



Index parent coaching guidelines – U12 Travel Soccer

Explanation of the age appropriate priorities	1
Possession Soccer – The Westfield SA Style of play	4
Game day coaching – a few simple guidelines	9
Pre-game warm up – U12-U14	11
How to prepare a practice	17
What are a Travel Soccer Coach's Responsibilities?	20
Appendix A. Outline of age appropriate priorities	A1
Appendix B. Outline/explanation of the 1-2-3-2	A2
Appendix C. Outline for a parent meeting (example)	A8
Appendix D. Subbing pattern for 8v8 teams	A10



Explanation of the age appropriate priorities – U12

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



As players progress through the program the topics addressed in practice will change assuming that players have developed in line with the age appropriate guidelines set for our players. Please understand that this is not an exact science. Coaches do have the responsibility to assess whether or not players are ready for more complex topics in practice. All players and teams develop at a different rate and these are guidelines to support the development of our teams. If players struggle, for example, with the concept of pressure and cover in a small group setting this of course needs to be addressed before focusing on more advanced topics. The majority of age appropriate priorities have been introduced at U11 already. Players are expected to be familiar with these concepts, but for many of the concepts it was only an introduction and as you can imagine it takes more than one year to fully gain an understanding of many of the more complex concepts. It will mostly be an introduction and a start to build the foundation players and teams can continue to work on in the years to come.

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 – Combination play – passing combinations on the move

Players will be introduced to this concept before getting on a team at U12. Given the amount of time spend players should be able to recognize good moments to execute an overlap or time a give and go. The technical abilities of the players should have increased as well, which means that the execution should take place at game speed. Well executed overlaps, give and go's or take overs can really unbalance the opposing defense and create scoring opportunities when used in the attacking 3rd.

For more information and a more detailed explanation of the different types of combination play please check the WSA curriculum up in the coaches' corner.

2 – Possession play with a purpose

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.



3 – Build up from the back – use the goalplayer

1 of the characteristics of possession soccer is the use of the goalplayer 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 goalplayer.

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

We should continue to take goal kicks short and stay away from punting balls up the field if not needed. The players playing in the back will need to provide option for the goalplayer in order for the team to play the ball out of the back. Players will be able to recognize how to build up from the back starting at the goalplayer and using the space given to them. They understand they need to spread out to create enough space to play in possession of the ball.

Given the pressure applied on a team, players will be able to adjust and play the ball away from pressure. It is important that players should attempt to play the ball forwards when they have the option. If the option to go forwards is not available the goalplayer is the player to use to alleviate pressure and, 9 out of 10 times, to switch the point of attack.

4 – Develop off the ball movement for the 3rd attacker

As teams develop their standard of play given the concepts introduced at U11 and U12, more focus will be put on the role of the 3rd attacker. Given the fact that we ask players to play the way they face and possibly reload an attack when stuck on one side of the field it does make sense to put a heavier focus on the runs made by the 3rd attacker or attackers.

It is important to note that the 3rd attackers' main goal is to unbalance the opposing team. They aim to make runs to further disrupt the defensive play of the opponent. Quite often they will not receive the ball, but they will create space for a team mate who is wide open and able to receive the ball. It is important for players to understand that the team will not be successful during the buildup of attack when all players run towards the goal or in the direction of the ball. We put some much emphasis on the concept of shape in the first couple of years to help players understand that you will struggle to maintain possession if your team doesn't have enough space to play.

5 – Transition from offense to defense – recovery

Up until this moment the main focus has been on the principles of play and two key moments in the game of soccer (either you are in possession or the opponent has the ball). As you know there is a moment when possession switches from one team to the other.

Teams will end up giving the ball up either due to bad decisions, the quality of the touch wasn't there or the opponent simply intercepted the pass. As a team we have to be ready for these moments and understand that it is very important to make sure that you are organized again as a team shortly after giving up the ball. Teams that do not get that concept down quickly enough might be very successful in possession of the ball.

