

MSA – Full Service Youth Soccer Club

MSA offers all levels of play and is a full-service soccer club. Many players who are interested in trying out for competitive teams, begin their training by building a solid foundation in MSA Gunners (U6 – U8). Players then move on to MSA teams at the Blue or Gold Level (U9 – U19). MSA “Blue” is the first stage of travel soccer. Those players that continue to develop and fully want to commit to the sport of soccer, are selected to participate in MSA Gold / Premier.

Premier Teams: MSA Gold (U9 – U19)

MSA Gold is the highest level of training and competition within MSA club soccer. Our Premier players and coaches will demonstrate the highest level of commitment to excellence in skills, fitness, work ethic, attitude and sportsmanship. Premier players and coaches will demonstrate a commitment to the club, the team and their own soccer development.

Players and teams compete against premier teams from leagues and clubs throughout the region and nation, and at times, Internationally. Based on age and level, teams will compete in 4-6 tournaments annually, that carry additional fees.

Travel Teams: MSA Blue (U9 – U19)

MSA Blue is the first stage of “travel” club soccer. Travel is not as extensive and time consuming as “Premier” soccer, as it is typically limited and shorter distances of travel, ironically. The goal of MSA “Blue” is to provide an environment in which the level of competition, commitment, and player development falls between that of the recreation and premier levels. All Blue level coaches are paid, experienced, licensed club soccer coaches and have a responsibility to develop the soccer skills and team play of their players.

With two training sessions per week, Blue Level players will rapidly increase their skills and abilities. Blue teams participate in the PA West Soccer Association sponsored leagues. Based on age and level, teams typically compete in 1-3 tournaments annually.

This program is geared towards the players that have played recreational soccer for some time - and want to “jump to the next level”, in order to prepare for grade school, middle school or high school soccer. It also prepares players that are ready to commit to the Premier level and need to refine their skills and general tactics.

MSA Gunners | U6 – U8 Players

MSA Gunners is the foundation of the Club! It serves as an effective bridge into MSA’s competitive programs for our youngest players. The professional trainers will provide age-appropriate technical instruction. Typically, it’s for those players that excel at the recreational level and desire an additional environment that is more competitive with advanced coaching. It is, however, open to all players.

The coach’s role during the sampling years includes an approach centered on children’s needs instead of performance outcomes. The philosophy of coaching youth soccer places great importance on age-appropriate activities and creating a child-centered learning environment. Many great players have

traced personal success to the coaching received at an early age. It is hoped that the youth soccer coach will one day look back with pride at the opportunities created for learning and enjoyment. A supportive, child-centered, positive experience in youth soccer is vital to the growth of the game.

COACHING the MSA Way:

Player-Centered Training Guided Discovery

The traditional way sports have been taught is with the coach as the center of attention. The coach tells the players what to do, command style, and then expects them to produce. With the command style, the coach explains a skill, demonstrates the skill and allows the players to practice the skill. In contrast to reproduction of knowledge in the coach-centered approach, the guided discovery approach emphasizes the production of new talents. The approach invites the player to think, go beyond the given information and then discover the correct skills. The essence of this style is a coach-player connection in which the sequence of information and questions leads to responses from the player. The combination of information and question by the coach elicits a correct response which is discovered by the player. Guided discovery simply means that the coach raises questions and provides options or choices for the players, guiding the players to answer the questions because they become curious about the answers. The player in a command style setting thinks too much about what they are trying to do, a form of paralysis by analysis. If the coach instead guides the players in a player-centered training environment, then they gradually become capable of holistic thinking in their soccer performance.

It is often argued that effective coaching is as much an art as it is a science. Guided discovery in coaching soccer is a balance of the two. In a broad sense, our coaching style of the American soccer player must move away from the *sage on the stage* and more toward the guide on the side.

Over Coaching

Successful coaches are effective communicators. For players to become self-reliant, the coach must not micromanage the game for them. As a player-centered sport, some coaches become disillusioned as they learn that they are the guide on the side and not the one performing. In many sports the coach makes crucial decisions during the competition. This coach-centered perspective has been handed down to us from other sports and coaching styles of past generations.

"Talking too much is a big danger for a coach. The words get lost in the wind." -- Sir Alex Ferguson, Manchester United Football Club, former Manager

In soccer, players make tactical decisions during the match; the coach's decisions are strategic. The egocentric personality will find coaching soccer troublesome. During the match the coach can call out some general reminders, "mark up" for example, but for the most part should remain quiet, only yelling out loud praises while sitting and quietly observing the match. It is the players who should be heard the most during a match. Some team supporters might think the coach is not coaching if there is not constant talking, so parents will need to be educated on why this chatter diverts players' attention. Team supporters too often have their view of the match colored by the professional model and by the way coaching is portrayed in other sports and in the sports media. In a coach-centered sport with frequent

stoppages in play and timeouts, the coach takes on a direct role during the game. Soccer does not stop except for a serious injury and halftime, giving the coach an indirect role during the match.

