

**New Scotland Soccer Club**

**Coaching Curriculum for Player Development**

**Purpose and Introduction**

The top priority of any organized soccer program should be to provide players with the best opportunity for the enjoyment of the great game of soccer. This should include programs that support individual development, positive team participation and an overall positive club experience. A successful program will also consider the long term development of the club which not only includes players but also coaches, managers and officers.

This curriculum is compiled based on United States Soccer Federation (USSF) best practices, U.S. Soccer Coaching Curriculum, International Coaches Association (ICA) guidelines, Eastern New York Youth Soccer Association (ENYYSA) coaching education, various USSF coaching course materials and experiences of several club coaches. Specifically it is presented in an organized manner to support our coaches. It should be considered as additional reference material that can be used for each age group and regardless of the coach’s experience. It is also presented in a format that attempts to provide a level of continuity of coaching techniques and theory in order to help players relate what they have learned from year to year and coach to coach.

The themes represented in this curriculum are designed to support a common style of play that New Scotland Soccer Club teams should expect to play. This style consists of individual ball control and possession soccer with combination play developed through short passes on the ground. This will provide the means to develop attacks and support defensive tactics.

 **“Coach’s Note”**

Although the club is trying to support a long term player development program with this curriculum, it should be noted that these are only guidelines to be referenced. Individual coaches are encouraged to use creativity and their own style to help implement these topics. It is not in the club’s best interest to “program” coaches to do the same exact training sessions at a particular age level. Instead we support coaches who understand these guidelines and do their best to incorporate them into their training sessions and, where appropriate, soccer matches.

It is also important to note that these guidelines do not propose to take the place of official coaching education. In fact, all club coaches are strongly encouraged (and reimbursed) for official education licenses such as the Youth Module course, USSF level F,E & D courses, NSSA diplomas, Goal keeping certification, etc… There are multiple opportunities for interested coaches to continue their education throughout their coaching career. Only through education on the latest ideas and techniques will the club continue to provide a strong program for our young soccer players.

**Things to Remember When Coaching Youth Soccer**

1. Coaching young players requires patience, kindness and respect. Always remain positive. When players respect their coach they are more likely to learn from them and are willing to give their best in both practices and matches.
2. Come prepared but be ready to make adjustments. In both training and matches good coaching requires a plan. However a good coach will constantly monitor the plan in action and be ready to make changes to ensure the children are having a positive experience.
3. Set age appropriate goals. Goals can be set on a weekly, monthly or even seasonal basis. Goals should be realistic and something players can identify. Expectations should also be age appropriate, for example, younger age level goals should be individually based while older children can obtain team oriented goals.
4. Matches are an opportunity for your players to try out the new skills they have worked on in practice. Winning or losing is only an aside. Winning at all costs attitudes will damage players and teams in the long run. Younger age groups should be playing in non-results oriented matches. Winning records should not be brought into team concepts until at least the U14 level. Even then, the team record should never take precedence over development. Although it must be noted that success in youth sports plays a large part of the enjoyment for many children. Therefore healthy competition should always be encouraged appropriately.
5. Use these guidelines to understand the different levels of play. Coaches should be aware of the levels of play ahead and behind their current age group. This will prove helpful in two ways. First, it will allow the coach to develop training sessions that will continue development from the previous level and reinforce skills and tactics that can be improved on at the next age level. Next, a coach must realize, particularly at the younger levels, individual player abilities will vary. Some children will demonstrate strong technical skills while others will struggle with basic concepts. The coach must be ready and willing to work with both types of players, always ready to challenge the more advanced player as well as support and encourage those with less ability.
6. Always remember that the game is the best teacher. Practices should include game like situations where players can hone their skills and learn from their experiences, both positive and negative. The best approach to this is the use of small sided games (SSGs). These are small sessions that are designed with a specific goal or skill set in mind. They also provide coaches many opportunities to share coaching points to correct improper play. SSGs are recognized worldwide at all age levels as the best way to coach the game of soccer. The SSG examples provided here for each level are ideas only! They can be modified to reinforce specific training sessions. They also can be adjusted for age appropriate training. Many of the same SSG’s can be played at various age levels with only a few modifications such as available space, number of players or number of targets or rules.
7. Teach and encourage ball skills and creativity before trying to teach tactics. The first few seasons of a young soccer player’s career should be nothing but touches on the ball and fun games to experiment and learn. Only after players are more confident with the basic skills of dribbling, trapping and passing should coaches try to teach tactics such as positioning, offense and defense. At all levels coaches should encourage creativity and experimentation for their players. Children are resilient and they will learn which experiments work and which ones do not.
8. All coaches should encourage their players to watch soccer. Perhaps an older age group within the club or a local college team or even their favorite professional and international teams on television. Watching advanced, competitive soccer is an excellent way for kids to obtain ideas on things they would like to try. If they see good soccer it will be easier to learn good soccer. That means that coaches should watch too! That way they can discuss the latest fixtures (standings) with their players and learn right along with them.
9. Coaches should realize that their long term goals are to prepare youth soccer players to recognize and solve the challenges of the game on his or her own. That means that practices should consist of SSGs where coaching points are made, but comments should be brief; improper play can be corrected but should not have prolonged stoppages of activity; endurance can be supported without mindless laps around the field; and matches can be exciting and rewarding without the coach yelling every move and decision to the children. No Laps, No Lines, No Lectures!
10. Finally, have fun! Coaching young children may have challenges, but the returns can be incredibly rewarding. Make sure the children are having fun and make sure you are having fun with them. Together you can build relationships that last forever….they will always call you coach!