This concept of recovering can be introduced and worked on in small sided games, 3v3 or 4v4, and show players how important it is to slow down the opponents break and get numbers behind the ball again. Try to apply immediate pressure on the ball when possession is lost.



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's 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 U12-U14

As our players get older and hit puberty they go through many changes that affect them both physically and mentally. From U12 and on players will differ in physical and mental maturity since not every child goes through these changes at the same time. Girls normally go through these changes earlier than boys and at this age are physically more mature than boys. Boys start a little later, peak a little later and can also continue to grow in length all the way till they are in college. With our players going through all these changes it is even more important for them to do a proper warm up. No matter the level of a team, all teams U12 and up need to spend enough time to properly warm up before a game. Due to all the changes players are going through they gain muscle mass, but can lack flexibility. Although our soccer players might not need to be as flexible as gymnasts, they do need to be able to perform a variety of moves during a game which require flexibility. Although children are more resilient than adults they can get hurt if not warmed up well. Many muscle injuries, unless it is an impact injury, can be avoided by doing a good warm up.

In the below outline we will provide you with some suggestions we advise you to use in preparation ahead of the game. Make sure to establish a routine that players can execute by themselves which gives the coach/trainer an opportunity to walk around and provide the players with some last tips before going in the game.

The exercises included, which can be used after the dynamic warm up without ball, provide you with opportunities to help players get ready both physically and mentally.

Before the actual outline we will explain the difference between dynamic stretching and static stretching.



Dynamic Flexibility vs. Static Stretching for Warm Up

A proper warm-up routine is very important to the health and performance of an athlete. If the body is not adequately prepared for the demands of the upcoming sport or activity, injury is more likely to occur. In addition, it is impossible for the body to perform to the peak of its ability without warm, flexible muscles.

In the past, static stretching was the preferred method of pre-activity warm-up, and is still used to a large extent. Static stretches are performed with a prolonged hold and are used to increase the length of soft tissue and the flexibility of a specific muscle. This form of stretching has the most profound effect on a specific tissue known as collagen. Collagen is the cellular framework found in our muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Recent research has found that static stretches have a neuromuscular effect on the muscle's performance and may decrease strength in the stretched muscle group for up to one hour. It is our belief that this induced weakness could contribute to an increased risk of injury. Static stretching still has its place, and is still an important aspect of an athlete's overall health. Static stretches help to reduce injury by maximizing flexibility and improving biomechanics. Static stretching is very useful and beneficial to be done not only after activity, but also to increase and maintain muscle length and flexibility.

Recently, however, there has been more warm-up programs that utilize a dynamic approach. Dynamic warm-up focuses more on the neuromuscular system of the muscle complex. These dynamic activities will aid in short term flexibility gains and the resting tone through stimulation of the Golgi tendon organs. These organs are hidden deep in the muscle and measure muscle tension to protect it from injury. These organs are likely to over react if not appropriately conditioned and prepared for activity. For example, the knee accelerates forward during running and the muscle tension increases rapidly. The Golgi tendon organ can stimulate a protective/reflexive muscle contraction at the time of rapid stretch/acceleration, this mechanism has been theorized to be the mechanism of a muscular strain. Dynamic warm-ups can have a dampening effect on this Golgi tendon complex, making them less reactive during normal activity levels, and without decreasing strength as noted in static stretching. Dynamic warm-ups can increase muscular flexibility for the short-term through the neuromuscular system and potentially reduce injury though decreasing reflexive muscle contractions.

The reasons listed above point to dynamic activities being ideal components for pre-activity and sport warm-up. There has also been recent research on the effect of dynamic warm-up specifically for soccer activities. These research articles have found that dynamic warm-up can enhance performance in such areas as sprinting, dribbling with cutting, kick power through increased hip range of motion, and kick velocity. While static stretching was found to be detrimental to the performance of these same activities.

So to summarize:

- Dynamic stretching before activity prepares the muscles, joints and neuromuscular connections.
- Static stretching after activity reestablishes hard-working muscles to resting lengths, an important part of recovery.
- Dynamic stretching – Lengthening of the muscles as the body moves through the normal range of motion around a joint or joints.
- Static stretching – lengthening of the muscles in static, stilled or holding position.