The coach should attempt to have players play for an extended period of time. The players must solve their own problems on the field that occur during the run of play. Coaches should not platoon players in and out of games in order to wear an opponent down. Unlike most team sports, soccer is a player's game, not a coach's one. Substitutions allow for all players to play and will speed development for a greater number of players.

Players have more room to grow when the coach makes sensible substitutions and talks less during matches. In this fertile game environment, some players will grow as team leaders. This will begin with a player directing one or two players, and in time, the entire team. Leaders will guide and inspire the team from within.

"Over-coaching is the worst thing you can do to a player." - Dean Smith, University of North Carolina, former basketball coach

Fair Play

Soccer is a competitive sport. Competitiveness is a natural and desirable mindset, but it can spawn negative consequences if not properly harnessed. Notice the warning signs, such as tryouts prior to U-10 or punishing players for a loss. US Youth Soccer is committed to raising the awareness of the negative consequences of an over-emphasis on outcome-based expectations. The Citizenship Through Sports Alliance 2005 Youth Sports National Report Card (Sportsmanship, 2005) is highly critical of the lack of a child-centered philosophy in youth sports, giving youth club leaders a grade of 'D' (poor) while the coaches did not fare much better, receiving a grade of 'C- minus' (between fair and poor). More alarmingly, the report gave a grade of 'D' for parental behavior. Referees received a favorable grade of 'B-minus' for their behavior, although the need for improved training in technique, rules and safety was cited.

It is essential to note that overly competitive trends are not only adversely affecting the essence of player development, but also blur the line between ethical and unethical behavior. The mission of any youth organization revolves around these fundamental goals: develop character, instill values, teach respect for authority and society, develop confidence and a positive self-image - and help youth reach their potential in life. The goal is to use soccer as the vehicle to achieve this mission.

What role should administrators, referees, coaches and parents play? Together, they have an enormous impact on the lives of millions of youth soccer players in the United States. While each parent must be accountable for individual actions and teach the child to do the same, administrators, referees, coaches and parents form a quadrangle of role models from whom many children learn behaviors that they will carry into adulthood. Cooperation, respect and maturity among the adults in soccer will encourage those qualities in our players.

The Mission of a Soccer Club should not revolve around winning championships. Winning is a byproduct of a quality program, but it should not be the driving force. Many club leaders articulate the need to deemphasize results, but fail to notice that club procedures, or the actions of the staff, contradict the club's stated philosophy. Some simply do not see the difference between teaching life lessons through

sport and collecting trophies in sport. This ambivalence to right and wrong dims the moral clarity and leads to a collision between mission and ambition.

PHILOSOPHY of Coaching

A coach's philosophy has an impact on daily coaching procedures and strategies. A coach's philosophy is actually a very practical guide. The beginning coaching philosophy usually comes from our former coaches. This is a natural start because it is the approach with which we are most familiar and comfortable. It is also reasonable to assume that the philosophy of a person's everyday life, thoughts and actions would be applied when it comes to coaching. How many coaches would stick to principles of Fair Play rather than win the match? There may be a gap between what is thought to be the right thing to do in daily life and the action taken on the field.

To form or analyze a personal philosophy of coaching, first know what a coach is. A coach can be many things to many different people. A coach is a mentor, teacher, role model and sometimes a friend. Most of all, a coach must be a positive personality. A positive coach has the following traits:

- Puts players first
- Demonstrates consistent actions
- Develops character and skills
- Sets realistic goals
- Treasures the game
- Creates an enjoyable partnership with the players
- An ethical coaching philosophy
- A coaching philosophy compatible with the individual's personality
- Fair play is a top priority in the coaching philosophy
- Approach to coaching is educationally sound and appropriate for players

Coaching is much more than just following a set of principles or having a well-established club. Coaching is interaction in young people's lives. The players who come onto the field are students, family members and friends to someone. They are the same person in all areas of life with the same personality, ideals, flaws and struggles throughout all aspects. It is the coach's responsibility to help players make right and more mature decisions in all areas of their lives. Coaches must help them develop character, discipline, self-motivation, self-worth and an excitement for life. To achieve these objectives, the coach must set these standards for the players and others around them, and then help them reach those standards by developing appropriate relationships with them based on respect, caring and character. When character development is the foundation for a program, players will get the most out of their soccer experience. When that happens, the coach will also get the most out of players, for this approach makes champions.

