

CFD Player Development Curriculum

The purpose of this curriculum is to help standardize “best practice” soccer training for CFD Soccer. A curriculum is a plan for teaching the subject. It is an attempt to account for all the learning guided by the coach. The process of learning is made easier if both the coach and the player know what the coach is trying to achieve. This should be an explicit statement, the more precise the better. These statements are the coaching objectives within the curriculum. The player is aided knowing not only what to do, but also whether he or she has done it. The coach’s task is easier when knowing what to look for in the player’s performance.

The figure below (**Worthington, 1974**) gives an overview of the factors influencing player development within all four components of soccer (next page) described here as soccer skill. Like any teacher, a soccer coach must decide what skills will be introduced during the year and in what sequence.



While the curriculum is the baseline for what to do in training, coaches should observe matches and take notes to understand developmental needs of each player. The coach must be flexible with the curriculum and be ready to adjust it based on specific needs.

The curriculum should consist of the ***four components of soccer*** (shown below) used to develop player performance. To tie the four components together for both the player and the team as a whole, the principles of play must be evaluated.

Four Components of Soccer



These four components of soccer should be a consistent theme throughout each age group’s applicable *principles of play* (shown below). The principles of play are essentially the checklist a player goes through mentally for each situation that occurs in a match. Over time, these principles of play will start to become second nature for the players and improved decision making quickens. The foundation to building a team during the development years is to teach, within the players, the principles of play through those four components of soccer.

Principles of Attack	Principles of Defense
Penetration	Pressure – immediate chase
Support	Goal side
Mobility	Cover
Width	Balance on ball side
Improvisation	Compactness
Finishing	Control

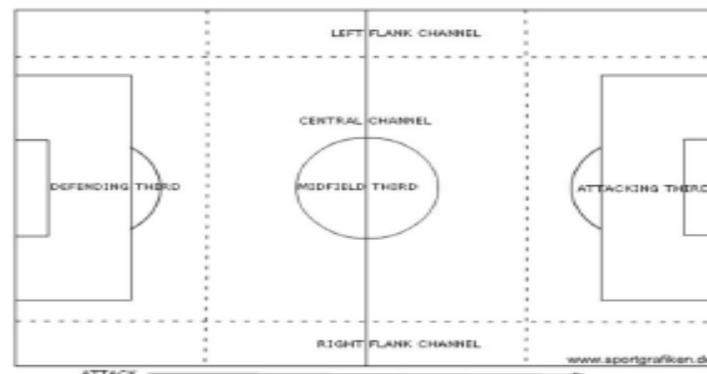
Systems of Play

Many times we may concentrate on a team formation and exclude essential developmental needs. A common question is, “What is the best formation to win?” We cannot be too quick to permanently place a player in a specific position. Many coaches teach the game by position. This approach has an over emphasis on a particular system of play. Systems are not the focus, but rather the framework. The decisive factor is the player and his or her individual qualities, specifically technical expertise. Players must be given the chance to play every position in soccer to deepen their understanding of the game. Teaching positioning is key prior to the roles of positions in a formation develops anticipation players, which is what we all want.

Top teams play offensively, fast and flexible. To achieve the form of top teams, players must be soccer savvy and versatile. These are players who can adapt to several different systems of play and can take on diverse roles in various team formations. Remember that the formation is merely a platform, a reference point for the players, from which to play soccer.

Division of the Field - Thirds and Channels

Soccer, like all team sports, involves both simple and advanced tactics. The general principles of play and the division of the field into the following three specific areas help clarify tactics for the beginning player and coach. The three divisions of the field cover the defending, midfield and attacking thirds. The midfield third is the same for both teams, while the defending third for one team is the attacking third for the other. The basic strategies performed in each third help make for an attractive and well-played game. Furthermore, the field is divided into three channels running the length of the field – two flank channels and one central channel.



