the match is among 11 players, like adults, we must not forget that the participants are children that are ready to learn new abilities from the mistakes they make or from new situations: they all need to have this experience, therefore all of them must have the opportunity to play as much as possible. It is in the Sunday matches, in fact, that the children feel the stronger emotions. Emotions and motivations that must necessarily be mediated in the best way by the coaches and manager (as by the parents) in order to convey the tensions of the young boy towards positive channels, to allow him to express his qualities to the maximum.

14.7 CHANGE DRIVER - QUICK SUBSTITUTIONS



The clubs therefore are invited to present themselves at the competition with as many players as possible (maximum of 18) and the quick substitutions rule is effective wasting less time in the numerous changes.

14.8 TIME-OUT



In line with the didactical and methodological aspects that legitimate the three times of play and the quick substitutions, this category also uses time-out.

This tool, combined with the two interruptions provided during the three times of play, allows the coach to avoid useless shouting at the children that are trying to untangle themselves in the various situations of play by applying the knowledge learned in the didactical learning process of Football School. The coach will then have the possibility of interrupting the game at the time he deems appropriate to talk to the boys and give the right indications in the best way and surely more efficiently.

14.9 THE "GREEN CARD"



A recent introduction is the so-called "Green Card", a green card which, with the yellow card (booking) and the red one (expulsion), is used to praise the positive gestures of the players

that participate in the competition, or the actions that the referee deems to be symptomatic of honest and correct play (Fair Play) or of a nice and fun play (Fun Play), which in the latter case highlights the execution of particular and unusual technical moves.

The "Green Cards" assigned will be noted on the referee's records, specifying the type of assignment (Fair Play or Fun Play), whereas the particularly significant Green Cards for Fair Play, which are deemed as such by the coaches and managers of the participating teams, will have to be pointed out, describing the situation and motivating the assignment. Only these "Green Cards" can be inserted in the classifications of the grass roots categories, upon ratification of the relevant Provincial Committees.



14.10 THE DIMENSIONS OF THE GOALS

As far as the goal dimensions are concerned, in this age group we advise goals that are 5.50x2 metres or 6x2, according to the results of several studies carried out at the FIGC Football School of Acquacetosa in Rome and at the Regional Pilot Centres (D'Ottavio in Technical Sector Bulletin n°6 - November/December - 1996).



| | 1 st year Beginners (11 yrs) and mixed (11-12yrs) | 2 nd year Beginners (12yrs) | 2 nd year Beginners (12yrs) | 2 nd year Beginners (12yrs) |
|--------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Match | 7:7 | 9:9 | 11:11 | 11:11 |
| Times of play | 3x18' | 3x18' | 3x18' | 3x18' |
| Field dimensions | 65x40 | 70x50 | 85x55 | Regular |
| Goal dimensions | 5,50x1,80 op. 6x2 | 5,50x1,80 op. 6x2 | 5,50x1,80 op. 6x2 | Regular |
| Football size | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Regulation changes | No off-side rule or off-side at the boundary of penalty area (13 mt from goal line) | Off-side at the boundary of penalty area (15 mt from goal line) | | |
| Miscellanea | Two parallel games at the same time | Two parallel games at the same time | | |

TABLE 16 - Technical-organisational characteristics of matches in Beginner category



14.11 REFEREEING

We believe it is very important for the matches in this category to still be overseen by qualified managers or coaches in this phase. Furthermore, to tell you the truth one of the proposals of the Juvenile and Scholastic Sector is to use the football players of the same club at the Pupil or Junior level.



14.11.1 KNOWING THE RULES OF THE GAME

How many players and how many coaches in their career have read the "Rules of football"? The possibility of refereeing favours the acknowledgement of the difficulties it entails, the acquisition of the rules of the game and to, consequently, adopt better behaviours on the field and on the sidelines. All is therefore aimed at a cultural training of the individual, and this is why the Juvenile and Scholastic Sector, in cooperation with the Italian Association of Referees, propose, in their peripheral Committees, refereeing courses for managers and coaches that will have to operate in the various grassroots categories. It is therefore important for the instructors to know the rules of the game in as much detail as possible, which they in turn will have to transmit to their group, with the ways and terms that are appropriate for the age of the children. Therefore the invitation is for everyone, players, coaches, managers and parents, to visit the website of the Italian Association of Referees (www.aia-figc.it) to consult the rules of the game of football and practical guide and possibly organise a training course within the club.



