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Chapter 1

Club’s Coaching Philosophy
Vision Statement:

Develop and encourage innovative and creative soccer players and leaders today that will shape and change the game for tomorrow.

Mission Statement:

To perpetuate a prominent standard of quality in youth soccer by exemplifying excellence through coaching; and to encourage and inspire youth, of all ages and backgrounds, to develop a passion and absolute love for the beautiful game. By creating environments for the player that will allow them to completely and unconditionally express their passion through pure innovation and creativity. Therefore, allowing each player and team to achieve their personal best; by efficiently and effectively problem solving, no matter the situation.

Club Values:

Innovation + Creativity + Dedication + Passion + Respect + Integrity + Pride + Resolve + Encouragement + Player-Centric-Focus + Responsibility + Leadership + Trust

Club Philosophy on Coaching:

ASC Ajax’s number one goal is to foster the innate ability for children to do what they are taught and encouraged to do every day; to be creative and innovative both individually and collectively. A detailed Player Development Curriculum has been developed and will contain five stages; Stage 1 is ages 4-6, Stage 2 is ages 7-9, Stage 3 is ages 10-12, Stage 4 is ages 13-15 and Stage 5 is ages 16-18. The stages will focus on attaining specific goals which in turn will ensure the player is properly progressing through the Player Development Continuum. Children will be taught the beautiful game through fun and engaging technical and tactical training sessions that are organized in a manner to ensure success for the individual player and team. The training sessions will focus highly on games and activities that allow the individual player a maximum number of physical touches with the ball. This will encourage the individual to explore creatively and experiment in a manner that is conducive to maximum development potential.

At every stage in the Player Development Continuum the individual will be the primary focal point with the team as the secondary focal point. Recently, there has been an enormous push of information regarding tactics and system of play in soccer. This barrage has stifled the individual player development and caused a void for learning, growing and creating. ASC Ajax will focus more on the principles of play rather than the tactics and systems of play. This will ensure a more focused approach is taken to individual player development which in turn will ensure individual and team success.
At the first stage in the development sequence, ages 4-6, there will be no focus on tactics, team shape, systems of play or positions. We are not trying to create tacticians at this age; we are trying to develop creators and inventors. Therefore, all of the focus will be on the individual which will assist in ensuring maximum development at this stage as this is the beginning of the development sequence.

The second stage in the development sequence, ages 7-9, should be very similar to stage one but adding some complexity (i.e. incorporating deceptive skills prior to the actual skill; fake strike step-over instead of a step over). This will motivate the player to beat an opponent with skill rather than kick and chase. Some attention will be placed upon team (no more than 3 players) at U9. The primary focus will be teaching the proper attacking and defending principles of play both individually and as a team. Focusing primarily on penetration, width, support, off ball movement and creativity to include shooting for the attacking principles of play; pressure, cover, proper body positioning (pressing and marking), proper tackling and team shape for the defending principles of play. We will introduce our defending style of play at this stage; Extreme High Pressure! A key phrase or point to instill in your players at this stage is: “ALL PLAYERS ATTACK AND ALL PLAYER DEFEND!!”

During the third stage in the development sequence, ages 10-12, the player should have obtained a certain level of comfort with a ball no matter the situation they are placed in. To further prepare each of our players for successful competition, we will explore all of the principles of play both individually and as a team. We will focus on how the individual roles fall into the team tactics of the game. During this stage a more detailed focus will be placed on when and how to penetrate (dribble or pass) with creativity, proper support for the ball (back, right, left and through), 2nd and 3rd man runs with combination play for a mobile attack and spreading a defense from touch line to touch line (width) to open up space in the middle. This will be an introduction to our attacking style of play (combination of possession with a purpose and total football). To ensure we are creating a balanced approach we will continue to focus on defensive team shape and getting number behind the ball (cover and balance), we will begin to explore when to press, delay and deny the ball (pressure and patient defending) and how to stay compact and keep a team from penetrating the middle of the field. We will also continue to explore our tenacious defending style of play; Extreme High Pressure (defend in the opponents half of the field).

At the fourth stage in the development sequence, ages 13-15, we shift our focus to teaching the player how to incorporate their individual creativity, innovation and proper principles of play developed from the earlier stages of development into their tactical decision making. We want this decision making to be effortless and correct most every time (it will not be correct 100 percent of the time that is an unreal expectation). We will begin to fine tune our defending style of play (Extreme High Pressure) and attacking style of play (a combination of possession with a purpose and total football). In doing this we will begin to develop a speed and rhythm of play that utilizes the individual player’s creativity and control in team unison.
The fifth and final stage in the development sequence, ages 16-18, is to master our style of attacking and defending play. A major component for this stage is to prepare them for the next steps in life and in soccer and to teach them to embrace it and be successful with it.

The collective coaching system of this club will be highly encouraged to focus on the aforementioned methods to establish creative and innovative individual technical players and incorporate them into the tactical aspect of the team. Children should be taught all positions on the field, to include goalkeeping, and not just be subjected to play one position. Children should be allowed to experiment and find out what they are good at because if a child chooses to play that position on the field they will give it their best effort. Having a child give 100 percent of their effort 100 percent of the time is one of the greatest compliments any coach can receive because it means you are employing all the correct methods of teaching and the child is enjoying what they are doing.

As coaches it is our responsibility to teach and instill a passion for the beautiful game. In order to accomplish this, we need to teach our players to be aware of all the options available to them. This method will produce good decisions, bad decisions and indifferent decisions but by allowing the player to make mistakes and as a coach, supporting/assisting them through this process without negative punishment, will in turn, allow players to develop an ability to quickly identify the right decision in any situation. When the ability to consistently make the correct choice and properly execute becomes automatic and without reminder or contemplation we have truly succeeded and developed exceptional players. This is the true measurement of our success as coaches and is the most gratifying accomplishment that can be attained.

It is important to acknowledge that, throughout each and all of these stages of the player’s development, the Club’s values will be implemented and taught by the coaches during training sessions in order to assist in the creation of complete athletes. This may include players taking turns to warm everyone up, discussions around particular values and/or real life scenarios, etc. The philosophy of winning at all cost will not be tolerated in this club; it is truly about the development of each player both individually and tactically and not about winning as many games and trophies as possible. Winning should never be the focus of anything we do as coaches; rather a by-product of what and how we teach and coach. Teaching players to be self-reliant, humble and exceptional sportsmen will be the greatest asset the child can obtain in life and in soccer. This is done by focusing on the child and not winning. Ultimately the fear of failure will be eliminated and an astonishing level of self-determination and self-esteem will be established that can create elite players and teams for many years to come.