A dynamic warm up (without ball) 10 -15 min

Preparing the body for activity with a general warm up for the whole body followed by the active dynamic stretching of a sport specific nature is best. General warm up with walking, jogging or skipping increases the temperature and blood flow to the working muscles and joints, preparing them for movement. After this first part comes the dynamic warm up with suggestions for this warm up below.

The form is very important. This is not designed to be fitness work.

- Jog forward
- Jog backward
- Slide side (facing right- moving left) NO clicking of heels
- Slide side (facing right – moving right)
- Slide forward, alternating right and left diagonal (“wizard of oz”)
- Drop step (backward “wizard of oz”)
- Knee up and out/open the gate (do as 3-count: step-step-knee up and out, results in alternating legs)
- Knee out and rotated in/close the gate
- Carioca left with emphasis high step across in front (1 – 2-3-4 and repeat)
- Carioca right (1 – 2-3-4)
- Step kick to opposite hand (do as 3 count as above) (keep body upright: foot lifted to touch suspended hand)
- Step and lean forward with arms wide, shaping a T (support leg has a bend at the knee, other leg is straight out behind, ankle flexed, toe down)
- High knees
- Butt kicks
- Sprint to quick, multi-step stop (option: slide 3 steps, turn and sprint)
- Sprint to quick, multi-step stop (option: backpedal 3 steps, turn and sprint)

All exercises above are part of a dynamic warm up. As players get older you can add some strength exercises like planks and lunges.

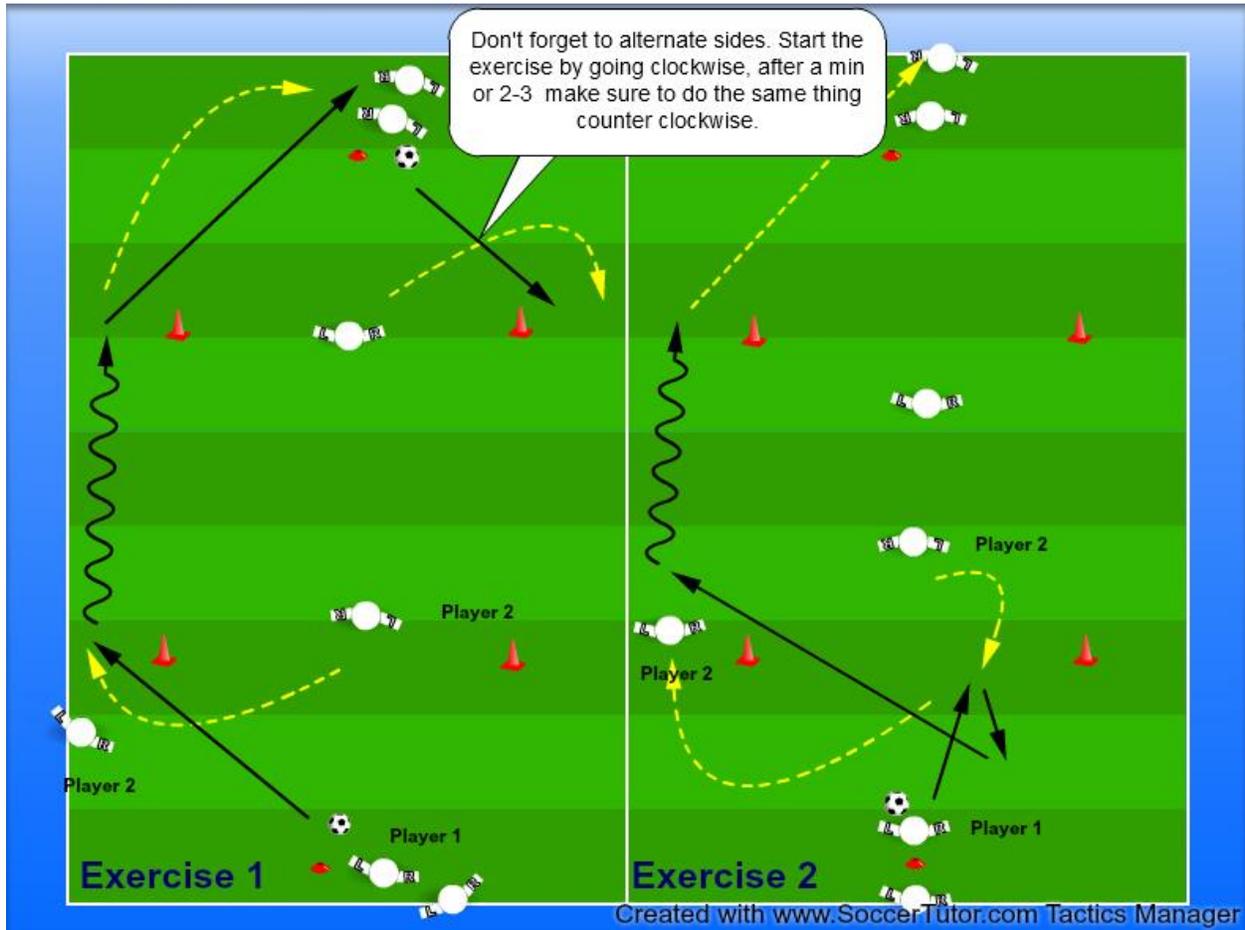
The information above is directly taken from the website www.fit2fitness.com.

