

Soccer Development Model for WSYSA District IV

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*“The world we have created is a product
of our thinking; it cannot be changed
without changing our thinking.”*

– Albert Einstein

101

Introduction

101.1

Recreational youth soccer is generally the first soccer experience for most players, and is the program where most youth players will remain for their whole playing career. Therefore, the most important objective of any Recreational Program should be to provide a positive fun-filled experience to each child and instill a love of the game within each player.

The international soccer community recognizes and acknowledges that the United States has some of the most organized youth soccer programs in the world. Our recreational administrators and coaches are dedicated, intelligent volunteers that donate countless hours toward developing life-long learning within the children of our communities. However, it is also common knowledge that the “most organized” program in the world does not necessarily mean the “best program” in the world. Despite all of our organizational skills, the lack of people with life-long soccer experience, especially technical experience, is a glaring weakness in our recreational programs. It is obvious to soccer experts throughout the world that most of the technical youth soccer expertise in the United States is concentrated at the competitive level and the recreational programs are generally in the hands of willing, enthusiastic volunteers that have little or no soccer background.

101.2

This youth development model is a descriptive continuum. Its purpose is to provide perspective on the skills, abilities and emotional needs of young children as they mature, and to provide evidence supporting smaller-sided games for the vast majority of players below U12. While the information is generally applicable for each identified age group, all children mature at different rates and it is entirely possible that some precocious youngsters will understand the game and perform at levels beyond their peers. Long overlaps between stages of development are also quite normal and it is possible that some older players’ skill level and understanding will more closely resemble that of younger players.

Generic Problems In Recreational Youth Soccer**201.1**

The generic problems seen in recreational programs across the country are repeatedly the same, and predictably relate to the fact that strong technical supervision is missing. The most common problems observed are:

- (a) At the U6 through U12 age groups, coaches place too much emphasis on 'booting' the ball aimlessly forward. This practice is not conducive to technical skill development and results in players never really gaining any comfort or confidence with dribbling or controlling the ball at feet.
- (b) Coaches and parents place too much emphasis on game results (wins/losses) at the younger age groups, and not enough emphasis on individual skill development. Adding unnecessary pressure to win at a young age often curtails the development of a love for the game, and detracts from the beauty of the game.
- (c) At the U12 and above ages, players good enough for more competitive soccer are encouraged to remain at the recreational level by coaches who want to win. This practice impedes "*individual player development*" in both the exceptional players, and in the players sitting on the bench of a recreational team. The necessary competition is lacking for exceptional players to develop and improve their individual skills and the players on the bench of the recreational team fail to develop because a player that should be playing at a higher level is displacing them in the lineup of the recreational team.
- (d) Parental behavior on the sidelines of U13 and below games is too loud, too overbearing, and filled with too much instruction. Young players need to have the freedom to just play the game, learn from the game, and grow out of their dependency on the adults.
- (e) Full-sided games (11 versus 11) at the younger age groups results in the bigger, stronger, faster players dominating play. Too much standing around and limited touches on the ball by the majority of the players on the field impedes the development of the majority of players at the U12 and below age groups. Studies by the United States Soccer Federation show that most players at U12 and below do not have the technical skills or the athleticism to deal with the demands of

11-a-side soccer games. It is highly recommended that players at U12 and below participate in smaller sided games that allow more opportunities for touches on the ball and a greater chance of technical skill development.

- (f) Inexperienced recreational soccer coaches do not have enough variety of activities to make the practices fun and effective. Most clubs have problems just getting volunteers to coach, much less trying to get volunteers with soccer knowledge that know something about coaching soccer.
- (g) Pre-game and game management by (inexperienced) coaches are very poor and do not prepare the players for the demands of the game, and too many substitutions during games kill the flow of the game and turn games into a helter-skelter situation.
- (h) At some clubs, the formation of teams at the recreational level becomes a problem as overbearing coaches manipulate the recreational registration system to stack teams. This results in the formation of “super” recreational teams and removes parity from the recreational game. To be a true recreational program, formation of recreational teams is strictly random, and new teams form each year at the U14 and below age groups.
- (i) Most Clubs lack of a qualified Director of Coaching (DOC) to help educate, train and assist recreational youth soccer programs. A knowledgeable DOC must be involved in overseeing and monitoring the technical aspects of recreational programs. The technical aspects taught to children at the ages of 4 to 9 years old has a direct and profound impact on the future development of the player and the Club.

201.2 It cannot be over-emphasized that young players need to develop “technical skill” by touching the ball as much as they can. They should develop a feeling that wherever the ball is, they can do anything with it. No matter where the ball is, what part of their body the ball is touching, how the ball is spinning, how the ball is coming to them, what speed the ball is coming at them, they should have the feeling that they can do anything with the ball.

301 **Generalizations and Themes of Youth Player Development**

301.1 U6 and Below Player Generalization. Five and six year-olds have very limited coordination and body awareness and are just learning to appreciate the difficulties associated with manipulating an object as troublesome as a round soccer ball without using their hands. At this age, players can usually:

- (a) Dribble in straight lines.
- (b) Turn the ball in wide arcs.
- (c) Kick with the laces and the toes.
- (d) Stop the ball if it is not traveling too fast or coming out of the air.
- (e) Pass to teammates if they have time to assess their location and can figure out how to coordinate the kick.
- (f) Try to recover the ball when out of possession.

Generally, children at this age have no practical concept of space or teamwork and they have very little tolerance for complicated rules. They are very egocentric, but they will share the ball with teammates, and in spite of their limited attention spans, and absent pacing skills, players as young as five and six will play small-sided soccer games for up to an hour as long as they get to take periodic breaks.

301.2 U6 Coaching Theme. At the U6 level, the primary emphasis of coaches and parents should be to facilitate activities that cater to individual play and frequent ball contacts that assist in the development of basic motor skills and muscle memory. Fun games and activities that incorporate one player per ball are excellent complements to small-sided soccer games of three versus three.

The formation of teams is not necessary, and games can be in the form of a Sandlot Game or a Play Day. Play Days replace formal team formation and structured play. All Play Day activities include everybody playing and 100% playing time for each player.

301.3 U7 and U8 Player Generalization. Seven and eight year-olds are still very fragile young people and still very egocentric, but their coordination, balance and agility are developing rapidly and a growing technical range allows some players to be quite sophisticated in their individual play. At this age, the following traits are usually evident:

- (a) Players begin thinking in terms of small groups, thus making planned passing more of a realistic tactical option.

- (b) Players can kick the ball accurately over a short distance.
- (c) Players still do not like to deal with balls coming out of the air.
- (d) Players can dribble away from pressure.
- (e) Players begin to understand that the game can have a rhythm other than frantic and panic.
- (f) Players will move to open areas to receive passes when given time to assess how to help their teammates.
- (g) Players are more capable of playing and practicing with restrictions and rules that are more complicated.
- (h) Players do not understand offside.
- (i) A player's range of techniques can include a number of different kicking surfaces and textures.
- (j) A player's vision for the game is almost exclusively post-control (after his/her team wins possession of the ball).
- (k) A player's limited appreciation for space does not meld well with numbers above four or five a-side.