Club’s Style of Play:

**Attacking:** During training and matches we will focus on a controlled combination of possession with a purpose and total football. Possession or indirect play is a style of play that focuses on total control of the ball by combining short passes and long passes with calculated probing passes at varied distances. Players will need to focus on providing as much support for the ball as possible and will need to use mobility in order to achieve this. In order to maintain its effectiveness players will need to have
outstanding technical ability and be physically fit. The majority of the ball movement will need to be played to feet with penetrating passes finding space between and behind the defense. Total football is team tactical play where all outfield players are interchangeable and the team shape is fluid and ever changing. In total football players are expected to know all the roles on the field and can fill any of them at anytime. As the game is played, players will move in and out of positions as their teammates move around the field. This keeps the initial teams system of play intact at all times. All players are expected to attack and defend in total football and a large portion of the success is reliant upon players understanding and applying all the principles of play. Again the players will need to be physically fit to perform at a high standard

**Defending:** During training and matches we will focus on Extreme High Pressure defending and seeking to play the majority of the game in the opponents half of the field. The first and perhaps most important part of defending is pressure. It needs to be immediate and controlled and force the attacker to make a decision they were not planning to make. By playing a high line and high pressure we will force the attack to play at a pace they are uncomfortable with and force them to make simple mistakes which will allow our defense to capitalize early and often. High pressure also forces the opponent to pull players back and play at a line uncomfortable for their attack. This assists in mitigating the through or over the top ball because the opponent will be more focused on staying onside which will have an effect on their first step. However, the through ball or over the top ball is the biggest threat and the goalkeeper and full backs need to know and understand this and be expecting it at all times. Therefore, we will require our goalkeepers to be good with their feet and require them to play outside their goal box often. High pressure begins at our attacking line of play; these players will need to keep constant pressure on the opponents back line forcing them to play mistake free. Get everyone behind the ball and win back possession immediately!! As with our attacking style, the players will need to physically fit in our defending style of play.
Chapter 2

Introduction to ASC Ajax Coaching Curriculum
Introduction:

Our vision is to develop and encourage innovative and creative players and teams with genuine leaders today that will shape and change the game for tomorrow. We will use the current strengths of United States Soccer of organization, infrastructure and coaching development. We will achieve this by exemplifying excellence through coaching; and to encourage and inspire youth, of all ages and backgrounds, to develop a passion and absolute love for the beautiful game. By creating environments for the player that will allow them to completely and unconditionally express their passion through pure innovation and creativity. Consequently, allowing each player and team to achieve their personal best; by efficiently and effectively problem solving, no matter the situation.

We will work diligently to ensure that each and every coach implements and combines soccer skill development with the following 3 aspects that summarize our unique curriculum;

- Sequential Training (each skills builds upon the next)
- Compound Training (multiple skills being accomplished at one time)
- Specific Training (everything relates to the sport and has a purpose)

A summary of our encouraging and unique approach for player development and a few of the many benefits are:

- Emphasis on individual player development, particularly during the first two stages – technical over tactical.
- Large focus on small sided games, particularly 1v1 to 4v4, skills and confidence for beating an opponent, confident finishing and fearless defending.
- Players become extremely confident on the ball, develop phenomenal individual technique, defend ferociously and develop impeccable speed of thought.
- Players are exposed to more realistic game like situation with the street soccer style of training in which the world’s greatest team players learned to play.
- Emphasis on great risk taking and the desire to learn from mistakes instead of playing safe and team statistical emphasis.

This curriculum recognizes that there’s no possible way for a human to learn all the techniques and tactics of soccer before they complete their youth career at age 18, and that attempting to do so will only result in poorly developed skills and little tactical understanding that can be used at the highest level. Coaches will learn to understand what it takes to build instant perception, self-confidence, technical brilliance and amazing tactical speed. Coaches will learn to appreciate how a team containing multiple players with these abilities will eventually dominate ball possession plus the creation and finishing of goal-scoring opportunities. Coaching technical brilliance and incorporating them into the principles of play will maximize development and will allow players to play in multiple systems.
## ASC AJAX OVERVIEW OF CURRICULUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of Curriculum</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Equal Play</td>
<td>Establish Individual Principles of Play</td>
<td>Solidity of Consistency</td>
<td>Encourage Perspective</td>
<td>Vision of Future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Achieve Individualism</td>
<td>Balance of School, Sport and Health</td>
<td>Co-Curricular Learning</td>
<td>Positive Learning</td>
<td>Achieving Individual and Team Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Individual Technique</td>
<td>Individual and Team Technique</td>
<td>Team Principles of Play</td>
<td>Individual Mentality and Psychology</td>
<td>Team Mentality and Psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Fundamental Technique</td>
<td>Understanding Individual Principles of Play</td>
<td>Individual Preparation</td>
<td>Individual and Team Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>Guided Discovery</td>
<td>Individual and Team Evaluation</td>
<td>Practical and Theoretical</td>
<td>Directed and Modeled</td>
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<td>Principle Information</td>
<td>Factors for Creative Development (Physical and Mental)</td>
<td>Factors for Biological Development</td>
<td>Factors for Emotional Development</td>
<td>Develop Nutritional Understanding</td>
<td>Develop Ideal Physical Fitness</td>
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“Respect yourself, your Opponent and the Game”
# ASC AJAX FIVE STAGE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT DIAGRAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Stages:</th>
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<th>Stage 5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age Groups:</td>
<td>U4-U6</td>
<td>U7-U9</td>
<td>U10-U12</td>
<td>U13-U15</td>
<td>U16-U18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Years:</td>
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<td>3 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
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<td>Length of Training:</td>
<td>30-45 minutes</td>
<td>60-75 minutes</td>
<td>75-90 minutes</td>
<td>90-120 minutes</td>
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<td>Training Session Per Week:</td>
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<td>1-2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Players per Team:</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>18-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles of Play:</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Individual Attacking &amp; Defending</td>
<td>Specific Attacking &amp; Defending Roles</td>
<td>Attacking &amp; Defending as Small Group</td>
<td>Attacking &amp; Defending as a Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tournaments Per Year:</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>5-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small Sided Training:</td>
<td>1v1 - 3v3</td>
<td>1v1 - 4v4</td>
<td>1v1 - 6v6</td>
<td>1v1 - 7v7</td>
<td>1v1 - 7v7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Game Format:</td>
<td>3v3</td>
<td>4v4 - 5v5</td>
<td>6v6 - 8v8</td>
<td>9v9 - 11v11</td>
<td>11v11</td>
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<td>Assessments:</td>
<td>Once per Year</td>
<td>Two per Year</td>
<td>Four per Year</td>
<td>Four per Year</td>
<td>Six per Year</td>
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<td>Coaching License:</td>
<td>USSF Youth Certificate or NSCAA Level 1</td>
<td>USSF E or NSCAA Level 2-3</td>
<td>USSF National D or NSCAA Level 4-6</td>
<td>USSF National D or NSCAA National Diploma</td>
<td>USSF National C or NSCAA Advanced National Diploma or Higher</td>
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The United States’ progressive attitude on coaching and player development has become more evident as of late. This progression has infinite potential and shows the determination and dedication for advancement. This is clearly evident with the United States’ Men’s National Teams latest showing in the World Cup. Although the United States does not have the rich soccer history their developmental mindset has built a solid educational foundation. The United States has exhibited intelligent and rational coaching philosophies for youth soccer programs, ensuring there is a focused training approach. Unlike
the United States, the coaching philosophy for players between the ages of 4 and 16 around the world is out of date. As odd as it may be; these programs are, in general, in the developing state due to the coaching at these levels. Coaches at these levels are inexperienced in developing up-to-date youth systems due to the methods being deployed for many years prior. The traditional youth systems methods have not been updated, therefore allowing for some room for improvement.

The unique and innovative methods we will describe and employ at ASC Ajax are guaranteed to develop the player with reasonable athleticism into a dominant player with outstanding creative brilliance. The coaching and preparation of our youth players for the highest levels of play need to undergo a total transformation. A complete educational curriculum that builds gradually and sequentially to develop highly skilled, deceptive, creative and disciplined players. Because it focuses on developing players who can dominate the ball and the opponent, the approach detailed here will benefit the players to the maximum degree.

Every so often all ASC Ajax coaches will need to explain their philosophies on team soccer. Therefore, it is important that coaches have the ability to confidently explain not only their short term goals and plans but also their mid and long term goal and plans for each player and team. It is equally important to us that players continue to improve throughout each stage of their development. For that reason, as players become more technically accomplished in the early stages, the emphasis will gradually switch from performance of the most difficult individual techniques, i.e. dribbling and opponent and shooting, to the most difficult team concept, i.e. combining deceptive combination play with 2nd and 3rd man runs with one and two touch passing. These skills will be the most difficult that a player will ever have to perform; once these have been mastered everything else in the game will seem simple.

