



## **“The Chiefs Way” Academy: U9 – U12**

**The coaches and staff at Chiefs FC are committed to developing every player - with a focus on helping every player reach his/her potential.**

- **Chiefs FC aims to instill a love of the game, and a desire to continue to improve for years to come**
- **Winning is a side effect of proper coaching, not a focus**
- **We encourage experienced players to take on increased responsibility for their own development**
- **When player development is the objective, there is no such thing as overnight success in youth soccer.**

**Our program-wide commitment to player development and enjoyment of the game is the mission and purpose of the Chiefs Futbol Club.**

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## "The Chiefs Way"

The below information is a brief guideline for all coaches, parents and players on how things are structured in the Chiefs FC Academy Program. This document is intended to be an educational tool for all participants in our Academy Program and to provide information and expectation guidelines. It is intended to answer questions concerning our Academy structure and is not part of the contractual registration agreement.



"True player development focuses on the development of the player, not the development of the team! Up to age 12, this should be the only criteria used in designing and running youth soccer programs."

**Ron Quinn, leading contributor US Youth Soccer Programming**



## What is Academy Soccer?

The following is taken from GA Soccer's explanation of the Academy program:

The Academy Program is the select developmental program for boys' and girls' teams U9 through U-12. The academy program is administered by our individual Youth Member Affiliates.

### **Program objectives**

- To eliminate keeping scores and reduce pressure on players and coaches to get results.
- To emphasize individual player development and especially individual technical development.
- To reduce the excessive travel around the state for games.
- To reduce the possibilities of mismatched opponents and lopsided scores by allowing clubs to do their own scheduling.
- To increase the number of training opportunities.

### **Program Benefits**

- Free player movement within the academy program.
- Growing a 'CLUB' concept with a club loyalty as opposed to individual team mentality.
- Professional coaches taking over administration and training of younger ages.
- Increased player enrollment and larger membership at the club.
- Increased pool of players for older teams with improvement in quality of players.
- A good introduction to 'Select' competitive soccer for players transitioning from recreational to select soccer.





## Style of play - The Chiefs Style

At Chiefs FC we have created our own style of play where our players have the opportunity to take ownership of and be heavily involved in their own development during practices, games and away from the fields in their own time. Key characteristics:

- Free thinking, skillful problem solving players who are not afraid to take risks or make mistakes.
- Young players who are prepared to take risks in order to learn how to create goal scoring opportunities, through smart passing, dribbling, movement without the ball, and balanced field positioning.
- Players will be instructed to avoid "Just Kicking" the ball down the field.
- Defensive play combining proper tactical maneuvers that include individual play as well as team defensive shape for optimal results of limiting shots on goal and of regaining ball possession.
- Punting to be kept at a minimum from the goalkeepers as a last option. Throwing and rolling the ball out in order to assure ball possession will be encouraged.
- Sometimes the Chiefs Style will result in presenting the opposition chances to score goals, as we are encouraging our players to make their own decisions on the ball. In the long run, this will enable Chiefs FC Players the ability to be problem solvers on the field and make better decisions having a larger foundation of personal experience from which to draw.



"I've been here since I was 10 years old. I've spent 20 years here, and always with the same idea: Play keep-away, keep possession, don't lose the ball, head up, and look before you receive. Those are all concepts that are taught in Barcelona's academy. Then the aim [on the senior team] is to win, but not at any cost."

**Xavi Hernandez, Barcelona and Spain National team player**



## Coaches

Chiefs Coaches are of a very high standard, most of whom have played professional soccer or in college, all Chiefs Coaches are USSF Certified. The Chiefs FC coaching staff is spearheaded by the McNab family. Three former professional players, who as family members have an unmatched consistency in coaching style, make Chiefs FC youth soccer and its staff unique and different.



At Chiefs FC, coaching assignments are made to create consistency throughout the age group. There will be one “Head” coach per Academy age group, per gender. There are supplemental coaches throughout the program and their roles are outlined below.