**Special Note on Risk Assessment** – It is a coach’s responsibility to limit the risks for their players and liabilities for the clubs. The NSSC, CDYSL, ENYYSA and USSF all have guidelines for managing the risks associated with coaching youth soccer. Coaches should be completely familiar with these guidelines and implement them at all ages of play. The health and safety of our young players is paramount.

**Ages 6 – 8, 1st & 2nd Grade (U8’s)**

**General**

Soccer should be pure fun for children at this age. Most of the individuals playing club soccer at this level are just starting out in their first or second season with a team or club. The focus and concentration should be on the enjoyment of the overall experience and let them dictate how to play around with the soccer ball. Any attempts to structure players at this age will usually provide negative development in either removing the fun or taking away the chances of creativity.

**Soccer Maturity**

Children at this age have limited understanding of team. The game is not about the team, it is all about “me”. Concepts of passing or sharing the ball are virtually nonexistent for these young players. Furthermore, they are only beginning to develop the ability to apply past experiences to current or future situations. Therefore, less time should be spent on showing them how it’s done and more time just letting them do it. Their concept of consequences is also very low, so the “what if?” questions should be kept extremely simple. However, most U8’s love to use their imaginations, so use this to your advantage when coaching this age group.

**Practices**

* Training sessions should be filled with numerous touches on the ball.
* Every child should have their own ball throughout the majority of practice.
* Games should be fun and exciting with many opportunities for players to run, laugh and touch a soccer ball with all parts of their bodies.
* Many small groups are best. Use of assistant coaches is recommended to facilitate small groups.
* Coaches should use positive encouragement for all players. At this level, every kid is a superstar all of the time!

**Games**

* Games should be similar to training sessions with a good deal of fun and positive attitude.
* 4 v 4 (at most) with small goals and no goal keepers and non results oriented.
* There should be no set positions.
* Coaches should refrain from yelling instructions from the sidelines. Only encouraging statements such as, “Nice job, good work and try again!”
* Players are going to bunch together at this age no matter what any coach says or does. So use your energy in other ways instead of repeatedly yelling it from the sidelines.

**Skill Objectives**

* Confidence with the ball and enjoyment of the game
* Introduction to basic dribbling skills (inside, outside and turning with the ball) but let players develop their own style
* Introduction to basic striking (locked ankle, top of foot and follow through) but let players shoot however they are comfortable
* Comfort when receiving the ball
* Introduction to soccer terminology used on and off the field
* No other actual soccer skills should be taught at this age although be prepared for players asking for help with a certain task and feel free to encourage proper technique with that task

**Tactical Objectives**

* How to have fun playing soccer.

**SSG Examples**

* *Anatomy Soccer* (4 v 4 using parts of body called out by coach)
* *Sharks & Minnows* (Minnows have ball on feet dribbling while sharks do not. Sharks try to kick the ball out of playing area and when they do, the minnow becomes a shark)
* *Pinnie tag* (individual tag or team tag w/ colored pinnies. Can be played with and without a ball)
* *Soccer bowling, horseshoes, shuffleboard, golf, etc…* (any game where kids can play for passing comfort and accuracy and have fun while doing it)

**Conclusions**

Kids at this age need a coach who is willing to be a kid and enjoy soccer with them. Very little structure is suggested and a good deal of imagination is required. The challenge for this level of coach is to design a season long program that will reinforce some basic skills without having the children know that is what is happening. If the right attitude and enjoyment of the game is reinforced at this level, it has a good chance of staying with the children throughout their youth soccer.

**Ages 9-10, 3rd & 4th Grade (U10’s)**

**General**

Soccer at this level can be a very exciting time for a coach with a new set of challenges. Developmentally there will begin to be differences in players that become apparent on and off the field. Some players will have better eye-foot-ball coordination than others, while a few will have a more focused concentration off the field and during practice. Most of the time, these players are not one and the same. Therefore, the coach should still enforce the fun activities of the game while working with all types of players on their team. Be prepared to work equal amounts with players who are at all parts of the development spectrum.

**Soccer Maturity**

Players may begin to realize the team aspects of the game (i.e. passing, combination play and formations) as well as having a greater understanding of offense and defense. However, by and large, the game is still about the individual at this age level and coaches are encouraged to support players in their creativity and ball control. Children of this age are still more focused on action rather than thoughts so be sure to make your training sessions and matches about doing first and thinking (for those that are ready) after.

At this point, it is important to help kids understand that soccer success can be measured in different ways. One is the measure of the team’s success in how they train and how they perform on match days. The other is the individual development and the success of performing at his or her personal best. This will allow coaches and players to realize their successes and move forward with appropriate development.

**Practices**

* Sessions at this age level should be fast paced and full of activity.
* Basic skills should be taught in drills of development and endurance (e.g. square and triangle passing, small group play) and not in long lines and cones.
* SSGs and drills should be designed with simple principles and many touches on the ball. Keep away games (i.e. 2 v 1, 3 v 1, 5 v 2, etc…) may now be introduced as a method of teaching problem solving.
* Coaching points should be more prevalent and soccer oriented but be concise and age appropriate
	+ - Note: Be prepared to provide some advanced coaching points to those individuals who appear to be on the more developed end of the spectrum and reinforcement for those on the less developed end.
* Coaches should provide a great deal of encouragement for players to experiment during training sessions (as well as games). This will allow children to learn by doing and finding out on their own what works and what doesn’t. This includes individual skills as well as tactical applications such as offense and defense.
* Training sessions should always include an aspect of competition because it pushes players to perform the activity at match speed. This can be win/lose, how many, how fast, etc...