Long-Term Player Development

Intelligent development of soccer players is a continuum that overlaps age groups. The following are the top 10 objectives in the development of a soccer player:

- 1) Develop the child's appreciation of the game.
- 2) Keep winning and losing in proper perspective.
- 3) Be sensitive to each player's development needs.
- 4) Educate the players to the technical, tactical, physical and psychological (four components of soccer) demands of the game for their level of play.
- 5) Implement rules and equipment modifications according to the players' age group.
- 6) Allow players to experience all positions.
- 7) Players need to have fun and receive positive feedback.
- 8) Training should be conducted in the spirit of enjoyment and learning.
- 9) Provide the appropriate number of training sessions and matches according to the player's stage of development.
- 10) Strive to help each player reach their full potential and be prepared to move to the next stage of development.

The coach turns technical, tactical, psychological and physiological (four components of soccer) know-how into reality. The ultimate goal is to prepare the players to participate at the next level. The next level could be the next age group or a different level of competition. Stages for age progression are:

- U5 - U6 = Me and My Ball
- U7 - U8 = Me and My Partner
- U9 - U10 = The Start of Us
- U11 -U12+ = Us

Development Matrix

Stage of Development	Me and My Ball		Me and My Partner		Start of Us		Us	
Age Group	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
DRIBBLING SKILLS								
Running with the ball	I			D				
Feints and dribble	I				D			
Beating an opponent		I			D			
Escaping an opponent		I			D			
RECEIVING								
Control - Foot	I					D		
Control - Thigh			I			D		
Control - Chest				I			D	
Control - Head								I
PASSING								
Ground - Inside of foot - 5 yards		I				D		
Ground - Inside of foot - 10 yards			I			D		
Ground - Inside of foot - 20 yards				I			D	
Long pass				I				D
Chip/Lofted pass					I			D
Swerve pass - inside foot					I			D
Swerve pass - outside foot					I			D
Crossing					I		D	
SHOOTING								
Instep / Laces	I				D			
Half volley				I			D	
Full volley				I			D	
I = To be introduced								
D = Expected to demonstrate								

U5 – U6 / Me and My Ball

The fascination for the ball, the desire to master it and the thrill of scoring goals provides the launching pad into a lifetime of soccer participation. The joy and skills of the game are best nurtured by encouraging freedom of expression and organizing children’s play in small groups.

Coach’s qualities: Uses the games approach to learning, not drill oriented. Act as a facilitator rather than a coach. Other characteristics are: good humor, friendly helper, organizer, stimulator, ability to see soccer from a child’s perspective, patient, able to demonstrate movements and simple skills, enthusiastic and imaginative.

Components of the Game

Fitness: Introduce the idea of how to warm-up and movement education. Begin education about nutrition with players and parents. Balance, walking, running, how to start and stop, jumping, hopping, rolling, skipping, changing direction, bending, twisting and reaching.

Technique: Dribbling (stop and start) and shooting. Experiment with the qualities of a rolling ball.

Psychology: Sharing, fair play, parental involvement, “how to play” and emotional management.

Tactics: Where is the field? The concept of boundary lines, at which goal to shoot and playing with the ball wherever it may go.

****Please note that the components of the game are in a priority order for this age group.***

Typical Training Session

- Should not exceed 45 minutes.
- Every child should have a ball.
- Free play or a warm-up - approximately 15 minutes
- Game-like activities, mostly body awareness and maze games -approximately 15 minutes
- Finish with a 3v3 game with two goals, no goalkeepers-approximately 15 minutes

Coaches should devote the end of each training session to playing 3v3 practice games. During these practice games is the best time for the coach to teach rules of the game to the players. Fun games involving small numbers can be played, especially 1v1, 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2 leading up to a final activity of 3v3. It is important to ensure each child has a ball and to focus on fun games. The benefit of the increased number of touches on the ball in those games is irreplaceable. Coaches should be well prepared and have a selection of game-like activities planned.

