



U.S. Soccer “C” License Candidate Recommended Reading

Methods of Coaching

I. 3.0 Methodology

U.S. Soccer recognizes that there are many ways to teach the game of soccer. For this reason, the methodology in the U.S. Soccer coaching curriculum offers a broad based methodology that ranges from a directed to a more guided approach. Regardless of the specific coaching style or methodology, we believe there are basic concepts and characteristics that are foundational to effective teaching of the game. When developing and executing appropriate and effective training sessions, it is helpful to consider the following concepts.

- **Context:** How does this technique or decision fit into the match model and how are they affected by the particular situation occurring in the game?
- **Contrast:** How is this technique or decision directly opposed to another movement or decision that occurs in soccer?
- **Recurring Themes:** How to identify, recognize and act on consistent “patterns” that occur in every soccer game.
- **Spontaneity:** Movement and decisions with the ball that are more “felt” than processed intellectually.

Some common characteristics of any effective coaching style include but are not limited to the following considerations:

1. The method and style helps the players win their game, find success and solve the problems that they are experiencing in the game.
2. All players want to play without interruption.
3. The coach considers and respects the rhythm of play when looking to make a coaching intervention, looking for ways to coach without interrupting the rhythm of the game and to make any coaching interventions as non-invasive as possible.
4. Is the coach able to anticipate the problems as they develop on the field, or is he addressing only the result?
5. The guidance that the coach provides prepares the players to be successful at their current level as well as at the next level or age group.



The Coach's Tool Kit:

Every coach needs a variety of coaching methods to use as tools with their teams. Here is a tool kit of 5 coaching methods and explanations of their use.

1. **Coach within the flow of the game.** This is successful with players whose technique allows them to process and play at the same time. The coach provides clear, brief instruction to individuals or small groups of players as the ball is moving. This is not an ongoing monologue, but rather instructions at a critical time to influence play. The caution here is to not let this become noise.
2. **Coach the individual player as the game continues.** Here the coach stops an individual player to make a coaching point, but does not stop the activity. While the coach interacts with the player, the team plays a "man down." Obviously the interaction must be brief and concise to get the player back into the activity.
3. **Coach at natural stoppages.** Here the coach addresses groups of players during times when the game is still, e.g. when the ball goes out of bounds; at water breaks; change over. While being brief and concise is always important, here it is important to focus on a problem that is fresh in the player's mind.
4. **Allowing the conditions of the activity to coach the theme.** Here the conditions of the activity provide the problem for the players to solve.

For example, the 6 goal game to coach small group defending. Defending three goals forces the players to pay particular attention to cover and balance. Conversely attacking three goals will reward the team that can change the point of attack quickly and accurately.

5. **Coach using the "freeze" method.** Here the coach "freezes" the game to make his coaching point. This allows the coach to "paint" a very visual picture for the players. Use this option with care, because if used too often it can disrupt the game and frustrate the players.

A **technical freeze** allows the coach to correct incorrect technique and is coach directed. Here the coach can demonstrate proper technique and have the player rehearse the technique.

A **tactical freeze** is often coach directed, but can benefit from guided questions as well. If we use questioning, then the questions should state the problem. e.g., "we are giving the ball away coming out of the back, how can we prevent that from happening?" The tactical freeze should be reserved for "big picture" situations involving several players. Optimally, the play should be "frozen" just as the situation presents itself. e.g., as the back four should be "stepping" to the ball. Coach in the



flow of play as much as possible. The following situations are as examples of when using the Freeze Method would be most appropriate:

1. Several players are involved;
2. Play can be frozen as the tactical situation presents itself;
3. It is a big picture problem that you have not been able to solve using another method;
4. There is short preparation time with a team for an event;
5. Coaching restarts;
6. To correct technique.

It is important to consider coaching methods and styles to be part of a broad continuum that ranges from directive to guided. In the course of a season, and certainly depending on the age of the players, a coach can use all methods and styles effectively. A balanced approach that employs each method and style appropriately and at the right moment is always best. There are two important considerations in any method or style:

1. Does the information – regardless of its delivery – make sense and help the players solve the short term and long term problems that they encounter in the game?
2. Are the players given sufficient time and opportunity to experience soccer and solve problems on their own?