The other conclusive justification for this approach is that there are two types of teams that are extremely difficult to defend against; a team full of gifted dribblers and finishers and a team with great first and second time passers and finishers. With years of coaching experience and having identified weaknesses in the older players, we believe that this is the most effective way to turn these weaknesses into strengths. This will also support us creating the complete player by the time they finish youth soccer. However, it is also important to note that we do not promote 100% focus on individual skill during the early years; the majority of individual skill can still be achieved within small sided activities and games. It is our belief that by working extensively with a combination of both methods (small sided game with an individual approach) during the early stages of youth development, our coaches will be able to develop players and teams that have mastered all the principles of play and are purely creative.

**Developing Individual Player and Team:**

As a coach, it is important to be creative. This includes deciding upon a path, planning ahead and sticking to the plan religiously. Creation demands a conscious choice and may only occur when we imagine, predict, plan and act. Great coaches acknowledge that setting goals, developing a vision of the future and following an established curriculum that achieves the ultimate objectives is the most effective way to inspire and develop young players. Strategically working and focusing on the future is important in order to invest valuable time and effort into the development of players who are individually gifted.
and collectively capable of making a positive contribution to any team. We will use the ASC Ajax’s “Four Corner Model” of training; (1) technical (2) tactical (3) physically and psychological, this will change in order of concentration at each stage of training. This will be accomplished in an environment where the pressure to perform is high and the risk/reward is high, the tactical environment is absolutely insane and the pressure to finish under pressure is invigorating and immense. This will ensure we are developing individuals and teams of creativity.

Our aim is to achieve creative unity by developing an extremely talented and thoroughly equipped group of individuals that permit team brilliance with the ability to accomplish things not previously considered possible. For this to be achieved, it is vital that the coach ensure training does not restrict creative opportunities and allows players to conquer progressively complicated challenges in their own unique, improvisational ways. The nature of ASC Ajax’s approach generates creative independence and superior levels of confidence, producing an offense that combines technical excellence with extraordinary tactics which can score on any defense rather than relying upon defensive mistakes. In order to obtain this level of play and ability it will require a long-term term vision (all 5 stages of the player’s development). It will also require regular losses, mistakes and failures. To this end many clubs and coaches have such emphasis on the importance of their team winning that they fail to interpret the amazing opportunities to improve their players by first embracing the individual development success in spite of the result. This open-minded approach develops individual feelings of personal attainment and self-esteem, as well as an appreciation of superior personal potential. In turn, each player is motivated to give maximum effort in the pursuit of soccer excellence.

**Preserving Creativity and Style:**

The sharp passing game or teams such as Barcelona is widely admired. However, primarily coaching players to only use one and two touches will program and restrict them to get and give the ball very quickly. It is important for us that this ‘ball sharing’ approach does not come before or at the expense of, developing individual character and creativity. At ASC Ajax we develop the player in stages and all stages have a focus on the individual player and creativity, ball skill, deceptive dribbling and shooting. Only when the players have become interdependent will we focus more of our attention on the team game of passing and receiving. This way, we will have more diverse players who have the ability to break down defenses with their great technical ability and many tactical options. To understand the benefits of our approach, look at some of the greatest soccer countries in the world, Brazil, Argentina, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands. These countries have produced some of the greatest players of all time that have helped their countries to great success.

**Teaching Character and Responsibility:**

In order for people to endure the challenges they face in life, they need character. No matter the age, there is no time like the present to build character. Soccer, with its difficult, enduring challenges, is one of the most complete forms of character building whereby participants are frequently exposed to
situations requiring them to overcome the extremes of the environmental, physical, psychological, technical and tactical challenges. The challenge of observing, analyzing and selecting the most appropriate solution whilst being under these pressures, tests the strength of the player’s character and spirit. This, along with leadership, teamwork, perseverance and courage makes soccer one of the truest forms of character education. ASC Ajax’s approach aims to acquire remarkable character within all players by specifically utilizing all the challenges presented by soccer.

In reality, the coaching component that divides the good from the incredible is the coach’s ability to first, maximize the players’ self-concept and then their leadership and character qualities. The only way to do this is by constantly extracting maximum effort out of your players. Coaches should use every tool at in their tool box to continually challenge players in unique and diverse ways. It is crucial in the development of creativity, skill, tactical speed, fitness, self-belief and mental toughness. The unique focus and intensity you deliver in every practice and game will improve players’ self-concept, and in turn develop their leadership capability to its maximum potential.

To create a team full of effective leaders, players must first have great self-concept and be confident in their ability to do the job correctly. In order to develop a high self-concept, players must establish dependence, independence, mutual dependence (with other players), leadership, and mentorship. A true leader will spend years perfecting their craft by making mistakes and persevering.

A player’s choice to take responsibility means choosing to achieve, choosing to succeed and choosing to make a positive difference. It is our job to encourage players to accept responsibility in order to become a truly great team player and leader. To reach the highest level of soccer, a child will first have to be selfish and have a major focus on dribbling and finishing at the earlier stages of their development. The development of the truly successful individual is dependent on a foundation of independence. The greatest players are those who can beat players, change a game and don’t constantly rely on the support of their teammates. These are players who spend a greater amount of time on the ball, learn the best skills, accept and demand responsibility. Great players take responsibility to be mentors in their own right. They beat players and create space for teammates and help everyone on their team to greater individual and collective levels of success. It is important for us, as the coach, to encourage great individual creative skill and risk taking at the earlier stages in the player’s development rather than coaching our players to pass off the ball and responsibility to someone else.

**Every Player, Every Position with a Long Term Vision:**

Unfortunately, the need to win means that most coaches will keep players as young as six in fixed positions during practice and games. The negative end result: players only see the game from one perspective and learn limited skills, principles of play, fitness and mental demands of that one specific position. It is important that our coaches accommodate and encourage the children’s natural love to play, create, experiment and be adventurous in order to grow. Children desire the ball, the last thing they want to do is share it with a teammate. To be able to do all this, it involves great movement and lots of contact with ball in a creative, free spirited and safe environment. It is important to recognize that young
children don’t care for or need positional structure in their games. It takes away from the things they see as most enjoyable such as ball contact, movement and playing through exploration. As a result, motivation levels significantly drop.

Coaches at ASC Ajax are required to create training sessions where the emphasis is on doing ones best, individual skill and enjoyment. Each player will play an equal amount of time in both offensive and defensive positions and be encouraged to attempt difficult creative dribbling and ball striking skills in all areas of the fields without receiving negative comments/feedback from the coach or other players.

The nature of teaching is student-centric. Thus, to reach their optimal potential, it is necessary for young individuals to be selfish. At ASC Ajax, we supply our young individuals with a large amount of player-centric knowledge and skill, so that they can become, over the years, the ultimate team of brilliance. While at first, this may result in the team losing the statistical game, more importantly, the individuals who are taking the risks necessary to learn and play a more creative style, are winning in the developmental sense.

Many coaches fail to develop independence in the early stages because of incorrect emphasis on "passing/team", "winning", and "positional play". However, our unique approach to the early stages of development focuses on and encourages individual creative technique and a selfish pursuit of knowledge that eventually promises our players the ability and self-concept to be great team players. Our players are educated not to concentrate or be disheartened by the amount of times they lose the ball and games, as their long-term development will make them the eventual winners. This is achieved by the eventual combination of maturity and external forces (coach and peer pressure), making even the most gifted but selfish players to balance their individual brilliance with a positive team contribution.

