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Explanation of the age appropriate priorities – U11

The purpose of the age appropriate priorities is to help trainers and coaches understand the characteristics of this specific age group. To properly prepare yourself for a session you need to have an idea what the players are capable of, mostly technically and tactically, and what areas of the game they need to focus on to develop as soccer players at this age.

The guidelines should also help the trainers and coaches' work out seasonal goals to ensure there is a progression from one week to the next and that the content covered fits the needs of the players that our coaches are working with. We also want to make sure that our players in our WSA programs are given the opportunity to develop at the right pace. Although meant well, the chances are that we force the adult version of the game on young players to quickly which means our players are not given the opportunity to learn to play the game. Our players need to be challenged, but when the content in practice is beyond what they are mentally capable of understanding there is a chance that these players grow up playing the game without substance or understanding of the game.

It takes a long time for players to get used to the basic concepts of the game, so it is not only important that we are patient, but also that we don't force an advanced topic on a player to quickly. We also want to avoid too much emphasis on the physical abilities of young players. Some of the better and more talented players are most likely physically not as gifted as their peers who might be a lot bigger and faster than them.

As coaches we must look at player development through 'bi-focal vision'. We must understand the present needs of the age group while, at the same time, retain the long term vision of the ideal end product. Without this bi-focal vision, it would be hard to design a road map for a developmentally appropriate program that allows players to reach their full potential.

It is good to remember that our number 1 priority within our programs is to make sure our players are given the opportunity to grow and foster a love for the game. When athletes enjoy a sport they are more likely to stick with it for the years to come. This counts for all players no matter their age, ability or gender. Even at an established club like Barcelona they know that if the children in their programs do not enjoy the work done in practice, they will not improve. We of course want to make sure that the players playing in our programs stay involved with the WSA for years to come.

The information shared with all coaches is not only based on observations of the different WSA programs, but we also used information provided by US Soccer, US Youth Soccer, the NSCAA and many other sources to determine these age appropriate priorities.

For more in depth information on the addressed topics we do have the WSA curriculum available on our website as well.

"At a young age, winning is not the most important thing. The important thing is to develop creative and skilled players with good confidence."
Arsene Wenger – Head Coach Arsenal



At U11 our players should have been introduced to the first and basic principles of play. This has been practiced in individual and small group settings (1v1; 2v1; 2v2). As the players mature both physically and mentally they can be introduced to more complex situations. Training activities can be made more complex by adding additional players. However, be careful adding to many players to quickly as we have to make sure our players are challenged but can also oversee the situations they are put in. When increasing the numbers, the amount of lines of interaction will increase as well. More players simply means more players to pass a ball to or more players to defend. This automatically increases the complexity of the situation for young players.

It is important to note that the coaches involved with teams in this age group continue to observe and analyze their teams to determine the specific needs of the group they work with. We are working with in a player centered model focused on the needs of our players. The information provided will guide coaches towards a better understanding of what is appropriate for players in this specific age group.

1 – Reinforce the first 2 principles of defense – 1st and 2nd defender

As we progress we have to make sure that our players understand their roles in defense as the 1st and 2nd defender. The 1st defender has to put pressure on the ball and slow down the attack of the opposing team. The priority is to make play predictable, so the covering defender can determine where and when to support the 1st defender. The first defender will not run straight at the player with ball, but in an angle to force the player on the ball to one side. It is important to explain the difference between putting pressure on the player with the ball and trying to contain them.

The 2nd defender will react to the curved run of the first defender and provide cover for this player by reading the run of the first defender and positioning him or herself on a good angle. Players will be able to make play predictable, read the ball and in the end intercept the ball.

2 – Combination play – Overlap, give and go or take over

After the first 2 years in travel players should have gained a good understanding of the role of the 1st and 2nd attacker. The player on the ball determines if and when the ball will be played, where the supporting players decides in what area of the field he or she wants to receive the ball. The movement of the 2nd attacker is meant to unbalance the defenders.

The 3 most common types are wall passes (give and go), takeovers and overlaps. Combination play allows for the attacking team to create numbers up, leading to mismatches, unmarked players and a more effective attacking scheme. When your players still struggle to make the right decision on the ball, as the 1st attacker, they are most likely not ready for these types of play!

The different types of combination play will put more pressure on the 1st attacker as the execution of the pass will determine whether or not the outcome is positive. The support run of the 2nd attacker also need to be timed well, in the right area of the field and at the right distance of the player on the ball as well.

For a more in-depth explanation on the 3 types of combination play please check the WSA curriculum shared with the coaches in the coaches' handbook.

3 – Possession play with a purpose – reload the attack

When players have gained a decent understanding of the first couple of principles of attack (penetration; support and width) we can put even more emphasis on keeping the ball in possession. By teaching our players the principles of play they will be able to find answers to the problems they



encounter while moving the ball around. The end goal is not to maintain possession, but keeping possession is a means to create opportunities to score goals.

Players will have to be comfortable on the ball and confident in their own ball skills. The amount of time and space a player has, dictates how technical they need to be. The more time and space you've got, the lower the requirement on technique. This means that the lower the level of your team is competing at, the lower the technical requirement on your players. Players need to be trained to create more time and space for themselves and their teammates (shape).

