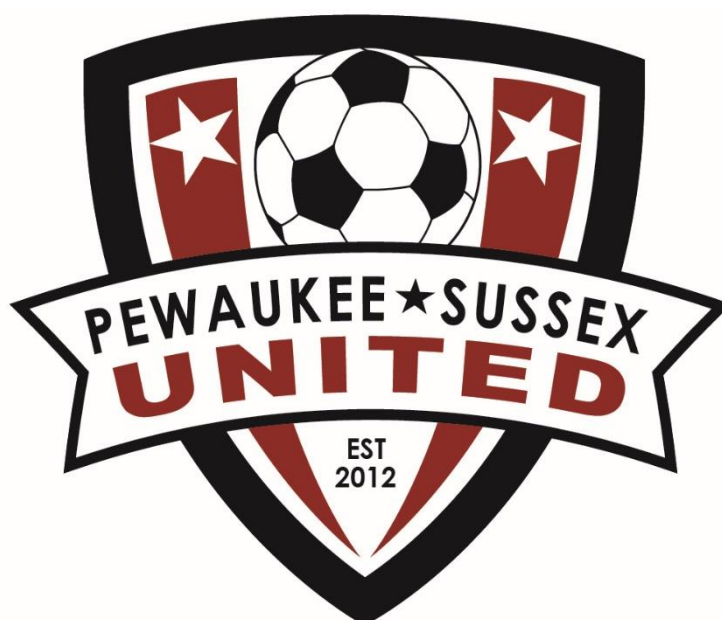


# Kicking Is Not Soccer (KINS) Playing Format

U7 and U8 Recreation Soccer Program



Pewaukee Sussex United

"I don't believe skill was, or ever will be, the result of coaches.  
It is a result of a love affair between the child and the ball"  
-Manfred Schellscheidt-

## **KINS Playing Format**

KINS is an acronym that stands for "Kicking Is Not Soccer". In the Pewaukee Sussex United, we will use this playing format with our U7 and U8 players. These are some of our youngest players who are at the introductory age in the sport. These players are gaining some of their first experiences with the game of soccer. It is these experiences that can either hook the player for life or turn them away. Players will be more likely to continue playing soccer if they are having fun and are experiencing personal success. Hence, the recreational program's main philosophy is to create a fun filled, active environment, in which the players can improve and succeed.

The KINS format's main objective is to promote and emphasize the skill of dribbling at the U7 to U8 age groups and discourage the aimless booting of the ball that is all too prevalent at these young ages. When young players are conditioned to just kick the ball forward as far as possible, their skill development is stunted, making it harder for them to reach their true potential. Dribbling is the foundational technical skill and provides a platform for all the other fundamental skills of soccer, such as controlling, passing, and shooting. Laying the proper dribbling foundation in these early years will enhance the players' ability to improve all the soccer skills. No matter what level the players will end up playing, recreational or select, they will derive increased pleasure from the game if they can control the ball better and become more adept at manipulating it. Spectators will also enjoy the game more if they can watch players who exhibit skill and creativity. The format's second objective is to promote decision making by the players on the field and reduce their dependence on the adults for problem solving.

### **BENEFITS OF THE KINS Format**

1. Improves the skill and enjoyment of PSU players entering soccer.
2. Provide coaching assistance by using a defined format that helps teach skills.
3. Develop a club identity through a common vision.
4. Raise the skill level of the recreation and select programs.

Pewaukee Sussex United has established the playing rules for small-sided soccer in coordination with the Wisconsin Youth Soccer Association and they are easily adaptable to the KINS format. The playing numbers of 4 v 4 for U7 and U8, are ideally suited to the KINS format since the main focus is dribbling.

There are a number of variables that should be considered for inclusion into the game format already in place to enhance the effectiveness of the PSU program. For example, observations of games reveal that, when the coaches/referees enforce strictly the normal rules for out-of-bounds, throw-ins and goal kicks, the imposed stoppages are so excessive that the actual playing time amounts to no more than half the available game time. This reduces significantly the number of contacts with the ball in each game.

The KINS format uses multiple strategies to increase the actual playing time. These are explained in detail below:

**New Ball Strategy:** In the KINS format, the coaches keep a supply of balls with them during the game at half field. Every time the ball goes out of bounds, one of the coaches shouts "New Ball!!!" and plays a new ball onto the field. The players respond by chasing the new ball and the game never stops. Actual playing time is almost 100% of game time. Players will look for the ball as they become familiar with the format. This method eliminates the endless stoppages for taking throw-ins, goal kicks, and corner kicks and increases dramatically the number of touches each player gets in a game. The only re-start stoppages are for kick-offs after a goal. This method is also great for getting the less assertive players into the action, by throwing the new ball towards them.

**Loose Boundaries Strategy:** In this format, the field boundaries are not adhered to very strictly and the ball is still in play even if it goes slightly outside the sidelines and end lines. It is only when the ball is kicked very far away from the field that play is stopped and a "new ball" enters play. This method produces almost non-stop action with actual playing time close to 100% of game time. Doing a throw in is not a soccer specific skill, but rather a hands-to-body coordination maneuver that all kids will eventually master as they grow older and learn to control their bodies. Once kids move up in age, strict adherence to boundaries and throw-ins is then introduced.

**Using Coaches to Referee Games:** The KINS format works much better because coaches are utilized to call the game instead of referees. The message that "results don't count" is sometimes lost when referees are involved. Observations of youth soccer reveal that the presence of official referees adds a competitive edge to the game that is not desirable for these ages. Referees tend to call the games strictly and to the letter of the law.

