



GENEVA LAKE UNITED SOCCER CLUB COACHING PHILOSOPHY

First Principles

- Playing soccer is fun.
- We respect our teammates, opponents, and the officials.
- The game belongs to the players.
- The game is the best teacher.
- Every player wants to improve.

The Coach's Role . . .

In General

Soccer coaches provide a safe and educational playing environment for players. This is their first and most important responsibility. Educating soccer players requires developing both their skills and their soccer vision or intelligence. You can locate different styles of coaching on a continuum between player development on one end and achieving a result (winning a game) on the other. GLUSC believes coaches should operate towards the player development side of the continuum.

Soccer is a competitive game. However, competition does not require a fixation on results (wins and losses). GLUSC believes that a competitive environment at the youth level encourages decisions from players and coaches that focus on performance rather than outcome. In other words, coaches and players should work to improve player and team performance in executing soccer skills and tactics, regardless of match results.

"4 v 4 is the smallest way of playing soccer without losing any of the ingredients that make up soccer." (USSF Best Practices)

Most of GLUSC's teams play in recreational leagues. Such teams do not hold tryouts and are open to all players. Recreational teams typically have players with a wide range of skill levels. Successful coaches improve all players' skills and level of play, although not to the same level or at the same rate.



In Training

Soccer coaches exert the most influence over players in training. During a match, the game's flow and speed relegates the coach's role (particularly for higher level coaches) to that of spectator. GLUSC believes all coaches should develop their players' confidence in executing individual creative soccer, free of fear of making mistakes or losing a game. Such an approach may not bring immediate improvement to match results. It will, however, produce stronger players better able to perform at higher levels.

Successful coaches set and communicate clear goals to their players and teams. They track progress towards these daily, weekly, and seasonal goals alongside their players. GLUSC believes these goals should focus on developing players, having fun, and sportsmanship rather than match results.

"Coaches can often be more helpful to a young player's development by organizing less, saying less and allowing the players to do more." (USSF Best Practices)

Practical Tips for Training Sessions

- Have a plan (but be flexible) - if something is not working, move on to another activity.
- Keep it simple - plan for three or four activities each session.
- Be organized - plan in advance each session's objective or theme, the related activities, the basic timing of each activity, the required equipment, and needed preparation time.
- Be progressive - increase the complexity of skills and activities as the training session and the season progress.
- Have fun - let the game teach.
- Don't talk very much - interject your comments in short, targeted bursts that address specific issues you want to emphasize. Typically, these issues are directly related to the session's theme.
- Design activities that have lots of ACTION - youth soccer players do not have fun standing in lines waiting to play.
- Schedule periods (15-30 minutes) of uninterrupted play during every training session.



- Train all players in every aspect of the game - do not create attackers, defenders, or even keepers on youth teams.

Effective soccer training is about creating situations in which players play, are confronted with challenges, and attempt to solve problems. Your players should be free to experiment and fail in soccer situations. Failure should not result in criticism from the coach, but rather present an opportunity to learn.

A soccer situation is one that includes the ball, opponents, teammates, space, pressure, rules, time and goals.

Remember that a player's ability at age 7, or even 9 or 12, does not accurately predict his or her eventual ability level. Avoid assigning lasting tags, classifications, or levels to youth players based on current ability. Constantly re-assess players to see how skills have developed and provide appropriate opportunities to demonstrate those skills. Particularly in a recreational league, teams should have players with a wide range of skills and experience.

On Match Day

The main responsibility of a soccer coach at a match is to demonstrate good sporting behavior for the players and spectators. The coach is ultimately responsible for spectator behavior during the match. If the coach remains calm and does not yell at officials or others, the players and spectators will likely follow suit. Coaches can avoid many issues related to spectator behavior by communicating clear expectations during the pre-season meeting.

Practical Tips for Matches

- Focus your efforts on contributing positively to continued player development. This should always remain more important than winning any particular match.
- Demand that all players, regardless of position, participate in attacking and defending.