A couple of characteristics of possession soccer are:

- a. When our team has possession, players spread out and make the field as big as possible (width).
- b. Players play the way they face
- c. The ball will be played out of pressure
- d. When a ball is played out of pressure the team will normally switch the point of attack
- e. Players will get open for each other in the right angle (2nd attacker)
- f. The goalkeeper is used during the build up
- g. Goal kicks and punts are played short.

4 - Build up from the back – Use the goalkeeper during the buildup phase of an attack

1 of the characteristics of possession soccer is the use of the goalkeeper during the buildup of an attack. The goal is to minimize the amount of punts up the field and also to play the goal kicks short to the defenders supporting the goalkeeper.

Players also need to be taught to trust the goalkeeper, pass the ball back (play the way you face/reload the attack) and let the goalkeeper switch the point of attack.

We do understand that we are still working with young players who will guaranteed make some mistakes as we teach our players how to build up from the back. Our players need to know that we do support them and that we take these mistakes for granted.

Players have been brought up gaining an understanding of the first few principles of play. Given the pressure applied players will be able to problem solve and work out a solution the majority of the time to play their way out of pressure. We have to start with simple exercises in practice starting at the goalkeeper focused on getting open for the player with ball. As time progresses players will recognize situations on the field and find a way to play the ball out of trouble in to an open area of the field.

When first introduced to this concept the play at times will be very robotic and the players will take instructions from the trainer during practice very literal. As time progresses players will be able to recognize the game situations they are in and adjust accordingly.



The importance of the technical development for U11/U12 travel soccer players

From U9-U12 the technical development of our travel players is the number 1 priority. To play a positive style of soccer, with a focus on keeping possession to build up an attack, players on our teams need to not only understand the basic principles of play, but also have a solid technical foundation. At U11/U12 we will build on the skills taught and practiced in the first 2 years of travel soccer. The outlined technical priorities build on what has been addressed at U9 and U10.

- I. Dribbling to beat a defender – feints. We need to continue to encourage players to take on opponents the moment the opportunity comes around. Given the training curriculum for our players at U9 and U10 all players should be able to recognize when it is a good moment to attack their opposing defender. Players need not only to be confident, but also capable of using both feet and different moves (body fake, scissors or step over) to get around their opponents. Creative and skillful players can make a difference in the years to come when the teams we face are more organized.
- II. Passing and receiving using both feet. To successfully play a possession orientated style of soccer players need to be able to pass and receive a ball under pressure of an opponent or opponents. Not only do we need to be able to play the ball back and forth using the right technique, but players should learn and practice these skills while moving. The weight of the passes will increase, which will affect the distance covered by these passes.
- III. Receiving the ball on the first touch. The quality of the first touch determines the speed of play during the build of an attack. To maintain possession it is important that players can receive the ball using both feet without it bouncing away or getting stuck under the player’s body. To continue forwards during the buildup players need to be able to get open and receive the ball sideways on. After a good first touch players can continue play in the direction of the opponents’ goal.
- IV. Receiving bouncing balls – ball through the air. Although the ball will spend the majority of the time on the ground, the players will get in situations where they need to control the ball out of the air. Reception can occur with any part of the body, but the chest and foot are the most common with the thigh used quite often as well.
- V. Shooting technique. Not only do we need to teach the players the right technique, but we also have to make sure our players can shoot with power and accuracy. The placement of the non-kicking foot and the surface used of the foot to hit the ball determine how the ball will make its way to the goal. Players need to be able to use the right technique given the angle and the distance to the goal.
- VI. Heading. Players need to be made familiar with the technique to head the ball away in defense or to head a ball on goal in offense. The most important item to discuss when introducing this skill, is to make sure players hit the ball with their forehead, not on top of their head. Players should also be taught how to direct the ball in the direction they want it to go.
- VII. Crossing. Players will end up in more complex situations utilizing the width and length of the field. When players end up near the sideline in the attacking third they should be able to cross the ball in to their teammates in front of the goal. A well aimed cross over the ground or through the air can create great scoring opportunities for your team. Players need to know how to cross the ball in (placement of non-kicking foot, turning your hips).
- VIII. Juggling. It takes time to master this skill and it takes a long time to juggle the ball successfully. Players needs to start juggling at a very young age to become more comfortable on the ball. Juggling develops your foot-eye coordination and it can help you improve your first touch.



Possession soccer – The WSA style of play

During every meeting, presentation or WSA ran clinic we have shared with our coaches that we look to play possession soccer and aim to have our teams play out of the back. For those involved with soccer these phrases are easy to understand. When watching a team play it is very easy for these coaches to figure out if these teams emphasize possession soccer or not. However, for many especially inexperienced coaches; players and parents it would help if we explain these phrases to make everybody understand what we aim to achieve with our soccer teams when they start playing under the flag of the Westfield SA.

The goal of this brief document is to help parent coaches better understand what type of soccer we envision all teams to play. It is necessary to stress three major points that we all need to consider and be aware of as we help our players and teams focus on possession based soccer.