### **Coaches Roles:**

- **Head Coach** – Responsible for all practice planning and game day roster selection. Will coach all games per age group, per gender where possible
- **Assistant Club Coach** – Part of the Chiefs FC Coaching staff, we have one assistant coach per gender who will conduct practices, oversee games and help support all Head Coaches as the need arises.
- **Volunteer Coach** – Usually a parent coach, who is USSF certified who will help support the Head Coach
- **Senior Coach** – A Chiefs FC Head Coach with at least three to five years’ experience with Chiefs FC program, and reviewed and approved as a Senior Coach by the Chiefs FC Board and Director of Coaching.



### Coaches are also educated in The Chiefs Way by the following:

- **Shadow Coaching:** New coaches will work with an existing Chiefs coach who is familiar with The Chiefs Way.
- **Coaching Material/Lesson Plans:** Along with this document, coaches will be provided with a comprehensive handbook including practice plans that will highlight the lesson plans needed to implement The Chiefs Way.
- **Coaching Clinics “Implementing the Chiefs Way”:** Once per season (fall and spring) coaching clinics will be conducted by the Senior Coaches (McNabs and others) to share ideas and best practices.
- **Coaching Reviews:** Each coach will have reviews at least once a year by a Chiefs Senior Coach to provide opportunity for two-way feedback, learning and coaching development.

"The competition is one aspect of the job, but I think if you're too busy worrying about the competition, you don't focus enough on what you're doing."

**Katie Couric – Broadcast Journalist**

### Practices

Practices are **the most** important part of the Academy development process. Some key points on how practices are structured are outlined below. For any player to develop to the best of their ability, practice time away from the fields is a must.

Players are expected to dedicate themselves to the program, best demonstrated by dependable, prompt attendance and enthusiastic participation. The level of commitment (and attendance) increases with each age group. In general, optimal development in the Academy is designed to drive attendance and participation using fun programs in a challenging, competitive environment. Chiefs FC recognizes children will likely miss some sessions due to school or religious commitments, vacations and commitments to other sports. **The Chiefs FC Academy supports children playing multiple sports** (especially in Winter/Summer) and understands the associated scheduling/attendance considerations.



### Practice Structure:

The goal is to provide interchangeable, focused training for all players within the program to underscore the belief that each player is capable of significant development and achievement.

- Focus on individual player development, especially technical development
- Inclusive to all players
- Academy practice sessions are 1 1/2 hours long twice per week
- 1/3 of each practice usually involves individual ball work
- Practices will not include full size games at the end of practice. Small sided play will be played instead (3v3, 4v4) as this will increase the number of touches on the ball per individual player
- Each player will have equal time with our professional coaches assigned to respective groups
- Groups will have supplemental assistant club coaches and volunteer coaches
- Tactical development should be at a minimum as this will be instructed in the games, no positions and only basic set plays will be taught during practice. For example, instruction on throw-ins with the goal being “Who is open” and not “always down the line.” Goal kicks and free kicks will be encouraged to play short to maintain possession and not just kick down the field
- Training is conducted in a “pool” training format, not with specific teams
- In order to advance each player, coaches will create peer groupings periodically to help players at all levels to work on those skills and development needs consistent with their current level of ability. These peer groupings will be fluid, and will be formed based on the coach’s assessment of skill mastery by each individual player.





## Games

"Worrying too much about winning and losing gets in the way of development. There are always shortcuts that you can find to win the next game. That doesn't necessarily mean you'll be winning five, six years from now. The kids all try to win anyhow, so I don't think we need to add to this. No kid ever steps on the field and says, 'Today I'm going to lose.' They're naturally competitive. We should be concerned about the players' performance, not the final score."

**Manfred Schellscheidt, Head of U.S. Soccer's U-14 program**



Chiefs Academy games are where players get to showcase their skills and try to implement lessons learned in practice. The results are not recorded as they are in Select and are not the primary focus for the Chiefs FC Academy program.