**Games**

* Matches should be played 6 v 6 and be non result oriented
* True soccer goals should be introduced but be of much smaller dimensions than regulation size (e.g. 6’ x 18’)
* Positions should be introduced along with formations, however all players should have an opportunity to play all positions including goalie. Children should not be reprimanded if they do not stay in position, instead, encouraged to learn when it is important to do so.
* Most of the kids will begin keeping track on winning and losing at this level even though it is non result oriented. Focus game goals on soccer skills and basic tactics such as good passing, good talking and spacing. (Be prepared, many of the kids will continue to bunch together and that is OK! This is only the beginning level of understanding of space and positioning)
* Make sure your players are coach guided and not coach instructed. Games are a time for players to test out their newly learned skills or to continue their experimentation. Coaches should refrain from yelling directions from the sideline during games. “Move up, move back, pass, shoot and go wide”, are all instructions that players will figure out in time with some guidance from a good coach. Instead keep sideline comments to positive reinforcement, general directions and reminders like, “Good Job, and remember, you’re playing defense today.” More detailed instructions and discussions should be had on the sideline when players come off the field for substitutions or at half time.

**Skill objectives**

* Both feet dribbling using all 6 sides of foot (inside, outside, top, bottom, toe & heel)
* Changing directions while dribbling and why it is important
* Correct instep (or push) pass with at least the dominant foot
* Correct basic foot traps with at least the dominant foot
* Introduce advanced trapping techniques (e.g. thigh and chest trapping)
* Proper receiving of passes (i.e. body position and technique)
* Introduce basic concepts in shielding
* Reinforce proper striking technique with dominant foot and introduce shooting with non-dominant foot
* Introduce Throw-ins and proper technique

**Tactical Objectives**

* Basic positions, offense, defense, midfield and goalie
* Basic ideas of time and space in soccer (simple concepts)
* Basic concept of attack - spread out; Basic concept of defense - compactness
* Introduce the various restarts of the game (i.e. free kick, goal kick, corner kick and the very important kick off)
* Constructive soccer communication skills on the field
* When to tackle, when to contain
* Individual and team defense, basic concepts (e.g. pressing the attackers)

**SSG Examples**

* *Sponge Bob Soccer Pants* (Divide into two groups, “Sponge Bob’s” and “Plankton”. Plankton sit on the ground while Sponge Bob’s try to dribble the “Crabby Patty” from one side of a grid to the other. The plankton can move any part of their body trying to steal the “Crabby Patty”, but they may not stand up)
* *Pass to Score* (4 v 4 or 5 v 5 game where players try to pass through a small goal to a receiving player on the other side to score)
* *Hit the target* (SSG where the goal is an upside down bucket, or other object more difficult to knock over than a cone, to reinforce more power when striking)
* *Juggling contests, soccer tennis, soccer basketball, etc*…(any game or drill that reinforces controlling the ball through passing, volleying and trapping)

**Conclusions**

Now is the time to very gently bring in soccer concepts to all of the fun that the kids are having. Coaches are challenged to do so in such a way that the kids really don’t know that they are learning these skills, rather, having fun and getting better while doing so. Because of this, coaches at this age level are encouraged to experiment a little on their own. Develop their own coaching style by finding out what works, what does not and adjusting accordingly. You will notice that the competitive spirit will begin to rise in some of your players. Make sure to encourage it without neglecting the children that are playing just to have fun.

**Ages 11 – 12, 5th & 6th Grade (U12’s)**

**General**

Now will be the time that coaches will not only have fun with the children and their team, but will begin to see the beginnings of good soccer being played. The skills and confidence taught at the U8 and U10 levels, reinforced by maturing players and their love for the game will result in matches and practices that resemble true soccer. At this critical stage, it will be important for coaches to identify players who need additional skill support, challenge players with the next level of soccer development and begin introducing team tactics.

**Soccer Maturity**

Maturity levels will continue to vary at this age, but children will begin showing signs of advanced understanding of the game (e.g. combination play, group offense and defense, etc…). Their desire for competition and results continues to increase where they begin to understand that soccer can be successful with a group effort. That being said, most 11 and 12 year olds will still want to want to focus on their individual talents and take pride on showing off. Coaches should encourage these individual capabilities while demonstrating ways on how to incorporate them into a team effort.

**\*\*Male / Female Note\*\*** As is well known, boys and girls will mature at different ages with girls tending to understand team efforts earlier than boys. The differences will be more defined at the next age level, but coaches will begin to see these differences at this level. Therefore, it is recommended that coaches of each gender be aware of the different soccer challenges when coaching girls versus boys and develop coaching styles accordingly.

**Practices**

* Training sessions will now take the form that should continue for the rest of the youth soccer levels (making sure that all activities are age and skill appropriate).
	+ - Warm up
		- Activity #1 with progressions
		- Activity #2 with progressions
		- Scrimmage or free play with limited coaching input
		- Warm down

(Note: the order of the middle three can be altered to keep practices fresh and entertaining)

* Practices should be single themed and reinforce the learned skills (i.e. dribbling, passing, trapping & shooting).
* During these themed sessions coaches should begin incorporating team tactics such as offense, defense, positioning, support and set plays during restarts.
* Constant reminder that soccer is a game of time and space and show them examples as they arise during your session.
* It will be important that practices remain enjoyable to the children as bored players will not focus as well and have a greater chance of losing interest in continuing to the next level.

**Games**

* Matches should be played 8 v 8 and can be result oriented but should not be considered in long term team objectives.
* Soccer goals should be used but smaller than regulation (e.g. 7’ x 21’)
* The importance of positions should be introduced and players will begin gravitating to mastering a position. It is appropriate to play children in their stronger positions, however coaches are still encouraged to move players around as they find their niche on the field.
* Children who enjoy playing goal keeper will let you know that they want to play and can be focused on that position. Make sure to continue to develop their ball control skills as successful goalies will need to be very comfortable with handling the ball with their feet as well as their hands. Also, make sure to give any player the opportunity to play goal if they want. Many players may not yet know if they have a knack for the position.
* As a coach on the sideline you will see many things that still need corrected particularly in the form of tactics. You should still refrain from trying to control your players with your voice. Make those corrections on the sideline. You will also begin to see many successes on the field and it is very important to use positive reinforcement to reward those players involved. That is what you should be yelling from the sidelines.