1. I know I'm repeating a message that has been shared with all of you on more than one occasion, but it is an important message that we as a club will continue to share with the public. We of course would like to win our games, but the emphasis should be placed on the process. To teach young players how to play possession based soccer we will definitely need to take our time to do it right. It is a bumpy road that we will take our teams on. Sometimes given the opposition you play it will seem that your team has already figured it out. I, however, can guarantee you that we will continue to face teams focusing on the physical strengths of their players and/or teams who will put your team under immediate pressure when you try to play out of the back. This will most certainly lead to mistakes on our end. It will cost us goals and potentially even some games. These sacrifices definitely outweigh the short term losses. **Be patient** and support your players when they make a mistake!

2. When we train our teams to play possession soccer we will have to overemphasize the execution so much that it will look a bit robotic in the beginning years. This is definitely necessary so players start to understand and recognize how they can play out of the back, into the middle third of the field. When players are able to continuously put themselves in the right position to receive a ball when the goal player has the ball; they are capable of utilizing the full width every time and are comfortable to play a ball back even when under pressure, we know we are on the right track. In the beginning years this might make it a bit easier for the teams driven to win games to defend high up the field, but eventually our players will grow in confidence and skill to be able to play a possession based style even under pressure of an opponent.

3. We emphasize a possession based style of soccer to give our players the opportunity to fully develop in to good soccer players. When our players grow as soccer players, develop a good understanding of the game and have gained the skills necessary to play this style of soccer we will all be able to recognize the benefits of this long term plan/vision. Please understand that maintaining possession is not the end goal. We are maintaining possession to build up an attack; to go forwards and score goals. Another advantage of this style is also that our opponents will not have the ball, are forced to chase the ball and without the ball in possession, they are unable to score. In the end, possession is kept to outplay our opponents, to create opportunities to score goals and to eventually win games. This is, however, a process that takes time and when rushed could lead to players learning bad habits (aka kicking balls forwards/away; a north-south approach; players unable to recognize where the space is; etc.).



On the next page I have outlined the 10 principles of possession soccer developed by US Youth Soccer and used nationwide by our ODP programs (state, regional and national ODP).

To be successful in our goal/mission to play possession soccer; building out of the back; utilize our goal player; spreading the opponent across the field and eventually creating goal scoring opportunities in the attacking 3rd, our players need to be introduced to these 10 principles outlined below. Please understand that this, as stated before, is a long term process and can't be rushed. Pushing concepts on players who are physically, mentally, technically and/or tactically not ready for these concepts will only lead to disappointment.

The age appropriate priorities will be shared with you and they include the principles outlined in this document, but they are not all introduced at the same time. When our U9's start playing travel soccer it is of the utmost importance that players are made familiar with the concepts of width/depth in order for them to be successful.

When we work to provide our players with support of the ball (U9/U10) it is also important to include the goal player. This to ensure players are comfortable and capable to include our goal player in possession of the ball. By the time our players are capable of doing this, through experience – trial and error, a heavier emphasis can be placed on the build up from the back (U11/U12). Both these examples make clear that there is a time and place to introduce all these concepts to our players.

The 10 principles of possession soccer

1. The team shape

To create enough space to play in possession of the ball our teams need to fully utilize the playing field they are playing on. In possession of the ball we need to spread across the width and stretch the field in the length to ensure enough space is created to play. It is easy to see that when our players/teams bunch up it will be very hard to outplay our opponents. This is a very important concept that players need to understand and needs to be introduced and reinforced from U9 on. Our players on the wings (whether it be our backs/midfielder or forwards) need to provide us with width. The length of the field can be utilized by pushing our highest forward up and by utilizing our goal player in possession of the ball.

2. Make sure to receive the ball with your body open to the field

Players open their body to the field and have as much of the field as possible within their line of vision. Players constantly need to look around to scan the field to find out where their team mates and opponents are. Players ahead of the ball want to ensure they peel off their opponent so they can receive the ball facing up the field. It is impossible to continue play up the field if our players receive the ball with a player on their back. Another concept players need to be introduced to at a young age as this is a skill they need to master as they get older.

3. Support off the ball in every area of the field

Players on the back line drop off to a safe distance from opponents and offer support underneath the ball. Although we would like to go forwards when possible, to make the field bigger and give our team the opportunity to play a ball out of pressure it helps when your backline makes the playing field bigger. This is in line with the first two principles of possession soccer.



4. Goal players rarely punt the ball or kick a goal kick up the field

Although there will not be a heavy focus on the build up from the back at U9/U10, since we need to focus on a few more basic concepts as per the age appropriate priorities, players do need to get in the habit of playing these balls short. At U9 and U10, when players are capable of opening passing lanes/peeling off an opponent facing the field, the goal player should be encouraged to play the ball short. It is the difference between maintaining possession of the ball and starting an attack or a 50/50 somewhere a little bit further up the field.

When our goal player blocks a shot or catches a cross, our teams should recognize this as a cue to spread out and provide our goal player with options around the ball.

5. Throw-ins can be used to maintain possession (and eventually switch the field).

When players are first introduced to the concept of throw-ins in many instances mistakes are made and possession is given up. This leads to two common errors to deal with this frustration. Under the pressure of parents who continue to view a throw-in as a soccer specific skill, coaches spend too much time on the actual throw-in in practice. The throw is not a soccer specific skill and is a concept players will master as they get older. To avoid loss of possession 99% of the throw-ins of younger players are thrown along the line to ensure teams do not loose possession (although possession is lost any way by doing it this way).