"We all want to win games, however not at the cost to our players' overall development. Playing the 'Chiefs Way' will help inspire players to develop - promoting confident, passionate, and skilled players. These are the types of players who are capable of winning games the right way!"

**Neil McNab Sr, Director of Coaching Chiefs FC**

### **Game Structure:**

- Every player will play a minimum of half of each half for every game they are selected for. If a player is also invited to play in a secondary game, the Head Coach will place priority on those players for whom that game is their only game, and as such a secondary game may only yield a half of game time allotment.
- Coaches will "coach in the moment." Players are constantly getting feedback on their play to help them improve. Such "coaching in the moment" is not directive or an attempt to choreograph the plays, rather to provide timely guidance and relative feedback.
- No official scores or standings are kept in an effort to reduce pressure on players and coaches to "get results".





- Players will have the opportunity to play in more than one game on a game date where available during the course of the season.
- No players will play in 2 games until all players have played in 1 game where available. This same principal applies to players selected to play in 3/4 games over a weekend where applicable due to level of opposition.
- Player progress is constantly monitored, and as such there are no set teams. Rosters are selected by the Head Coach of each age group weekly in order to optimize individual player development and progress.
- U9/U10 teams play 6v6 and will play a 3-2 or 2-3 formation (or a variation of these).
- U11/U12 teams play 8v8 and will play a 3-3-1 or 2-3-2 formation (or a variation of these).
- Players will have the opportunity to play in various positions throughout the season.
- Any more than one game on any game date should be considered a bonus.
- Team managers are asked to monitor number of games each player has played and give updates to coaches.

Probably the most important piece of player development is the “No set roster” policy. This simply means that players are not placed on a set team, Blue, White or Red when tryouts conclude. This allows the coaches the freedom to move players up or down throughout the course of the season as they monitor their development.

Balanced appropriately, this allows for less experienced players to learn from more advanced players and for more experienced players an opportunity to perhaps play in a different position and take on a leadership role within the team dynamic. The fluidity of this system is enhanced by the coach’s expectations which are adjusted to fit the level of the individual with the game day roster.





## Tournaments

Throughout the four years of the Academy program, soccer players will be asked to participate in tournaments. Tournaments should be viewed as an extended, condensed series of games. Tournament participation is voluntary and is an extra opportunity to play. Tournament games are a little more structured in the sense that results over that weekend are recorded for that weekend only and teams have the opportunity to “win” their bracket. Our aim is to offer at least one tournament opportunity to every player for each of the fall and spring U10-U12 seasons. Tournament play at the U9 level will be at the sole discretion of the assigned head coach. U9s do not typically play any tournaments in their first fall season.

Tournaments have various levels of play throughout the four-year process of Academy development. Coaches will try to offer tournament opportunities that are developmentally appropriate to the individual player.

Below are some of the common questions we receive concerning tournaments:

- Is there an additional cost for a tournament?  
*Yes, depending on the tournament, it will be in the range of \$30-\$50 per player.*
- What if we are not available to play that weekend?  
*No player is mandated to play, your assigned coach will try to include you in the next tournament opportunity as long as they consider it to be developmentally appropriate.*
- What if my child can only commit to some of the games during a tournament?  
*A commitment to a tournament involves all games at that tournament. If your child is only available for some of the games your head coach will determine if your child can be included in that tournament or if your child will need to be included in a future tournament opportunity.*
- What is the typical tournament structure?  
*Two games on Saturday (One AM one PM) followed by one game on Sunday (AM). There may be a fourth game on Sunday (PM) if the team advances to the final.*
- How are tournament teams selected by the coach?  
*Coaches will select tournament teams based on availability at U9, U10 and U11 (fall). Coaches will try to be fair to all players based on that availability response. However sometimes, a coach will need to operate on a first come first serve basis. For U11 (spring) and U12 coaches may select teams in advance of a tournament to ensure teams are developmentally appropriate for that weekend.*



## FRUITS

### Success – the Chiefs Way

At Chiefs FC, we measure success for our Academy program on individual player growth, having fun playing soccer, players developing their own passion for the game, and game-time problem solving. When we see evidence that these items are happening for players at all ability levels, that is our primary measure of success.