3.1 Teaching Methods and Styles

a. Direct Method of Teaching

This method of coaching attempts to teach by providing the players with much of the solutions to the soccer problems. In this respect, the coach takes the information from the game and interprets it for the players. This can be described as a “coach-centered” approach.

Young Players Need Some Direction...

1. Players need something to emulate (TV, older players, highlights, MLS, etc.). If the player does not have this, the direct approach for some of the technical side and creative side must come into play.
2. At the younger ages, it is probably a combination of direct coaching for technique and repetition (in the absence of emulation) with a lot of guided discovery.
3. Repetition and direct approach for many of the kids is needed.



4. The whole process can be aided by energy and passion from the coach and how that coach inspires the passion for the game in the young player. Also, fun competition within the group culture has shown to be a great motivating factor in all aspects of development.

To develop familiarity with the ball, repetition and direction is necessary to an extent. If we are more efficient and effective in collecting, passing, striking a ball at the young ages, we can allow more time in training to promote creativity and free expression.

There is great value in giving young players “pictures” to copy, whether this is from older local players, or from watching high level soccer on TV. Unfortunately, in our culture, young players are not steeped in a soccer tradition that encourages players to watch and experience soccer - other than their own games and practices.

Our players are not spending enough time with the ball – on their own or during practice. So much of their soccer experience is spent being “organized” (staying in their positions and not making mistakes). This is evident every day at the club level, in college and with the youth national teams. We are technically deficient.

Not all kids bring or pick things up by just watching. But with some demonstration and repetition a few kids get it and this jumpstarts their creativity. But, at the young ages a more direct approach to teaching technique may be beneficial, (lots of repetitions of specific movements with the ball – passing, receiving, shooting, feints).

Mixing in some more directed technical coaching at the young ages gives more kids familiarity on the ball, which allows for more kids to become creative. Those kids that are going to do it on their own will still do it and may figure it out more quickly.

Direct Approach Can Be Effective:

- Teaching proper technique, especially those that do not learn best by just watching and emulating.
- Teaching restarts.
- Preparing the team to play a particular opponent, especially in the day or two leading up to a match.
- Preparing a team to play a very specific style.
- Addressing group and team tactical concepts (e.g., high or low pressure defending, positional roles, etc.).
- Addressing concepts to a group of tired players – during a “recovery day”.

Potential Weaknesses of the Direct Method of Teaching:

- If used exclusively, players are not able to learn by experiencing the game for themselves.
- Player may depend too much on their coach for the answers.
- It may be difficult for the coach to anticipate all the potential problems that the player will encounter during a game, season, or career.



- Players may struggle in games where they must adjust during the run of play.
- Players may struggle in new environments, (for example, when a player moves up an age group, changes Club, plays in ODP, etc., they may encounter a coach with a totally different approach or outlook on the game, therefore this player may focus on adjusting to the coach, instead of adjusting to the game).
- It may stifle creativity, especially in young players. Coaches that depend on this method too heavily often lead players to believe that there is only one way or one solution to each problem.

Guided Method of Teaching:

This method of coaching attempts to teach by using the game as the forum for asking the players questions to draw out their own thoughts about what is happening in the game. The Game provides the material and the coach helps to guide, but the player has some responsibility and freedom to find his own solutions. This is an experiential method that allows room for mistakes and the lessons that can be learned through trial and error. This can be described as a “player-centered” approach.

Young Players Need Some Freedom...

Often times, the need to direct and often choreograph movements for our young players are a product of us, (as coaches), feeling that we somehow have a deadline to meet. And the quicker and more specific we can give them information, then the more efficient and effective we have become. Too often, as youth soccer in this country focuses on moving players vertically as fast as possible, many of our young players move to the next level with a lot of “match” experience, but without a solid skill base. We need to consider a more lateral approach to teaching that spends more time allowing players to develop the skills that they will need to continue to enjoy soccer before the move onto to the next set of challenges.

A coach's passion can have a very positive impact on players. Oftentimes, and especially at the youth level, enthusiasm for the game can go a long way.

There is a misconception that a player centered approach has no direction from the coach. This is not accurate. This approach does not advocate the coach just sits in a lawn chair and reads the paper.

Any coach needs to take an active part in the learning process. But oftentimes, this can be done through exercises and games they organize that allow players to do the lion share of the problem-solving.