Much of the problem in soccer is due to the need of the coach to win games. Unfortunately, because of this attitude, there is no risk of any player developing creativity because to do so increases the risk of losing, which cannot be tolerated by the fearful coach.

*Training under High Levels of Pressure:*

One reason why some players seem to fall apart when competing at a higher level is because of the increased physical pressure placed on them compared to that of playing at a lower level. As a result, players who are unable to produce deceptive dribbling and hold onto the ball, begin to force passes because they are unable to cope with the tighter and tougher defensive pressure. In comparison, players who have the ability to; display fakes, dribble deceptively and finish will be able to adjust to the immense pressure and challenges posed by playing at a higher level.

The same applies for players who are trying to cope with the higher levels of psychological challenges. Players with great individual skills and creativeness are much more likely to overcome the mental challenges that the big game situations bring. The ball master is able to conquer his/her fears and utilize his/her extra skill and confidence to manage the psychological challengers. Again, most players tend to
forces passes before it is appropriate because they have not acquired the mental strength required to hold on to the ball during their early years of development.

It is important to define the coaching philosophy to the player’s parents when they first arrive at our Club. Some people will be unconvinced when explaining that you are going to place a major focus on individual skills and shooting, encouraging the kids to dribble with a high degree of risk and take shots at every opportunity. This will cause some parents and coaches to look at you different and wonder how you are going to accomplish this and be successful. Remember that some of the greatest players in the world grew up playing street soccer from a very young age; many times 1v1 against a friend or sibling and small sided games of 2v2 and 3v3, just like we played back yard American football growing up. We will implement, in every warm-up, this style of play to encourage creativity and maximize touches on the ball. The warm-up will look like this:

- Target areas put in the goal, i.e. shooting at the corners of the goal.
- Goals 20-25 yards apart.
- Playing grid 25x25 yards
- High degree of individual principles of play
- High emphasis on dribbling skills due to small sided teams.
- High emphasis on shooting skills due to close proximity of goals.
- Crowded practice area with all players playing simultaneously (awareness of space).
- Lots of playing time (maximize possible practice length).

The end goal is to get the individual player to think and plan ahead at speed and to develop and astonishing technical ability in a highly crowded space. Coaches must continually create training sessions that force players to utilize creativity under immense pressure with multiple decision making activities. Over time, the ability to do this will become an instinctive and require little to no effort for the players. Therefore, it all becomes habit rather than consciously taking time to think about it all.

1v1 Conditions:

The 1v1 follows a ‘Make it, Take it’ or winner stays on style of play. This means that whenever a player scores, that same player retains possession and attacks the opposite goal or stays on the field defending a player coming on. This is intended to create game like situations to technically and tactically challenge and develop each player’s ability to dribble and finish. The following is a proposed sequential list:

- Players must perform a fake before each shot that they take. Failure to do so results in a loss of possession or goal. This encourages players to be creative in order to beat players and score.
- All shots off the floor must be bent, chipped, driven with power with either foot. Failure to strike the ball as specified results in the loss of score or possession. This conditions a full range of shots under pressure.
• Shot must go in the specified areas of the goal, i.e. the corners. Failure to hit the designated spots results in loss of possession or score. This conditions the ability to hit shots where the chance of scoring is the greatest.
• Dribbling player must explode at least 5 yards after performing a skill. This conditions the players to explode away from danger and truly dominate their opponent. Failure to do so results in the goal being disallowed or loss of possession.
• Minimize touches allowed before a shot must be taken after a skill; i.e. the player completes a skill and after that, must shoot on their second touch. Failure to do so results in possession being turned over or disallowed goal. This promotes quick ball striking under pressure before the defender recovers.
• Limit players to using three, two or one specific skill (reduce as players improve). Failure to do so results in loss of possession. This increases the pressure on the player on the offensive.
• The offensive player must explode towards goal as soon as they have shot to maximize the chances of scoring a rebound. If they fail to do this, they either lose possession or the goal is disallowed. This encourages players to always follow-up their shots.
• Every touch must be a fake, skill or shot. This encourages incisive and penetrative play in order to totally deceive the defensive player.

2v2 Conditions:

Our aim with the conditioned 2v2 process is to develop every player’s ability to penetrate and score individually, or to use one’s teammate to improve the chances and create a scoring opportunity.

The following sequential list of 2 v 2 conditions is designed to gradually increase the level of challenge and accelerate development of the players involved:

• Fake and move within two touches. This condition dictates that either a fake, shot or pass must be made on or before the second touch in each possession. Failure to do this, results in the loss of possession. This encourages the players to think ahead, develop a viable plan before receiving the ball and play quickly and deceptively in front of goal.
• The shot must be struck on the play away from the skill or first time with power. Any shot counts if struck first time with power. First time shots can be struck off passes from teammates, after balls deflect off opponent, after balls deflect off other players in practice, or off the goalkeeper, goal posts or cross bar. Failure to strike the ball on the play away from a fake or first time results in loss of possession. This conditions the ability to score first time shots or strike a ball quickly, under pressure.
• Players will be asked to perform one, two or three specific skills in each round. As players improve, increase the difficulty. This ensures all skills that can create a penetrating or goal scoring opportunity are practiced and implemented under pressure. Only the specific skills can
be used and must be performed prior to scoring. Failure to perform the skill(s) results in loss of possession.

- The offensive players must both explode immediately after a shot at goal is taken in order to maximize the chances of scoring if there is a rebound. If either player fails to explode immediately, the score will not count or possession will be turned over. The idea is to encourage players to naturally follow up every shot and maximize their chances of a goal from a rebound.

- One touch soccer. The players are allowed one touch before having to perform a skill, pass or shot. Failure to do so results in loss of possession. This is an attempt to produce lightening quick thinking and play from the forwards in order to penetrate effectively.

- Specify a combination play that players must include prior to a goal-scoring attempt. This could include specific types of passing, overlaps and/or fakes. Failure to do so results in a loss of the goal or possession.

Goalkeepers:

We fully appreciate every player at our club and this includes our goalkeepers, which is shown in our unique approach to training them. A lot of coaches integrate their goalkeeping training within their team training and frequently deny the goalkeepers of opportunities to be integrated into any developmental activity. As a result, goalkeepers are constantly forced to pay additional money to attend private sessions with specialist keeper coaches. Unfortunately, the goalkeepers therefore switch from a team environment that is specific to developing field players, to an individual environment that doesn’t challenge the keeper in the same intense and specific way that working with outfield players in real game situations would.

Note: The ideas from above are a compilation of many different publications and revised to fit the specific developmental goals of ASC Ajax. However, it must be noted that the “1v1 and 2v2 Conditions” were copied with little revision from “Training Soccer Legends”.

“Respect yourself, your Opponent and the Game”
Chapter 3

Five Stage Player Development Curriculum
U4 – U6 | Stage 1 - FUNdamentals

**General Characteristics of Stage 1:**

- Constantly moving – love to run, jump, roll and climb
- Eye-hand and/or eye-foot coordination is very limited
- Coordination is undeveloped
- Controlling the ball in a small area will be an extremely difficult task
- Understands simplistic and direct rules – run to that orange cone (ensure you point to the orange cone)
- Selfish
- Repetition is key
- Easily motivated
- Reliant on the coach(es)
- Needs a lot of positive encouragement and reinforcement – does not like correction in front of teammates
- Limited attention span – can only comprehend one thing at a time

**Components of the Game for Stage 1:**

**Physical:** Introduce the idea of how to exercise. Work on balance, running, starting and stopping, jumping, hopping, rolling, skipping, changing direction, bending, twisting and reaching.

**Technical:** Dribbling (how to stop and start) and shooting (basic technique of striking with the inside of foot). Experiment with rolling a ball (forwards and backwards) and basic foot skills.