Training Activities

- Edge of the World
- Soccer Marbles
- Meg the Coach
- Kick the Coach/Parents
- Line to Line Dribbling
- Interactive Dribbling
- Red Light/Green Light
- Gate Dribbling

U7 – U8 / Me and My Partner

Igniting a passion for the game must be the number one objective for coaches of this age group. The aim of the coach is to keep their soccer experience enjoyable and to foster a desire to play. This love of the game keeps people in the game for a lifetime.

Now is the opportune time for encouraging skills with either foot as the muscle movement patterns are a clean slate. Ambidextrous skill is certainly a goal for a coach committed to player development. Show players that passing is another option to dribbling. This is not just a technical objective but a social one since the basis of all teamwork is cooperation between partners. Many activities will be done in pairs to promote communication, cooperation and the conceptualization of soccer principles. Furthermore, encourage them to get better by practicing on their own with the ball.

Coach's qualities: Sensitive teacher, facilitator, patient, enthusiastic, imaginative, able to demonstrate and understand technique.

Components of the Game

Technique: Experiment with the qualities of a rolling or spinning ball. Introduce ball lifting, juggling, receiving ground balls with the inside and sole of the foot, shooting with the inside of the foot, passing and shooting and dribbling while changing direction. Introduce the push pass.

Fitness: Agility, eye-foot and eye-hand coordination, balance, leaping, bounding, tumbling, catching, throwing, pulling, pushing, warm-up activities and movement education. Continue education on sports nutrition with players and parents.

Psychology: Encourage working in pairs, sportsmanship, parental involvement, how to play, emotional management, creativity, dynamic activities, and participation of all players in a safe and fun environment. There is still a short attention span unless the player has peaked (keep interest high). Like to show what they can do – encourage trying new things. Developing self-esteem – activities should foster positive feedback and attainable positive success.

Tactics: Back line and forward line, 1v1 attack and choosing to dribble or pass. Introduce the names of positions (fullbacks and forwards). Institute games of 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2, playing with the ball with a purpose and promote problem solving.

****Please note that the components of the game are in a priority order for this age group.***

Typical Training Session

- Should not exceed one hour
- Free play or a warm-up, each player with a ball, dynamic stretching -approximately 15 minutes-
- Some individual body awareness activities
- Introduce partner activities
- A mixture of individual and partner activities. Add more maze-type games. Introduce target games with a variety of player combinations: 1v1, 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2 -approximately 25 minutes
- Conclude with a Small-Sided Game of 4v4, two goals and no goalkeepers - approximately 20 minutes

Coaches should devote the end of each training session to playing 4v4 practice games. Fun games can also be played involving small numbers, especially 1v1, 2v1, 1v2, 2v2, 1v3, 2v3 and 3v3 leading up to the final activity of 4v4. Through these games, expose the age group to the principles of play. It is important to ensure each child has a ball and to focus on fun games. The benefit of the increased number of touches on the ball is irreplaceable. Be well prepared and have a selection of game-like activities planned while keeping in mind these young children have short attention spans.

Training Activities

- Foot Skill Drills; pull back, step over, scissors, lunge
- Triangle passing with and without defender
- Juggling allowing ball to bounce
- Hit the dirt
- Circle passing
- Paired gate passing
- Combat to goal
- Directional 2v1
- 3 line drill; shoot, pass, defend

U9 – U10 / The Start of Us

An emphasis needs to be placed on skill development at this age while using a games-based approach. Practice individual skills within individual and small group tactics. Training sessions should include fun skill building activities with some teaching of technique. When coaching players in this age group, the

coach's role expands from one of facilitating to being a teacher of technique and game application. However, playing at this age is still very important, so emphasis should shift toward enjoyable skill development. These players start to move from the how (technique) to when, where, with whom and against whom (skill – tactics). Training sessions should still focus on small-sided games so players have the opportunity to recognize the pictures presented by the game. These objectives are best achieved through a games-based approach to learning soccer.