Demonstrating how to execute a certain technique is different from telling a player the mechanics of how to do something, and then giving them little or no freedom for their own interpretation. Repetition can be positive, and coach driven. If you set up multiple opportunities for players, that's repetition - but they should also be given a certain amount of freedom to find their own way.



The coach's role is NOT to provide all the answers so that the kids win the game today. The coach's role IS to provide ideas and pictures that help kids think in ways that will help them solve problems. A great deal of coaches at the youth level spend too much time organizing and controlling players, step for step, or play by play. The youth coach's responsibility is to set up environments that allow for these repetitions in some sort of fun, competitive situation that allows for a balance of some guidance and a lot of "doing" by the player. Gaining experience by doing, by trying, by succeeding and by failing – are all central to how kids learn. "Learning is the kindling of the flame, not the filling of the vessel."

The extreme example of a directed style doesn't allow for options beyond the coach's own set of ideas. That is what needs to be avoided. In fact, the coach should present the players with some guidance and options that will provide a framework or foundation for the players that they can use as a starting point for their journey, not as a set of boundaries. When working with 9-11 year olds, the coach will give some ideas for ways to deal with the ball, pass, shoot etc. as well as things to think about in 1's, 2's, 3's and 4's, etc. But the coach should not give them a set of options that gives them all the answers.

Guided Method Can Be Effective:

- Introducing young players to the game.
- Late in the training session that allows players a chance to practice what they have learned.
- Give players a chance to apply their technique in competitive situations.
- When teaching the principles of play.
- When you want to evaluate the players.
- When the players need repetitions in decision making.
- Introducing decision making as a need for the game.
- To give the players a break from having coaches telling them what to do.
- To stabilize new found tactics or technique.
- To instill in the team the need for them to make decisions based on the cues of the game.
- To give the responsibility of the decisions to the players

Potential Strengths of the Guided Method:

Enhances player development as it encourages players to become independent, critical thinkers.

- Is a "player centered" approach?
- Exposes players to the problem solving demands of the game.
- Allows players to be exposed to the creative demands of the game.
- Players enjoy training in this environment.
- Puts more responsibility on each individual player.
- Accommodates a variety of learning styles.
- Players learn more because they are playing more.
- The game is the best teacher... so, why not let them play the game.
- Allows the coach to learn more about the players as they see them in environments of their own choosing.
- Gives high repetitions for decision making.



- For younger players, guided discovery method may stimulate ideas and facilitate the growth of creative problem solving. Through discussion with players, we are often able to find that there may be many different solutions to problems happening within the game.
- According to periodization expert Istyan Balyi, players from 10-15 are very motivated by a player-centered approach and perhaps much less suited to direct teaching because they may not have the knowledge base or technical tools to benefit from prescriptive instruction.

Potential Shortcomings of the Guided Method:

- Guided method **MUST** be an active teaching style. A player –centered approach does not mean “no coaching”. Players may feel abandoned if they feel the coach seems disinterested in their development.
- Weaker, developing players may need more direct assistance to “get them on their way.”
- When addressing technique, the coach may need the model of an older / more skillful player for developing players to emulate.
- If a higher level player or older player is not available for the players to emulate, learning can be much slower.
- May not accommodate all learning styles effectively.
- If the guided discovery method is used in a manner that disrupts the rhythm of play, then the player is not able to experience the game first-hand, and much of the benefits of this approach are lost.
- The knowledge base of the teacher/coach may not allow a questioning approach to be effective.

Players Need Some of Both:

- The direct method addresses the immediate needs of the player, coach and team. This approach often helps to organize the team and give the player and team a focus and a purpose. The directive method can also be effective when setting up environments where players receive repeated opportunities to practice a specific technique.
- The guided method is part of a long term process of learning that prepares the player to eventually think for himself based on the lessons he has learned from the game and from the coach. It is a principle-based approach to learning rather than a “situational” based approach. (Here is our objective, now use this to find a way to get there, versus this is how to be successful in this specific scenario). It may not help the player win a game in the short term. In fact, it may even contribute to some costly mistakes in the short term. However, by using these mistakes as appropriate learning tools, the player has the opportunity to become an independent thinker, and therefore a more complete player.