The most successful coaches are not necessarily the ones who win the most games. Coaches who have successful experiences focus on team cohesion. The desire to see the players learn and improve their skills is the key to effective coaching. Coaches should commit to using all of their knowledge, abilities and resources to make each player on the team successful. The focus is to promote an atmosphere of teamwork, mutual respect and commitment. By achieving this, the coach will be successful and also win.

The **MSA Player Development Curriculum** details the framework, aims, objectives and content that creates tremendous value and helps to raise standards, performance and expectations. The curriculum includes approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, quality of relationships between coach and the player and the values embodied by the club.

MSA has developed an approach to curriculum design based upon three key elements:

1. Element 1: Curriculum Aims
2. Element 2: Curriculum Organization
3. Element 3: Curriculum Evaluation

ELEMENT 1: WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE? The MSA Player Development Curriculum provides an opportunity to create a relevant, coherent and engaging environment for all players, parents and coaches. Having clear purposes representing the club's hopes and desires for the players is an important starting point. Purposes not only provide a reference point for decision making but also a direction on how learning experiences are to be organized.

Curriculum Purposes

The purposes of the MSA Player Development Curriculum are:

1. Establish an entitlement – for every child entering the program irrespective of social background, wealth, gender or differences in ability.
2. Establishes standards – at each stage of development so progress of players and coaches can be monitored, goals and improvement targets can be established and players can be selected for the appropriate development groups.
3. Promotes continuity and coherence – facilitates the transition of players between teams and phases of skill development, and provides a framework for coaches to adhere to.
4. Promotes understanding for parents and players – increases understanding and confidence in the player development philosophy and coaching team.

Element 1: Curriculum Aims

The MSA Player Development Curriculum aims to:

1. Provide attainment standards for measuring coach and player performance
2. Reflect best practice
3. Promote intellectual, social, personal and physical development
4. Establish high expectations for all constituents
5. Identifies outcomes relating to skills, knowledge and other performance criteria
6. Reflects the vision and mission of MSA
7. Provide equal opportunity for all players to learn and achieve

Curriculum Outcomes

A successfully implemented MSA Player Development Curriculum will result in:

1. Players enjoying playing and learning
2. Players committing to playing and learning
3. Result in best possible progress
4. Achieve highest attainment for all players
5. Develop player and coach confidence
6. Offer opportunities to work individually and as a team
7. Enable players to think creatively and critically and solve problems

ELEMENT 2: HOW DO WE ORGANIZE LEARNING?

The MSA Player Development Curriculum is developed from the work of Istvan Bayli. Now widely adopted in many sports in Canada and Europe. Commencing with the youngest players, the curriculum is organized into building blocks of learning – learning that is deep. When appropriately implemented, the building blocks will stack together to form a pathway of teaching and learning experiences appropriate for all players.

There are several components that contribute to curriculum organization including: 1) Content – games and activities chosen to accomplish a coaching outcome; 2) Methodology – a wide variety of approaches to teaching and instruction to encourage player participation and learning; 3) Supporting knowledge – scientific evidence, philosophies and opinions underpinning the curriculum model; 4) Learning Environment – consideration of the different types of soccer provision and interaction between practice and competitive play.

By understanding the dynamic interplay between these four factors, MSA can help every player make progress, building on their experiences both at club organized training and competitions, at home or at the park with friends and family. To this end, one objective of the curriculum is to encourage players and parents to appreciate that learning experiences should occur beyond the scheduled club activities. In fact, in many countries around the world, players develop their knowledge and understanding more quickly by watching high level play on TV or in person at live games and by dedicating ‘homework’ time to individual ball mastery.

Considering the critical relationship between coaching and curriculum, the curriculum document must not be used in isolation. It is imperative that coaches firstly understand about the players (stage of development, level of proficiency, interest and commitment etc). Secondly, they choose the activities wisely to meet the needs of the player, team and environment and thirdly they adopt measures to continually assess progress of players and coaches.

ELEMENT 3: HOW WELL ARE WE ACHIEVING OUR AIMS?

The concepts of assessment and evaluation regularly cause concern and are uncomfortable topics. This is no truer than in a youth sports environment where assessment is typically associated with selection. In soccer, assessment means tryouts and tryouts are designed to answer one question – are you good enough to play travel soccer?