**Tactical:** What the field is, what the boundaries are, which goal to shoot at and playing with the ball wherever it is on the field. Learn what a 1v1 is and who the defender is and who the attacker is.

**Psychological:** Players in stage are self-centered; it is about me. Children in this stage do not share well together, they will play in a group with their own ball or toys but they do not like sharing it. As coaches we must know this and incorporate this into our training sessions. In soccer you will see players in this stage in a big swarm around the ball; this is because it is the only ball on the field and the child wants it for themselves. This is just fine and the players should be encouraged to get the ball and see what they can do with it, they should be encouraged to be selfish with their ball. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together but still involved in individual play.

Children in this stage can only focus on one thing at a time. It will take all of the players attention to perform the exercises they are asked or to control the ball in a soccer activity. In games they will often be faced with multiple players (sometimes their own teammates) trying to win the ball. This will stretch their focus to the max. This is where as coaches and parents we can assist these children by not yelling at them or talking to them as they are playing, let them play and talk to them when they are off the field.
or at the end of the game. Coaches should instruct the parents to help by just cheering and not giving any direction. Children at this age do not care if they win or lose, they just want to play. As coaches and parents let’s just foster that love and passion, to play, and do not even mention the word win. The coach should also let the parents know that it is normal to play swarm soccer from this stage; this style of play will actually beneficial in improving their dribbling skills and decision-making ability.

**Ideal Training Session for Stage 1:**

- No longer than 45 minutes (U4 & U5 would be ideal to have a 30 minute session and a 30 minute game (once per week)
- Every child should have a ball.
- Free play or a warm-up – include body movement introduction with and without a ball (no more than 15 minutes)
- Game-like activities – to include body movement and games; a ball should be involved the entire time (at least 15 minutes)
- Small Sided Game – should be 3v3 – (15 minutes)
- Player-Centered with the coach being a facilitator utilizing the guided discovery as the training method; let the player come up with the answers
- Coach should highly encourage players to be creative and discover how to do the ball skills on their own; coach should demonstrate and let the players play
- Use constant encouragement and praise throughout the training session and continually encourage players to be creative and experiment with their ball

**Coach’s Qualities:** DO NOT USE THE TERMINOLOGY “DRILLS” AND LINE ORINNETED TRAINING SESSIONS, PERIOD!! The utilization of game activity and the coach as the facilitator will allow the children more time with the ball and experimentation. A sense of humor, calm and friendly demeanor, great organizational skills, patience, ability to properly demonstrate soccer specific skills, enthusiasm and imagination will be great tools for teaching this stage. Understand that it is okay for the children to make mistakes. Ensure all players feel comfortable and safe to explore.

**License Recommendation:** USSF National Youth License or NSCAA Levels 1-3Coaching Certificates

**The Game:** U4-U6 should be friendly scrimmages where the children are encouraged to showcase their creativity. The game should be 3v3 (field is 20x30 yards) with two goals (approximately 2ft x 3 ft) no goalkeepers (2 – 15 minute halves). There should be no score kept and coaches are allowed to be on the field with the players. There should not be any focus on us vs. them or winning. It is purely about having fun and showcasing what each child has learned.

**General Information for Coaches to Use in Training Sessions Stage 1:**

Training sessions should be structured so that one third of the focus is on body control (warm-up), one third of the focus is on individual play (game like activity) and one third of the focus is on group play.
(small sided game). There should be no lines and a great emphasis should be placed on just letting the players experiment with the ball. Players in this stage will also need to be taught how to control their body before they can control their ball. Having good control on one’s body will be essential to how they develop, over time, as players. Controlling the movement of their body will ultimately be the primary goal at this age and ball skills will be second. As odd as this may sound, in order to be good players, the child will need to know what they can and cannot do. This is where, as a coach, you help them find that out with fun games that involve body movement (i.e. hop on one foot with the ball above their head, etc.). These games should be fundamental, basic and FUN. This will start the process of enjoyment for the game as you are their first encounter with the beautiful game.

There should be no mention of positions in this stage, all players are encouraged to steal the ball and not give it away until they score or it goes out of play. Players in this stage will have 50 percent play time and should not play in any tournaments or more than one match per week. They should also only play for 6-8 weeks at a time where they are then given 4-6 weeks off.

U7 – U9 | Stage 2 - Development

General Characteristics of Stage 2:

- Enjoys showing what skills they know
- Developing physical confidence
- Attention span longer but only for a short duration
- Developing friends and playmates and will share some
- Starts to imitate their favorite players
- Still needs encouragement and positive reinforcement
- Starts to comprehend a team and teammates but is still self-centered
- Inclined more toward small group activities and some team play

Components of the Game for Stage 2:

Physical: Begin to incorporate agility and eye-foot and eye-hand coordination activities that challenge the mind as well as the physical ability. Introduce leaping, bounding and catching and throwing. Continue to work on balance, running, starting and stopping warm-up activities.

Technical: Continue all the items mentioned in the Stage 1. Introduce juggling; dribbling with all parts of foot; tackling (poke and block); receiving balls on the ground with the inside, sole and outside of the foot; receiving balls in the air with foot (use juggling for the majority of work with controlling ball in the air); striking with the inside and instep of the foot; passing with the inside and outside of the foot; shooting and dribbling while changing direction and moving. Introduce the technique for 1v1 defending (jockeying) and attacking (skill for beating an opponent). For goalkeepers (U9): proper footwork and
angles, W technique, basket catch, collecting ball off ground, diving, underarm bowling, side-arm throwing to targets, punting and taking own goal kicks.

**Tactical:** Teach attacking and defending principles of play. Attacking – penetration, width, support (everyone attacks) and creativity; defending – pressure, cover (everybody behind ball) and patience. Start teaching names of the positions (Forward, Midfielder, Full Back, etc.). Continue to work on 1v1 and the choice of dribbling or passing. Incorporate games of 2v1, 1v2, 2v2, 2v3, 3v2 up to 5v5. Allow creativity and playing with the ball to create play with a purpose as well as to promote problem solving and decision making.

**Psychological:** Children in this stage still prefer to play as individuals and occasionally with a friend or teammate. The coach must set up activities where play is both individual and together with a teammate but still focuses on the individual development of the player within the team. Learning to share the ball will need to be praised when it happens but should not be demanded from the coach. Encouragement for accomplishing the task of sharing will be the key to this accomplishment and the approval for trying to do so will show the children it is ok. You can let the children know that it is ok to use teammates to assist in solving the problems that the game presents and that they do not need to do it all on their own. Ensure this is implemented slowly and steady (one teammate at a time). The use of small sided games, which resemble the bigger game, allow for more individual touches on the ball which allow for more creativity and experimentation. At this stage the implementation of more complex game with obstacles and a target to hit will help the players to learn to effectively solve problems. The aspects of the small sided game are key components to player development for the next years to come.

**Ideal Training Session for Stage 2:**

- Should not exceed 60 minutes for U7-U8 and 75 minutes for U9
- Free play or a warm-up with and without a ball (no more than 15 minutes)
- Every player with a ball for the majority of practice
- Introduce activities with teammates
- A mixture of individual and partner activities (20-30 minutes)
- Small-Sided Game of 3v3 to 4v4 no goalkeepers (field is 20-30 to 30x40 yards) with two goals (6ft x 12 ft - 6ft x 18 ft) (approximately 20-25 minutes)
- Expanded Small Sided Game of 5v5 with goalkeepers (field is 50x60 yards) with two goals (6 ft x 12 ft - 6ft x 18 ft) (approximately 20 minutes)
- Player-Centered with the coach being a facilitator utilizing the guided discovery as the training method; let the player come up with the answers. ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS (i.e. When you have a defender coming towards you, what kind of skill move can you do to beat him/her 1v1?)
- Coach should highly encourage players to be creative and discover how and when to pass and dribble on their own; coach should demonstrate technique and skills and let the players play
Coach’s Qualities: DO NOT USE THE TERMINOLOGY “DRILLS” AND MINIMIZE THE USE OF LINE ORIENTED TRAINING SESSIONS! The utilization of game activities and the coach as the facilitator will allow the children more time with the ball and experimentation. A sense of humor, calm and patient demeanor, great organizational skills, ability to properly facilitate, ability to properly demonstrate soccer specific skills, enthusiasm and imagination will be great tools for teaching this stage.