It is therefore very important that the player on the ball (1st attacker) is given the opportunity to throw the ball to an open player (supporting player – 2nd attacker). Most of the time this player will be underneath the ball. As per point 3. Eventually this can lead to a switch of possession to an area of the field left open by the opponent.

The first 5 concepts described are basic and need to be introduced to players at a very young age. This to ensure players will be able to play possession soccer as described in this document.

6. Bending runs

Whenever you make a forward run on the flanks, bend your run towards the outside to create width and to separate yourself from you opponent. Whenever you make a forward run in the middle of the field, bend your run to give the passer enough time to judge the pass, to open up a passing lane for a through ball and to avoid running into offside.

7. Diagonal passes

Most passes are diagonal passes into players who are open to the field or with a sideways stance. Diagonal passes are better than vertical passes. Diagonal passes allow the receiver to open up his/her body (sideways on) and receive the pass facing up the field. A diagonal pass both accomplished penetration and switching the point of attack all in one pass. A vertical pass is most likely played in to a player facing his/her own goal which limits the playing opportunities. With a player on your back it is very hard to receive a vertical pass.

8. Every back pass is followed by a switch



When a player plays a ball back he/she normally does this as they see no opportunity to play the ball forwards. This means there is pressure on the ball which stops us from playing a ball forwards in that part of the field. For this reason, it is usually best to switch the ball to another area of the field. The switch is normally made through a lateral or diagonal pass to an area of the field where are our players are open and able to go forwards.

When our players are able to play a longer, more accurate pass to cover bigger distances it will be a lot easier to switch the point of attack. At U9 (and potentially U10) our players will struggle to connect passes over longer distances and switching the point of attack will take a lot longer.

9. Speed of play

The ball doesn't stay in one area too long. After two or three passes within one area, the ball will be switched to another part of the field. This eventually requires a lot of one and two touch play. This results in a high tempo of possession and makes it difficult for the opponent to keep up with the play. There are definitely moments when dribbling is appropriate (1 on 1 in the attacking 3rd for example), but it is very important to keep the ball moving.

SIDE NOTE: *At U8, U9 and U10 players should be encouraged to take on players in the attacking 3rd. We need players with that kind of creativity. Those players that can make a difference through creative 1 vs 1 play are rare, but are worth developing. They can definitely make a difference on a team as they get older. At U9 and U10 our players need to be given the opportunity to dribble the ball and I'm certain some players will drive our coaches crazy. We just need to teach our players, eventually, when it is the right moment to take on an opponent.*

Too many players are taught to pass a ball in moments that a 1 vs 1 on. Just remember, it is easier to teach a dribbler how, when and why to pass the ball as they get older; than to teach a player who always passes the ball how, when and why to take on a player when the opportunity arises.

10. Play the ball out of pressure

When a team wins the ball, they immediately play the ball into another area of the field. By another area, we mean either a back pass to relieve pressure, or a switch or a counter attack. Playing the ball into another area of the field immediately after winning the ball gives the team the time to open up and transition into an attacking shape. The transition, in this instance from defense to offense, will receive more focus at U12 assuming the players/teams are ready for it.

A counter attack is hard to succeed, requires precision and superior speed of play and often results in a quick turnover. When aiming for a counter attack we have to be certain the other team is off balance for it to work.

The technical ability of your players does determine how successful you are implementing a positive playing style. The amount of time and space a player has, dictates how technical they need to be. The more time and space you've got, the lower the requirement on technique. This means that the lower the level of your team is competing at, the lower the technical requirement on your players. Players need to be trained to create more time and space for themselves and their teammates.



Game day coaching – a few simple guidelines

1. Player development vs winning

The games on Sunday are a test for the young players we work with. Our players practice several times a week to prepare for the tests they take every weekend. We, coaches, need to make sure that our players are given the opportunity to take the test without somebody “looking over their shoulder” hoping to provide them with a solution to every problem they face.

Coaches have to encourage learning, and nobody will learn without making mistakes. Avoid subbing players out after they made a mistake. Players will soon be afraid to apply the new skills they have learned in practice if they are not allowed to make any mistakes. This can also trigger bad habits that might be hard to get rid of when players get older. Give our players the opportunity to experiment and most importantly of all, give them the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

2. The execution is more important than the end product

A group of nine your olds playing out of a very organized backline, with many players behind the ball, waiting to counter attack might look very disciplined and well organized. However, methods like that at the youth level will not aid the development of players. If we convince players that winning is the number 1 priority they will quickly create bad habits, not develop the right skills necessary to succeed and we will hurt the players develop in the long term. Encourage your teams to build up from the back. Compliment players when they control the ball, even under pressure, instead of kicking the ball away, and encourage them to try this over and over again, even when they make mistakes.

3. One voice on the sideline

When you have multiple coaches on the sideline it is very important that you divide your duties. The head coach is responsible for the actual coaching during the game. As soon as multiple coaches start coaching, players might get confused which will only lead to chaos. Soccer, unlike most American sports, is a player’s game. Keep it brief, to the point and the best moment to talk to your players is when they come off the field. We want to develop confident and independent players. Give them the opportunity to play!

This needs to be addressed in your preseason parent meeting as well. Coaching from the sideline confuses the players. Words of encouragement are always welcome and applaud the players for correctly executing the skills learned, but screaming “kick it” or “boot it” only goes against what we are trying to teach these young players.