Assessment has its place, it should be used at every opportunity to make a difference for learning. Assessment should also be fit for purpose – the quantitative and qualitative methods used must be appropriate to the stage of development and also relevant to the skill, knowledge or behavior being tested. Identifying the appropriate level of play for a particular child often provides an organization with a number of sensitivity issues. Talent identification should not be restricted to a once a year occurrence, but needs to be an ongoing process involving coaches, players and parents. Ultimately, the aim of a talent identification program is to ensure that all players have the opportunity to progress at a rate and level that their talent and development allows. Matching the resources and expertise to meet the needs of the player requires both an internal and external perspective.

A progressive assessment process encourages a variety of methods. For example, utilizing several assessors to evaluate players can offer strength to the process.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Physical and emotional changes that occur as people mature affect all aspects of life, including sport. A child-centered coach needs to understand the different phases of development and how they can affect sports performance – particularly coaches of young athletes. Coaches need to consider not only the player's physical needs but also their social, emotional and cognitive needs. Adapting teaching methodology and content to meet the player's needs significantly improve their progress in soccer. Training, competition, and recovery programs should be designed to match the physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional development of each player. Ethics, fair play and character building should also be taught according to each child's ability to understand these concepts at different ages.

Discussions about development center around two factors - Growth and Maturation: 'Growth' refers to measurable changes such as height, weight and fat percentage. 'Maturation' refers to more subtle qualitative adaptations, such as cartilage changing to bone. Noticeable and subtle changes in growth and maturation are referred to as development, and these include social, emotional, intellectual, and motor performance. There is also a distinction between chronological age (days and years since birth) and development age (the degree of physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional maturity). The development age of the player is of primary importance to the successful implementation of the **MSA Player Development Curriculum**. As a player's developmental age can differ by as much as two years from their chronological age, it is important that all content and teaching methodologies are appropriate to development. For example, a player who is 12 calendar years old could be 10 to 14 in developmental age.

Knowing if a player is an early, average, or late developer is critically important in adopting an approach to coaching. This knowledge will provide the basis for determining the starting point and capacity of a player to absorb information and perform. Most importantly, appreciating where a player is situated

along the Player Development Continuum allows for the coach to plan for individual needs. Failure to recognize development cues can contribute to several negative outcomes, including selecting teams based on size, strength and speed. Research has concluded that children born in the first third of the year (i.e. January to April for sports using the calendar year) have a statistically significant advantage over children born near the end of the year. However, research also concludes that children with late birthdays eventually draw alongside their older peers and in many cases surpass performance levels. Unfortunately, many average and late developers do not reach their full soccer potential when they are passed-over at age 10, 11 or 12 and don't receive good coaching, patience and perseverance.

The development considerations for each stage in the curriculum are explored in the 'Stage' sections of this curriculum.

CHILD CENTERED CURRICULUM

Central to the theme of Player Development is the concept of 'Child-centered' learning. The focus of the MSA Player Development Curriculum is the need of individual players (child) – first and foremost. The education environment is constructed to focus on the player's, abilities, interests, and learning styles and the coach performs as the facilitator. At each stage of development the player should actively participate in creating learning experiences. Individual performance outcomes should largely direct coaching content and activities. Conversely, 'Coach-centered' approaches have the coach as the central director and players in a passive, receptive role.

A 'Child-Centered Coach' uses a variety of techniques to engage the players in thought and discussion. One technique used consistently is questioning. Questions give children an opportunity to solve a problem and typically players try hard to solve it. Solutions generated to address the issues are theirs and subsequently players take greater ownership than if they were told what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Solving problems through questioning enables players to explore, discover, create and generally experiment with a variety of techniques and tactical processes.

There are several approaches to help players reflect on their learning while practicing and playing games:

- Skill questions develop purposeful feedback and skill awareness. Skill questions include what and where. For example, What happened to the ball when you leaned back? Where did your head finish when you took that shot?
- Tactical questions develop decision making and problem solving with respect to the strategies of the game/activity. Tactical questions include how and why. For example, how can you and your teammate work together to get into a position to score a goal? Why did you contain and delay the attacker at that moment?
- Review questions develop thinking skills to help modify activities to make it more challenging, enjoyable and inclusive. For example, what did you enjoy about this activity? What would you change about this activity? What did you learn about this activity?