301.4 U7 and U8 Coaching Themes. Emphasis continues on individual play and players begin to pass a little. At the U7 and U8 level, dribbling the ball should be the primary soccer focus, but coaches should begin teaching the basic principles of passing. The players will be much more aware of how to play soccer games and should be given more responsibility for making teams and rules, and (if deemed necessary) for keeping score. Games of three versus three at U7, and up to four versus four at U8 with no goalkeepers are excellent small-sided versions of soccer for these players. At this stage/age of their development, there is no need to form teams and "Play Days" are an excellent alternative to formal league competitions and activities. Play Days need to include every player, and need to provide every player with 100% playing time. Practices should consist of small-sided soccer games and fun skill developing games that maximize ball contacts by each player.

301.5 U9 and U10 Generalization. Nine and ten year-olds can be very creative in their play. The best young players at this age move well with the game, circulate the ball quickly between teammates, defend with power and aggression, and generally play soccer in a way that can be exciting to watch. Some of the better players at this age will exhibit excellent field vision that allows them to determine "what next" and starts before the ball arrives (pre-control). The ability to apply sound technique in subtle ways, such as chipping and one versus one dribbling will start to become evident. Players at this age can understand the value of technical repetition and are much more willing to practice independently. They will head the ball and are more likely to try to control balls

coming out of the air. Their passing range can be upwards of 30-40-yards. Players can pass and control the ball with any surface and are capable of disguising their passing and dribbling movements. Feinting and faking are common features of play for the more gifted technicians.

Some ten year-olds start developing a working understanding of width that allows coaches to teach some measure of positional play that is realistic to the players' level of understanding. However, players at this age do not generally create depth very readily and the inclusion of a "midfield" in any playing organization creates insurmountable crowding problems for all but the most advanced players.

301.6 U9 and U10 Coaching Themes. Individual play is continued, and support, ball circulation, and small-group tactics commence. At this stage, young players begin identifying with a team, and they will be much more motivated to attend to formal instruction and repetitive practice activities. Improving and refining individual play through technical repetition is an important goal of this period of development. Granting children the freedom to produce creative individual solutions to tactical and technical problems is a critical element of coaching this age group.

Players will begin to move away from each other, but creating space and playing with their back to goal is a difficult combination of skills that is evident in only the more advanced players. Improved vision and support are the tactical markers of this age. Improved ball circulation is possible as players begin to understand how to control and change the rhythm of play. The better players in this age group will begin to combine with each other. Games of up to six versus six provide a natural balance between technical repetition and tactical complexity.

301.7 U11 and U12 Generalization. The competent U11 and U12 player is comfortable in possession and can demonstrate a number of skillful solutions to evading pressure. The better players will juggle and perform "tricks" with the ball. The maturing body control and increased coordination of players in this age group provides the agility to change speed and direction with the ball. Some players can kick the ball with a wide range of techniques, with bending the ball seemingly the last skill to emerge. The delivery of shots and passes are with power and accuracy, and the passing range of some players is expanding beyond 40 yards.

Crossing and heading is a much more common feature of play. Given appropriate playing spaces, players can control and change the rhythm of play in large groups and attack and defend with a high level of sophistication. Players are generally pre-pubescent, but some size and weight differences related to growth are evident. The level of competitiveness and the drive to win can be impressive, with a maturing physical dimension providing for longer periods of play.

301.8 U11 and U12 Coaching Themes. Focus continues on individual play, and support play. Focus on combination play and large group tactics begin. At this stage, motivated and talented players are capable of demonstrating almost every technique. Practices should still include significant periods of technical repetition and small-sided play to reinforce and refine this technical base. For the first time, players can intellectually appreciate the basic ideas of positioning and roles; meaning games involving possession in midfield will be possible. The early lessons of support and mobility is expanded to evolve combinations in two's and three's, and defending can become more coordinated as players learn to relate to each other in both attack and defense. Individual and group decision-making can be associated with purposeful changes in the rhythm of play and movement away from the ball can become a critical element of problem solving. The careful introduction of activities designed to develop soccer-specific fitness find a foundation in this period. The very best players in the U11 age group may have the capability of playing 11 versus 11; however, the vast majority is not ready for the full-sided game.

301.9 U-13/14 Generalization. The most talented and dedicated soccer players will have developed a full range of technical skills by the dawning of the teen years. Unfortunately, adolescence can often play havoc with agility, coordination and balance and these skills may regress for a while until nature's time for rapid maturation has passed. These physical changes can also take an emotional toll as young, and often, insecure teenagers struggle to overcome the frustration of diminished performance and perhaps social status. Throughout the teen years, a primary function of the coach is to stabilize the range of techniques and develop permanent mind-muscle habits. Both isolated technical repetition and technical repetition under pressure are critical for this development and for improvements in overall speed of play. Players targeted for higher levels of play will notice that technical and tactical functional (positional) training take on a more prominent training role during the mid to late teen years.

The physical changes that mark adults from adolescents will create wide ranges in the size and weight of players during the teen years. Girls will generally complete their growth spurts earlier than boys will, although both sexes can experience periods of delayed growth as late as the early 20's. Physical and psychological training that incorporate a wide range of performance factors are essential components of a well-balanced training environment.

301.10 U-13/14 Coaching Themes. Large group tactics and team building are the main themes for this age group. Young teenagers are not polished soccer players, and the expansion and refinement of their technical base must still be the primary focus of these important years. Patience will be required as the players' physical and tactical dimensions continue to adapt to playing on the large field and with increased numbers. Practice activities should target improving decision-making under pressure, while challenging players to solve small and large group problems quickly and collectively. As defenders become stronger, faster and more aggressive, attacking players will require sharper instincts for creating and using space, particularly, when playing with their backs to goal. The integration of soccer-specific fitness activities into an overall training and development plan needs to occur at this age group. Coaches, players and parent need to be cautious to prevent over-training and burnout.

301.11 U-15 through Adulthood. Team building, functional training and learning to win are major themes for these age groups. This is truly the beginning of the formal "teambuilding" years. As players begin to reach physical and technical maturity, training should seek to develop the skills specific to positional (functional) play and fitness becomes important as a means of achieving victory. Expansion of players' strategic understanding of soccer is a priority. It is of paramount importance that players become coach-independent at these ages. Appreciation of the various systems of play, the study of individual and team tendencies, and the tactical applications of the laws become important aspects of player development.

401

U9 and Below Player Development Model.

The following U9 and below development model outlines a program that overcomes the lack of sufficient people with the soccer experience and knowledge to teach our youngest players the necessary technical skills required to play the game properly, and presents alternatives to the over organization of youth soccer at the youngest ages by overzealous adults.