Sports science today is clear that players should not perform sustained, static stretches during pre-game warm up. These can be damaging to cold muscles and detrimental to the power and quickness for sports performance.



Phase 2 – Include the ball 10-15 Min

After your players have concluded the first part of the warm up it is important to give the players an opportunity to work with the ball. Below some suggestions that can be used for the next phase of the warm up. It is important that the intensity is build up little by little so players are well prepared for the game ahead of them.



The rectangle is about 8 yards wide and 10-15 yards long. Distance between player #1 and player #2 is about 10-15 yards. About 8-10 players per exercise. For a full sided team 2 organizations are recommended.

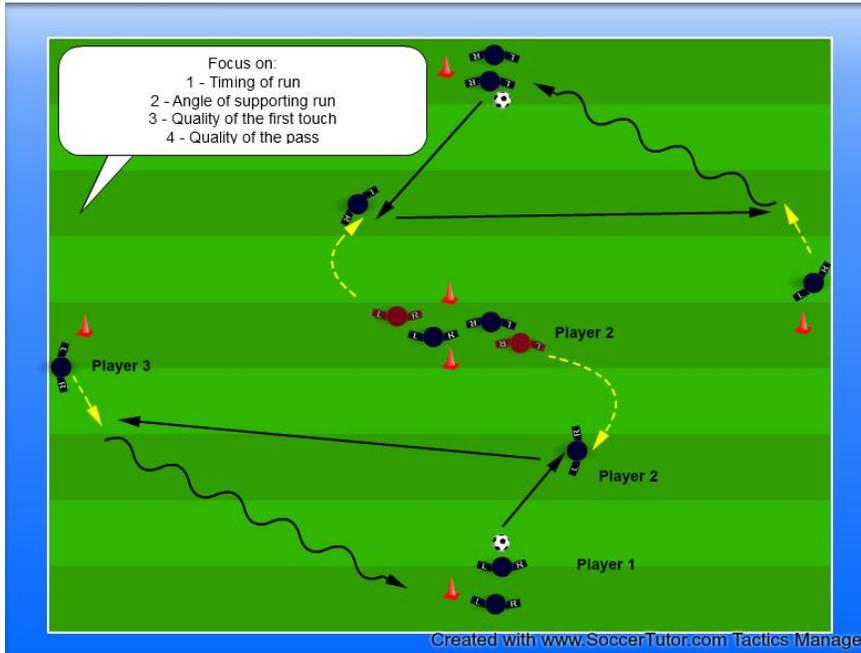
Exercise 1 - Player #1 starts with the ball. As soon as player #1 starts the dribble, player #2 starts a peeling run as shown in the picture. Player #2 receives the ball sideways on, dribbles the ball forwards and passes the ball to the next one in line.