14.11.2 THE APPROACH TO THE REFEREE

The fact that it is the manager who is refereeing instead of a real referee is intended to guarantee the children a match that is not a synonym of "championship", but an extension of the training process that is still being completed and the will continue in a more specific way in the following phases of grass roots categories. It often happens in fact that the boys, as well as having to solve problems of a technical-tactical nature, have to measure themselves against parameters that regard a model that is closer to adults, with all the consequences. We therefore feel the obligation to re-state a few tips to players, coaches, managers and clubs in football on the aspects regarding the relationship between

managers-coaches-referee-children. Children that play, for the first time, with all the rules that apply to adults. As far as the players are concerned it is appropriate to say that if it is absolutely true that only the captain can refer to the referee to ask for explanations, in these categories things are done a bit differently. It is easy to guess that the young players in this age group need continuous and significant explanations, given their little experience in this regard (and the 6-7 years of Football School are not always enough). Therefore it is appropriate for everyone to be able to consult the manager-referee and ask for the relevant explanations. On the other hand the coaches and the managers must not think of the referee as the person that can make a team win or loose a match, but as a tool with which the children learn the rules of the game better. Many times all this does not happen. Maybe because things are seen differently. Therefore, as we have already stated, it is fundamental for the coach, first of all, to know the rules of the game and the dynamics that come into play when refereeing a match.

14.11.3 A SUGGESTION FOR THE REFEREES

Therefore the function of the referee in this category must evidently be a training one for the young football players that face each other on the field remaining within the rules of the game that determine their freedom of action. It becomes useful to use the matches to explain what limits they can reach and what limits they have crossed. To make them repeat a lateral foul that was thrown in incorrectly or explain the reason why he whistles for a foul for dangerous play or an off-side, or the concession of the advantage norm (which is not a rule), determines a better knowledge of the rules of the game and therefore a better application of technical abilities in situations.



- From the phase of concrete thought to abstract thought (hypothetical-deductive); reconstructs physical action from verbal description;
- Formulates other hypotheses: anticipation, processing an planning of problem situations (attack-defence);
- Development of auto-criticism
- Formation of creative thought;
- Improves integration with the group; development of team spirit; identification in the group;
- The interpersonal relationships are also transferred outside the athletic environment;
- He responds to the tactical indications required; creative formation of ability;
- Improves precision and attention to detail;
- Phase of variable availability
- Stasis (regression) and recovery of locomotor abilities
- Guided development of physical capacity
- First responses to a certain sensitivities or certain solicitations; more responses during competitions;
- Respect of the role of coach

TABLE 17- Psycho-motory profile and general characteristics - Beginner Category

| | Technical-Coordi-native Factor | Tactical-Cognitive Factor | Physical-Motory Factor |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| General Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create the premises to make technical abilities stable in variable conditions and under time pressure (rapidity); in a situational regime. • Perfection of technical/technical re-adaptation to changed body proportions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of ability of self-control, autonomy and integration • Solution of individual and collective problems and in phase of attack and defence • Processing of tactical tasks according to the tasks of team mates • Formation of hypothetical thought from verbal input • Perfection of the application of operational patterns that characterise the game system • Acquisition of individual and collective tactical principles in phase of attack and defence • Knowing how to deal with 7vs7, 9vs9, and 11vs11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilisation and consolidation of coordinative area • Re-adaptation of general motricity • Development of general conditional abilities. |
| Specific Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding the ball with opponent • Oriented control of the ball • Improvement of shoot to goal with ball in movement • Technical control of movement in regime of rapidity (with opponent) • Development of headers • Improvement of weaker foot • Hitting in the air • Running with opposing/chasing opponent • Formation mental and motory structure of feinting action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to apply move to game situations • General tactical principals in phase of possession and non-possession • Moving; faking without the ball; use of tactical references and specifications (patterns, organised defence/attack actions) • Consolidation of the concept of active and passive zone • Development of individual and collective tactics in phase of ball possession; conquering space when guiding the ball and by cooperating with team mates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of aerobic strength (metabolic aspect) • Improvement of neuromuscular reactivity • Increase of rapidity • Maintaining articular mobility |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hitting; pass in free zone with several directions of intervention (cross and shoot to goal) • Hitting with head, in the air, with acrobatic move • Reception: anticipation ability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of individual and collective tactics in phase of non-possession: man and zone marking • Knowing how to come in to play in relation to ball possession in supporting role | |
| <p>Content</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handicapped situations (chasing opponent, variation of speed, etc.) • Opponent on the line • Actions with numerical advantage and disadvantage • Solicitations of technical move under time pressure and with semi-active opponent • Technical activities in couples in various forms: study and refinement of pass and reception of low balls, parabolic, etc. • 1vs1 game situations in various forms: faking and dribbling • Tennis football, piggy in the middle, German football, solicitation of technical moves in varied forms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual shooting actions with opponent • 1vs1 situations in attacking zone • Game situations with defender in lateral contrast (break-back) • 1vs1 in various situations (with lateral and frontal support, etc.) • 2vs1, 2vs2, 3vs2, 3vs3, 4vs3 in simple situations • Confrontation games • Attack vs defence games • Situation of compartment competition • Study and analysis of simple situations with inactive ball • Games and matches with technical, spatial, time, offensive solution restrictions • Confrontation competitions and games with strong numerical advantage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of aerobic mechanism in situational context (intermittent work) • Relay games with and without the ball (sprint, technical combinations, etc.) • Games and activities with the ball to solicit mobility of various articulations (awareness) • Pre-athletic exercises (various paces, etc.) • Movement circuits awareness with the ball |

TABLE 18 - General, specific objectives and content to pursue in the annual didactical programme of Beginner category.