Along with the generalizations and themes outlined in Section 301, the U9 and below development model serves as an excellent and cost effective means of training our youngest age groups and allowing them to have fun while learning the game of soccer.

402

U7 and Below Academy Training Format

402.1

There is no official team formation at these age groups. With the scarcity of qualified coaches that can teach the technical skills required of soccer players and the need to teach and educate new coaches, volunteers, and parents about the nuances of the game, each club will provide a qualified and experienced soccer coach to train the U7 and below players within the club in an academy style environment. District IV will help supplement a Club's cost of hiring a qualified Academy Director.

402.2

The Academy Director should train each age group separately at least once per week by age and by gender. In the case of smaller clubs, it may be necessary to combine age groups or gender into the same training session.

402.3

Games will be played weekly in a "Return to Sandlot Soccer" game day format that allows for maximum player participation and 100% playing time for all players present during the Sandlot games.

402.4

Academy Directors will focus their training sessions on the age group specific generalizations and themes outlined herein, and will teach to the age group specific objectives as outlined in the, Washington State Youth Soccer Association's Coaches Handbook.

402.5

Clubs are encouraged to recruit volunteer coaches or prospective coaches to attend weekly Academy training sessions. Use of volunteer coaches or prospective coaches to assist the Academy Director in running the training sessions will provide an excellent opportunity for clubs to train coaches in practice organization and structure. Trained coaches can then train and coach formally organized teams at the U10 and above age groups.

403 U7 and Below “Return to Sandlot Soccer / Play Day” Model

- 403.1** It has become increasingly evident that youth in the United States have lost the old sandlot mentality that used to be so prevalent in previous generations. It is a rarity in today’s society to see young children just picking up teams and playing a game. It seems like the only time that children participate in any athletic event is during an organized youth athletic activity. By introducing small-sided sandlot games to our young players, they may take it upon themselves to play soccer more often, and to realize that playing the game does not take a lot of organization. It just takes a ball and some imagination.
- 403.2** The “Return to Sandlot Soccer” play day model allows for 100% playing time for all players involved. At the U7 and below age groups, “Return to Sandlot Soccer” serves as the alternative to forming season-long teams, and eliminates the administrative need to schedule games for the youngest age groups. The model is most efficient with children that are seven years old or younger. Young children do not generally start to identify with the concept of “team” until the age of nine or ten, so forming stable teams and having coaches, referees, formal rules, and game schedules for U7 and below players is an adult-imposed condition that eliminates most connections to the ideals of children and play.
- 403.3** **Basic Organization.** To organize play days, start by identifying the number of players in each age group and the number of fields or open spaces available. This information will determine the number of hours and the number of volunteers required to organize the Play Day.
- 403.4** The five and six year-olds should play separately, as should the seven year-olds. In smaller communities, any two-year age groups can combine to provide efficient use of facilities and assets. Any “obviously” dominant players can be moved up to the next age group, but only if they are comfortable leaving their friends. Boys and girls can play together, but accommodations should be available for boys and girls that want to play separately.
- 403.5** **Flexibility in playing numbers.** The recommended playing numbers for U7 and below are ideal, but not always practical, and communities implementing the Return to Sandlot Soccer play day model should appreciate that flexibility is the key to success.
- (a) Chances are that these young players will NOT spread out until they are tired, and the more players that are competing

for possession of the ball will result in fewer touches by everyone. With little mob scenes inevitable, it is the size of the mob that is critical to providing for frequent dribbling opportunities. However, if the numbers present on the Game Day provide for some games of three versus three and some games of four versus four at the U6 and U7 level, then the organizers should arrange the players as such. It is even possible that some games will have uneven teams, such as four versus three; again, flexibility is the key to successful implementation.

- (b) When the number of players in attendance produces uneven teams, take care to ensure that the weakest players are not short-handed. All players must have the opportunity to experience some degree of success. Possible solutions include having the stronger players compete with fewer teammates and having an adult or older child play on a shorthanded team. The emphasis should be on 100% playing time and fun for all.
- (c) **Field dimensions, goals, and markings.** The reality of working with five through seven year-olds is that there is no practical advantage to marking out “fields,” as the small numbers will always bring the game back towards the goal as soon as the players’ skills allow them to turn the ball around. Organizers can use real goals, big cones or corner flags for goals. However, I recommend that clubs use the quick pop up goals that are available from various soccer equipment providers. Use the field layout diagrams provided herein for field configuration and goal placement. The field dimension recommendations in the diagrams use wide fields to reduce the number of sideline restarts. For most young players a ball going out of bounds is an imposition and may cause a loss of focus or concentration for players at this age.
- (d) Painted lines or disc cones, or a combination thereof, are the best way to mark out the perimeters of the playing areas. While upright cones are easier to identify, they are more dangerous and obtrusive when used as part of field lines that are technically “in-play.”
- (e) A size three ball is recommended for this age group

Diagram 2. On a 100x50 yard space, six 28x20 yard fields (three long by two across) are setup to accommodate 36 3v3 players with a 10-yard walk-space in the center. On this field, buffer zones (3-5 yards) are in front of any fixed goals and between each field.

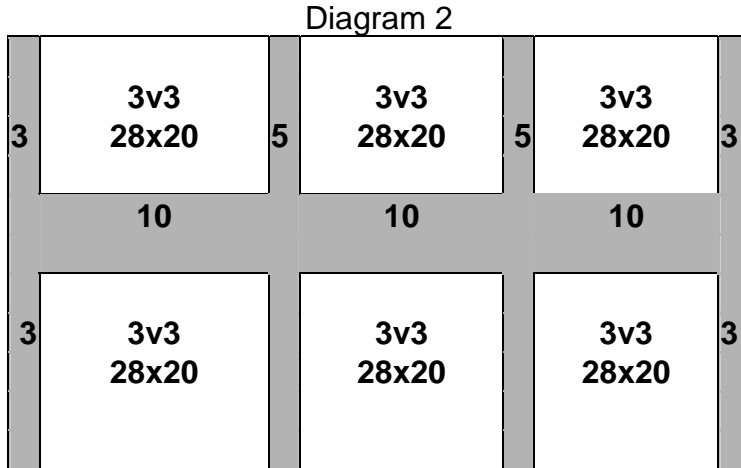
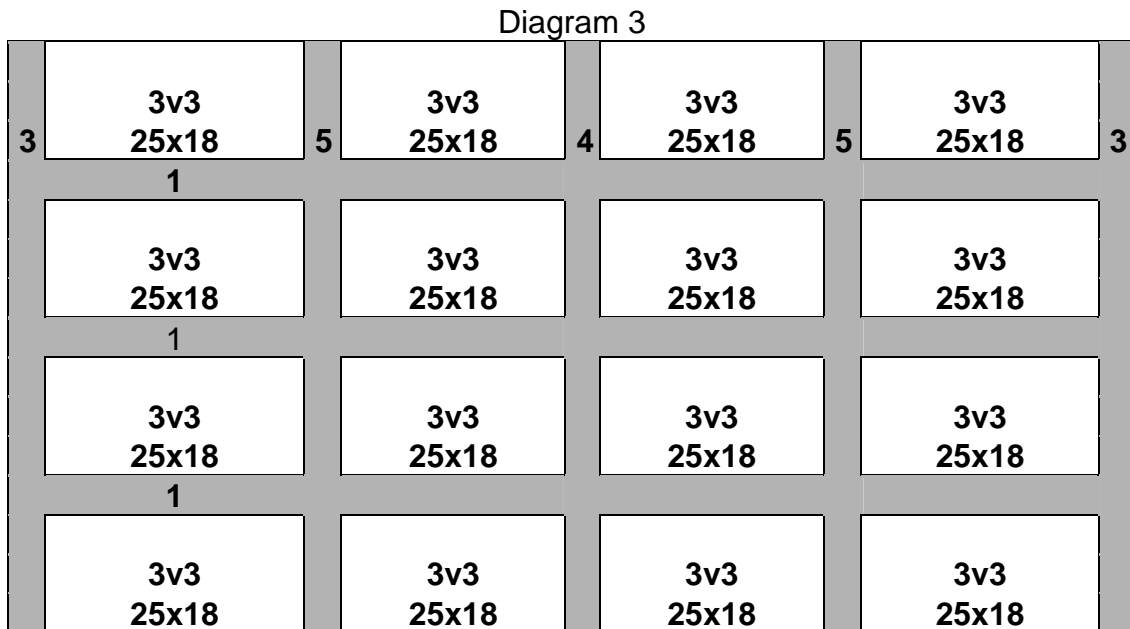