Coaches and parents are more inclined to react negatively to 'bad calls' by referees, which inevitably will occur. In clubs where the coaches act as referees, the atmosphere is much more low-key and festive. The coaches tend to display a greater spirit of sportsmanship and courtesy when they are calling the game. They usually call in favor of the other team in a conscious attempt to be unbiased. This sends the right message to the parents, who adopt a more relaxed perspective and are less inclined to worry about the result. In any case, the recommended methods of play make referees redundant.

### **Game Format:**

The KINS System seeks to take the positive qualities of small sided soccer and enhance them. The new ball strategy, loose boundaries strategy, and coaches as referees strategy better enhance the game for the children.

Other items of note in the game format include:

- Coaches use dribbling games as their "warmup" for Saturday matches
- Only team coaches may be ball servers
- Ball servers play the ball in with their feet
- Coaches alternate roles as the ball server after every quarter of play
- Ball server is responsible for calling fouls and interpreting the loose boundaries law
- Coach not working as ball server coaches their team
- Parent sideline will be 20-30 yards "off the field"
- Parents and coaches should not use the phrases "Kick It" "Boot It"

### **Skills Priorities for U7 and U8 Players**

By far the most important skill for beginners is the skill of dribbling. Young players need to learn to dribble within a variety of playing situations, such as dribbling forward unopposed, changing speed and direction, shielding the ball from opponents, dribbling past an opponent, and using dribbling to get away from pressure. The ability to dribble is absolutely critical since dribbling is the foundation and preparation for the other fundamental skills of soccer, such as controlling, passing and shooting.

When players are receiving the ball and making the preparation touches prior to passing or shooting, they are essentially engaged in a mini-dribble. A limited ability to dribble leads to a limited range of passing or shooting. The ability to dribble also helps maintain possession of the ball.

It's not unusual for players to find themselves in a game situation where dribbling is the only viable option to get out of tight pressure and maintain possession.

Aside from the fact that dribbling forms the foundation for all the other skills, there are many other reasons why we need to focus on dribbling at this level. First of all, it takes years to become a comfortable and confident dribbler. Players have to learn to combine body control, agility, coordination and balance with the mechanics of dribbling and the sooner they start, the better.

Secondly, the process of learning to dribble involves trial and error. At first, the players' rudimentary attempts at dribbling will often result in failure as they discover the contrast between a soft touch and a hard touch on the ball. The players will slowly develop a 'feel' for the ball as they experiment at controlling and propelling it. Young players don't get easily discouraged if they fail. Players of this age do not possess the analytical thought process to look back or think ahead. They live for the moment, in the here and now, and the fact that the last time they tried to dribble it didn't work will not even enter their minds. But if we wait for the players to mature before we emphasize dribbling, many of them will lose their confidence if they do not succeed and will become reluctant to dribble.

Thirdly, 4v4 play, the fields are so small that dribbling is always an option since the ball is always just a few yards away from shooting range. Once the game moves to the larger-sized fields, dribbling becomes less effective and must be combined with passing to get the ball from point A to point B.

Lastly, it's better to go through the process of trial and error when game results are not important and standings are not kept. As players get older game results assume more importance, making it harder for the parents and coaches to show patience and tolerance for mistakes, and putting added pressure on players to 'get rid of the ball' rather than risk losing it. Once games become competitive, the resultant environment is not ideal to start learning how to dribble.

In typical U7 and U8 club play in America, the players are encouraged by both the parents on the sidelines and the coaches to 'boot' the ball up the field. Players are so indoctrinated to 'kick it forward' that very few of them dare to get out of pressure by dribbling. The reality is that players are controlled like puppets by the adults to such an extent that they are not thinking for themselves, and are afraid to do anything but kick the ball.

Even throw-ins are routinely thrown straight to the other team by confused players who are conditioned to play the ball forward, no matter what. The kick-offs are no better, with players kicking the ball straight to the other team, American football style. Players, who clearly have plenty of time on the ball with no pressure anywhere near, are still kicking it forward without any thought or skill.

This type of mindless play is usually not corrected by the coaches and is allowed to occur time and again. What the coaches must do is encourage the players to dribble, dribble and dribble. Their first touch must be a soft one. There should be very little coaching done by the coaches, just the occasional reminder to "dribble" and, when close enough to goal, to "shoot". The shout to "kick it" should never be hollered by the adults. Dribbling out of pressure should be the emphasis for our U7 and U8 players. Results don't count and 'booting it' should not be an option. The players must be allowed to be creative, and to solve the problems of pressure and space by themselves, using dribbling techniques.

Passing is an impossible technique to master for players who cannot dribble. The better players, once they learn to dribble out of tight areas, will be able to create space for themselves with the dribble and will then start to look up and pass the ball. That will come on its own. Success at this level should be measured by how many times a player can dribble past opponents since game results are not important.

The coaches' approach to the pre-game warm-up should also change. No more the traditional line drills where the coach serves one ball at a time to a line of players who shoot on goal. Instead, the players should all have a ball each and dribble inside their half, using fun types of dribbling activities, to prepare them for the game.

If we want our players to fully master the art of dribbling, the following conditions must exist:

- 1) They must start learning to dribble early
- 2) We must provide ample opportunities for dribbling in practices and games
- 3) We must create the right game environment where players are not afraid to dribble.