This is the time to introduce basic combination play, wall passes and take-overs while concentrating on basic skills in cooperative play; i.e., passing, receiving, shooting. Remember players are being coached, not skills. The key motivator in soccer is the ball; use it as much as possible in training sessions. It is very important that warm-up sessions are well handled, as this is the time when the coach takes control and sets the tone. Get into action as soon as possible by having the team work at the outset without an involved and complicated explanation. The teaching of ball skills needs to be accomplished through games. The repetition of technique is undertaken through fun games and dynamic activities.

Coach's qualities: Sensitive teacher, patient, facilitator, enthusiastic, imaginative, ability to demonstrate, understands technique.

Components of the Game

Technique: Experiment with the qualities of a bouncing ball and running with the ball, passing with the inside and outside of the foot (emphasis on quality push pass), instep drive, receiving ground balls with the instep and outside of foot (body behind the ball), receiving bouncing balls with the instep (cushion) and the sole, inside and outside of foot (wedge), fakes²⁸ in dribbling and turning with the ball. Introduce crossing. Practice throw-ins.

Psychology: Keep soccer enjoyable to foster a desire to play using self-motivation. Working in groups of three, four or five, stay focused for one entire half. There is an increase in responsibility, sensitivity, awareness of how to win or lose gracefully, fair play, parental involvement, how to play, communication and emotional management.

Fitness: Factors are endurance, range of motion flexibility, rhythm exercises and running mechanics. Any fitness activities must be done with the ball. Introduce body resistance exercises and the idea of cool down.

Tactics: 1v1 defending, roles of 1st attacker and defender, 2v1 attacking, what it means to get goal-side, small group shape in pairs and threes (emphasize support on both attack and defense), playing on and around the ball as a group with purpose, playing a variety of positions to develop the complete player, introduce the principles of attack and set plays.

****Please note that the components of the game are in a priority order for this age group.***

Typical Training Session

- Should not exceed one hour and 15 minutes
- Free play or a warm-up (ball juggling), partner and small group activities, dynamic stretching - approximately 15 minutes
- Introduce small group activities (four to six players)
- Add more directional games. Play to targets and/or zones - approximately 25 minutes
- Conclude with a Small-Sided Game, 6v6, with goalkeepers - approximately 25 minutes
- Finish with cool down activities - approximately 10 minutes

Devote the end of each training session to playing 4v4, 5v5 and 6v6 practice games. Fun games involving smaller numbers can be played, especially 1v1, 2v1 and 3v2 or 5v3 leading up to a final training activity. Always coach for success. It is still important to ensure that each child has a ball and to focus on fun games, but as the players develop psychosocially, they will be ready to participate and cooperate in small groups.

Training Activities

- Interactive dribble with foot skill drills; spin move, step over, stop and go “V”
- Fast footwork; taps, tick tocks, side rolls, front rolls
- Juggling
- 2 ball circle passing
- Receiving flighted balls; trapping
- Half volleying in two’s
- Inside out
- 1v1 challenge
- 2v2 challenge; winners stays on
- Timed keep away; square
- Small sided game with free flank players

U11 - U12 / Us

The effect of the role model is very important at this stage of development. Hero worship, identification with successful teams and players and a hunger for imaginative skills typify the mentality of this age. This is a time of transition from self-centered to self-critical. Players of this age have a high arousal level in relation to the training of basic skills. The golden age of learning begins with the U-9’s and U-10’s and continuing with this group as being most important age for skill development. Demonstration is very important and the players learn best by doing. Continue to ingrain the principles of play. It is important to establish discipline from the beginning.

Continue establishing a solid base of technique. Develop individual skills under the pressure of time, space and opponent(s) and increase technical speed. While passing has become a more natural part of the game, the dribbling personality must still be encouraged to express that skill. When working with

this age group, concentrate on the application of age appropriate activities, placing an emphasis on individual possession and defending. This means more work on combining players in pairs and small groups to defend and attack.