Diagram 3. If the existing space is a regulation soccer field of 120x75 yards, twelve 25x18 yard fields (four long by three across) are setup to accommodate up to 72 3v3 players (twelve fields x six players). No shared sidelines are necessary and a 3-yard buffer area is setup in front of any fixed goals. Starting the fields on the top of the respective goal areas will still provide for two to three yards of buffer space between each field.



403.7 **Number and duration of “games” per Play Day.** Young children play with great enthusiasm and energy for short periods and then they rest or move onto something else. With this in mind, play days for U7 and below should not exceed 60 minutes of active play and ideally feature multiple short duration games against a variety of opponents. The game recommendation for U6 and below players is for two 20-minute games for a total playing time of 40-minutes. For the U7 players two to three 20-minute games for a total playing time of 40-60 minutes. A total maximum playing time of 60 minutes will satisfy typical player needs, with weather conditions, field conditions, and enthusiasm helping to determine the exact number of games each day. There is not a lot of strategy to review between halves, so half times will only last 2-3 minutes (just enough time to get some water and switch ends of the field).

403.8 **Uniforms.** The best solution for uniforms is for each player to receive an Academy T-shirt of the same color, and for the host organization to furnish scrimmage vests (pinnies) of a contrasting color.

403.9 **Staffing the Play Day.** One group leader is required for each age group and the primary responsibilities of the adults are determined by the age of the players, with U7 requiring much less assistance than the U6 and below.

With ten fields in the three versus three games, ten additional adults will be required to help facilitate games. This assumes 60 players are participating at one time.

403.10 **Facilitating the Play Day.** At the U6 and below level, the players will initially be quite limited in their ability to understand the game, but they will quickly learn and understand not to use their hands and which direction to attack and defend. With this age, the adult’s first responsibility is to help the group leader move the players to their assigned field and start the games as soon as possible. The players should start to play as soon as they are on their assigned field. Standing around waiting leads to boredom and you will lose their attention very quickly. The limited playing rules are explained as necessary, and are always short, concise and to the point. The players do not want to listen to rules they just want to play.

(a) Once the games are underway, the next challenge facing the adult is to observe the players to determine the “balance” between the teams. If the ball is generally moving back and

forth, the teams are probably balanced. If one team (or player) is dominating and scoring at will, the adult will have two basic options. First, to play with the weaker players and help them make progress and experience success, and second to change the players around to achieve teams that are more balanced.

- (b) The adults' other responsibilities include praising the players for their efforts, comforting any child in emotional or physical distress, helping settle any lingering rule disputes (usually U7 and above), and deterring parents from "coaching" their children from the sidelines. The final challenge will be to help the children rotate between games.
- (c) The most difficult aspect of playing soccer as a U7 and below player is restarting the game after it has crossed the goal line, and it is often in this case that the adult's most practical contribution to the game is physically participating in this phase of play. This is because the kicking range of the players is only a few yards, at best. In the adult version of soccer, a ball crossing the goal line results in a goal, a goal kick, or a corner kick and these rules should come into play at the U7 and above level. In the U6 and below game, all balls crossing the goal or end line is a restart and play is resumed by using a modified goal kick where any attacking player is allowed to dribble or kick the ball back into play from any point on the goal line. When all the players are in front of the ball and allow no obvious route to get the ball back into play, the adult can actively participate by kicking or throwing the ball into an open space where, hopefully, an attacker can run onto the ball and advance it downfield.

403.11

Referees. There are no formal referees required, but an adult should always be on the field, or close by. The golden rule for U6 and below is to keep the action as fluid as possible unless one of the players complains! For U7 and above, let the players call their own fouls, goals, and out of bounds as much as possible, with the adult available to help only when needed. In an ideal situation, U7 and above teams should also be free to decide on their own rule modifications! Decisions such as whether corners are taken or count "half" a goal, and whether players at the back of the team can use their hands or not, are common decisions that can be arbitrary decided on a game-by-game basis by the players in the Return to Sandlot Soccer play day format.

403.12

Rotations of players. There are a number of ways to rotate players on play days, and using a variety of these configurations provides opportunities for more players to experience success and failure, and winning and losing. Here are the most common options.

- (a) **Random Rotation by Play Day.** Rotate players and form teams by bringing the entire group together and assigning each player to a field: six or eight players will be on field #1, 6 or eight on field #2, etc. Once in the correct space, an adult randomly assigns a player to a team and play begins. Teams can stay together for the entire day, or player changes can occur to provide parity between the teams.
- (b) Another option is to assign players to teams as they arrive at the field. The first three or four become a team and then the next three or four become a team, and so on. As soon teams are set, send them to a field to play. With this method, players arriving early automatically get more playing time while waiting for the bulk of the players to arrive. The U7 and below will need adult assistance, while the U8 and above will be more independent.
- (c) **Random Rotation by Game.** Players can rotate onto new teams after each game. This is a viable option for U8 and above, but not U7 and below. With this format, the players return to a central area after lining the children up and re-numbering them into new teams. This takes a little more work on the part of the coaches, but is a fun way to create individual competition within team play. As long as the players are not standing in the same positions they occupied for the previous "count-off," each team will have new members.
- (d) **Ability Groupings.** Some players at every age group will have more ability than others in their age group. After one or two weeks of observing a group of young children, the following player characteristics become more and more evident.
 - (1) Who has a sense of the game
 - (2) Who is immature and avoids participation
 - (3) Who can play when given more time and space
 - (4) Who is physically advanced and can dominate the smaller or weaker kids
 - (5) Who thinks out tactical solutions
 - (6) Who is agile and can run, etc.