**Skill Objectives**

* Confident dribbling with both feet including changes in speed and direction
* Confident passing with both feet and lofted passes with dominant foot (proper weight of pass)
* Comfortable striking with both feet and where to shoot on goal (e.g. far post)
* Confident with all types of trapping (e.g. thigh and chest)
* Introductions to skill moves such as step-overs, scissors move, cut backs, Cryuff Turn, etc…
* Playing with awareness to all laws of the game. From off-sides to indirect kicks, substitutions and fouls, begin to teach players the rules that guide them on the field
* Aggressive shielding and how to use it when receiving a pass or going for a free ball

**Tactical Objectives**

* Strong understanding of field positions and their basic functions
* Reinforce the importance of time and space concepts and ways to achieve them on the field
* Building walls on defense and how to deal with them on offense.

**\* Special Note on Heading\*** There are conflicting views on what age is appropriate for children to practice heading. This curriculum will suggest focusing more on heading drills at the next age level. However, you will notice many players begin making more attempts to head the ball during practices and games. Therefore, it is essential for health and safety reasons that coaches are prepared to coach proper heading technique to those players who are willing to head the soccer ball (i.e. body positioned behind the ball, head and eyes fixed on the ball, back slightly arched with arms forward and to the side for balance, hit the ball with the top center part of the forehead, make contact with the ball instead of letting the ball hit the player, mouth closed and follow through with the upper body springing forward)

**SSG Examples**

* *Numbers and / or colors passing grid* (games where players are either assigned numbers, colors or both and passing as directed by a coach e.g. 1 pass to 2 to 3, etc… or Red must pass to Blue to Yellow, etc…)
* *Flip Flop Goals* (4 v 4 game designed to have players quickly switch from attack to defense. Two teams play small sided soccer, when one team scores, they immediately restart the ball and attack the opposite goal (i.e. the one they were just defending))
* *Kris-Cross goals* (game can be played with two, three or even four teams. Four goals, one on each side of the grid. Teams are assigned goals to defend or one or more to attack!)
* *Extra Points* (Play a small sided game and give extra points to players who complete practice objectives such as trapping, wall passes or opposite foot shots, etc…)

**Conclusions**

As your young soccer players begin to look like experienced players and your team begins to resemble a fully fledged soccer team, coaches are encouraged to build on the positive experience. Make sure to let all of your players know how well they are doing and the roles they are playing in the team’s transformation. Meanwhile, a coach will need to work very hard at identifying areas that need improvement. Because of the difference in development at this age level, there will always be areas that require improvement. Use your experiences, references and enthusiasm to work with your kids on all aspects of the game.

**Ages 13 – 14, 7th & 8th Grade (U14’s)**

**General**

U14’s is an age group with multiple challenges and multiple rewards. Children at this age level are going through many changes both on and off the field. Coaches will need to be prepared to reinforce technical skills while teaching their players tactical concepts. For the first time in your player’s youth development, the importance of the group should be a focal point. As the kids begin to confidently rely on each other you will see great combination play on the field. Coaches should reinforce these team oriented principles to help your players deal with individual challenges.

The children will begin playing organized 11 v 11, full field soccer for the first time. There will be many opportunities for players to show off their skills and put together impressive combination plays. This should allow for more enjoyment of the game for the players and as the coach, you should take part in the enjoyment as well.

**Soccer Maturity**

Most players at this age group have been playing soccer for several years. They tend to understand all of the basic concepts and are hungry for more soccer knowledge. The children will be able to understand and implement group efforts on the field. Their problem solving ability will also increase. These two factors when combined together make for young players eager to learn more, play more and take another step in their development.

Coaches must consider that their player’s soccer maturity may be directly affected by their physical and mental maturity. As they continue through puberty, there may be off field development issues that interfere with their on field playing (e.g. attitude problems, peer pressure, physical development, etc…). When a coach suspects any of these issues, they are encouraged to talk to the player and, if necessary, involve the parents.

**Practices**

* Warm ups should be designed to reinforce technical ability where players at this age will still need some practice.
* Practices can have multiple themes, but they should have some commonality that reinforces a specific tactic (e.g. passing and movement off the ball to create space).
* Design fun and challenging games and drills that will be used as activities that reinforce your themes. Activities should progress to a level where score can be kept and there is a winner.
* Time and space concepts should be continually reinforced during practice.
* Goal keepers should now have side sessions designed to hone their skills, reinforce the importance of positioning and develop good game plans for initiating the team attack. However, it is important to include your keepers in team activities and SSGs as the interactions will help develop group play.
* Warm downs are very important after a high intensity practice. These growing children are very susceptible to cramps, pulled muscles, strained ligaments and other repetitive use injuries. Coaches should stay aware of their players complaining of these types of injuries and never force a player to practice or play in a match.

