

Role of Fitness in Youth Soccer

Soccer has four main components: **technique, tactics, fitness, and psychology** (competition).

Depending on the age of your players, the competitive level of your team, and how often you train your team will depend on how much weight you will give to each one of these components. There is no right or wrong answer as to how much time you should dedicate to each component. It is really up to you, but I hope most of you are spending a great deal of time focusing on the technical part of the game. In general, for our teams, I would weigh heavier on technique and psychology. When I say psychology I mean developing competitive spirit, positive attitude, building self-esteem, self-confidence, and having a positive experience/fun.

I am going to make a couple of assumptions when giving my recommendations to our teams/coaches in KenTon Soccer Association:

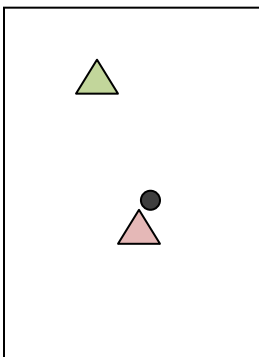
1. Most teams are practicing 1-2 times per week.
2. Most teams are playing 1 game per week.

Since most of our teams are only practicing once or twice per week I feel that fitness training will have very little impact on the overall fitness level of your players. If players are following a fitness program on the days that your team is not practicing then specific fitness training might have an impact on each players overall fitness level, but I doubt that most players/teams are on a strict soccer specific fitness program.

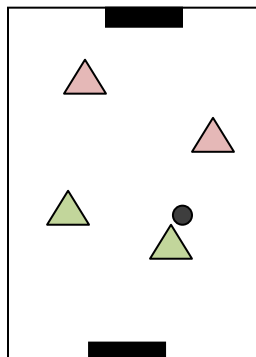
Since most of you are practicing just once or twice per week and practice time is limited I recommend two things:

1. Train your players in an economical fashion. The definition of **economical training** is to include as many of the four components as possible into one activity. If you look at my model training session on the website and take just one of the activities you will see that it includes all four of the components of soccer. Games like 1v1, 2v2, 4v4 are awesome economical activities.
2. If fitness is something that you feel is important for your group, I recommend that you do fitness with the soccer ball. Here are some "fitness with the ball" activities.

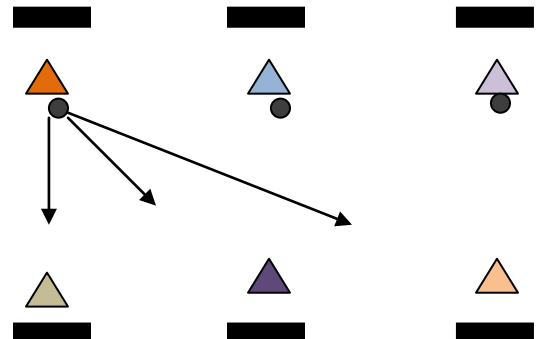
1v1 in Grid
Fig. 1



2v2 in Grid
Fig. 2



1v1 score in all three goals, defend all three goals. Only play against the person across from you. Fig. 3



Race around cone

Relay race to cone and back

Player 😊 runs up to player 😊. Player 😊 tosses the ball to 😊. 😊 Plays ball back to 😊. You could pass, head, or use any technique back. Fig. 6

Fig. 4

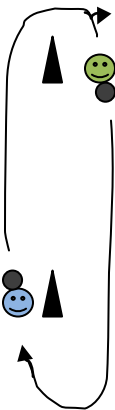
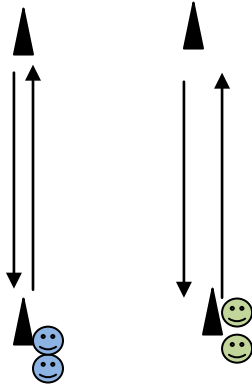
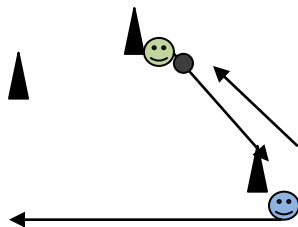


Fig. 5



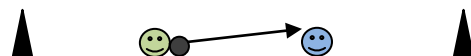
Same as Fig. 6 except go from cone to cone.

Fig. 7



1v1 to cones. Hit cone for a pt.

Fig. 8



Most fitness activities that you would do without a ball you can do with a ball. There are tons of activities; you just need to be creative. Sometimes by just making the field bigger and giving the players more space in a small sided game can increase the amount of running they have to do.

Our younger (U12 and younger) players don't have the lung capacity or endurance that older players do; they also don't understand how to pace themselves. During practice keep your activities short as players will quickly tire out, but they will only need 30 seconds or so to recover. This is why they tend to tire out quicker in games. They don't know how to rest on the field. Normally, all it takes is a couple minutes on the bench and a drink of water and they are good to go for another shift. Don't treat our young players like small adults. Their body systems aren't as developed as much as our older players or adults.

Our older players (15 yrs and older) have more developed body systems and muscles. They are also able to pace themselves and consequently have the ability to last a whole half or game. These players have also learned to rest on the soccer field or are at least learning how to rest on the field. These players won't need to break as often, but will need to rest for a little longer period of time in order to completely recover.

When doing fitness try to mirror the demands of your fitness session with the demands of the game. This is called **specificity of training**. Basically what this means is that each particular physical activity creates certain demands on an individual's body systems and muscles. For example, soccer plays during a game sprint, jog, and walk, so an effective fitness activity should also include sprinting, jogging, and walking. To be very specific you should even train different positions in different ways. Goalkeepers don't experience the same demands physically as center midfielders. What I am saying is if I was a marathon runner I wouldn't train for a marathon by running a series of 40 yd. dashes.