

Guidelines for coaching heading in soccer

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In association with the US
Youth Soccer coaching
department

Summary: A reference for youth soccer coaches regarding age-appropriate training of heading the ball. These guidelines represent a safe, progressive and research-informed approach based on player characteristics at various stages of development and based on the amount, intensity and type of heading typically demanded of players in matches within each age group.

Age	Training Frequency	Methodology	Emphases
U6	None		Not appropriate to attempt heading at this age before body awareness and visual tracking become more refined
U8	No formal training	Beach ball or a soft and small ball Balance ball on forehead Head ball out of own hands/juggle and catch - Use the lightweight soccer ball	Fun and body awareness No teaching; Ensure safety for players who want to try heading a ball on their own
U10	1 activity, 0-3 times per season	Size 4 or softer ball, e.g. Nerf ball Head ball out of own hands/juggling Self-toss – use lightweight soccer ball	Comfort and basic technique ✓ Mouth closed ✓ Eyes open ✓ Hairline contact ✓ Heading at a goal
U12	1 activity, 0-1 times per week	Size 4 or softer/lighter ball, e.g. volleyball Underhand toss – use lightweight soccer ball Teammate (not coach) serves with feet • Chipping Incorporate into skill games • e.g. Soccer-tennis	Confidence and improved technique ✓ Chin tucked in (neck contracted to fix head to the trunk) ✓ Torso extension and flexion ✓ Heading to pass/heading to clear ✓ Introduce jumping; two-footed takeoff ✓ Passive opponent
U14	1-2 activities, 0-2 times per week	Size 5 or smaller ball, e.g. size 4 or 3 ball Underhand toss/throw-ins – initially use the lightweight soccer ball Teammate (not coach) serves with feet • Chipping and crossing Incorporate into training games • e.g. Head-Catch	Refined technique and basic tactics ✓ Arms slightly away from body to provide a barrier for own body/head in anticipation of contact from opponents ✓ Footwork to head ball at highest point possible; one-footed takeoff ✓ Attacking/defending headers ✓ Active opponent
U16+	1-2 activities, 1-3 times per week	Teammate/coach serves with feet Incorporate into match situations • e.g. Set pieces	Performance under pressure and body contact Refined technique and advanced tactics ✓ Footwork and body control for power and accuracy ✓ Near/far post considerations ✓ Heading to initiate counterattack/heading to clear ✓ Flick headers; create separation from opponent to avoid head-to-head contact ✓ Diving headers to score

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