**Games**

* Games will be played 11 v 11 and will be results oriented. Since the children will take pride in their winning records, it is appropriate to incorporate overall records in team goals.
* Full sized, regulation soccer goals should be used
* Players will be played in their strongest positions and coaches should make sure to help players develop understanding of game situations for that position. It is appropriate to let players try other positions as well. Sometimes your better ball controlling strikers make great defenders and strong footed defenders make excellent strikers. Rotating players can also provide positive development for a player who may be struggling with skills or concepts.
* The pre game, half time and post game coach’s talks will have more significance. Now that the team has the ability to fully grasp group tactics, it is important to develop a game plan, review the progress at half time and reflect on what worked and what did not after the game.
* Games should reinforce practices and practices can be designed with themes from recent matches. It is appropriate to reflect on a recent match situation during practice to further your player’s soccer knowledge.
* Now, more than ever, players should be guided and not directed. Errors should occur through acts of commission rather than errors of omission, they should not be “playing scared” they should make every attempt to solve the quickly changing problems that occur on the field.

**Skills to Master**

* Players need to be very comfortable with all basic aspects of ball handling (i.e., dribbling, trapping, passing and shooting) with very good technique.
* Coaches should encourage advanced aspects of ball control such as dribbling while changing multiple directions, trapping with different parts of the body from different angles of approach, passing and movement in directions in relationship to the play, and confident striking with both feet at specific targets in the goal.
* Further encouragement of special moves for ball control so they become second nature rather than experimental.
* Players should be comfortable receiving a pass and turning with the ball, in space and under pressure
* Strong understanding of the laws of the game.
* Age appropriate understanding of tactical concepts of offense and defense and game set play restarts.
* All players should be comfortable heading the ball and be able to do it with proper technique. \* However do not demand a player to head the ball in practices or games\*
* Good introduction into problem solving on the soccer field. Since most players will have a firm grasp of the basics, the laws and some tactics it is time to begin putting it all together and figure out ways to “solve the opposing defense” and score or “anticipate the opposing offense” and shut them down.

**SSG Examples**

* Many 3 v 3, 4 v 4, 5 v 3 etc… games should be played. They should be designed with targets, tactics and problems to allow your players to put together the puzzles of the game.
* *Building Numbers –* Have 5, 6 or 7 players begin passing a ball around a grid. Then add one defender at a time to try and win possession. Watch your players begin to solve the numbers game as the teams become even.
* *Give and Go Goal –* A small sided game where a goal can only be scored after a wall pass (give-and-go) is completed. This can be used for other tactics such as overlaps and pass backs.
* *Heading Races, Relays and Circles –* Any SSG where heading is the theme and points can be given for technique and accuracy. Relay races can be designed or circles can be used to start a 4 v 4 SSG.
* *Master the Angles –* Play a SSG where parts of the field are marked as ‘No Go’ zones. They should be strategically placed to help players become comfortable shooting from wide angles. (Or reverse it to force players to pass the ball from wide and shoot central!)

**Conclusions**

U14 is a very important time in a youth soccer player’s development. It is during these years that the game begins to reflect their comfort level with the ball, understanding of team concepts and the enjoyment of competition. As a coach it is important to guide these developments in a most positive fashion. This will allow the player and the team to evolve into an organization that promotes growth and respect for the game of soccer.

As challenges arise, a coach should remain focused and calm. Your players need to follow your examples of hard work and overall enjoyment of playing soccer. Through these efforts, you will be able to teach the game, reinforce all aspects of soccer skills and create a positive experience for all of your players.

**\*Team Meeting Note\*** Although team meetings and parent meetings are encouraged at all levels of play, it becomes exceptionally important beginning at this age level. This will allow you, as a coach, to communicate to players and parents important items, such as dates, expectations, philosophies and other team details. Allowing players and parents to communicate with you early in the season will help prevent problems as the season progresses. (See Appendix ‘C’ The Team Meeting).

**Ages 15 – 16, 9th & 10th Grade (U16’s)**

**General**

It’s time for Soccer!! As a coach of the U16 level you should be rewarded with players who love the game, have a decent understanding of basic tactics, possess comfortable ball skills and have a drive for competition. Your player’s will have a thirst for soccer knowledge, and as a coach, you need to be ready to provide them with all they are willing to handle. However, as a coach, you will be presented with the challenge of trying to develop a team that consists of young teenagers of varying skills, attitudes and knowledge. Through an open minded approach to practices, games and seasons, you should be able to have the players develop into a cohesive unit that is able to enjoy a competitive level of soccer.

**Soccer Maturity**

Children at this age have an increased self-awareness. Because of this, the level of self-criticism tends to increase. On the soccer field this can lead to the ability to learn and develop quickly. This can also lead to increased and sometimes exaggerated emotions both on and off the field. Coaches should be tolerant of any frustrations while providing an appropriate degree of enjoyment. Players will have a mental maturity that enables them to work on group concepts. Coaches should use this to their advantage and work in small groups and full sides to reinforce team tactics, while introducing more advanced concepts.

**Practices**

* Practices should be full of game like situations to work on developing team concepts.
* Coaches should reinforce daily themes during practice using repetition to strengthen player’s understanding and development.
* It is important to further develop player’s vision of the field and their recognition of situational concepts (e.g., odd man attacking and defending, overloading one side of the field, support play for offense and defense, etc…)
* Coaches should be introducing advanced game plans for restarts as well, such as more complex runs during a corner kicks and direct kicks, designed plays for throw-ins and designed attacks from goal kicks.
* At this age level it is now appropriate to have in-depth discussions and sessions on soccer theory. Either using white boards or cones on a field, question and answer sessions will continue to challenge the player’s understanding of the game. However, these sessions should be short and to the point, and then let your players demonstrate their understanding of the concept on the field. Remember that the game is the best teacher!

**Games**

* The level of competition will be noticeably different beginning at the U16 level. Therefore, seasonal records and post season play can be considered in team goals. However, it is important that, as in any age level, a win at all cost attitudes will hurt players and teams more than it will help.
* Most players will have settled into their strongest positions. Coaches must work with players to continue their development and understanding of advanced concepts pertaining to that position.
* Focus on the importance of adjustments at half-time. Perhaps the initial game plan isn’t quite working, or an injury has changed your preferred positions or the other team is exploiting a weakness. Make sure to help your players understand what the changes are and how they should attempt to make the adjustments.
* A review of game outcomes both positive and negative should take place at the very next practice session. This will allow your players to incorporate their understanding into their training.