"The value of matches is that they provide youngsters with an opportunity to showcase their newly acquired skill and creativity. It is always nice to win, however that should not be your focus at the younger age groups." (USSF Best Practices)



- Consider a few principles regarding your substitution patterns:
 1. Players improve more rapidly given relatively long uninterrupted periods of play. Players will usually prefer playing one 12 minute shift instead of two 6 minute shifts.
 2. Change the positions played by individual players. All players should experience playing all positions during matches.
- Soccer is a fluid game that requires players to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Avoid instructing players to “always” or “never” do things. Do not position players inflexibly on the field (do not tell them “don’t cross the half line”).
- Successful coaches make positive comments towards players, referees, and opponents during matches or remain silent.
- In your pre-season meeting, explain to parents that they should encourage their children and not instruct them during matches. Multiple and conflicting instructions will only confuse players.

"The coach and players must respect the laws and spirit of the game. Tactical fouling, diving to deceive the referee for a penalty kick, referee abuse are examples of playing behaviors detrimental to the ethics and spirit of the game." (NSCAA Coaching Philosophy)



Age Specific Guidelines

Young players develop as they age and coaching should develop along with them. Various goals, approaches, and expectations are more or less appropriate based on the age of the players.

"The success of each new skill and concept is based upon skills and concepts already learned. The more comfortable a player is with the ball, the more options he/she will have to solve each soccer challenge he/she faces." (USSF Best Practices)

The first, most fundamental skills are individual mastery of the ball and the creativity that comes with it. Once individual skills are mastered, introduce tactics largely in the context of decisions made with and without the ball. Successful players make the correct decisions more often and possess the skills to execute them.

U8 Guidelines (Ball Control and Creativity)

Soccer is not really a team sport at this age level. Players should concentrate on developing their individual relationship with the ball. More complex and tactical team-oriented concepts such as combination play or positions should not be introduced at this age.

Practical Training Tips: "No Lines. No Laps. No Lectures."

- Training should consist of playing with the ball in small groups for short periods of time.
- Ideally, most activities during training will have a 2:1 player-to-ball ratio.
- Schedule training for 45-60 minutes total.
- Coaches need to be well prepared and organized in order to keep the session moving from activity to activity with very little "down time" waiting for set-up or listening to coaches talk.
- Players at this age learn best by watching and copying - either demonstrate skills yourself or get an older player to demonstrate them for you.
- Training activities focus on informal play using basic skills and lots of time on the ball. Incorporate scoring goals in the activities.



U10 Guidelines (Ball Skill, Creativity, and Gradual Insight Into the Game)

Players at this age continue to develop their individual ball skills. The size and ability differences between players may increase. Teams may have one or two players with substantially more skill and confidence than the others. The ultimate goal of coaches at this age level is to increase every player's confidence and creativity with the ball. Some players will begin to grasp some team-oriented concepts, but these should not become the focus of coaching.

Practical Training Tips: "No Lines. No Laps. No Lectures."

- Training should consist of no more than 60 minutes of coach-directed activities plus 30 minutes of free play when the coach does not interrupt.
- Training will increase players' confidence with the ball if the coach provides plenty of experience with the ball. GLUSC believes coaches should reward creativity with the ball, even if the result of the play is negative. Teaching players to be creative on the field is one of the biggest challenges youth coaches face because the players will fail, and such failure may impact matches negatively.
- Organize as many activities as possible in 3v3 to 5v5 format for 10 or 15 minutes at a time. This medium duration should provide opportunities to develop competence without taxing the players' attention span.

U12 Guidelines (Ball Skill, Creativity, and Gradual Insight Into the Game)

This is a pivotal age at the center of much debate about player development approaches. While players are advancing in some areas of the game, coaching should remain focused on improving individual ball skills and soccer instincts over match results.

It is common at this age for children to experience growth spurts that increase strength and power but temporarily reduces agility and suppleness. Some players who previously demonstrated precise control of the ball might lose some of that control for a time.

Players' ability to remain focused on activities and accept responsibility for their decisions on the field increases during this period as well.

One of the primary goals at this level is "getting players to understand and recognize numbers up, even numbers and numbers down situations and the appropriate decisions based on each scenario." (USSF Best Practices)



Practical Training Tips: "No Lines. No Laps. No Lectures."