Coach's qualities: Sensitive teacher, enthusiastic, possess soccer awareness, ability to demonstrate, knowledge of the key factors of basic skill, loves to have fun while teaching, able to deal with youngsters who question/challenge the coach, gives encouragement and preferably energetic.

Components of the Game

Technique: moving throw-in, master the qualities of a bouncing spinning ball. Experiment with the qualities of a flighted ball, feints with the ball, receiving bouncing and air balls with the thigh and chest, first touch receiving, heading to score goals and for clearances while standing or jumping, outside of foot passing, receiving with either foot, short passing with both feet, bending shots, crossing to near post space and penalty spot space and heel and flick passing. Introduce half volley and volley shooting, chipping to pass.

Tactics: 2v1 defending, 2v2 attacking and defending, roles of 2nd attacker and defender, man-to-man defense, combination passing, playing on and around the ball as a group with purpose, verbal and visual communication for all positions, halftime analysis, general work on all restarts, wall pass at a variety of angles, passing combinations on the move and rotation of all players through the team – everyone plays in each position. Reinforce the principles of defense.

Psychology: Keep it fun and enjoyable to foster a desire to play, self-motivation. Focus on teamwork, confidence, desire, mental skills, handling distress, how to learn from each match, fair play, parental involvement and emotional management (discipline).

Fitness: Fitness work continues to be done with the ball. Strength can be improved with body resistance and aerobic exercises. Also focus on agility at speed (sharp turns), acceleration, deceleration, reaction speed, range of motion exercises, proper warm-up and cool-down (include static stretching in the cooldown) are highly recommended now.

****Please note that the components of the game are in a priority order for this age group.***

Typical Training Session

- Should not exceed one hour and 30 minutes.
- Warm-up, small group activities, range of motion stretching - approximately 15 minutes
- Introduce large group/team activities (six to eight players)
- Continue with directional games. Play to targets and/or zones - approximately 30 minutes
- Conclude with Small-Sided Games, 8v8 with goalkeepers - approximately 35 minutes
- Finish with cool-down activity, including static stretching - approximately 10 minutes

A continued emphasis should be placed on the principles of play and the roles of players when attacking and defending. Players will need to understand their particular role when attacking and when trying to regain possession of the ball. The players will need guidance in understanding these roles because of a greater number of players and the increased size of the field. The players should have a basic understanding of how to interchange roles during the flow of play.

Training Activities

- All foot skills know; encourage players to research and learn new ones to show
- Middle man passing and receiving low balls
- Short – short – long passing patterns; in three's
- 2 ball circle passing
- Timed 4v2 keep away & 5v2 keep away
- Small sided game with free flank players
- Zone 1v2 + 1v2 & 1v3 + 1v3
- 3 line drill; shoot, pass, defend

Conclusion

Questions to answer when measuring success for youth soccer:

Short term and Continual

Fun: Do the players smile and laugh? Do the players look forward to playing? The first question from the player's family should be, "Did you have fun today?"

Fair play: Does a player demonstrate by words and actions a sense of sportsmanship?

Rules of the game: Do the players know and follow the rules of soccer?

Health and fitness: Are the players fit enough to meet the physical demands of the game? Are they developing good nutrition and hydration habits befitting an athlete?

Friendships: Are the players creating new friends within the team and with players from other teams?

Skills: Are the players demonstrating a growing number of ball skills and are they becoming more proficient in those skills?

Long term and Continual

Commitment: How do the players answer when asked at the end of a game, "Did you try your best?"

Roles in the team: More important than learning a position, are the players learning about positioning? Knowing where the center forward plays in the team formation is important; yet, learning how to move

tactically within the game is far more important. Do all of the players get exposed to playing all of the positions?

Leadership: Are players being given the opportunity to take on leadership roles and responsibilities? Are the coaches and team managers teaching leadership?

Tactics: Are the players experimenting with new tactics in matches? The coaches must teach new tactics to the players in training sessions, and then allow them to try out the tactics in a match, regardless of how that might affect the outcome.

Retention: Do the players come back year after year?

Notes: