Easton Youth Soccer League

U14 Development Curriculum
Introduction

The position of youth soccer coach is a very important one! You are charged with the responsibility of positively impacting the development of young people through the sport of soccer…an awesome responsibility!

The youth soccer coach must work toward providing each player with an environment conducive to learning and having fun! This is no small task. It will take effective management of players, parents, referees and opponents to provide such an environment. Preparation for training sessions and games is imperative if positive player development is the goal.

The decisions that you make as a youth coach may not always be popular decisions, but, if they are player-development-centered, they will be the right decisions. With that in mind, I have prepared this player and coach development curriculum.

The purpose of this curriculum is to standardize “best practice” soccer training for the Easton Youth Soccer League (EYSL). This curriculum provides age appropriate player and coach development information for all EYSL coaches, players and parents. This document deals with player and coach development as they relate to the components of the game: technical, tactical, physical and psychological. The curriculum is also based on the human development domains: cognitive, psychomotor and psychosocial domains.

It is imperative that we understand that every child develops at a different rate; so this curriculum is a guide from which youth coaches can design their training and playing environments to meet the needs of their players.

This curriculum is the compilation of youth soccer training information from 19 years of youth coaching and training experience. In addition this resource relies heavily on the coaching experience of Tom Goodman, who brings 35 years of youth coaching and training experience. As the former US Youth Soccer National Director of Coaching Education, former USSF National Staff Coach for Region 1, former Technical Director for Mass Youth Soccer and former Founder and President of World Class Soccer, Inc., Tom has researched and studied youth soccer at many different levels, and, as a result, he has provided much of the content for this document.

Best of luck…

John Barata
Director of Coaching, Easton Youth Soccer League
State Instructor, Massachusetts Youth Soccer
USSF A License
USYS National Youth License
NSCAA Premier Diploma
How to Use This Curriculum

The curriculum that you are about to use is organized into the following major sections as detailed in the Table of Contents:

- The U6 Age Group (Pre-K and K)
- The U8 Age Group (Grades 1-2)
- The U10 Age group (Grades 3-4)
- The U12 Age Group (Grades 5-6)
- The U14 Age Group (Grades 7-8)
- The U16/U18 Age Group (Grades 9-12)
- Important Resources

The Age Group sections are full of valuable information such as:

- Role of the coach
- Age group player characteristics
- What game components should be taught to players in the age group
- What the training session should look like for players in the age group
- Sample practice plan for the age group
- Link to more age appropriate practice plans

The Important Resources available in our complete Easton Youth Soccer Curriculum offer very valuable supplemental information such as:

- Team Management – Parent Communication
- Prevention & Care – Risk Management
- Proper Warm-up/Cool-down/Stretching
- Player Evaluation/Assessment
- Coach Evaluation/Assessment
- The Training Environment
- Coaching Points
- Systems of Play (Formation)
- Small-Sided Games in America
The U14 Age Group (Grades 7-8)

This is a transitional age into the adult game. Adult standards and formal rules become applicable at this stage of development. The pace of development quickens at this time due to the acceleration of physical and mental maturation. The demands of skill training as well as training loads should increase thus provoking improvement in mental toughness, concentration and diligence. Awareness of tactics within the game becomes an important facet of the learning process. Players tend to be self-critical and rebellious, but have a strong commitment to the team. The Principles of play must be infused in every aspect of training:

**Attacking Principles:**
- Penetration
- Support
- Mobility
- Width
- Depth (Length)
- Improvisation (deception, creativity)

**Defensive Principles:**
- Recovery (Immediate Chase)
- Pressure
- Cover
- Balance
- Compactness
- Counter Attack

Role of the Coach

The role of the coach at the U14 age group must be a patient, strong and motivating leader. The coach must create game-like training environments where the lessons of the activities transfer to the game of soccer. Therefore, the coach must be comfortable teaching/coaching in the game. The tactical application of technique becomes extremely important for players in this age group, therefore the coach must introduce functional (position specific) training so that players develop the skills they need to solve the problems that the game presents.

License Recommendations

The [US Soccer National C License](https://www.ussoccer.com) or higher.
The U14 Player Characteristics

Mental/Psychological (cognitive)

- Crucial period for learning…will ask questions
- Initiation of thinking as an adult in the adult environment…more players, larger field
- Improved ability to sequence thought and actions and perform more complex tasks…can anticipate possible outcomes based on the recognition of visual cues
- Ability to use more abstract thought to meet the demands of the game (i.e. well-timed overlapping run)
- Use more of their teammates to solve game problems
- Training must replicate the game

Physical (psychomotor)