So, where is the middle ground between the two outside edges of these approaches? Certainly, the information and guidance from a knowledgeable adult that is delivered at appropriate times during practice and matches, on and off the field can play a vital role in a player's development.

When providing information, guidance and direction to players, keep the following points in mind:

1. There should not be so much information that the player gets overloaded, or so little that the players lack a purpose to their decisions.
2. The direction should make sense to what's happening on the field, and it should be based on the principles of soccer.
3. The player should be allowed some room to think for himself, based on what's happening on the field, keeping in mind that there can be more than one way to solve a problem.

A coach should offer his players and the team a purpose and direction for each practice session and match, for the week and for the season. Each practice should be well organized, with the coach giving the players a clear understanding of the general objectives for each exercise, and how it fits into the overall purpose of the day, week, and season. At the same time, within the practice or match, the coach should consciously allow for some amount of "player interpretation" that is based on the basic principles of soccer, as well as the general team goals that the coach has presented. It is very important that the coach's information and direction makes sense based upon soccer and what's happening in the game or practice.

When teaching technique to younger players, (U-10 to U-12), it can be beneficial to give these players some amount of directed repetition, especially in the beginning of the sessions. For example, a coach can set up a series of exercises where players are actively involved in passing the ball, receiving the ball, practicing different ways to wrong foot players and shooting on goal. The coach is directing through the different techniques that he is requiring the players to repeat. The coach can provide specific examples of how to execute these techniques through demonstrations and allowing the players repeated opportunities to practice. This can be done in structured, but active exercises (a lot of small groups and a lot of movement – no lines or lectures). At the same time, the coach should not expect the players to grasp each technique immediately. Even with repetition, the process is often slower than the coach would like it to be. Coaches should try to avoid the temptation to spend too much time with one player's mechanics. There should be brief demonstrations and then the repetitions in the exercises, over time, should move the player forward. As the practice evolves to the middle or 2nd half of the session, the players should then be given freedom to practice these techniques in a free flowing game. As the players move to the free flowing portions of the practice, the coach becomes more concerned with how the players are able to apply the different techniques that they have been practicing.



Soccer is a fluid game and coaches should approach the game with a flexibility that reflects this quality. At the same time, managing players and communicating information to others, especially young boys and girls, also requires a willingness to adjust to personalities and varied situations. It is a great challenge, and one that we, as coaches, don't always get right. But this is okay. There is not just one way to coach. Each approach and style makes sense in the right situation. It is the responsibility of the coach to find how to best blend these teaching methods together in order to give the players the most positive experience possible. Constant self-evaluation as well as periodic peer assessment is the most effective guarantees for helping a coach continue his own professional growth.

Continuum of Teaching Methodology:

Coach Directed → Balanced Approach → Player Centered

Each of these methods has its place in helping to develop young players. Neither of these methods, in their purest form can be used at the exclusion of the other. Therefore, the most effective developmental model for young players includes a balanced approach that employs direction - for the purpose of clarity (demonstration), structure (rules) and discipline (behavior) – within an environment that also allows the player to experience the game (repetition) and encourages experimentation (discovery), trial and error (lessons).

When used in a balanced manner and at the appropriate times during a practice, a match and throughout the season, the combination of these two teaching methods can be very effective for success in the short-term as well as for long- term player development.

3.2 What Is Coaching?

This question is difficult to answer. Depending upon the ages of the players, coaching may be seen as a management and facilitating process while others see it as developing and nurturing talent. Whatever the perspective, we can answer the question simply by stating that coaching is an activity aimed at influencing the way soccer is played and the people who play it. The basis for coaching is observation. All coaching begins with an analysis of the game and the causes and effects which determine the eventual outcome of the game. The ability to articulate the events or actions seen in a game and re-create those situations in training requires the coach to have a keen sense of observation and a good memory. It can be said that a coach is like a camera - always taking pictures of situations within the game so they can accurately assess the needs of their players and team. The development of a coach is similar to that of a player. Much on-going practice must occur for the coach to gain the skills and techniques necessary for teaching and coaching.