THEORY OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

The MSA approach emphasizes development-appropriate skill acquisition to maximize the player's potential. The supporting theory supports ever more complex and demanding conditions placed on the player as they advance through several stages of development, which include pre-puberty, puberty, post-puberty and maturation. In addition to physical transformations, the model also accounts for changes in emotional and cognitive development, factors having a dramatic effect on the capacity of players to learn and perform. Significant developmental differences also exist between children of the same gender and same age. To this end, the MSA model supports the adage – “if you are good enough ... you are old enough”. It is extremely important to offer programming flexibility to enable each child to find their training and performance level. This perspective should not only apply to ‘playing-up’, but also to placing players ‘down’. Our focus must always be on what is best for the child – a decision involving a number of variables. One reason players plateau and leave soccer is an overemphasis on competition instead of training during the important period in their athletic development. Stage 1, 2 and 3 are the most important phases of preparation, physically, mentally, emotionally and in the development of key soccer skills of dribbling, passing and control.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

Children entering soccer at aged 3, 4, 5 or 6 will start a ‘journey’ that should have a clearly defined beginning, middle and end, including multiple assessment points and learning experiences. Some players and parents will choose to end the journey early, but for others who aspire to play soccer into adulthood, the Player Development Model manages every step of the way. For many players and parents understanding the steps to success, expected outcomes and focus on education and training are extremely important factors. True Player Development provides such a pathway, building programs around principles that respect the developmental needs of all children.

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Originally, a model for Elite Athlete Development, the MSA pathway provides a process for development from early childhood through retirement. Stage 1 (4 and 5 year olds), Stage 2 (6-8), Stage 3 (9-11), Stage 4 (12-14) and Stage 5 (15-18). Each stage of the model promotes a different development focus – the interplay between physical, cognitive, emotional, psychological and social variables. For example, when working with four and five year olds consider that players of this age tire easily, need repetition and reinforcement, have short attention span and mostly approach tasks individually.

In terms of soccer participation, we need to ensure the sessions are short, activities change constantly, skills are demonstrated and continually reinforced and information needs to be camouflaged and concealed, such as using cartoon characters and creating a story for a particular activity. Importantly, every child should have a ball at their feet for the vast majority of time. Team play at this stage of development should be restricted to small sided games and 1v1 situations. As players move into Stage 2 we start introducing passing and working cooperatively with teammates.

LEARNING FOCUS

In the context of youth soccer, learning is often left to chance. Clubs and coaches often seem satisfied to accept the major benefits of participation as activity and having fun. Although these outcomes are very beneficial to the child, wider ranging results can also be realized through a structured and organized

program. Regardless of age and ability a Player Development Coach is focused on nurturing players to achieve end of stage goals and attainment targets.

To this end, MSA has developed a Player Development Competency Matrix (4-18 years old). Benchmarks for performance are provided at the end of each stage of development. The assessment program measures the players 'competence' – the relationship between skill, selection and application of skills, tactics, strategies and ideas and the readiness of body and mind to cope with the activity.

THE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CONTINUUM

Player Development Continuum: Development occurs on a continuum where development is more important than the chronological age of the player. Developmental differences between players of the same age are common place and can correlate to +/- 2 years of chronological age. Thus, in a mixed ability group of 10 year old players, it is feasible to have players performing at a level of an average 8 year old and an average 12 year old - a 4 year development range.

Stage of Development:

- Stage 1: Active Start: U4-U6
- Stage 2: Fundamentals: U7-U9
- Stage 3: Learning to Train: U10-U12
- Stage 4: Training to Train: U13-U15
- Stage 5: Training to Compete: U16-U19

STAGE 1 – Active Start: EARLY CHILDHOOD (3-5 YEARS OLD)

The introduction to soccer Stage 1 coincides with the onset of independence from parents and increased self confidence in most children. Children also start to begin to play cooperatively with others. This does not mean however parents should fully pass the responsibility for learning to the club coach. The parent has a very important role in encouraging the child to play at home. Practice sessions should occur once or twice per week and players should be encouraged to play multiple sports and activities.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

- Players should learn the fundamental movement skills of running (forwards, backwards and sideways), jumping, turning, twisting and bending (lowering center of gravity to form a solid base).
- The ball should be involved all the time.

STAGE 2 – Early Fundamentals: MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (6-8 YEARS OLD)

A 6 year old is eager, active and likes to be on the go. Although keen to act independently, a 6 year old needs parental approval, understanding, praise and encouragement. Pushing too hard or expecting too much can result in the child becoming tense and nervous. An 8 year old is able to accept moderate responsibilities. Peer groups become important and the child will identify with other youngsters of the same sex and with similar interests and activities.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

- Movement skills and technical development remain top of the agenda in Stage 2.
- Small-sided games and teamwork activities are introduced.
- Optimal time for training suppleness occurs for both Girls and Boys in stages 2 and 3 (6-10 years)

STAGE 3 – Learning to Train: ADOLESCENCE (9-11 YEARS OLD)

This is the beginning of pre-adolescence. Children begin to ‘spread out’ as their rate of development accelerates. Girls in particular start to physically mature quicker than boys and this growth surge can lead to awkward performance, particularly on tasks requiring fine motor movements. As friendships are developing and players are becoming more reliant on their peers it is important for team selection to be handled sensitively. The reason why so many athletes plateau during the later stages of their careers is primarily because of an over-emphasis on competition instead of training during this important period in their development.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

- This is a crucial time for developing advanced competency in basic techniques and this platform allows for the introduction of more advanced skills.
- Some basic tactical appreciation can also be introduced.
- Commence aerobic capacity training at stage 3, prior to the adolescent growth spurt, also known as Peak Height Velocity
- Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after growth rate decelerates.
- It is also very important that children are encouraged to take part in unstructured play and other sport participation is encouraged.