**Skills to Master (Mostly Tactical Objectives)**

* Small group ideas for both offense and defense and the understanding of how the small group affects the play of the large team group
* Understanding the three lines of the team, their responsibilities and how they are incorporated into the team as a whole
* “Seeing the field”. The ability to watch the game develop during both attack and defense. It is important that players can do this when they have the ball and also when the play is away from them
* The ability to perform set plays during restarts as designed by the coach
* If any of your players have not demonstrated proficiency in any of the basic skills (e.g., dribbling, trapping, passing and shooting) you can work with them for continued improvement. However, you should strongly encourage the player to work very hard on their own to improve their weaknesses

**SSG Examples**

* *Pressure Passing –* A SSG (2 v2, 3 v 3, 3 v 4, etc…) where you can use players within the grid to create pressure situations. A progression on the SSG is to use players outside of the grid to act as support.
* *Chip or Cross to Score –* Design a grid and play 4 v 4 or greater. Teams score a point when a player chips or crosses successfully to a teammate. (Boundaries set by the coach for age appropriate distance).
* *One on One Off –* Play 4 v 3 with a 4th player outside the grid. The 4 player team plays possession. 10 consecutive passes score a point. If the 3 player defense wins the ball, their 4th player joins the grid and the player responsible for the loss of possession leaves the grid.
* *One touch-Two touch –* Play any number of players and any number of teams. Play possession where the passing must alternate as one touch, two touch, one touch and so on. This can be played with and without pressure and can progress with goals.

**Conclusions**

Coaching at this age group can be very challenging. Some of these young teenagers believe they already “know it all” and may have a counterproductive attitude. Interestingly, if a coach has only a few years experience and has accepted the challenge of coaching the U16 level, it is possible that some players may have more knowledge than the coach. Use this unique opportunity to learn together. Even with experienced coaches, the player and coach relationship can be strengthened by constantly talking about the game. During practice sessions, after a match or even a review of “last week’s” UEFA Champion’s League game, players and coaches can develop good tactical concepts that the team can employ on the field from discussing soccer with each other.

Use these times to concentrate on developing your players for their future. Young soccer stars will arise from this age group showing great skills, strong understanding of the game and a passion for soccer that will propel them into the next level and beyond.

**Ages 17+, 11th Grade & Up (U18’s)**

**General**

The blueprint for players at this age is almost complete. The foundations of who they will be as an adult soccer player have been set through years of individual and team development. Coaches of this age group are challenged with helping players fine tune their blueprint, teach advanced tactics and increase their physical ability which is often the last piece to the developmental puzzle as these players move forward in their soccer career.

 Coaches will need to concentrate on three main areas: technical proficiency and precision, game insight and the individual player responsibility to constantly improve on his or her game. These young adults will have the ability to concentrate on complex tactical and technical exercises, take more responsibility for their actions during match play and should take a more involved approach to designing training objectives.

**Soccer Maturity**

As these children finish high school, most will have an increased self awareness and a greater ability to concentrate. They will also have more refined communication skills and the increased ability to deal with stress. Coaches should not be afraid to introduce any soccer concepts taught at any level. These players may not yet be able to execute certain advanced tactics, but their mental awareness should allow them to begin to absorb the information. That way, they can work on those ideas during training sessions and matches.

**Practices**

* Training sessions should be filled with complex games and drills that are designed to be challenging both physically and mentally, while emphasizing the principles of the game.
* All sessions should be designed with player accountability in mind. Not only individual players, but specific lines (i.e. mid-fielders, or defenders) can be held accountable for reactions to game like situations.
* Coaches should work with their players in advanced problem solving and tactical development.
* Allow players to contribute ideas on the themes for practices in between matches. A coach will be able to identify their player’s perspectives and have the opportunity to further develop the individuals and the team.
* As with all ages, there will need to be a time of uninterrupted playing time (the scrimmage) to allow players game like situations to practice recently discussed themes.

**Games**

* Most individuals at this age level will be very comfortable with full side, full field games that they will be playing for the remainder of their soccer career.
* The players will be developing their full side 11 v 11 tactical skills. They should be concentrating on improving the small group (line) play and how it relates to the larger team.
* An important factor for coaches at this level is game management. A successful coach has been developing game management skills through the years while the children have been developing their technical skills. Game management deals with different themes that occur during and at different times of the game. They may included topics like:
	+ - The level of pressure play by both teams and how each team is reacting to that level of pressure
		- The style of play of the opponent and how your team is (or is not) making appropriate adjustments
		- Is there domination by one team over the other and what are the main causes
		- Is fatigue at the end of the half or the end of the game a factor for either team
* A coach must continue to evaluate whether their players are incorporating the previous training sessions into the match. Players should be encouraged to make adjustments on their own during a game, but be reminded of any game plans that were worked on at practice.

**Skills to Master**

* Advanced tactical understanding of offensive and defensive concepts and how they relate to both individual and group play.
* Ability to make adjustments, including short term during the flow of the game, medium term throughout the entire game and long term for an entire season.
* The ability to identify any shortcomings of technical ability that may have been overlooked in earlier development. Players must have the desire to work hard at improving any technical skills.