Becoming a good coach has much to do with the experiences gained through numerous practice and game situations. Individuals who have played soccer often have an advantage in understanding the game. However, many former professional players who later went into coaching failed because of their inability to relate the game to players who were less talented than themselves. Coaching and teaching young players requires more than just knowledge of



the game, it requires the ability to apply that knowledge within a structure that creates a challenging and rewarding experience for the players.

Learning to coach can be divided into 5 different phases:

1. Knowledge and understanding of the game

First and foremost the coach must be familiar with the game. They must understand how the game functions as well as the principles and concepts that govern the game.

2. Reading the game

This means seeing what happens and listening to what is being said by the players. The ability to observe and hear what is occurring in the game is a fundamental requirement for every coach. The ability of the coach to concentrate on the game and what is happening is crucial to enable the coach to accurately read the game. The coach must be able to detach from the many emotions of the game in order to stay focused and objective.

3. Determining objectives

The coach must determine which objectives, both individual and collective, need attention. These objectives come from the game and are established by the coach through observation. Careful observation provides numerous objectives, both of a positive and negative perspective. The coach must then ask which objectives are worthy of more detailed consideration.

4. Setting priorities

After determining the objectives the coach must establish the priorities for improving or correcting the situations from the game. The more experienced a coach is, the more soccer problems they will encounter. However, the broader the coaches experience, the easier it will be to determine and establish priorities. Because of the limited amount of time available to correct problems, the coach must determine the priorities of the situation. Sometimes a minor problem must be corrected before moving on to a more complicated one. Understanding the game aids the coach in determining the priority and how to correctly address the problem.

5. Planning

It is clear that the coach must plan carefully to achieve goals and objectives, especially in terms of player development. Coaches need to make a plan of action at the beginning of each year or season. By doing so they have an outline of what they want to achieve by the end of the year and how they intend to accomplish it. Coaching without a plan, especially at youth levels often results in players not receiving instruction or practice in areas that are the basis for future development.



3.3 How To Teach

Prior to constructing a training session the coach should identify and consider the following factors: Who, How, When, What

A. Who Are The Players?

- Develop realistic goals and objectives for the age and ability of the players.

B. How Do They Learn?

- Understand how they receive information, process the most important, concentrate on the decision and, execute technically. Is it more appropriate to use guided discovery or direct approach?

C. When Do You Teach? — Consider Time Factors

- When to develop the topic during the coaching session.
- When to place in the weekly training program.
- When to place in the seasonal cycle.

D. What Are You Going To Teach and Why?

Explain where it belongs in the game. “Paint a picture”, explain rules of the activity, and give clear objectives and method of scoring.

The role of the coach is crucial to the learning process. As a coach you accept certain responsibilities for the growth and development of your players. Coaches must facilitate learning and provide a positive role model for their players. They do this by:

E. Acting as a Facilitator

- Set up conditions and environment for learning.
- Create an enjoyable atmosphere for training and provide players with positive feedback.
- Be enthusiastic and positive.
- Conduct training in the spirit of enjoyment and learning.
- Gear activities toward achieving success.

F. Providing a Positive Role Model

- Demonstrate respect for team members, opponents, referees, parents, spectators and opposing coaches.
- Show respect and responsibility to the game itself.

When constructing practices coaches must be careful to avoid the following that can be detrimental to the learning process:

- Excessive coaching and interference during training activities and games.
- Incorrect and inappropriate exercises.



- Training sessions that do not flow and are frustrating, i.e., too difficult or boring; not suitable for ability or age.
- Game and activities that do not resemble soccer (as we simplify soccer it should look like soccer)

3.4 The Practice Session

Once the goals and objectives for training have been determined, the coach needs to consider several factors relating to the organization and progression of the practice in order to be thoroughly prepared to conduct the session.

A. Organization

- Appropriate field size and location on the field.
- Necessary equipment, i.e., number of balls, pinnies, cones, goals.
- Number of players and substitutes required for activities and/or games.
- Available amount of time for activity.

B. Progression

- Make sure practice flows in proper progression from simple to more complex; general to specific.
- Follow progression for teaching technique and tactics together.
- The methodology for teaching technique and tactics together in the small-sided game model builds from simple to more complex. Specifically, the progression is: 1) technical warm-up, 2) small-sided exercise (even or uneven numbers, one, two or more goals, etc), 3) expanded small-sided exercise (an exercise with direction, with more numbers, but not necessarily to big goals) 4) 7v7 to two big goals.