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS TRANSLATED TO COACHING PLAYERS IN STAGE 3

With appropriate coaching and focus on fundamental movement and basic soccer skills at Stage 1 and Stage 2, the performance of players at Stage 3 start to resemble more traditional soccer that we witness adults and older youth play. A player in possession will be thinking of passing to a teammate and will understand the need to support in attack and defense. Players will have greater awareness for the team, allowing coaches to develop simple tactics involving small groups and units. However, coaches must not abandon individual skill development and this focus must continue to take precedent over team tactics.

STAGE 4 – Training to Train: (12-14 YEARS OLD)

In training, An 8v8 format – 7v7 on the field with a goal keeper is appropriate for players 11, 12, 13 and 14 years old. Smaller playing numbers such as 4v4 and 6v6 will also benefit these players. A 2-3-2 formation is recommended. A midfield line is now introduced as 2 more field players have been added to the team. Several formations are possible, but any formation used must make it easy for the players to execute the principles of play. 2-3-2, produces many triangles and places great focus on transitioning from attack to defense and defense to attack. Many tactics can now be introduced.

At U13 and U14, these ages are playing 11v11 for the first time and any number of team formations is possible. Whatever formation is chosen, it must be one that allows the players to execute the principles of play. Continue to expose the players to all of the team positions. Keep in mind that players this age still do not play well over long distances, so choose a formation that allows the formation of triangles to

support one another. The 4-3-3 formation is the easiest for this age group to execute. Along with full team formations, the U-14s now play on large fields.

STAGE 5 – Training to Compete: Full Sided Games (15-18 YEARS OLD)

Players should have a solid foundation in basic biomechanics, movement skills and general principles of play. Depending on the individual's level of performance and understanding, coaches can advance to advanced systems and team tactics. Players should play to win, but training should still emphasize technique and physical and mental development. Psychological development and mental toughness are primary aims at this stage.

This is a critical time in a player's development. Many children stop playing because of other interests, a lack of success, a shortage of playing opportunities, poor leadership or other reasons. Players tend to be mentally tough and self-confident, but need attention and security. There is a need for team spirit, leadership and discipline within a team.

The training to compete stage covers ages 15 to 18. The objectives are to optimize fitness preparation along with individual and position specific skills, as well as performance in soccer. The training to win stage covers ages 16 and older. The objectives of which are to maximize fitness preparation and individual soccer and position-specific skills, as well as performance (maximize engine, skills and performance). Much of the training with the U-17+ age group will continue the refinement of skills and tactics previously learned with an emphasis on developing positional and team play. The objective of this training is improved consistency and speed of play. Here are the primary objectives:

- Individual and group skill should be covered in the warm-up.
- Even players in their 20s must continuously refine the techniques and tactics learned earlier in their careers.
- Players have a personal responsibility to maintain and improve their physical fitness.
- Social and emotional growth is a lifelong process.
- The continued importance of developing players who have composure and technical speed under pressure cannot be overstated. To develop confidence and competence, players must be exposed to environments where ball manipulation and ball protection are practiced. Players should be placed in training activities where they have to look around and take visual cues of the options before receiving the ball.

In training at this age, several aspects of play must be addressed:

- Group games will include match-related training pitting attack versus defense.
- Vital to the game is the skill of crossing with the aim to develop a complete understanding of crossing angles, overlaps and near and far post runs.
- With set plays, players must develop a complete understanding of attacking and defending responsibilities.
- Emphasize the importance of possession from throw-ins through the defensive and midfield thirds of the field versus possession and creativity in the attacking third.
- Players need to understand how to play against a compact defense. They must learn to be patient as they maintain possession and look for the spaces to penetrate.

Components of the Game for the Training to Compete Stage:

Tactics: Should be developing the ability to adapt tactics during the flow of play and key players should be able to dictate the rhythm of the game. Practice playing on, around and away from the ball with purpose, group tactics, the role of the 3rd attacker, principles of attack and defense, diagonal passing, dribbling and off-the-ball runs, wing play, overlapping runs, defending in the midfield and attacking thirds, all possible set plays, match analysis and switching the point of attack.