License Recommendation: USSF National E or NSCAA Levels 4-6 and NSCAA Level 1 Goalkeeping License or any equivalent

The Game: Matches may be played in an organized manner; should still focus on children and encouraging them to showcase their creativity. There should be minimal focus on us vs. them and zero focus on winning; outcomes should not be part of any match or training session. It is still heavily about the children having fun and showcasing what each child has learned. At U9 there should be some focus on passing and teammates but the majority should still be on individual technique and creativity (80 percent individual 20 percent team). For U7 the field should be 30x40 played with 4 field players and no goalkeeper (4v4) with two goals (6ft x 12 ft) (2 – 20 minute halves). For U8 the field should be 40x50 yards played with 4 field players and a goalkeeper (5v5) with two goals (6ft x 18ft) (2 – 20 minute halves) and for U9 the field should be 40x60 played with 5 field players and a goalkeeper (6v6) with goals (6ft x 18ft).

There will be new phase of the game at the U9 age, offsides. Offside’s should not be the focus of training at this age but we need to ensure the players are made aware of this rule and understand it. As for tactical implementations, focus more on a team shape and the movement/roles within that shape (do not focus on positioning). Within the team shape emphasize the importance on ensuring the proper spatial awareness and balance on defense and attack. Assist in developing decisions that will connect all the lines of play within the team shape, both on defense and attack (defenders should attack and attackers should defend).

There are many different systems of play to choose from (2-2 and 1-2-1 (U7-U8) and 2-2-1, 1-3--, 3-2, 2-3 and 2-1-2 (U9) to name a few) but instead of focusing on the system of play more focus should be on the style of play. The Club will focus on a combination of possession and total football for attack and extreme high pressure of defending. Focus the attention more so on principles of play (attacking – penetration, support, mobility, width and creativity and defending – pressure, cover balance, compact and patience); any player with fundamentally sound principles of play will be able to play in any system or style.

General Information for Coaches to Use in Training Sessions in Stage 2:

Making the game fun and instilling a passion for the game is still the number one objective for coaches of this stage. This concentration of fun and love of the game keeps people in the game for a lifetime. There will be minor change in motor skills in this stage but these skills will still need significant attention. Encourage individual ball control and skill and practice it at every training session.
Incorporate small group play (no more than 3-4 players to 1 ball); this will be essential for maximum touches with the ball while using a teammate. Begin to highly encourage the use of skills with both feet as the players are beginning to understand how to move with the ball. Teaching the use of both feet with skills should be the main goal for coaches committed to player development. Incorporating the use of teammates and showing players that passing is another option to dribbling will be instrumental in future development. Incorporate the option of a pass but do not force or expect the player to pass.

Players at this stage should play every position, to include goalkeeper, as this will be key to determining what they are and are not good at. It also helps us, as coaches, to determine what the developmental needs are of our players. Players that know and experiment with every position on the field have a better understanding of the overall game. Specializing players too soon may be detrimental to their development and may hinder their growth as a soccer player. The thought process of any coach, no matter what stage they coach, should be to develop soccer player’s not positional players.

Coaches can begin to adjust activities to accomplish the desired objectives of the session (make it more complex or simpler). There should not be a lot of lines and standing around nor should there be an excessive amount of instruction, let the children figure the game out for themselves with your facilitation. Players in this stage will have 50 percent play time. U7 teams should not participate in any tournaments, U8 teams can participate in one tournament per season but the focus should be playing every team (festival style) and U9 teams should not attend in more than two tournament per season (Spring and Fall) Teams in this stage should only play for 8-12 weeks at a time where they are then given approximately 4 weeks off.

**U10-U12 | Stage 3 - Understanding of the Game**

**General Characteristics of Stage 3:**

- Ability to understand and handle simple balls in the air
- Puts thoughts in order and conceptualizes actions
- Has a sense of simple understanding to meet simple demands of the game
- Starting to run under control with the ball, change directions and strike the ball while moving
- Optimum time to learn – absolute willingness
- Physical and mental changes to the body - puberty
- Coordination, balance and athleticism has substantially increased
- There is a noticeable difference between female and male athletes
- Strength and power becoming factors in their performance

**Components of the Game for Stage 3:**
Physical: Fitness should be done with and without the ball. The implementation strength and resistance can be added as part of fitness. More speed and agility over distances can be accomplished from different starting position. Learning how and when to accelerate and decelerate while making more complex reaction activities. Incorporate a more proper warm-up both dynamic and static as well as a proper cool-down (include static stretching in the cool-down) to assist with injury prevention.

Technical: Ability to throw balls in while moving as well as understand how to control balls in the air (thigh, chest, inside of foot, instep and headers). Passing and receiving with both feet from multiple distances and understanding outside of foot and heel flicks. Introduce half volley and volley shooting, chipping to pass and slide tackle. For goalkeeper: introduce punching and boxing, setting the wall, defending corner kicks and free kicks.

Tactical: Small group attacking and defending principles of play (attacking – penetration, mobility, width, support and creativity; defending – pressure, cover, balance and patience). Concentrate on the specific roles (first and second attacker and defender) within the principles of play. Explore the understanding of zonal defending and man-to-man defending and when and how to employ both (reminder that our Club defending style of play is extreme high pressure). Incorporate more combination play; utilizing wall passes, overlapping and diagonal runs; playing with the ball as a team with a single purpose, to create a goal scoring opportunity (remember the Club’s attacking style of play is a combination of possession and total football). Note: it is still important to stress the importance that everyone attacks and everyone defends; numbers forward and everyone behind the ball! Start incorporating communication, verbal and visual gestures, to properly communicate what is being seen on the field and how to best respond. Start establishing team and individual goals that should be achieved for each training session and game. For goalkeepers: positional play and understanding where to be with the ball in correlation to the field.

Psychological: This player is now in the Golden Age for Learning (10-12) at this stage. The players in this stage will be able to begin conceptualizing and understanding more complex instructions and will create their interpretations with how they play. This should be highly encouraged and allowed as long as it conforms to what is being expected and taught. Individual skill should still be taught and encouraged as the player will start to understand when and how to properly utilize it. Their ability to comprehend enhances their understanding of tactics (principles of play) and what must be accomplished all over the field to succeed. Continue to develop and refine the use of the previous skills and techniques. However, there should be a bigger concentration on utilizing these skills within the team setting and under pressure of time, space and opponents. This will assist the player in developing technical speed of play which will be important as they progress to 11v11. Encourage the player to dribble the space and if space and time allow, taking on the first defender, even though passing has become a bigger part of the overall game at this stage. If this can be consistently accomplished, this will open the field up and set a better picture for the attack. Thus, the majority of the training sessions should be small sided (2v2 to 4v4) and expanded small sided (5v5 to 7v7 with an emphasis on 4v4 for U10 and 6v6 for U11- U12).

This is a vital decision making stage for players in this stage; they will decide what sports they are going to fully commit to playing. In the years leading up to this age they should have been allowed to
experiment with all sorts of sports but now a decision will more than likely need made. The coach should understand this and continue to be a positive influence and role model no matter what the child decides and should support and commend the child on that decision.