4. Everybody needs to play at least half a game

It is important for the development of our players that all of them are given the opportunity to play during our games. Sitting on the bench next to the coach will help nobody get better. Gambling on the few more physically gifted players on your team at U10 will limit the opportunities for the others players to develop. Those players that are considered the better players at U9 and U10 more often than not are by-passed by other players once they go in to high school. Children develop at different rates both physically and mentally. Some peak earlier than others. All players, including the late bloomers or the physically less gifted players, deserve to play. Player development is marathon, not a sprint.

5. Playing time

Just as a reminder, all players should be given the opportunity to play at least half of every a game. Coaches should make an attempt to give all players more than half a game, especially in the first couple of years of travel. The games are an important part of the training, so every child should be given an equal chance to develop their skills. Although winning your flight at U10 sounds fantastic, it is not



mentioned as a priority for our program! Players should be rewarded for their effort during practice sessions, their attitude during practice and games and of course their commitment to the team.

6. Develop players by pushing them outside their comfort zone

Players need to learn to play the game based on the principles of play, rather than focusing on one or a few positions at a young age. To aid their development they need to be exposed to different positions during the game and they should not specialize to play only one positions.

If a players migrates to the back every time he or she plays, that doesn't mean that this player should be forced to play defense all the time.

Rotate the players over the positions, just limit them to 2, maybe 3, positions each game. Playing more than 2 or 3 positions per game will only confuse the players and will hurt the team chemistry during a game. Do not focus on 1 or 2 positions, let players experience all the positions over the course of a season and push them outside their comfort zone at a young age.

7. Only 3 coaches are allowed on the coaches' sideline

Per league rules we are only allowed 3 coaches on the coaches' sideline during a game. This means that if you have a team of 3 coaches on the sideline and your professional trainer is in attendance, one of the 3 parent coaches should move to the parents' sideline.

There is another benefit for keeping another parent coach on the sideline. We do not want the parents to coach from the sideline, as this will create confusion, but we can share with them what the teams' goals are. They can cheer and applaud a player when he or she successfully completed a give and go or made a well-timed run to get open for the player on the ball. If one of the parent coaches spends time on parents' sideline it is possible to not only stop the coaching from that side of the field, but also share with the parents what you have been focusing on as a team in practice sessions the last few weeks.

*We should measure success in coaching by how long it takes the player to no longer need his coach.
US Soccer – Best practices for coaching soccer*



Pre-game warm up - travel teams U9-U11

It is important that all players are given the opportunity to prepare properly for their games. At a younger age the focus is mostly on the mental preparation as young athletes don't need a lot of time to physically prepare for their games or practice sessions. As players start to grow and develop physically, a heavier focus needs to be put on the physical preparation of our players. As they get older the warm up can ensure that our players are physically well prepared. A good warm up can also avoid players from getting injured. Many of the muscle injuries that occur with growing athletes happen simply because players are physically not really well prepared.

The warm up for players U9-U11 should take 20-30 min max and should take place ahead of each and every game. It is important to have a routine, but to keep it fresh and exciting you can vary with the exercises your players go through before the game starts.

Below several suggestions that can be used as part of your pre game warm up routine for travel players U9-U11.

Note: No matter the age or gender of a player, static stretching before any physical activity does actually more harm than good. Please do not line up your players in a circle to stretch before a game. As players get older a good dynamic warm up is needed before players touch a ball.

Phase 1 (about 10 min)



All players need a ball. The coach can provide soccer balls for all players, but encourage the players on your team to bring their own soccer ball.

All players with ball inside a square about 15x15 – 20x20 yards.

Focus on the dribbling technique. Change of direction, use of both feet, accelerate after a move, keep your head up and find open space.

Variations

1. Dribble using both your feet. Change of direction.
2. Use just your right or left foot.
3. Incorporate some of the moves learned in practice (inside cut; outside cut; drag back; cruyff turn; scissors; step over; etc.)
4. 1v1's. 2 players and they only need 1 ball per pair. Player #1 has to protect the ball and keep it away from player #2 for 30 seconds. After 30 seconds they switch roles.



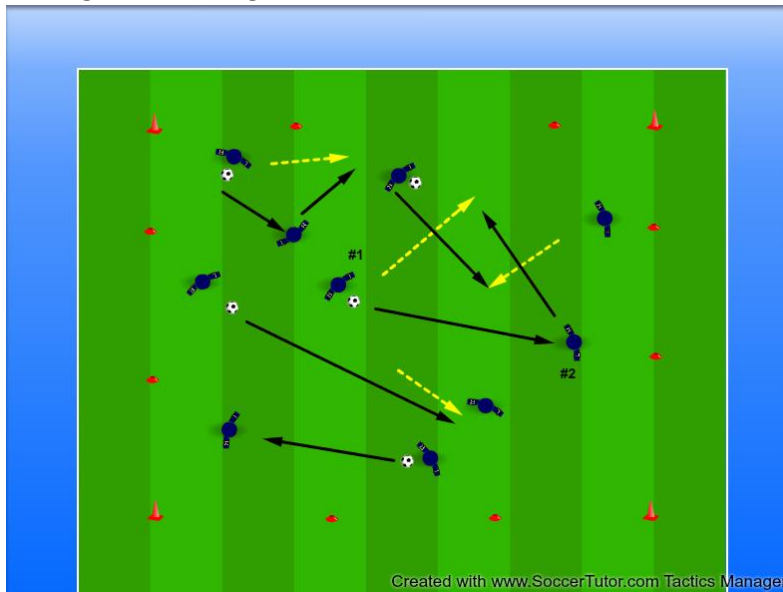
Protect/shield your ball; dribble away, use moves; keep your head up and find open space. Alternate partners.

See example.



Phase 2 (about 10 min)

Passing and receiving



Players are paired up and all pairs have 1 ball. All pairs move freely through the area set up (box 15x15 / 20x20 yards) while passing the ball to another.

Don't forget to have players change partners every 30-45 seconds.

Focus on

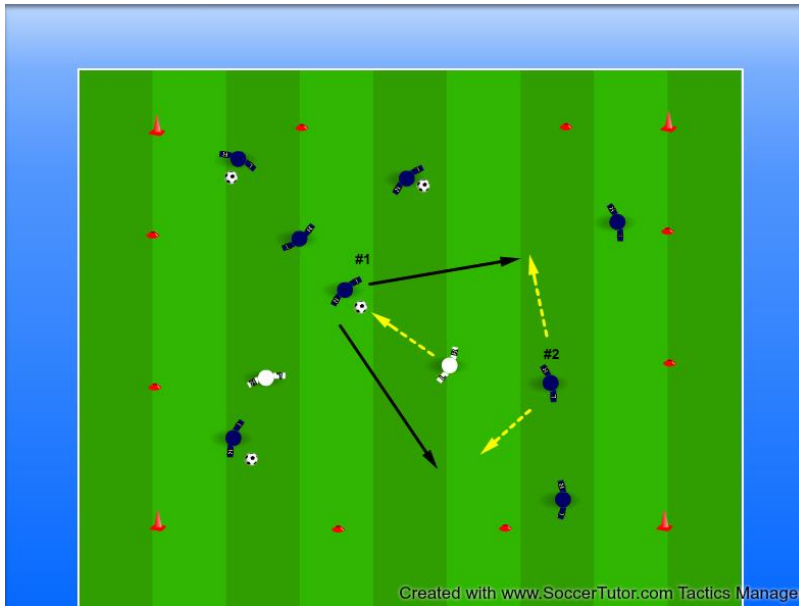
1. Quality of the passes. Use both feet.
2. Able to receive the ball with both feet → first touch
3. Continue to move around and find open space.
4. The weight and accuracy of the passes (play feet or lead your team mate).



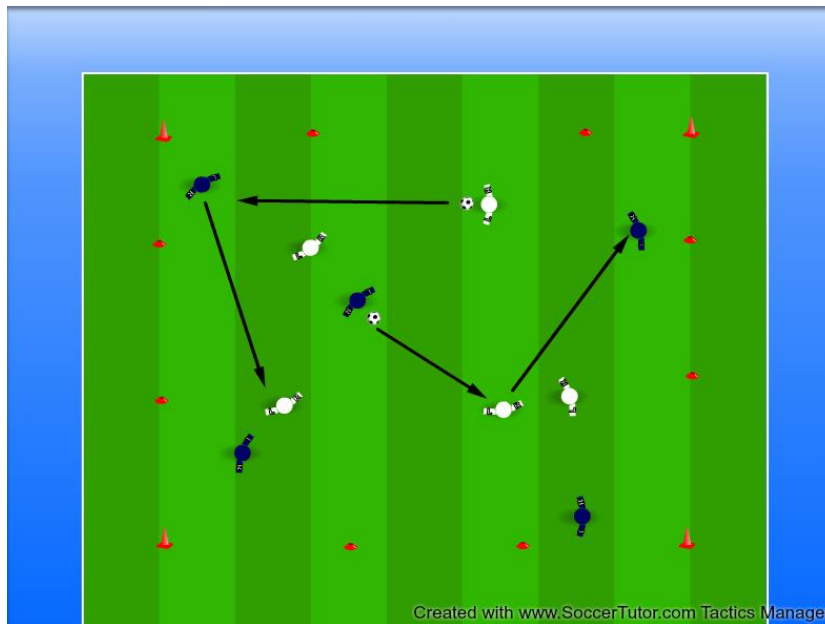
Progression – add defenders (coaches can serve as defenders).

Adds another dimension. Players need to be able to open up passing lanes and it is also important that they continue to move after a pass.

Focus is on the decisions on the ball (when, where and how) and the support of the 2nd attacker (angle and distance of support).



Rotate the defenders every 30-60 seconds and reward them with points for stealing the soccer balls.



Progression / variation

*The group is divided in to 2 even groups.
Start with 2 soccer balls, add more if it all goes well.*

Players in blue are only allowed to pass the ball to players in white. The players in white can only play the ball to somebody in blue.

*The 2 balls are not allowed to go out of bounce or stop moving.
It is possible to add more balls to increase complexity.*



This variation puts a heavy emphasis on the movement off the ball. Our players need to continue to provide their team mates with options off the ball and it will be a team effort to keep the ball in possession.

Players constantly have to communicate with each other to let each other know they are open and ready to receive the ball.

Important to establish eye contact / contact before passing each other the ball.

Phase 3 (about 10 min)

During the last phase of the warm up it is advised that the players play some small sided games (2v2/3v3) going to end lines, small goals or targets. It is important to focus on the same topics during this part of the warm up as you intend to focus on during the game.

As a coach you can consider some majority or man up situations (3v2 / 4v3 / play with a neutral) to ensure players find the open players and achieve some success going in to a game.

There is absolutely no need to line up the entire team in front of the goal and have them all take turns to shoot on goal. This only provides the players with a few touches on the ball during the warm up. During the 20-30 min warm up for your team all players need to touch the ball as often as possible to get ready for the game they are going to play.



How to prepare a practice session.

As a coach it is very important to be prepared for every practice session you run. Coaching schools in the United States, and across the world, stress the importance of being prepared for a session and never to go out on the field hoping you can wing it just for the day. Our players deserve to show up at the field for a planned out session. Plus, we expect a commitment from our players and 100% effort each time they are out on the field. Us coaches than have to make sure we lead by example. Failing to plan is planning to fail. In this document we will outline a couple items to consider when planning out your next practice session.

Keep the sessions simple and player centered. Give the players simple problem solving opportunities and plenty of opportunities to score goals. It is also important to be positive and to continue to create repeated opportunities for the players to express themselves through their ability with the ball, regardless of the outcome of their effort. Play, as both fun and as competition, is paramount. The more opportunities for each player to have experience with the ball, in fun games that allow them to go to goal, the better it will be for that player. US Youth Soccer Best Practices – Page 22

Below 10 tips that can help every coach ahead when planning and running your practice sessions.


- 🏆 Tip #1 – Pick a topic
 - ✓ When you plan your practice session make sure to focus on 1 topic for the day.
 - ✓ Your topic for a practice should be based on the seasonal goals for the team and the WSA age appropriate priorities.
 - ✓ Make sure to stay on topic during a practice session. As a coach you can always make notes of other items that break down during practice, but try to resist the temptation to set off track.

- 🏆 Tip #2 – Run a progressive practice session
 - ✓ A progressive session starts with a technical warm up. During the warm up a specific skill can be addressed in line with the topic chosen for your practice session.
 - ✓ A good buildup of a session will give players the opportunity to get familiar with the topic, players gain confidence as they progress through a session and as a coach you can increase the pressure put on the players.
 - ✓ A good build up will also teach players how certain skills will apply to a game situation. Remember: "A technical player can perform an action on demand. A skillful player, however, can perform the technique under pressure".
 - ✓ Plan out how much time you intend to spend on each exercise. This is not an exact science and is also based on the players' performance during each exercise.
 - ✓ As you plan your sessions you will notice that this becomes easier over time. *Attached to this document is a WSA lesson plan.*


- 🏆 Tip #3 – Consider all factors that can have an influence on your practice
 - ✓ Capabilities of players. Understand the needs of your players.
 - ✓ Number of players. A session should be planned given the availability of your players. Be flexible though, in case you have to adjust your session when players are unable to make practice.
 - ✓ Field space/equipment available. The amount of field space available and the equipment on the field for you to be used get help you plan out your session.




- ✓ Weather. When it is cold outside it is even more important to keep all players engaged and moving.

 Tip #4 – Avoid the 3l’s

- ✓ No laps. They do not replicate a game situation. Running laps can get you ready for a marathon, but not for a soccer game. Playing a game players constantly have to sprint over different distances, stop short, turn around and sometimes have the opportunity to catch their breath in between. There are better ways to improve their soccer endurance.
- ✓ No lines. Players will have a hard time staying focused during practice and we want to guarantee them as many touches on the ball as possible.
- ✓ No lectures. Too much talking simply means too much information to digest.

 Tip #5 – Keep the players active.

- ✓ Plan sessions that keep players moving.
- ✓ Standing around translates into boredom and fewer touches on the ball.
- ✓ A well run session will give players plenty of touches on the ball (technical development), gets them in many game like situations (tactical development) and will actually help players increase their soccer specific endurance (physical development).

 Tip #6 – Arrival

- ✓ The coach should always arrive ahead of time to set up the field.
- ✓ Showing up on time means actually making sure your players arrive before practice is supposed to start. On time means you are late.
- ✓ Make sure to have a set welcome ritual.
- ✓ Welcome every player when they show up at the field.
- ✓ Players should know what they are expected to do when they arrive for a practice or game. Shooting on goal can be dangerous, so the time before practice starts can be spend juggling the ball or playing a 3v1 possession game.

 Tip #7 – Teachable moments

- ✓ A good moment worth stopping the session for in order to teach the players focused on the topic for that day. It doesn’t necessarily need to happen only when something goes wrong!
- ✓ Understand the appropriate quantity of stops, the quality of your stop (again in line with your topic) and the duration of the stop. Talking too much is a big danger for a coach.

 Tip #8 – Communication

- ✓ Be clear when making a point.
- ✓ Keep it brief
- ✓ Draw a clear picture for your players.
- ✓ Get down to your players level, working with younger players, to communicate on a 1 on 1 basis.
- ✓ Be aware of your positioning. The coach should face the sun, but make sure there is no other way players can get distracted (there is a game being played in the background).



- Tip #9 – Be patient and stay positive
 - ✓ Be patient. The development of youth players is not a sprint, but a marathon. They will make mistakes. If a session doesn't go well this could easily be because the coach wasn't clear or the coach simply asked too much from his/her players.
 - ✓ Keep it positive. We do not need to sugar coat everything when coaching our players. We do, however, need to stay positive. When approached in a positive manner players will develop confidence, become more coachable, have more fun and continue to play for a lot longer.

- Tip#10 – Evaluate the success of your session
 - ✓ As a coach you can grade yourself regarding what went well during the session, were your objectives achieved and what you possibly could have done better. We all learn from our mistakes and every coach has had training sessions that they wish they could do over. Even though we have a plan for our training being flexible is important. Sometimes our players lead training in a different direction that is to be expected.

These 10 tips can help all coaches plan and run their practice sessions during the season. Set High Standards – you should be the role model to your players and lead by example. Keep your expectations clear and simple (punctuality, appropriate dress – shin guards, behavior, language, sportsmanship, teamwork) and reinforce them regularly. Be enthusiastic and always create a positive learning environment for your players. If you are having fun, they will too!



What are a Travel Soccer Coach's Responsibilities?

A. Coaching qualities

- Must be organized, fun, keeping the players central in the learning environment.
- Ability to relate to young players and keep players interest levels high.
- Possess the patience to organize multiple individuals.
- Enthusiastic and encouraging.
- Ability to communicate with parents and players.
- Possess the patience to deal with players/parents who are involved with multiple activities.
- Must place long term player development as a priority over short term team success.

B. Head Coach – Professional Trainer

In the current model used by the WSA all teams are assigned a professional trainer responsible for at least 2 practice sessions during the week. It is important that the volunteer coaches and professional trainer not only align their thoughts ahead of the start of the season, but continue to communicate with one another over the course of the season. A continued dialogue to discuss seasonal goals, weekly lessons plans and the games played on Sunday is needed to ensure continuity. This is of course a two way street and both parties need to make sure an effort is made to establish a healthy working relationship.

In the past all professional trainers have been asked to attend at least 3 games during the course of a season, assuming that this trainer is not assigned to be the full time trainer and coach for the team. This will help establish a closer relationship between the trainers, players and volunteer coaches. Through their match analysis they will get hands on information on the development of the team. This can help to possibly adjust goals for the team as the season progresses. This should also help to create a more cohesive learning environment from the weekday practice sessions to weekend performances. This year most, if not all trainers, will be able to attend more than 3 games for the teams they train and teams are advised to build it in to the budget of the team to have trainers attend at least 5 games.

Make sure that the players hear 1 voice during the games to avoid confusion. If the trainers are in attendance for 5 or more games during the season please utilize their services and experience accordingly!

C. Age appropriate priorities

To support our parent coaches and to help them recognize what topics should be addressed in practice we have worked out age appropriate priorities. The purpose of these age appropriate priorities is to help trainers and coaches understand the characteristics of this specific age group. To properly prepare yourself for a session you need to have an idea what the players are capable of, mostly technically and tactically, and what areas of the game they need to focus on to develop as soccer players at this age.

These priorities will also be shared with the professional trainers to create more continuity in our programs from team to team and from age group to age group.

D. Continue to invest in your own development as a coach.

To be able to coach a travel team a coach needs to possess at least an F license. This course will go over the basics a coach needs to have an understanding of to coach a team in travel soccer. We highly recommend that you invest time to continue to develop yourself as a coach.



The club will offer clinics and/or workshops for their volunteer coaches worth attending. To stay up to date with the latest developments within the club it is advised to attend the general meetings held once a month during the season.

Note: All travel teams are required to send a representative to each and every meeting.

E. Include the parents

We have to make an effort to include the parents in the athletic experience of their children. As a volunteer coach it is expected to communicate the goals/expectations with the parents on your team. Support the WSA policies/guidelines and keep the parents informed. Make sure to emphasize the WSA player development philosophy. We will continue to educate the rest of our membership through the newsletter, the website and other sources. The support of our volunteer coaches will help to strengthen the foundation of our club.

It is also important to offer parents the opportunity to ask questions. Manage the expectations, explain that player development is more like a marathon than a sprint, and be fair and honest.

Another way to keep the parents involved in the learning experience is to include them in your post game meeting with the players. The parents might not know what you and the trainer have focused on in practice the last few weeks. To keep them up to speed, informed, gather not only the players after the game, but also invite the parents over. The parents will feel included in the process. As a coach you are able to share with them what the players have done well and possibly still need to work on in order for them to grow as players and as a team.

F. Parent Meetings - emails

To communicate goals, expectations and other important topics it is advised to have a parent meeting at the beginning of each season. Include your professional trainer in these meetings to make sure the parents get to know their professional trainer. Your trainer can also help you outline the goals and expectations for your team for this upcoming year. At least one meeting needs to be held ahead of the season to inform parents about what is ahead of them and if needed answer questions from the parents they otherwise might not be able to ask. Remember that 1 parent meeting per season might not be sufficient.

Throughout the season you can keep parents informed through email. Not only about the household issues that need to be dealt with, but also about the development of the players and team.

An example outline for a parent meeting can be found in the back of this document.