- Continue to gain a tremendous amount of physical strength, endurance and power
- Flexibility training is key to prevention of injury
- More confident with physical technical demands above their waist (receiving with the chest; heading the ball)
- Goalkeeping skills are becoming refined
- Overuse injuries occur when age appropriate development is ignored
- Height for boys ranges between 5’3”-5’6” and weight ranges between 105 and 125
- Height for girls ranges between 5’3”-5’4” and weight ranges between 105 and 115
- Some boys are just reaching puberty, which impacts how they feel about themselves and how they are treated by their teammates.
- The onset of puberty brings a growth spurt that affects their balance and coordination; they gain strength and power, but temporarily lose agility and suppleness

Socially (psychosocial)

- Gender differences are more apparent
- Whether a child enters puberty early or late has important psychological implications regarding relationships with their teammates
- Spend more time with their friends and less time with their parents
- Children tend to conform to peer pressure
- Becoming more outgoing and confident…loves competition
- Their values impact their ethical and moral behavior on and off the field
What to Teach U14 Players (Game Components)

Technique (skills)

- **Dribbling**
  - To beat an opponent (penetration); to possess (shielding)
- **Feints with the Ball**
  - Subtle body movements to unbalance the opponent
- **Receiving Air Balls with Feet, Thighs and Chest**
  - Quality of 1st touch: away from pressure; to beat an opponent
- **Heading to Score Goals, To Pass and for Clearances**
  - Timing, accuracy (direction) and pace
- **Finishing**
  - Chipping; bending; toe; off crosses
- **Passing**
  - Short; long; chipped bent
  - Deceptive use of foot surface (toe, outside of foot, heel)
- **Crossing (placement)**
  - Near post; far post; penalty spot
- **Slide Tackle**
  - Constructive (to win possession of the ball)
  - Destructive (break up play and/or delay game)

Goalkeeping (skills)

- **Footwork for Goalkeepers**
  - Post to post (lateral); forward and backward
- **Throwing**
  - Side-arm; round-house; baseball
- **Kicking**
  - Drop-kick (driven); side volley from hands
- **Diving**
  - Step and Collapse (low)
  - Step and slide onto forearms and thighs (forward)
- **Angle Play**
  - Fast footwork; body shape
- **Parrying and Boxing**
  - One hand, two hands
Psychology (mental and social)

- Teamwork
- Confidence
- Increase demands
- Intrinsic motivation…develop training targets
- Sportsmanship
- Creativity
- Emotional management – Mental toughness – Handling stress in the game
- Training activities should be competitive with winners and losers

Fitness (conditioning)

- Speed
- Strength
- Power
- Aerobic and anaerobic exercise
- Proper warm-up and cool-down now mandatory

Tactics (decisions)

- 1 v 1 through 4 v 4 attacking & defending
- Train with uneven numbers (i.e. 4v3) to foster proper decision making when numbers up and numbers down
- Increase tactical speed (small sided games provide the right environment)
- Encourage risk taking in proper areas of the field
- Reinforce the principles of play
- Verbal & visual communication for all players (Cues)
- Half-time analysis
- Beginning to identify potential roles for players (goalkeeper, defender, midfielder &/or forward); should have more than one role; should be comfortable in more than one position
- Begin to focus on the relationship between the different lines of the team (keeper, backs, midfield and forwards)
- Encourage the goalkeeper to be part of the attack
- Commanding the 6 yard box by the goalkeeper
- Far post play by the goalkeeper
- Saving penalty kicks
- Simple set play patterns
- Speed in setting up walls

Rules

✓ Offsides
US Youth Soccer U14 Modifications to the Game

Playing numbers: 11v11 (with goalkeepers)
Field Dimensions:
  Length  100-120 yards
  Width  50-75 yards
Goal Dimensions:
  Height  8 feet
  Width  24 feet
Duration: Two periods of 35 minutes
Ball Size: Number 5

Practice and Game Considerations

- Practice Length: 75-90 minutes
- Practice/Game Ratio: 3 practices:1 game
Sample U14 Practice Plan  
*(Passing and Receiving for Possession)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Warm up</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Coaching Pts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Technical Warm up Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Organization Image" /></td>
<td><strong>Passing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups of 3 Passing &amp; Receiving:</td>
<td>12 Players divided into 4 Groups of 3</td>
<td><strong>Technique of passing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Players pass and move with one soccer ball</td>
<td>✓ 3 touch: receive, set &amp; pass</td>
<td>o locked ankle, toe up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ 2 touch: receive &amp; pass</td>
<td>✓ 1 touch: pass</td>
<td>o eyes on ball at instant of contact, follow through to partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 seconds maximum in one location. Throughout this exercise all players shall be in constant communication.</td>
<td><strong>Passing accuracy and weight of pass</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 15 minutes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Receiving</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technique of receiving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Keep eyes on ball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Select, present, and relax the controlling surface</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Receive sideways on so you have better vision of the field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Receive ball away from pressure and toward supporting options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Importance of first touch to control and prepare the ball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Turn and change direction with one touch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Team</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supporting Shape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Possession vs. Penetration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Keep possession-speed of play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proper angle and timing of support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Clear Communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Demand the ball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To alert teammates of attacking pressure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To alert teammates of defensive pressure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Easton Soccer
### Player Development Curriculum
#### U14 Age Group (Grades 7-8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small Sided Game</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4v4 to Four Small Goals:</td>
<td>In a 30x35 yd. grid with two small 3 feet cone goals on each of the 35 yard lines, near each corner. Each team defends and attacks two goals. If playing with 4 players, the attacking shape should be a diamond. If attacking with five players, the attacking shape should be a 3-2 or 2-1-2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 15 minutes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exp. Small Sided Game</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5v5/6v6 to Six Goal Game:</td>
<td>Players divided in two teams. Play 6v6 with six goals located on end lines; each team attacks &amp; defends three. Teams score points by dribbling or passing through goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Dribble goal located in center = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Pass through either goal near sideline = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Pass through either goal near sideline from change of point of attack = 3 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 20 minutes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Coaching Pts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7v7 or 8v8 Scrimmage</td>
<td>Play in 55x80 yd. grid with Goalkeepers. Encourage him/her to communicate with teammates</td>
<td>• All of the above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time: 30 minutes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOL DOWN</td>
<td>Activities to reduce heart rate, static stretching &amp; review session. <strong>Time: 5-10 Minutes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For More U14 Practice Plans go to:

Systems of Play (Formations)

A system of play is the formation of players or placement of players on the field at the start of the game. The system selected by the coach is most commonly determined by his/her players’ abilities (strengths and weaknesses). The coach also selects a system that will provide balance all over the field…players up top, players in the middle, players in the back; players on the right and players on the left.

We use numbers to define a system of play and describe the formation from back to front. The goalkeeper is assumed, therefore not included in the numbers used to describe the system. For example, a 3-3-1 system (formation) includes the goalkeeper, 3 players in the back, 3 players in the midfield and 1 player up front (top); 8 players total. How the coach positions the players determines the shape of the team. Formations must provide geometrical shapes that allow for different playing angles and distances for the players.

**NATURAL SUPPORT ANGLES IN A 1 - 3 -3 -2 FORMATION**

We could not discuss systems of play without discussing age appropriate playing numbers. The younger the players, the smaller the playing numbers and the smaller the field, thus, the less complicated the system of play. For instance, U6 teams play with 3 players. With only 3 players on the field, the only shape attainable is some form of a triangle. At this age, the shape of the team is not as important as the opportunity for the players to exercise and get touches on the ball.

The age appropriate playing numbers as recommended by US Soccer and US Youth Soccer are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Playing Numbers</th>
<th>Field Players</th>
<th>Goalkeeper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U6 Games</td>
<td>3v3</td>
<td>3 players</td>
<td>NO goalkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U8 Games</td>
<td>4v4</td>
<td>4 players</td>
<td>NO goalkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U10 Games</td>
<td>7v7</td>
<td>6 players</td>
<td>1 goalkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U12 Games</td>
<td>9v9</td>
<td>8 players</td>
<td>1 goalkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U13+ Games</td>
<td>11v11</td>
<td>10 players</td>
<td>1 goalkeeper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**U12 Formations**

Teams in this age group play with 9 players; 8 field players and 1 goalkeeper. Keep in mind that the size of the field has increased considerably, thus, introducing a middle third area of the field and the necessity to introduce midfield players to connect the back players to the front players. From this age group forward, we will discuss play as it relates to thirds of the field: Back third (defensive third), middle third (midfield) and front third (attacking third).

In the 9v9 formation, there are several different options, which are displayed and described below. Each system has their strengths and weaknesses on the offensive and defensive side.

- 1-2-3-3
- 1-3-3-2
- 1-2-4-2

At the U12 age groups, the players are more technically, tactically, mentally and physically developed, so, depending on the team, a one player in a line can be extremely effective. These players understand how to move off the ball, intelligently switch positions to create proper support for their teammates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN AREAS OF BUILDING BLOCKS: INDIVIDUAL / GROUP TACTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FORMATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHY USE IT?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHICH TOPICS DOES IT HELP TO ENHANCE?</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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**TRANSITIONS INTO**

11 v 11 – 1-4-3-3
### FORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-3-2-3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### WHY USE IT?
Players working in pairs in the wide areas allows for multiple topics to be conducted in relation to this area of the field. This formation also allows for lots of natural triangles.

#### WHICH TOPICS DOES IT HELP TO ENHANCE?
- Possession
- Attacking 2 vs 1
- Combination play

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### TRANSITIONS INTO

11 v 11 – 1-4-2-3-1

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### FORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-2-4-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### WHY USE IT?
Lots of natural triangles which create a structure that helps to bring out the principles of the game, two forwards as well.

#### WHICH TOPICS DOES IT HELP TO ENHANCE?
- Passing and Receiving
- Shooting
- Possession
- Combination play

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### TRANSITIONS INTO

11 v 11 – 1-4-4-2

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