C. Demonstration

- What is focus of demonstration - paint a clear picture for players.
- What are key coaching points to highlight?
- Explain the rules and objectives of the practice - give players a method to score (both attackers and defenders)

Coaches must provide players with immediate feedback on performance (positive and negative). The observation and listening skills of a coach are important in determining whether something good or bad occurred during the activity. Good coaching assists the player to find solutions to problems encountered in the game. When making corrections during games or activities there are several guidelines to follow. They are:

- When starting an activity allow players the opportunity to establish a playing rhythm before stopping the exercise.
- Whenever possible, make your coaching points during natural stoppages, or during the run of play. When coaching during natural stoppages make your point quickly and then restart the activity as soon as possible.



- Assess your coaching during the session. Ask yourself: is my coaching having a positive effect on the players or activity; do they understand the demands of the activity; are they improving?
- Make your activity competitive.
- Finally, put activity into larger game - make it realistic.

Prior to a training session coaches should prepare a practice plan that outlines the session. This plan should include the number of players needed or available, the amount of time allocated for each training activity and the objectives for each session. The plan should be flexible enough to allow for changes to the practice. During the course each candidate will be expected to prepare a practice plan for all their practical coaching sessions. These should be done in outline form and highlight the key coaching points of the session. Diagrams may be added to the back of the practice plan.

3.5 The Playing Area

The size and shape of a playing area is primarily dependent upon three factors: 1) the number of players involved in the game or activity, 2) the theme to be highlighted in the training session and 3) the ability level of the players. The shape most often used for a playing area is a rectangle. This shape mirrors the actual playing field and assists in providing the game with direction. We often refer to this playing area as a coaching grid.

The natural markings and spaces on a field can easily be used to make smaller playing areas. Use of these natural markings allows the coach to quickly set up multiple practice areas. When marking playing areas with disc markers or cones, the coach should use the fewest number necessary to create a positive visual setting of the playing area.

When setting up the grid, it is better to err toward a larger grid if the coach is unsure. If the skill level of the players allows them to play inside this area with no difficulty then the coach can reduce the size of playing area. As the skill level improves the size of the playing area must be reduced to further assist the development of technical and tactical speed of play. This reduced “time and space relationship” assists the coach to develop these important skills.

3.6 Components of Coaching Soccer

It is important to clearly understand the components of coaching soccer and how to apply the methodology of teaching both technique and tactics through economical training. We must apply these principles to solve problems identified in the game and to develop appropriate training sessions that allow us to “coach the player”, not the method. The components of coaching soccer are: **Technique, Tactics, Fitness and Psychology**. The order of priority of these components differs depending upon the age and ability of the players. The priority of these components for different age groups of players would be:

It is important to emphasize the use of small sided games in the development of players. Small sided games provide players with the proper environment to develop creatively while



encompassing each of the components of the game. Reasons for emphasizing small sided games are:

Skill Development

Number of touches on the ball greatly increased.

Tactical Development

Decision making is greatly expanded.

Fun and Enjoyment

Amount of goal scoring chances are increased.

Player Development

Positional play is greatly expanded.

Intuitive Development

Transitional play is increased and becomes automatic.

3.7 Technique

The relationship between technique and skill is important to consider in the development of competent players. Players who are technical must be able to apply those skills within the game, while under the pressure of time, space and the opponent. Successful application of technique while under pressure is referred to as skillful performance.

In order to develop players who are skillful and not just technical, we must coach and teach technique within the context of the game. By utilizing small sided games to develop technical skills a realistic environment is created that encompasses the demands of the game.

In addition to developing technical skills through the game the player further develops an understanding of the tactical application of technique. How does a situation in the game place demands upon the technical skills of the player and require the selection of certain techniques to be successful, i.e., passing on the ground or passing in the air?

Technical Functional Training — Training that is specific to a role or position; takes place in the area of the field where the player will be positioned; the technique to be practiced is determined prior to the session and maximum repetition of the technical skill is provided in the activity.

** Because the “C” course is focused primarily on principles of soccer as they occur in small group games, there will be limited discussion on functional (positional) issues during the week. The functional aspects of soccer are addressed in detail at the “B” and “A” level courses.