**SSG examples**

* Many previously discussed SSGs can be played at this level by increasing the difficulty. This can be done by making playing area(s) smaller, limiting touches on the ball or by just adding more restrictions to reinforce the themes of the current practice.
* *Improving quick decisions and passing –* In a 10 x 10 or 20 x 20 grid, playing a 3 v 1 or 4 v 2, the defenders try to tag (not tackle) a player with possession of the ball. The group of 3 (or 4) tries to maintain possession first with one ball, then increase the difficulty with two balls. Players will be forced to make timely and effective decisions.
* *3 v 1 Swap Over –* a 20 x 20 grid is divided into two equal halves. Each half contains four players, each assigned a number 1 through 4 and playing possession. A coach calls out a number and the associated player immediately goes over to the other grid and plays 3 v 1. First team to steal the ball is awarded a point.

**Conclusions**

At this point, players and coaches can enjoy growing together. Players should feel comfortable discussing all aspects of the game with their coach. Coaches should feel comfortable challenging their players with advanced tactics. The true relationship will flourish as they challenge and encourage each other at this advanced level.

**\*Note on Coaching Coaches\***

Coaches at higher levels often have a great deal of experience and usually hold a higher level of state or national certifications. They are strongly encouraged to give back to the club. Take the opportunity to coach at a very young level, take on several assistants, or be an assistant coach yourself. Perhaps hold a technical training session for players and or coaches to share your experience and tactical expertise. Some of the best coaching development tools for inexperienced coaches are other familiar friends that have gone through a similar program.

**Appendix A: Skill Development Progression**

These are skill **OBJECTIVES** presented as a summary. They are only suggestions for minimum goals at each age level. The items listed are not mandatory teachings, merely guidelines for coaches to review and consider for their players at each progression. Coaches should use their own ideas, methods and imagination on ways to share these objectives with our soccer players.

***Under 8***

* Enjoyment of the Game
* Confidence with the ball
* Confidence receiving the ball
* Introduction to Dribbling
* Introducing to striking
* Introduction to soccer vocabulary (offense, defense, clear, goal, etc.)

***Under 10***

* Introduction to juggling the soccer ball
* Introduction to dribbling with both feet and the use of six sides of the foot
* Introduction to changing direction while dribbling (e.g. pull back, and “L” move)
* Introduction to shielding the ball
* Introduction to tackling and containment (Defense)
* Basic Goalie concepts
* Proper push passing
* Basic trapping
* Concepts of shooting and proper strike of the ball
* Introduce positioning on the field and roles of positions
* Introduction to movement off the ball
* Understanding the field markings
* Explanation of various restarts to the game (e.g. goal kick, throw-ins, etc…)

***Under 12***

* Capable dribbling and passing with both feet, including aerial passing with dominant foot
* Confident juggling to develop ball control skills
* Confident striking and long passing with both feet and the understanding of power and accuracy
* Swerving or bending kicks
* Shielding while dribbling and preparing to receive / obtain the ball
* Introduction to all traps and the importance of the first touch (the importance of lateral 1st touch)
* Introduction of skill moves with repetition of favorite one (e.g. cut back or step-over)
* Individual defensive techniques
* Positioning tactics (formations) and understanding when it is OK to be out of position (i.e. movement off the ball)
* Offensive and defensive tactics on game restarts
* Detailed introductions to all laws of the game
* Sportsmanship

**Skill Development Progression (cont’)**

***Under 14***

* Confident dribbling with both feet and changing different directions and speed
* Capable passing with proper weight for distance and accuracy
* Passing principles of passing to feet vs. passing to space and using passes to switch fields
* Shielding during in-game situations (e.g. approaching 50/50 balls, engaging contact and receiving passes under pressure
* Effective tackling (including when slide tackles are appropriate)
* Advanced ball control using all parts of the body and using the trap to correctly prepare for the next move with the ball
* Advanced Goalie technique
* Fluid positional play including supporting play and coordinated attacking and defending
* Confidence in all laws of the game
* Increased tactical restarts (walls, designed runs and checking to/away from players, etc…)
* Respect for referees

***Under 16***

* Strong understanding of the tactics of Dribbling – when to dribble vs. when to pass
* Creative passes and combination play
* Long passes and effective traps to develop tactical advantages (either numbers or position on the field)
* Heading for proper location (e.g. defensive heading for clearance, offensive heading for pass or on goal)
* Continued preparedness for the physical nature of the game (stronger shielding on offense and more aggressive marking on defense)
* Advanced striking principles (placement, anticipate goalie position, develop movement on the shot including curves)
* Advanced tactical understanding (e.g. multiple formations based on tactical concepts for the match)
	+ Movement into space
	+ Team communication
	+ Physical demands of game
	+ Team evaluation (strengths, weaknesses and objectives)
	+ Behavioral control
	+ Fouls

***17+***

* Ability to change tactics during the flow of the game
* Act and React to the opponent’s changes during matches
* Long passes and effective traps to develop tactical advantages (either numbers or position on the field)
* Good technique under pressure and fatigue
* Advanced finishing principles in the offensive third
* Continue to develop strength and endurance abilities to perform at the speed of play, based on the level of competition (i.e. recreation adult league vs. premier teams or collegiate levels
* Clock management

**Note**

These skills will develop in players at different rates. It is appropriate to let advanced players seek challenging skills mentioned in higher age groups. It is also beneficial for less skilled individuals to revisit the objectives listed in younger groups. These guidelines should be considered *at minimum objectives* and should be adjusted accordingly based on players, teams and the overall enjoyment of the game.

**Appendix B**

**The importance of Stretching, Static and Dynamic**

As the development of youth soccer coaching techniques has progressed through the years, so has the understanding of stretching. This includes warming up before activities and warming down when finished. There are two notable developments to consider. First, the understanding that warm up and stretching requirements for children vary greatly with age. Younger children require little to no stretching before or after their activities. However as they age, warm ups, stretching and warm downs become critical for their physical fitness. Particularly as children enter different stages of growth spurts, their bodies are subjective to repetitive use injuries. Proper warm up, stretching and warm downs can help prevent these types of injuries. Coaches, particularly at the age groups of 12-14, are strongly encouraged to learn more about repetitive use injuries and how to help avoid them for their players.