Exercise 2 - Add a give and go. Player #2 peels of and checks to the ball. Player 1 passes the ball to player 2 who then drops the ball for player 1.

Player 2 peels away and makes a bend run to receive the ball, while players 1 plays a ball (on the inside of the cone this time).



Another variation (more advanced).

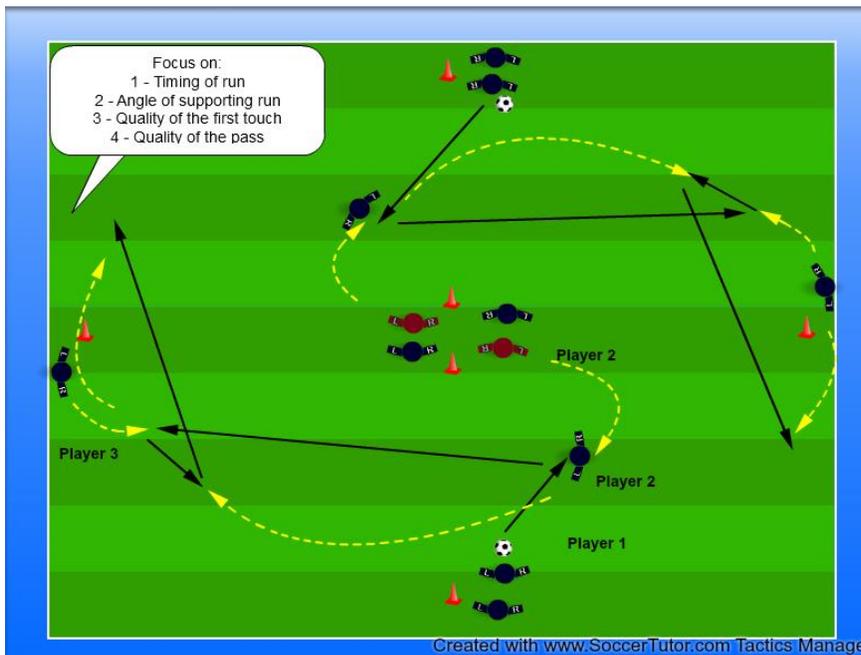


The entire set up of these exercises is about 30 yards long and 30 yards wide.

Exercise 1 - The player receiving the ball, player #2, peels off to make himself/herself available for the ball.

This player has a total of two touches to control the ball. One to receive/make sure the ball is ready, the 2nd touch to pass the ball.

The 3rd player involved receives the pass and dribbles the ball back in to the line where it started.



Exercise 2 -This exercise starts of just like the exercise above. Player #2 has to peel off to get open. This player still has two touches to get the ball to player #3.

Now when the 3rd players receives the pass, player #2 comes underneath the ball. They set up a give and go and the 3rd player makes a bend run going forward.



Phase 3 – Game related exercises 10-15 Min

During the last phase of the warm up it is important to introduce some game like situations in which player have to make decisions on the ball under pressure; opportunities to get open for the 2nd attacker and situations that include a transition (offense to defense / defense to offense).

This can be achieved by playing small sided games, numbers up if needed, or different variations of possession games.

What if you do not have a lot of space for your warm up?

The first phase of the warm up can be done without needing too much space. Depending on the number of players on your team, you can divide players over 2-4 lines about 12-18 yards in length.

Players can still get touches on the ball during the 2nd phase of the warm up by establishing lines with players standing across from each other. Include different passing sequences and/or have players dribble back and forth.

During the 3rd phase of the warm up players can play small keep away games / possession games whether it be 3v1 or 4v2. For these exercises you do not need a lot of space and players are still put in situations in which the 4 main moments of soccer come back.

Sources (among others)

www. Fit2finish.com

Fit 2 finish – keeping your soccer players in the game by Wendy LeBolt

The Fifa 11 with Alex Morgan and Cobi Jones – YouTube videos



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.