Although game results are noticed, they are not the primary driver of the Chiefs FC Soccer program. It is important for all coaches, players and parents to understand and internalize the bigger picture and goals behind the overall Philosophy and Methodology of the Chiefs Way. Our path to success is measured in the following ways.

- **Fun** – A player enjoying their soccer will learn and implement skills faster.
- **Retention** – It is our intention to retain all players in the Academy program into Select.
- **Understanding** – Players understand the game and why our style of play will bring them success in the long term.
- **Identity** – The Chiefs Way is a unique way players can identify who they play for and feel like they are part of something bigger than just their team or group.
- **Training** – Chiefs provides the best training available.
- **Success** – Although game results are not a primary focus they are a “side effect” of playing The Chiefs Way. Over the last 2 years, we have seen teams entering tournaments make the final in their bracket 40-50% of the time.



Chiefs FC is consistently producing competitive Select teams that contain a large amount of players who have developed via The Chiefs Way. A large majority of our select teams have moved up in level over the course of the last several seasons. They are reaping the FRUITS of their hard work within the Chiefs Way system!

“Failure happens all the time. It happens every day in practice. What makes you better is how you react to it.”

**Mia Hamm – US Women’s National Team Player**



## Communication

Communication is vital to the success of any program; below we have highlighted some of the major areas/avenues of communication along with who to contact should questions arise.

### **Communication Protocol:**

- Game day rosters will be sent out before Tuesday's practice by the team manager. All rosters are selected by the Head Coach.
- Schedule updates will be sent out by team managers when/if updates occur.
- Club updates will be sent out by Club Administrators.
- Pre-season and end of season meetings will be conducted by the Head Coach with the entire group of parents and players.
- Registration questions should be directed to Club Administrators.
- Team logistic questions should be directed to Team Manager.
- Coaching, practices, games, rosters, individual development questions should be directed to the Head Coach.
- All other questions should be directed to the Club Administration.



## Parents

The role of the parent is very important in supporting the overall experience of the player. Parents should try to follow the below guidelines and help set an example to our players (their own child and others), opposing players and officials of good sportsmanship and club support.

### **Parent Expectations:**

- Should not coach from the parent's side line
- Should not yell at referees, players or coaches
- Should encourage all players (not just their own child) during games
- Should encourage players to practice at home to make the most of the Academy experience - utilize Neil Sr.'s "The Habit"
- Remain focused on the bigger picture - long term development, not winning or losing or one weekend's play time
- Contact coach or team manager with concerns or questions. This should be done via phone call or email or pre-arranged meeting time. Game days and practice times are not appropriate times to discuss issues.
- Shall send their child to soccer practice and games ready to play with all required equipment and arrive in a timely manner established by the coach where possible. Any issues that come up should be communicated to the coach as soon as possible.

**Please remember this is your child's soccer experience**



## Conclusion

The Chiefs Way is part of our club identity, and a tool that can be used to create consistency throughout the organization and to enhance the Chiefs unique brand in the Atlanta area youth soccer community.

Chiefs FC aims to provide the full club experience at all levels, providing players with the opportunity to learn and grow through soccer. We hope that over time, Chiefs FC players will return to coach for our organization and raise their own soccer-playing children in "The Chiefs Way."

## Go Chiefs!



More than 73% of all kids who play organized youth sports end up quitting by the time they reach the age of 13 (Time Magazine, July 12, 1999)

The major two reasons children give up sport:

1. It is no longer fun
2. It is too competitive/too much pressure

"The emphasis on winning is a detriment to young players because it prevents us from developing technically proficient players. And we're not giving them the ability to make decisions. We want competition. There'll always be competition and it's not bad. The bad part is the emphasis on winning."

**John Hackworth, U.S. U-17 national team coach**

*Coming soon in the Series are documents outlining the Chiefs Way for its Select and Recreation programs.*