- (e) By labeling players based on their abilities (i.e. Red, White, or Blue) it is possible to match players of similar abilities together, or stratify teams with balanced, but mixed ability levels; both practices serve to create games that are likely to be more balanced in terms of score.
- (f) In theory, when grouped by mixed abilities, the weaker players learn by watching and participating with the stronger ones, while the stronger players learn how to compensate for weaker teammates. With this approach, teams are pre-determined before play begins and stay together for one or two game days. This method provides the group leader with opportunities to balance each team by separating the better players.
- (g) Dividing the players into “aggressive” and “non-aggressive” groups ensures that the more timid or hesitant players have the opportunity to experience success and emerge over time. This method has proved to be highly beneficial to both groups of players, with the adults having license to move players from group to group as deemed necessary.

404 U8 and U9 “Street Soccer” Play Day Model

404.1 The “Street Soccer” play day model continues to use the Academy training format and allow 100% playing time for all players involved. However, the Academy training increases to twice a week, and to add a degree of competition, and spice up the game, players may earn points for personal and team achievements during the Street Soccer game.

404.2 Basic Rules Governing the Street Soccer Play Day Model

- (a) Four players per team, games are four versus four with no goalkeepers.
- (b) Matches are four to eight minutes in length.
- (c) Four matches in an hour. Give sufficient time between matches to record player points, get water, and get to the next field for the next match.
- (d) Players set up fields using cones, corner flags and pop-up goals.
- (e) Have training bibs/pinnies at each field.

- (f) The players determine the rules (how to score goals, corner kicks, goal kicks, etc.).
- (g) The players solve disputes (fouls, etc.).
- (h) The organizer/coach keeps time.
- (i) The organizer/coach records the points for all of the players after each match.

404.3 Street Soccer Game Day Organization.

- (a) To organize Street Soccer play days, start by identifying the number of players in each age group and the number of fields or open spaces available. This information will determine the number of hours and the number of volunteers required to organize the Play Day.
- (b) The U9 and U10 players should play separately. In smaller communities, you may need to combine the age groups. Any “obviously” dominant players can be moved up to the next age group, but only if they are comfortable leaving their friends. Boys and girls can play together, but try to make accommodations for boys and girls that want to play separately.
- (c) In this version of the small-sided game, assign players a number as they arrive at the field. Log the players’ names and numbers. Players will keep their number for the duration of the game day, so make sure you tell them to remember their number.
- (d) The organizer will announce teams of four players each by calling out numbers prior to each small-sided game, and the organizer will assign a field of play to each group of eight players.

For instance, in the first match, numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 will play as a team against numbers 5, 6, 7 and 8 on field A, while numbers 9, 10, 11 and 12 will play against 13, 14, 15 and 16 on field B. In the second match, numbers 2, 6, 10 and 16 might play against numbers 1, 5, 9 and 13 on field A, while numbers 3, 8, 12 and 15 play against numbers 4, 7, 11 and 14. In this way, players play with and against different combinations of players throughout the event.

- (e) After each match, players report to the organizer and report the match result and their individual score to the organizer. The organizer records player points and maintains a Street Soccer Statistics Log for all players within the club. The following point system is used.

POINT SYSTEM		
Win	=	3 pts
Draw	=	1 pt
Loss	=	0 pts
Goal	=	1 pt
Assist	=	1 pt
Shutout	=	1 pt

National statistics show that players that score the most points will generally be the top-level players at the U11 through U14 ages. This system will allow clubs to identify top-level players at an early age for future consideration for more competitive play.

404.3 Field dimensions, goals, and markings. As in Sandlot Soccer, there is no advantage to permanently marking out fields. Clubs can use real goals, big cones or corner flags for the goals. However, use of the quick pop-up goals is preferred. If the playing space is an open park area, drop cones, plant corner flags and place pop-up goals at either end of the field.

Diagram 4. On an 80x40 yard field, two 40x30 yard fields can be created to accommodate up to 16 4x4 players. The fields are setup across the width of the existing space to eliminate any possibility of a collision with fixed goals and to avoid the need for a common sideline.

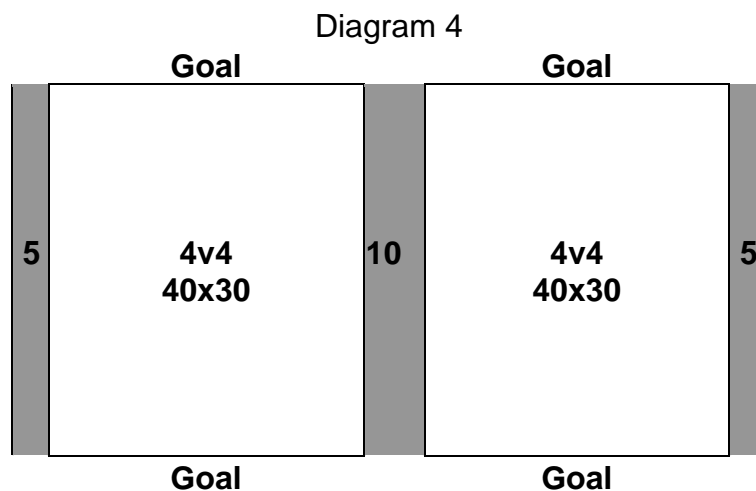


Diagram 5A. On a 100x50 yard space, four 40x25 yard fields (two long by two across) can be setup with shared sidelines and a walk-space along the existing center of the field. In this way, 32 4v4 players can compete at one time.

Diagram 5A

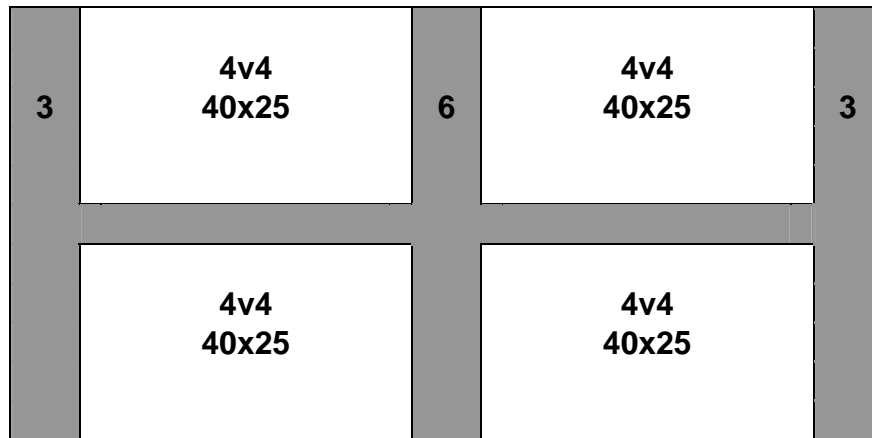


Diagram 5B. If space is available, the fields should be marked outside of the existing sidelines and widened to the full 30 yards. This would also provide for a central walkway.