**Ideal Training Session for Stage 3:**

- U10-U11 should not exceed 90 minutes and U12 should not exceed 120 minutes
- Warm-up, individual and small group activities and stretching (dynamic and static stretching) use ball with warm up (approximately 20 minutes)
- Incorporate group and team session that include player up to 8; focus should be at 6v6
- Small Sided Games 2v2 to 4v4 with targets, zones and directional play (approximately 30 minutes)
- Expanded Small Sided Games 4v4 to 6v6 with goalkeepers (approximately 30 minutes)
- Cool down to include stretching (approximately 10 minutes)
- Player-Centered with the coach being a facilitator utilizing the guided discovery as the training method; let the player come up with the answers. ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS (i.e. When you are in a 2v1 and the defender commits to you and the ball, should you pass or dribble?)

**Coach’s Qualities:** Should be a great communicator, enthusiastic, has soccer awareness, knowledge of the key factors of basic skill and is able to demonstrate, loves to have fun while teaching, able to deal with children who question/challenge the coach, gives encouragement and preferably energetic.

**License Recommendation:** USSF National D / NSCAA National Diploma or higher or equivalent and Level 2 Goalkeeper License

**Coach/Player Consideration:** At age 12 committed players should consider participating in the state sponsored US Youth Soccer Olympic Development Program. Coaches should be aware of this program and should understand the requirements in order to assist the parents. Here is the link with all the information: [http://www.moyouthsoccer.org/odp/what_is_odp/](http://www.moyouthsoccer.org/odp/what_is_odp/)

**The Game:** Matches will be played in an organized manner; a strong focus should still be focused on the children while encouraging them to do their best. At this stage there will be a slight focus to us vs. them and the children will want to start winning. As coaches, we still need to maintain our philosophy on development over winning. At U10 the individual’s development will still be more important than the teams but by U12 there will need to be an even focus on team and individual the team and how the individual player fits into that team. For U10 the field should be 40x60 with 5 field players and a goalkeeper (6v6) with two goals (6ft x 18ft) (2 – 25 minute halves). For U11- U12 the field should be 50x70 yards played with 7 field players and a goalkeeper (8v8) with two goals (7ft x 21ft) (2 – 30 minute halves).
General Information for Coaches to Use in Training Sessions for Stage 3:

Players at this age should still be allowed to experiment with multiple positions as this is an integral piece to their future development. They must know the majority of the positions and should be able to play them with a degree of success. Specializing players too soon may be detrimental to their development and may hinder their growth as a soccer player. The only position that should start specialization is the goalkeeper at age 12 but they should still be allowed to play in the field at least half of the time. The thought process of any coach, no matter what stage they coach, should be to develop soccer player’s not positional players.

Children in this stage understand team play and now want a team success as much as individual success. Now that the child has a good understanding of ball control they should be highly encouraged to combine and try to create their own twist on skills previously taught. With that said, children in this stage may become frustrated if ideas and decisions do not go how they see in their mind. Support and continue to condone thoughtful play. Showing the proper technique of dribbling, ball striking, passing, etc. and allowing the players to “do” will be the best teacher at this stage. Continue the principles of play and illustrate the importance of their specific role within the principles; this will be the key to success at the 11v11 level.

Continue teaching the attacking style of play (combination of possession and total football) and defending style of play (extreme high pressure). On attack, the purpose is to create as many goal scoring opportunities as possible and on defense we want to win the ball back immediately and play as much of the game as possible in the opponents half of the field. These principles of attack and defense can be work with maximum ball touches in small sided activities with a greater success; specifically 2v1 to 7v6. While in these smaller sided games innovation and improvisation should be encouraged and rewarded.

When working on principle of defending, players should know what their role on the field is and what they are supposed to do (i.e. when defending we need to put immediate pressure on ball but the player will need to know their role and where they are on the field to attack, delay or deny) with the overall goal of gaining back possession. They also need to understand how to move as a team to minimize the passing lanes and space on defense and maximize the passing lanes and space on attack.

Players in this stage will still experience 50 percent play time. U10 teams can participate in two tournaments per season and U11-U12 teams should not attend in more than three tournaments per season, one of which may be a traveling tournament. Teams in this stage should only play for 8-12 weeks at a time where they are then given 2-4 weeks off.

U13 – U15 | Stage 4 – Preparation

General Characteristics of Stage 4:
- Attention span is greatly lengthened
- Understands ethical and moral principles and decision
- Enjoys praise and recognition and needs encouragement
- Able to understand and comprehend complex instruction
- A strong need to be accepted and a fear of ridicule
- A strong sense of self belonging
- Experiences physical changes - very concerned with their appearance and very self-conscience about their physical changes

Components of the Game for Stage 4:

**Physical:** Work on explosive power, vertical jump, body composition, plyometric (jump) training, soccer-specific weight training, interval training, 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.

**Technical:** Continue to work on all technique throughout the season and begin to incorporate chipping to score and bending shots; forward volley and side volley and defensive/attacking heading. For the goalkeeper: backwards diving, saving the breakaway, all forms of distribution, narrowing the angle and improve reaction saves.

**Tactical:** Understands the overall tactics (principles of play) of the game and how to incorporate these into the flow of the match. Players in specific roles will start to assert themselves as leaders and will start to assist in directing play on the field. Understands and utilizes the principles or attack and defense as the game continually transitions. Understands how to play on, near and away from the ball in order to best support the attack (wide play, mobility and creativity) and the defense (pressure, cover, balance, compactness, patience and high pressure). For goalkeepers: command back four to assist them in cutting out passing lanes and space and to best win back possession.

**Psychological:** Individual and group identities at this stage are important; this will assist the team and player in developing a style and system of play for a consistent performance. With these identities there will be some conflict; the coach needs to ensure there is a constant level of discipline. The expectations of this discipline needs to be clear and fair along with the expectation of the players and their roles and responsibilities. Leadership should also be a priority of the coach but the leadership should be positive and encouraging. If the player-leaders are negative their teammates will rebel and a distance will creep in amongst the team. Every player at this age should be afforded the opportunity to lead and be a team captain. To assist with developing leaders; teams should have discussions and team meetings. These discussions should be tactical achievements and thoughts as well as goal setting for individual and team. The coach should bring ideas up and let the team come to conclusions for themselves. The coach should not come up or make decisions in these discussions. The goals should be short term and long term and
should be attainable and measured. These goals should be based on match results and should be the focus in training sessions.

Typical Training Session for Stage 4:

- Approximately two hours no more than 3 times per week
- Warm-up, small group activities, range of motion stretching incorporate a ball -approximately 20 minutes
- Use small sided games activities (4v4 to 8v8)
- Introduce team activities (all 11 players)
- Continue with directional games (4v4 to 6v6) - Play to targets and/or zones - Intersperse functional training -approximately 40 minutes-
- Conclude with expanded small-sided games (7v7 to 9v9) or 11v11 -approximately 45 minutes-
- Finish with cool-down activity, including static stretching -approximately 15 minutes-
- All activities should be challenging, motivating and involve transition

Coach qualities: Should be a great communicator, enthusiastic, charismatic, experienced with coaching, knowledge of the key factors of technical and tactical play, loves to have fun while teaching, articulate, managerial experience and expertise and thoughtful persuader.

License Recommendation: USSF National “C” License / NSCAA Advanced National Diploma or higher or equivalent and Level 3 Goalkeeper certificate.