3.8 Tactics (Decisions)

We define tactics as player decisions within the game. Tactics can often times be addressed in group and team scenarios during the week of practice. These specific “team” tactics are worked out prior to a game and provide a specific plan of action for the players. This plan of action could be the way in which the team will play to either defeat the opponent or achieve a tie.

When teaching tactics to players we progress in the following manner: Individual, Group and Team. Because the “C” license is targeted toward coaches of 11-14 year olds, the tactical focus during the week is on individual and small group decisions.

It is important that players learn how to recognize the recurring situations that are encountered in soccer and to make appropriate decisions based on the information.

3.9 The Relationship between Technique and Tactics

Players who are technically competent will have greater freedom to make appropriate and effective decisions during the game. The ability of players to perform tactically throughout the game depends upon the close relationship between 1) how comfortable they are with the ball at their feet (technique), how fast and long and powerfully they can run (physical fitness) or how long and powerfully and accurately they can strike a ball, and how quickly and clearly they can see what is happening around them in a game (tactics).

These components are interrelated and must be applied together during training to obtain the highest level of performance. Because the game has become increasingly complex, we must construct training to meet the demands of the game.

There are teams who have much “fighting power” but little tactical or technical ability. While, on the other hand there are teams who possess great technical or tactical skills and have great “playing art” but lack the willingness to do battle on the field. In order to be successful we must work to develop both traits and characteristics of play. Only when players and teams combine both “fighting power” and “playing art” will they be complete.

3.10 Methods of Coaching

Individual Tactics – Each individual’s ability to make appropriate decisions during play based on what is happening on the field and the basic principles of the game. This includes all aspects of attacking and defending (with or without the ball, around the ball or away from the ball, etc). Ultimately, the tactical competence of each individual will determine the effectiveness of group and team tactics. (Tactics cannot be taught without also addressing the impact that technique has on a player’s decisions.)



Group Tactics — Begins whenever two or more players join together to become effective tactical groups around the ball; group tactics can be any combination of small groups such as of 2v1, 2v2, 3v2, 3v3, 4v3, etc; a general rule for group tactics is to have one more player than your opponent in the area of the ball - this is referred to as being “numbers up” and applies to both attack and defense; group tactics demand both visual and verbal communication and the reading of tactical cues from the game. General method for teaching group tactics through 7v7 includes both generic training (non –functional) and simplified positional training and finally, the game to two large goals. (Tactics cannot be taught without also addressing the impact that technique has on group decisions).

Team Tactics — Team tactics begin at 9v9 full field activity where players are taught their responsibilities in each third of the field for both attack and defense; team tactics can also include half-field activities such as 6v4 or 6v5; the objective within team tactics is to provide a basis of play for both attack and defense; use of specific restrictions to assist in the development of a tactical plan may be included, e.g., 1 or 2 touch, forward pass followed by back pass, etc; restarts for both attack and defense are addressed during team tactics.

Team tactics are not a focus of the “C” Course. This topic will be addressed in detail during the “B” and “A” courses.

Tactical Functional Training — Training that is specific to a role or position; takes place in the area of the field where the player will be positioned; the player determines which skill is necessary as dictated by the game; the choices within the game that are often available to the player are presented; decision making is the essence of this tactical functional training. In the “C” course there is some simple functional training that can occur (for example) by placing a goalkeeper in goal or asking your wide players to stay wide; however, when using numbers up to 7v7, positional concepts are still mainly addressed through principles of soccer and areas of the field, as opposed to a more regimented approach to positional play that occurs with numbers from 9v9 to 11v11. At the smaller numbers, for example, the basic principles of soccer (width and depth, etc.) are still emphasized, but there is not necessarily a demand that one particular player consistently fill that positional role. Instead, players have more freedom to identify the needs of the game and make sure that the positional responsibilities are collectively fulfilled.

3.11 Fitness Training For Soccer

Soccer is a physically demanding sport characterized by explosive activities such as tackling, turning and jumping in addition to high intensity running and sprints over relatively short distances. According to statistics, top-class soccer players make approximately 1100 changes in exercise intensity and cover a distance of roughly 6.5 miles during a match. Fitness training can help a player endure the physical demands of soccer and maintain high technical ability and decision-making quality throughout a match. Every soccer player, regardless of standard of play, can benefit from a fitness training program based on soccer-specific exercises.