Diagram 5B

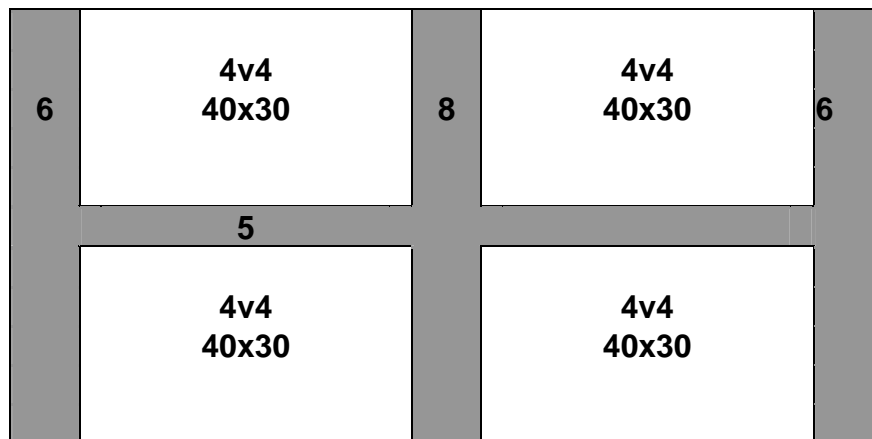
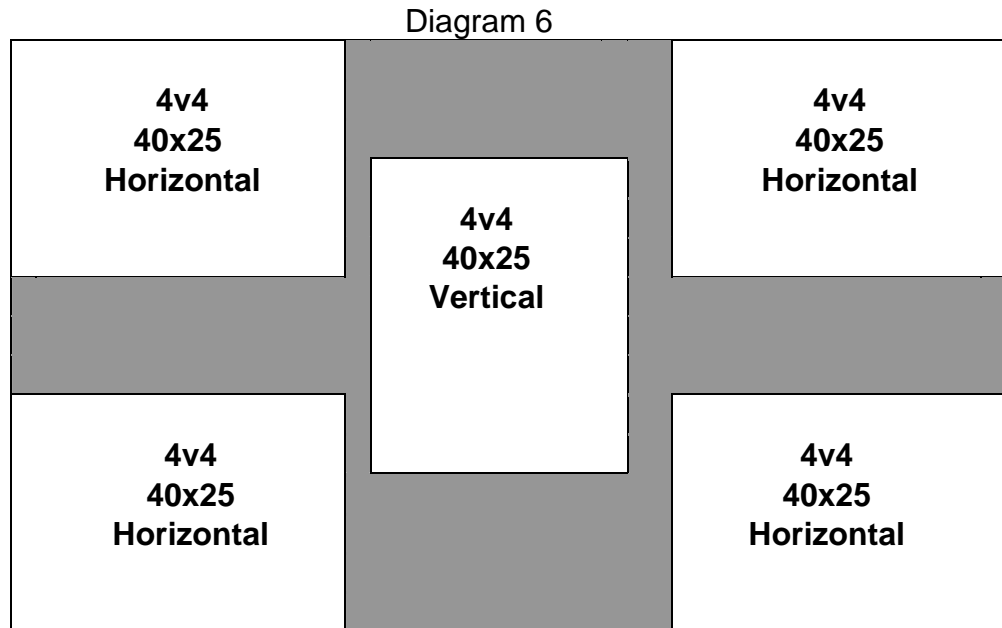


Diagram 6. Shows a 120x75 yard field divided to accommodate 40 players competing in 4v4 games.



405

Volume of Activities. The Academy training format allows for one practice session per week and a game day for U7 and below players. It also allows for two practices plus one game day per week for U8 and U9 players. For U10 and above recreational players the national norm is two practices and one game per week. Practice sessions for U10 and below should be between 60 to 90 minutes, and practices for U11 and above should run around 90 minutes.

- 501** **Arguments Surrounding the Small-Sided Game Program.**
- 501.1** The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) feels that the best way for children to learn how to play soccer is by playing the game and maximizing touches on the ball. The world's best coaches all say that the game teaches itself and the more a player just plays the game, the better the player will become. As such, the move to small-sided games for children U11 and below was inevitable (and there is a possibility that in the future U13 and below youth programs will all be playing in some sort of small-sided program).
- 501.2** At the 2005 National Coaches Convention in Salt Lake City, all of the United States National Coaches and the State Directors of Coaching agreed that for the most part players are technically, physically and tactically not ready for 11 versus 11 games until the U14 level. It's not surprising that the opinions of the top coaches in the United States corresponds with those of the professional youth coaches from the traditional soccer powerhouse countries of France, Holland, England, and Italy. All of those countries have an excellent reputation in the area of player development, and all of them *mandate* small-sided play until U12, and recommend not starting 11 versus 11 games until the U14 age.
- 501.3** No doubt, there are some 11 to 13 year-olds who can cope with the demands of 11-a-side play on a big field, but the majority of the players in these ages cannot. The typical 12-year-old just does not have the strength and technique to cross the ball, or deliver a cross-field pass, on the big field.
- 501.4** Putting aside the debate on whether 11/12 year olds can or cannot play 11-a-side soccer, the most compelling reason top-level coaches believe in reducing the playing format to a smaller sided game is the fact that it is undeniably better within a player development context. A smaller field with fewer players on the field means more touches on the ball which in turn, speeds up the mastery of ball skills and provides more enjoyment to the players. Smaller fields also encourage better, more skillful soccer since the long kick up the field is not required as much as on a larger field. Dribbling, passing, and combination play are a more effective means of moving the ball forward in smaller fields and that is exactly what most coaches want their players learning to do. If the top coaches in the United States, France, Holland, England, and Italy think that 11-a-side is too much for 11/12-year-old select players, then it certainly is that much more difficult for recreational players who are, for the most part, less athletic and technically efficient.