The second development, not only in youth soccer, but in all athletics, is the concept of static versus dynamic stretching. Static stretching is when a player stands still while stretching a muscle or a group of muscles. This has been the typical style of stretching for many years in youth sports. However, research has shown that this type of stretching, particularly without proper warm up, can do more damage than good. Dynamic stretching is when a specifically designed activity stretches a group of muscles. For example, light jogging with knees pushed high will help stretch quadriceps and hamstrings; while skipping side to side will help stretch the lateral leg muscles and calves. Adding a half twist to the skip will help loosen the torso.

The difficulty with dynamic stretching for youth sports is that many children do not perform the activity properly, causing the stretch to be less effective. Therefore, coaches should monitor the dynamic stretches and provide encouragement. Also, a mixture of dynamic and static stretches is appropriate with static being more important after the activity.

**Examples of Basic Dynamic Stretches**

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**Exercise Description:** Walking Quad Stretch
**Classification:** Flexibility
**Instructions:**
1. Start by lifting your right leg and grabbing it with your hand and pull it to your butt in a controlled manner.
2. Hold the stretch for a couple of seconds, release your foot and return to the ground. Then take a step and repeat with the opposite leg.
3. Continue this alternating motion for the desired repetitions.



**Exercise Description:** Leg Cradle
**Classification:** Flexibility
**Instructions:**
1. Start by lifting your right leg and grabbing your foot and knee with your hands.
2. Pull them up towards the ceiling until a comfortable stretch is felt and simultaneously stand up on the ball of your opposite foot.
3. Return to the starting position, take a step and repeat with the other leg.
4. Continue this alternating motion until the desired repetitions



**Exercise Description:** Lateral Leg Swings
**Classification:** Dynamic Warm-up
**Instructions:**
1. Start by holding onto a secure object and raise your outside leg out to the side.
2. In a smooth and continuous motion swing your leg back and forth across the front of your body.
3. Swing through your full range of motion but keep your upper body stable throughout the movement.
4. Repeat for the recommended repetitions and then flip sides and repeat with the other leg



**Exercise Description:**
Large Arm Circles
**Classification:**
Flexibility
**Instructions:**
1. Stand straight with your arms out to your sides.
2. Start swinging your arms in a large circles going forward and then back.
3. Repeat for the recommended time and then repeat in the other direction

<Courtesy of [www.Stretchingworld.com](http://www.stretchingworld.com) >

**Appendix C**

**The Team Meeting**

It is important to communicate vital information to your team. In youth soccer, that means the parents as well. Effective communication prior to the season’s start will help ensure a smooth and successful season. Communication during the season will be greatly appreciated by your team’s players and parents. These meetings can be held before a practice at the field or in a community room such as the library or school.

Below are **examples** of preseason team meeting agendas and should be adjusted for the appropriate age level:

**For Parents**

* Prepare some type of team list with names and contact information. Have them sign in for accountability of the information.
* Introduce yourself and any coaching staff the team has. It is appropriate to share your coaching experience, training and or coaching certifications or licenses with your parents.
* Describe your coaching philosophy. Provide detailed information on how you plan to handle important issues like: balancing playing time, expectations from players during training sessions, how you determine positions, how you plan to develop player skills and of course, behavior and player discipline.
* Goals and objectives for the season. Winning? Developing? Having fun? Make sure parents are aware what you think is a successful season.
* It is very important to provide the code of conduct for players, parents and yourself. Make sure parents know that they must not yell instructions to players from the touch line or criticize players or officials. The CDYSL has the code of conduct already established and should be given to the parents and enforced by coaches.
* Establish communication details such as emails, cell phones etc… Inform the parents of how you expect communication to happen throughout the season and make sure you are aware of any parent who has a preferred method of communication.
* Outline season details**:** Practices and Games: days, times, organization. Uniforms and required equipment. Tournament dates and information. Any other club or league information.
* A questions and answer session is imperative. Make sure the parents feel they have the opportunity to raise any questions or concerns regarding any aspect of the season.
* Make sure to thank everyone for their time.

**For Players**

* Share a team roster with the players to determine if any introductions are necessary
* Introduce yourself and any coaching staff the team has. It is appropriate to share your coaching experience, training and or coaching certifications or licenses with your players. It may help in developing a respectful coach / player relationship.
* Describe your coaching philosophy. Provide detailed information on how you plan to handle important issues like: balancing playing time, expectations from players during training sessions, how you determine positions, how you plan to develop player skills and of course, behavior and player discipline. <<Notice that this is exactly the same as the parent meeting. It is important that your players and their parents are on the same exact page regarding these topics>>
* Goals and objectives for the season. Discuss different ideas that can be outlined for goals and objectives. Team objectives should be determined by the team and not solely the coach(es).
* It is very important to provide the code of conduct for players, parents and yourself. Make sure parents know that they must not yell instructions to players from the touch line or criticize players or officials. The CDYSL has the code of conduct already established and should be given to the parents and enforced by coaches. <Same as parents for the same reason as above>>
* Discuss your expectations with your players for them as individuals as well as a team (e.g. skills development, team development, position proficiency, etc...) It is important to start off with a similar understanding of what the group will be working on during the season.
* Outline season details**:** Practices and Games: days, times, organization. Uniforms and required equipment. Tournament dates and information.
* Try to get your players excited for the upcoming season and make sure they are ready for some fun!