For this reason, it is important for youth coaches to understand basic fitness principles and their appropriate applications. It is even more important for coaches of players under the age of 14 to realize that match fitness can be achieved in regular training sessions and games, provided training is structured in an economical manner.

Dr. Jens Bangsbo, internationally renowned Danish fitness advisor, provides the following insight on fitness training for youth:

There is evidence to suggest that training of youth players does not need to be focused on improving physical performance. Often young players get sufficient physical training by regular drills and games. In a Danish study, 132 young players from football clubs, in which fitness training was not performed with players under 15 years of age, were tested using a football-specific endurance test. For boys younger than 15 years there was a pronounced increase in performance with age despite the fact that they did not perform any specific fitness training. Furthermore, results of 18 year old players were as high as those of the senior league players. It appears that a player can reach a top-class level as a senior player without performing specific fitness training during the younger years. The time saved by excluding fitness training should be spent on training to improve technical skills, as the players greatly benefit from this type of training when they become seniors.

When training young players one should be aware that there is a large difference in individual maturation within a given age group. The adolescent growth spurt may start as early as the age of ten or may not start until the age of sixteen. On average, girls mature about two years earlier than boys. As maturation status can have a profound effect on physical performance, care should be taken not to underestimate genuine football talents due to physical immaturity in comparison to other players in the same age group. Another important aspect of youth training is the amount and intensity of training. The coach should carefully observe how the individual players respond to the training, as young players can easily be “overtrained.”

Types of Fitness Training

For the purpose of providing basic information to youth coaches, fitness training for soccer can be divided into the following general categories:

1. Warm-up and Cool Down

Both of these phases are important when starting or ending a training session. A proper warm-up prepares the players for training not only physically but mentally. Static stretching is included in the warm-up to assist in the prevention of muscle strains. During the cool down, light jogging and static stretching aid the body to recover from the trauma received during the training session.

2. Overtraining

The effects on performance due to overtraining are well documented. The signs and symptoms of aerobic overtraining are identifiable and can include physiological, psychological and biomechanical characteristics. If an athlete or coach does not recognize the symptoms of overtraining, the danger lies in mistakenly thinking that the athlete is not



training hard enough. Often times, these athletes and coaches increase the training load in an attempt to improve performance, when in fact it should be reduced to let the body recover.

Because many off field factors (sleep, nutrition, relationships, school, work, etc.) can affect training, communication between the coach and athlete is critical to making a proper diagnosis of overtraining.

Coaches should carefully consider all aspects when determining the factors that may be contributing to overtraining. Below are just some of the symptoms of overtraining.

3. Fitness Training In Perspective

Training for young players, prior to and during early puberty, should not be focused on the physical aspect, but should mainly emphasize technical training. Fitness training for females and males should follow the same principles.

4. Rest/Recovery

Children are very sensitive to the physical and psychological stresses imposed by a demanding training and competition schedule. They are especially susceptible to injury or burn-out during growth spurts and puberty. Youth coaches must take into consideration the positive effects of adequate rest periods during training, alternating hard and light practices through the season and allowing days off and time away from soccer to recuperate and rekindle passion for the game.

Final Considerations

Two final considerations for coaching are extremely important for the coach to achieve success. At present the American coach practices their craft in an environment where soccer, although a popular participant sport, does not yet share the same major league status as other top sports within the U.S. Nor does the environment at youth level provide the same opportunities for growth and development that exists today in the top soccer playing nations. In order to be successful we must strive to create an environment where players are constantly challenged and motivated by the game. In order to accomplish this we must apply the specificity of training principle to all our coaching.

Specificity of training is best represented in the acronym SAID.
Specific Adaptations to Imposed Demands (SAID Principle)

The SAID Principle is further defined for the coach by stating:

- Training needs to be specific to the demands of the position
- Training must replicate the game itself

Finally, in consideration of the existing soccer environment within our culture and the amount of time available to the American coach to develop young players, we must be extremely economical in the application of our training methods. To achieve this we must apply the concept of Economical Training.



Economical Training demands that we combine as many of the components of coaching as possible into our training exercises and activities in order to obtain maximum results in a minimum amount of time.

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