- 501.5** The benefits of small-sided games are clear:
- (a) It's more appropriate for the players,
 - (b) It promotes better soccer,
 - (c) It improves the player development process and speeds the acquisition of skills,
 - (d) It is more enjoyable for the players,
 - (e) It requires less field space, and
 - (f) It allows the smaller clubs to keep their recreational program in-house.
- 501.6** There will undoubtedly be some resistance to the recommendation of moving U11 and below to small-sided games, and to training the U9 and below players in an Academy format with Sandlot and Street Soccer game days replacing the traditional team formation and scheduled game format. However, logistically the Academy and Game Day format requires fewer coaches at the youngest age groups, provides quality technical skill training and more game time for the players, and allows clubs to train a pool of volunteer coaches from which a club can draw when teams are formally established at the U10 and above ages.
- 501.7** The arguments that most tournament play is 11-a-side, and that kids like to play the adult version are valid, but that argument normally only applies to the U11 age group, and there is nothing wrong with providing players with a regular diet of small-side play, mixed with the occasional 11-a-side tournament. As it currently stands, very few recreational teams participate in tournament play, and teams that do wish to participate in tournament play can still do so. Per the WSYSA format, U11 teams can have a roster of up to 14 players. That is enough players for a team to enter an 11-a-side tournament, and if insufficient players are not available for a tournament, it is possible to add guest players for most tournaments.
- 501.8** The WSYSA small-sided game model presents a problem with its field and goal size structure. Per WSYSA, the U6 through U8 recommended goal sizes are 6x6 feet; the U9 recommended goal size is 6x8 feet; the U10 recommended goal size is 8x12 feet; and, the U11 recommended goal size is the standard size of 8x24 feet. However, District IV's recommendation of an Academy Training and Game Day format for U9 and below lends itself ideally to the typical resources available in our community, and the U10 and U11 age groups can easily adapt to the regular full sized goal.

601 Parents' Role and Sideline Behavior.

601.1 If a program is to succeed, parents must understand the skill priorities and embrace the program. Clubs should prepare a parent handout that deals specifically with the U9 and below priorities. The handout should include the rationale behind the priorities and explain to parents the Club's expectations of sideline behavior, and should include a parent "Code of Conduct" that clearly states what is and isn't allowed on the sideline (if necessary, use field marshals to monitor and enforce the Code of Conduct).

601.2 One of the main problems with parents at games is that they sit too close to the field. Their proximity to the players gives them too much of a presence which in turn affects the behavior, response and performance of the players. It is very hard for parents to resist shouting instructions to their children, and children aged 4 to 8 are naturally dependent on their parents, and will tend to look to their parents for help. Therefore, another important objective of the U9 and below programs should be to wean the players out of their dependency on their parents' help during games. Weaning players' dependency on parents is very crucial for the development of young soccer players.

601.3 Soccer is a free flowing game that requires players to make split-decisions on the field. Coaches have a lot less influence and power during games than in most of the other traditional American sports. Therefore, soccer players must learn to think for themselves and the sooner they learn to stand on their own feet, the better. Since results do not matter at these age groups, no one should be overly concerned if players make mistakes. In fact, players need to overcome the fear of making a mistake, and in turn learn to correct their mistakes through a process of trial and error. Parents and coaches must resist the urge to tell their players what to do.

601.4 The following guidelines apply to sideline behavior.

- (a) If possible, setup the fields to keep the parents as away from the sideline. Using lines or ropes beyond which parents cannot encroach can do this. Most players want their parents to be at the games watching them play and having the parents sit by the sidelines seems so nice and cozy. However, keeping the parents some distance away from the action will enhance the players' sense of freedom and ease

most of the intimidation any players might feel when the parents are right on top of them.

- (b) Parents should not coach the players from the sidelines. Parents should cheer good plays by their team and they should be encouraged to applaud good play by the other team.
- (c) Parents must never tell the players to “kick” or “boot” the ball. As discussed in the section on the skill priority, just kicking the ball needs to be discouraged. The parents will need to be prepared to accept that many of the dribbling attempts will be unsuccessful and that they will have to bite their tongues and let the players try again and again.
- (d) The coaches should also keep their instruction to a minimum and let the players understand that they must make their own decisions on the field and that it is okay to make mistakes. The coaches should stand on the sideline and only enter the field if necessary. Remember that we are trying to help the players grow out of their dependency on adults. The coaches should encourage dribbling out of trouble and discourage just kicking or booting the ball.

601.5

A good rule of thumb to pass onto to everyone is that the game consists of four people elements; the Player; the Coach; the Referee and, the Spectator. You can only be one of the four people elements. If you are not a player, or a coach, or a referee, be a spectator and enjoy watching your child play the game.

701 Recreational Play at U-13 and Above.

701.1 The recreational program at the U-13 and older levels is probably the least problematic and least controversial of all the age groups. By the time players reach this age, most of them will have found their proper playing levels, and parents have mellowed (we hope) to the point that they begin to realize that life does not revolve around the result of a soccer game. Anyone who is still involved in recreational soccer at this age is obviously a true fan of the game. They are playing soccer for enjoyment and normally do not take it too seriously. Usually the biggest challenge clubs face with this age group is to retain enough players to field a team. It is starting at U13 that Clubs and Associations need to look into the possibility of combining age groups or combining with a neighboring club to have enough players for a team. If clubs do not have enough players available for the traditional 11-a-side game, they can modify the game and still play small-sided soccer.

702 Training Priorities and Volume of Practices. As players grow older, having pre-set training priorities becomes a less effective approach. A more sensible approach to training would be for coaches to analyze their team's performance in games, and base their training decisions and/or topics on their team's performance in matches. For example, if the team is struggling with possession and breakdowns are mostly technical, the practices the following week should be devoted to improving passing.

702.1 Coaches should keep in mind that very few recreational players are willing to participate in technique enhancing activities if they are not fun. Therefore, coaches must make it fun or stand the risk of losing the attention or desire of the players. The best approach is to use game-like activities that create repetition of the topic and are enjoyable. Line drills are boring; they bear very little resemblance to the game and do not prepare the players for the demands of the game. Therefore, it is advisable to avoid line games. The Recreational or State "E" coaching course is a great source of activities for this level and recommended for every coach.

702.2 The standard two practices and one game per week represent the right dose of soccer activity these players need. Coaches should make it clear that they expect the players to attend practices, but flexibility should prevail. Teenagers have many interests and need to keep a balanced life. Soccer is just one of many activities that fill their weekly schedule and missing the occasional practice should not become a source of conflict as long as they attend the majority of the practices.

702.3 Participation is the key at the recreational level. Winning should always take a second seat to enjoyment. All the players on the team should get equal, or close to equal, playing time. Recreational players are not likely to become professional players, so the objectives of playing soccer should center on building self-esteem, staying fit, making friends, and having fun. Sitting on the bench will not contribute to building self-esteem, improving fitness or having fun.

703 **Team Formation.** The basic guidelines for forming recreational teams are that there are no tryouts and there are no cuts. Balance teams evenly to provide parity in recreational competition. Formation of recreational teams should occur each season up to the U13 age, and an impartial, club-appointed person should oversee the formation of teams. Forming new teams every season serves a number of useful purposes.