The Game: 11v11 (4-4-2; 4-3-3; 4-2-3-1; 4-5-1; 3-5-2, etc.) – With an emphasis on principles of attack and defense and the Clubs style of play within the system of play. Teams at this stage should be able to adjust and conform to multiple systems of play in order to match up to the opposition (if they have a solid foundation of the principles of play). Players in this stage should also have the technical and tactical ability to know how and when to play man-to-man zonal defending as well as man mark in a zone defense. The primary focus of matches and training technical application into a tactical setting; know when to dribble and when to pass, understand how to successfully create on set plays, etc. Continue to be a student of the game and continue to learn and develop the game is still not about winning. There should be a limited number of substitutions to develop team chemistry.

General Information for Coaches to Use in Training Sessions for Stage 4:

Fitness and nutritional habit should be formed for future success. There should be instruction on what an athlete should and should not eat and drink. At this time in a young athletes life they will, for the first time, make decisions for themselves. Developing fitness plans for offseason and in season will be integral for players at the next stage. The utilization of different techniques (overload principle, speed training, resistance training, weight training, etc.) will assist the players to attain the physical attributes that they need for the next level of their career.
Ensure that players in this age are familiar with proper pre-game/pre-training session warm ups and post game/post training session cool downs. This will assist the players with injury prevention and in the event of an injury there will need to be a recovery plan and a plan to supplement the injured players (this is the one main reason for ensuring playing time in multiple positions at the younger ages). Coaches should familiarize themselves with the common injuries in soccer and their recovery times. We do not want to put players back in training before they are cleared or actually ready as this will cause longer term chronic issues.

Continuing the proper techniques of soccer in training should still be a focal point for at least the warm-up section of training. Continuing the excellence of individual technique is not the “end all, be all” in soccer but sound individual technique will assist in achieving tactical superiority. However, this superiority depends on each player’s ability to execute the fundamentals of the game. Ensure the players can use the proper skills in the correct situations at game speed; focusing on ensuring they are making the correct decisions the majority of the time, this is how technique in a tactical setting is advanced.

Incorporating 4v4 to 6v6 in training will promote good possession with a purpose habits that will transform to the bigger game. This will also show the players what tactical decisions need made in a smaller more controllable environment. These small sided games help players read the game as the field and number of players in smaller. Promote the individual techniques in these environments and encourage them to incorporate this into the small sided game. The players are still developing intellectually, even though they are much more apt to understand and comprehend. These small sided games will assist them with the tactical intellectual growth.

Systems and styles of play are designed to enhance strengths and minimize weaknesses of a team. Teams should be able to employ more than one system or style of play. Players should be able to individually defend or defend as a team (the technique of individually defending should be worked at every stage). Players should understand different roles so that they can interchange as the game progresses. Players should still not be locked into on position as this will hinder growth potential and development. Rather work with the players within the principles of play (attacking and defending) and ensure they know how to properly perform in each.

Set plays have now become an important part of the game; one successful set play can change the outcome of a game at a moment’s notice. Constant and proper training for set plays should be worked on, at minimum, one training session per week. The most successful way to train set plays is within the flow of practice (i.e. small sided scrimmage, all ball out of play are free kicks from 20-25 yards at different places on the field). Players should understand their roles and should be able to react immediately; players should know what the ideal outcome is and execute to the best of their ability. Teach the players multiple roles so that all set plays are successful the majority of the time, whether defending or attacking.
U16 – U18 | Stage 5 - Commitment

**General Characteristics of Stage 5:**

- Attention span is greatly lengthened
- Understands ethical and moral principles and decision
- Enjoys praise and recognition and needs encouragement
- Able to understand and comprehend complex instruction
- A strong need to be accepted and a fear of ridicule
- A strong sense of self belonging
- Experiences physical changes - very concerned with their appearance and very self-conscience about their physical changes
- Often has a mindset of a child but the physical features of an adult
- Nearing growth maturation but still in need of physical growth
- Self-confidence will need molded
- Vulnerable (both emotionally and socially)

**Components of the Game for Stage 5:**

**Physical:** Continue working on explosive power, vertical jump, body composition, plyometric (jump) training, soccer-specific weight training, interval training, 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.

**Technical:** Continue to work on all technique throughout the season and begin to demand techniques at match speed with pressures of time, space and opponents (at all times). For the goalkeeper: all technical aspects should be completed at match speed with agility aspects involved.

**Tactical:** Should be able to apply the overall tactics and principles of play to all situations and incorporate these into the flow of the match. Able to demonstrate the Club’s style of play with little assistance and can incorporate at all levels of play (small sided to full game). Understands most all situations and how to play in those situations (i.e. numbers down in the defensive third on a breakaway). For goalkeepers: support the attack from the defensive third and command the defensive third.

**Psychological:** Focus and concentration is increased and the ability to make fewer mental errors has decreased. Players will start playing with more self-confidence and become self-motivated to become better for future potential. Coaches should continue to review the importance of the following:

- Managing emotions
- Dedication
- Commitment
- Proper leadership
- Responsibility for actions (both on and off the field)
- Proper sportsmanship
• Team first
• Discipline
• Concentration
• Confidence
• Consistency
• Personal goal setting
• Respect for the game

Typical Training Session for Stage 5:

• Approximately two hours no more than 3 times per week
• Warm-up, small group activities (incorporate a ball) and dynamic range of motion activities - approximately 20 minutes
• Use small sided game activities (4v4 to 8v8)
• Use team activities (all 11 players)
• Continue with directional games (4v4 to 6v6) - Play to targets and/or zones - Intersperse functional training -approximately 40 minutes
• Conclude with expanded small-sided games (7v7 to 9v9) or 11v11 -approximately 45 minutes-
• Finish with cool-down activity, including static stretching -approximately 15 minutes-
• All activities should be challenging, motivating and involve transition

Coach qualities: Should be a great communicator, enthusiastic, charismatic, experienced with coaching, knowledge of the key factors of technical and tactical play, loves to have fun while teaching, articulate, managerial experience and expertise and thoughtful persuader.

License Recommendation: USSF National “C” License / NSCAA Advanced National Diploma or higher or equivalent and Level 3 Goalkeeper certificate.

The Game: The game is played at 11v11 from now on; continue to refine the principles of attack and defense and the Club’s style of play within the system of play. Demand players and teams continue to know, understand and perform the Club’s style of play in whichever system of play they are in. Continue to be a student of the game and continue to learn and develop the game is still not about winning. There should be a limited number of substitutions to develop team chemistry.

General Information for Coaches to Use in Training Sessions for Stage 5:

Continue to monitor and adjust fitness and nutritional needs to ensure success for future growth. Players should be accustomed to making decisions for themselves, however, they will need to be reminded to make the correct decisions. Continuing offseason and in season fitness plans will benefit the player for future play. Setting fitness goals and tracking them will teach responsibility and accountability as well as a focused work ethic.
Players should know and routinely perform proper pre-game/pre-training session warm ups and post game/post training session cool downs, this is key to minimize injury. Coaches should continue to keep themselves abreast with common soccer injuries as well as concussions.

Continuing the excellence of individual technique will still provide substance and be integral to the future game for the player. However, the player will need to understand how to imprint their technical brilliance within the tactical blueprint of the team. Continue to focus on the proper technique in the correct situations at game speed for the majority of the time. This will be the key for the player to continue playing at higher levels.

Set plays will continue to be a big part of the game Set plays should be worked on in most every practice. As was mentioned earlier, the most successful way to train set plays is within the flow of practice (i.e. small sided scrimmage, all ball out of play are free kicks from 20-25 yards at different places on the field). Players should understand their roles and should be able to react immediately; players should know what the ideal outcome is and execute to the best of their ability. Teach the players multiple roles so that all set plays are successful the majority of the time, whether defending or attacking.