For goalkeepers: command out to the penalty spot, initiate the attack, provide support on the attack to the fullbacks, recognize pressure on and off the ball and team organization when defending against free kicks.

Psychology: personal accountability, drive, courage, sacrifice in order to achieve one's best, sportsmanship, parental involvement, how to play, emotional management and communication.

Fitness: power, vertical jump, body composition, plyometric exercise, soccer-specific weight training, interval training, S.A.I.D. principle, recovery exercise and time off for rest, agility training with and without the ball, range of motion exercises especially during the warm-up and cool-down must include static stretching as well as light movement and proper nutrition and hydration.

Technique: The biomechanics of individual technique must continue to be developed under game-like situations to improve speed of play.

The game: 11v11 - With an emphasis on group tactics and being able to play more than one team formation. Teams should also be able to know when to play man-to-man marking in a zone defense. The focus of matches should be on the tactical application of ball skills, learning new tactics, executing set plays and trying new team formations. The match is for learning more about soccer, not entertaining the fans. In order for players to develop a rhythm of play during a match, substitutions should be limited. The act of platooning, where players are rotated in and out, stifles rhythm. Limits on substitutions need to be addressed based on the level of competition.

LONG TERM FOCUS

Research exists suggesting that becoming an Elite athlete requires dedication of 10,000 hours. Three hours of practice every day for 10 years. Although this elite level of performance outcome is only applicable to a very small percentage of the playing population, this example does illustrate a correlation between time, maturation and achievement. The MSA Model represents a more realistic perspective of commitment, focusing more on the quality of instruction, ratio of practices to competitive games and self-dedicated time, than on the volume of hours. However, becoming a competent performer takes time as the body and mind need to adapt to growth and experience. Unfortunately, in youth soccer a short term perspective is regularly implemented by coaches and parents with an over-emphasis on winning and achieving immediate success – this has been referred to as 'Peaking by Friday' mentality.

Progression is a term used frequently in soccer coaching to represent advancement in training complexity or applying coaching conditions to increase demands on the players. Progression is also used to describe how coaches gradually build learning experiences in stages rather than all at once, coordinating the instruction and content with the player's motivation and developmental phase. In

moving too quickly to tactics, formations and positions, coaches will pass over general movement skills and gradual skill progression. This is a significant oversight as failure to become proficient in the fundamentals of the game and in movement will create deficiencies in performance later. For players and parents with aspirations of playing soccer in college or beyond, failure to master the foundations of the game will affect their opportunities in adult sport.

HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LEARNING

Former USA Women's National Team Coach, Tony DiCicco uses a phrase 'Soccer sessions life lessons' to describe the role soccer should play in developing characteristics such as leadership, team work, commitment and responsibility. Participation in sport and physical activity not only helps to shape character traits but can also contribute to better academic performance. A strongly held belief by many administrators of town soccer is the perception that fun and learning are mutually exclusive – if we make the environment more conducive to learning (small side activities, ability based, player assessments, individual instruction, shorter and more focused sessions etc) we sacrifice fun. This belief has no scientific foundation and in fact flies in the face of common logic. In cases where programs cite bad experiences in implementing a 'learning environment', we propose the issue is more in the way implementation was approached and communicated, than in the idea itself. In his book 'Good to Great', Jim Collins addresses organizations having an issue in changing when their current approach is seemingly realizing good results. Collins refers to 'good being the enemy of great' and this is certainly applicable to youth soccer. Why change the approach to learning when participation numbers in soccer exceed all other sports in the town? We must also think of ways to encourage players to learn the sport outside of scheduled practices and games. Taking the ball out in the yard with friends and parents, attending a live game (high school, college or professional) or watching the game on TV are some of the ways we can further engage players and parents in the learning experience. Finally, MSA believes a Player Development Model should encourage players to play a variety of sports for as long as possible, until such times as the player decides to commit more fully to soccer. Soccer performance can benefit significantly by learning from physical transfers from other sports and vice versa. For example, tactical similarities such as attack and defense in basketball or field hockey - rebounding, quick feet and lateral movements in basketball can greatly enhance explosive movements required in soccer. Playing soccer 3-5 nights per week for a 7 year old child is too much. We do however recommended players participate year-round to limit performance regression – developing their competencies in movement and fundamental ball skills.

PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

Principles of play are the underpinning concepts of the game and can be coached from the first stage of development onwards. The principles relate to attacking and defending and should not be confused with systems of play – the formation of the team on the field. The principles of play are the same in any system of play. It is important for the coach to know and understand the principles before helping the players to understand. With a good appreciation and excellent technique, a team will be able to play any system and style.