- Practice should consist of up to 75 minutes of structured activities with another 15-30 minutes of free play and self-expression.
- Coaches should develop and expand what the players learned in U10 soccer:
 - Training focuses on individual ball skill and individual and small group decisions in attack and defense.
 - Encourage risk taking and experimentation with the ball.
- Coaches can increase the size of training activities to 6v6 or 7v7 situations more often, but players may actually only combine in groups of two or three.
- Continue to let all players experience all positions on the field in training and during matches.
- GLUSC believes that coaching instruction should be situation-based rather than position-based (teach the principles of the game rather than positions on the field).
- Successful coaches increase individual players' skills to the point that all players see 1v1, in both attack and defense, as an advantage. This requires players to possess technical skill, the beginnings of tactical awareness, and confidence.

U14 Guidelines (How to Function in a Group)

This is the transitional age into the adult game when players need to develop an understanding of the entire field and how to interact with the various situations that emerge in a game.

Coaches should introduce training focused on working as positions within a team structure. Realize, however, that not all players will reach this level of competence and understanding at the same time. Also realize that this more advanced approach requires players to have a particular level of individual skill (you can't teach them how to make a penetrating through pass to the forwards until they can execute a 20-30 yard pass effectively).

Successful coaches expand players' understanding of the game as their technical skill and maturity allows. They begin teaching players how their skills and decisions effect the outcome of the match.

Practical Training Tips: "No Lines. No Laps. No Lectures."

- Training sessions are 75-90 minutes long and incorporate a significant period of free play.



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- The focus of training activities should be on how their decisions and their ball skill help or hinder their team's ability to win at whatever game or exercise that they play. This requires competitive activities with clear objectives or goals where the score is kept and noted.
 - Successful coaches emphasize activities related to moving the ball out of pressure as a group and winning it back when not in possession.
 - Successful coaches focus instruction on the interplay between smaller groups of three, four, and five players on the field rather than all 11 at once.



GLUSC Academy Nights

Part of an International Movement

Youth soccer, especially in the United States, has a retention problem. While players are numerous at the younger levels, a substantial proportion of players stop playing around the U12 age level. Research has revealed several of the most common reasons players cite for dropping out: pressure to win from coaches and parents, it is no longer fun, physical and psychological burn out (more relevant for players on highly competitive teams), and a desire to participate in other activities.

The international “Festival” movement seeks to counter these complaints by restoring fun to youth soccer by “unorganizing” the game. This movement hopes to “give the game back” to the kids. It has to be given back because adult-dominated organized soccer has replaced the kid-centered pick up games of the past.

GLUSC is implementing parts of the Festival approach through GLUSC Academy Nights starting Spring 2011. GLUSC intends the Academy Nights to provide more informal and enjoyable competition that is not focused on game results. By including a program of skill developing activities, GLUSC intends to improve individual skills in a fun environment free of the pressure of short term performance.

During the competitive play portion of Academy Nights, players participate in a series of games, changing teammates each time. This encourages development through the varied combinations of players and skill levels.

GLUSC's Goals

- Provide players with a consistent approach to individual skill development.
- Provide new coaches opportunities to work with and learn from more experienced coaches.
- Develop enthusiasm for the club by combining players from all teams at a given age level.

Process

It is important to remember that this is a “pilot” program. The academy director and team coaches will evaluate the program at the end of the spring season and recommend changes for the fall.

- One day per week, all U9 and all U10 players will train together in academy format.
- Academy Directors (Keith Blakeman in the spring and Annie Isham in the fall) will plan the training portion of the Academy Nights.



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- Team coaches will assist the academy directors during each Academy Night.
 - Fifteen minutes before the starting time, the Academy Director will review the training plan with the team coaches and organize the coaches for the activities.
 - Each academy night will run for 90 minutes from 5:30 to 7:00 PM. Individual and small group technical activities will comprise the first 45-60 minutes. The remaining time will be reserved for 4 v 4 games with team make-up shuffled regularly.
 - Coaches will largely refrain from instructing players during the 4 v 4 games and will provide light guidance as referees.

References

United States Soccer Federation, "Best Practices for Coaching Soccer in the United States," 2003.

National Soccer Coaches Association of America, "NCSAA Position Statement - Role of the Coach in Player Development," <http://www.ncsaa.com/articles/20080731160401329.php>, accessed February 26, 2011.

United States Youth Soccer Association, Workshop Presentation, "Reducing the Drop-out Rate in Youth Soccer," 2008.