- (a) It discourages coaches from recruiting the stronger players and manipulating the system as they seek to build a “super” team at the recreational level.
- (b) It prevents coaches from becoming overly possessive of their players. This will make it easier for the better players to try out for the competitive teams (if they desire) without feeling guilty or otherwise pressured by their recreational coach.
- (c) It avoids the staleness and boredom associated with doing the same drills under the same coach for too long. After about a year most parent coaches begin to lose their impact and players start to tune them out.
- (d) It eliminates the build up of rivalries between teams and the “Us versus Them” mentality, which can sometimes breed animosity between players and parents of opposite teams. When players acquire new teammates every season, everyone becomes a friend and the atmosphere at games is much more relaxed.
- (e) Parents and/or coaches will argue that their child (or player) is happier playing with players with whom he/she is familiar. While this may be true in some cases multiple studies have shown that players enjoy playing and training with other players of the same caliber, and that children make friends easily, especially in a team and/or athletic environment.

801

Recruiting and Educating Coaches.

801.1

Convincing parents to volunteer to coach is always a challenge. There is no quick and easy way to find willing coaches. The following recommendations should help the recruiting process.

- (a) **Improve organization and communication** – If prospective parent-coaches see that the club has an established support system that will provide the necessary resources and not abandon them to deal with the team problems on their own, they will be more likely to volunteer. Clubs need to ensure that logistical details such as team formation, game scheduling, practice field allocation, uniform distribution, etc. are organized and efficient. Parents will be more inclined to volunteer if they see that the club is well organized.
- (b) **Offer Clinics and Coaching Courses** – Many parents are reluctant to volunteer because they know very little about coaching soccer. By offering clinics and coaching courses, the club can alleviate some of their anxiety. Clubs can also help a new coach by providing a coaching manual specifically designed for rookie coaches. The Club Director of Coaching (DOC) can inspire and motivate volunteer coaches by working with them and setting an example for quality sessions.
- (c) **Utilize Local Resources** – Clubs, Local Youth Soccer Associations, and District IV offer free clinics throughout the year. The State Director of Coaching (DOC) is also available to visit clubs, meet with club officers, meet with parents, evaluate club needs and offer advice on all player development/coaching issues. Take advantage of the expertise available to you.
- (d) **Assign age group Commissioners** – Clubs should appoint a Commissioner for each age group. Age Group Commissioners should stay at the same age level and not move up with the teams. For example, the U10 Commissioner will not become next year's U11 Commissioner but will always work with the U10's. This will improve the administration of each program as the Commissioners become experts at dealing with age-specific problems and their accumulated experience will not be lost. The prospective parent-coaches will be happy to know that there is someone available to guide them through the start up operation.

- (1) The duties of the Age Group Commissioner could include recruiting coaches and helping the Director of Coaching (DOC) with training them, organizing clinics, organizing parent meetings for his/her age group, monitoring the practices and games, and when necessary acting as a field marshal during games and/or tournaments. The Commissioner can also help coaches deal with parental complaints. Any time a parent and a coach cannot resolve an issue; the coach can refer the parent to the Commissioner. This again alleviates coaches' anxiety about having to deal with difficult parents on their own.
- (2) Smaller clubs could assign the same Commissioner to multiple age groups. For example, clubs with less than five teams per age group could assign a combined U6/U7 Commissioner. Bigger clubs should be able to appoint one person for each age group. All Commissioners should report to the Club Officer in charge of the Recreational Program and/or to the Club Director of Coaching (DOC).

802 Coaching Licenses.

802.1 All coaches should have a coaching license. The recommended minimum license depends on the age group as follows:

- (a) U-6 Coaching Certificate: The U6 Coaching Certificate provides the first-time parent/coach of five year olds with information on creating a beneficial soccer environment. The course addresses the specific characteristics of this age group and to present activities and games that are developmentally appropriate. This is a 2½-hour course.
- (b) U-8 Coaching Certificate: The U8 Coaching Certificate provides the parent/coach of seven year olds with information on creating a beneficial soccer environment. The course addresses the specific characteristics of this age group and to present activities and games that are developmentally appropriate. This is a 2½-hour course.
- (c) U-10 Coaching Certificate: The U10 Coaching Certificate provides the parent/coach of nine year olds with information on creating a beneficial soccer environment. The course addresses the specific characteristics of this age group and

to present activities and games that are developmentally appropriate. This is a 2½-hour course.

- (d) "E" Certificate Course: The emphasis of the "E" course is on coaching players 10-14 years of age. It is a general certificate of 11-a-side play and is for those coaches who are in the transitional stage from coaching modified (small-sided soccer) to coaching 11-a-side soccer. The course is best suited for those coaches with several years of experience or who have attended one or more of the youth module courses. The "E" course focuses on coaching points and the teaching of technique, with an introduction to the Principles of Play (attack and defense). The "E" course also provides elementary information on the management and preparation of a team.

- (e) "D" License Course: Attendees of a "D" course fall into two distinct categories. One, coaches who are using the course to prepare for the National "C" License, and two, coaches using the course to qualify for a particular level of coaching within the state. Many of the latter are not required to continue upgrading their license. In addressing coaches in these two categories, the "D" course can be either preparatory or terminal.
 - (1) The "D" course is for coaching players 14-18 years of age and emphasizes observing mistakes and providing information to correct the mistakes. A majority of the course schedule focuses on practice coaching and practical examinations. Candidates will learn and test in the areas of match analysis (examined by the analysis of videotape footage) and for their knowledge and understanding of tactics and methodology. There are also take-home examinations on soccer injury prevention and the FIFA Laws of the Game.

 - (2) Based on how well they do in the "D" License course, candidates receive either a National "D" License, which allows them to attend a National "C" License course after a year, or a State "D" License. If a coach receives the State "D" License, and is interested in obtaining a National "C" License, the coach can retake the "D" course to obtain a National "D" License.

- 803** Many small clubs have difficulties filling the above classes and/or meeting the minimum required attendance to hold a class. Subsequently their courses are repeatedly cancelled and their coaches cannot obtain certification. The District IV Director of Development and the WSYSA Director of Coaching will work with Clubs/Associations to help advertise any upcoming clinics and help smaller Clubs/Associations in obtaining a sufficient number of attendees at a coaching clinic. Please contact the District Director of Development to discuss the best solution for your club.
- 804** Clubs that put a low priority in educating and developing their coaches are doing a disservice to their membership, and are hurting the long long-term growth and development of their players. The important contributions that coaching education brings to the players cannot be over emphasized. Coaching education courses can help all coaches to create an enjoyable and fulfilling experience for the players.
- 805** Clubs have a responsibility to make sure that the coaches, in whose hands they put their players, are as knowledgeable and well prepared as can be. If a coach never gets an opportunity to observe a quality practice session, the chances are he/she will never learn how to conduct one. The basic game of soccer has not changed in over 100 years, the game remains intact and pretty much teaches itself. The good coaches simply learn how to “borrow” from other coaches and put their own twist to the training. The problem is recognizing what to borrow. The informed coaches are better able to understand, develop and challenge players. Uninformed coaches could de-motivate players and contribute toward player attrition.