ATTACKING PRINCIPLES

There are 5 principles of attack:

1. **Penetration:** In simplistic terms penetration is the act of breaking through the defense by dribbling, shooting, running or passing. We can start to coach penetration at stage 1 of development.
2. **Depth and support:** A player in possession of the ball receives help to maintain possession. Support attackers provide forward, backward and sideways options to the attacker in possession. We can start to coach support at stage 2 of development with passing and receiving.
3. **Width:** The attacking team attempts to stretch the opponent's defensive shape. The attacking players use the width of the field to tempt the defenders from a compact shape covering the dangerous areas in front of goal and in so doing create space. The attackers move the ball to change the point of attack in an effort to find a seam or space between or behind the defense. We can start coaching 'width' in late stage 2 and early stage 3.
4. **Mobility:** Attackers make runs into different areas of the field in order to draw defenders out of their positions. A coach can commence teaching this principle is best during stage 3 of development.
5. **Improvisation:** Creativity and Surprise Attackers will try to break down defenses by employing the element of surprise. Skills such as back-heels, cut backs, flicks, feints and fakes are all used to this end. Comfort on the ball is critical and this training starts in stage 1 of development.

DEFENDING PRINCIPLES

5 principles of defending designed to counteract the effects of the attacking principles:

1. **Pressure:** Early in the development process a coach should work on individual defending. 1v1 activities are great ways to teach the skill of 'pressure'. The objective of the defender is to force the attacker to make a mistake without over committing to win the ball. The defender must apply pressure to the attacking player with the ball and either win possession, delay the attack by preventing the shot, pass or dribble. 1v1 scenarios can be introduced at stage 1, but formal coaching of pressure commences at stage 2.
2. **Cover/Support/Depth:** In Defense Following our coaching efforts to teach defenders to apply pressure to the player on the ball, we progress to work with support defenders off the ball. When defending in pairs, the second defender cuts off passing lanes and is ready to revert to the role of the pressure player if the attacker beats the first defender. This principle is ideal to introduce in the stage 2 stage of development once the players have a good handle on the first principle of pressure.
3. **Balance:** There are a variety of defensive shapes used to counteract an attack. For example, when the ball is central in the midfield area, the defensive shape is more pie shaped with the defender nearest the ball applying pressure and the other defenders retaining defensive balance. A third defender will drop off the ball and get into a position where they can mark a player, follow a penetrating run or step forward to pressure the ball. Naturally, adding a third and fourth defender follows pressure and cover and should be introduced in the third stage of development.
4. **Delay/Patience/Discipline/Restraint:** All too often young defenders will be over eager to win possession of the ball off an attacker. Impatient defending can result in the loss of defensive shape and compactness. It is important for a coach to teach defenders to read the

game and make good decisions on when to win possession, when to apply enough pressure to force an attacker to lose possession and when to force the attack in a direction most beneficial to the team. It is now common place in soccer for coaches to work seriously on transition from defense to attack. Counter attacking and fast breaks are deemed great ways to create an attacking overload as over committed defenders are chasing back to get goal side of the ball. To this end, the defensive principle of delay is paramount. The objective is to slow the attack by forcing the ball to less dangerous areas of the field and allow teammates to get back into position. We can start to work on this principle in the later stage2.

5. **Compactness:** Defensive compactness is the polar opposite of Attacking width. The aim is to condense the middle of the field and limit the space and likelihood of penetration. We often see this tactic employed by a less capable team when they are playing against a stronger and more fluent passing team. The phrase 'parking a bus in front of the goal' has been used to describe how difficult it becomes for an attacking team to overcome a compact defense. One can employ this principle in small sided games at stage 3 of development.

SYSTEMS OF PLAY

A system of play is the formation of the team during a game. Commencing post puberty (mid to late teenage years), we can start to focus on 1 or 2 positions in an 11v11 game. However, specializing on one position should not occur until adulthood, and even then the more versatile the player (the ability to perform well in different positions of the field), the more value the player has to the team.

Specific positional training (functional training) can take many years as each role in the team has a unique set of attributes and demands. It is a mistake to limit a player to one position or role before it is imperative to specialize. To that end, throughout the youth experience, a key role of the coach is to provide players with an opportunity to play in many different roles in the system before they specialize.

As coaches of youth players, it is far more important for development that we focus on the principles of play and positioning – and not be over concerned with positions. It takes significant time for young players to understand and execute the principles of play, so patience is extremely important. Repetition and reinforcement is crucial and over time player positioning will improve.

"If you want to raise the level of the elite player, then you must raise the level of the average player."

- Rinus Michels Ajax and The Netherlands, former manager

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