



LSSA PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND COACHING PHILOSOPHY



Soccer Culture of Possession *(with the intent to score)*



pə'zeSHən

noun

The state of having, owning, or controlling something.

Sweating the Details with Conviction, Patience, Encouragement and Repetition

Fundamentals are the backbone of player development. The coach that sweats the details and fundamentals while coaching them in repetition is generally the most successful developing players for the long-term. The fundamentals of dribbling, passing, positioning, defending, movement, etc. are a must for development. Our coaches must sweat the details of fundamentals. If your team is to keep possession of the ball, each player must know how to handle the ball. Practice plans, especially at the early ages, must involve a lot of touches for each player. Focusing on technique, keeping the ball close to them, and the use of both feet throughout each practice plan repeatedly is essential. As they get older, or coaches have an older team the focus is on fundamentals with technical and combination play.

Coach your team to value possession of the ball. Say it, teach it, coach it and repeat it! Develop all speeches, training sessions, and parent meetings around maintaining possession of the ball. Build your whole soccer vocabulary at practices and in training sessions around the word possession and its soccer meaning. Goals in the net and wins are all byproducts of a culture of possession so don't focus on those aspects of the game as much. There are old adages that a person needs to hear something at least 7 times to remember it or you need to practice 10,000 hours to perfect something. This is the case with possession. Your coaching and support staff, the individual players, the team and the parents all need to be on the same page and understand the value of possession. One of the best ways to coach this is to vocalize praise for decisions focused on possession. Make possession of the ball your culture by rewarding and praising the behaviors of possession. Players won't always get it right, but you can praise the intent. When the players realize that their decisions and behavior focused on possession receive praise, they will want to repeat that behavior. It is human nature. Parents need to understand this too, so that they can help with the praise. If the parents are coaching or giving a different message from the sideline or in the car it will be confusing for the player.

Stay strong on the conviction of possession. Do not waiver due to frustration, talent, external factors, winning, etc. Keep the message consistent and keep coaching your team to value possession of the ball. Make sure we are developing for the long-term and not the plastic trophy, patch or medal.

Possession with the Intent to Score

What good is having the ball if you never get into the attacking third? Long term soccer development is the value of the ball and the possession of it, BUT with an overarching objective to create scoring opportunities from possession. There is a difference between possession with the intent to score and just plain old possession. If your team doesn't have the threat of scoring, then possession will become a small compact game spent in your own defensive third full of turnovers and indecision. Possession with the intent to score means that you are probing the spaces on the field for openings while keeping the ball away from the other team. This also means that your team's off-the-ball movement and communication needs be constant, moving in and out of what we call "Windows" within their zone of responsibility. More about off the ball movement later. The hard part is having players be patient enough to wait for the windows to open or to find them and move in to them. The transition to attack can be difficult to recognize or wait on and sometimes when players are unsure or impatient what happens is called the "HERO" or "PANIC" pass. This is trying to fit a ball into a space that doesn't have any chance of fitting or just blasting the ball because of impatience or panic or lack of teammate "empathy with action". The mindset must be to keep the ball, but also to break down the defense and look for opportunities to advance the ball towards the goal while keeping possession. Knowing when to dictate play forward or backward is critical in the player and team's development. This takes patience and a lot of practice. This is where the praise of possession driven behavior comes in, while understanding that they won't always get it right but remembering to praise the behavior.

EMPATHY with Action!!!

em·pa·thy

'empəTHē

noun

the ability to understand and share the feelings of another and do something to support it

What is empathy with action in soccer? It is the glue of a team working to help each teammate possess the ball. Every player needs to have empathy for their teammates when they are under pressure. We have all been in tough positions, so we should know how it feels. Just empathy is not enough though. The best teams act when they feel empathy for their teammate. They will work that much harder to get into that window, help defend, or make that extra pass. Try to relate this to standing up for your friends or family. If someone is trying to knock them around, steal something from them, or bully them; what are you going to do? You can have empathy for them, but will you cower down and pretend you don't see it happening and let it go? Or, will you act by relentlessly trying everything possible to help them? Having Empathy with Action on the soccer field means giving your all to support your teammates and the trade-off is that they will do the same for you. Sometimes it is expressed, "I will run through a brick wall for you". That is what we want. We want our teammates willing to run through a brick wall to support each other, because they empathize with one another. When your team buys into this on the soccer field, it will be something that the players carry off the field as well.

Equal Value on Positions

Please don't forget about the defensive positions. Possession soccer can't be just for the midfielders and forwards of a team. It needs to incorporate the defensive positions and goalkeepers. What are you teaching your defenders and goal keepers if their main job is to blast clearance balls up to the midfielders and forwards so THEY can possess the ball? You are undervaluing their position and not trusting their abilities, leading to asymmetrical development. Valuing the ball, and the possession of it, needs to be practiced, trusted, and expected at every position. So many teams in history, whether it be amateur or professional, win games or championships because their defense is a valued part of the team's success. Have you ever heard the saying, "Scoring sells tickets, but defense wins games"? This is true a large percentage of the time.

Defense=Attitude

Defense in soccer is not just positions 1-5. Defense is a full field, all hands-on deck assignment for the team. Every teammate and every position need to cover their zone of responsibility with the tenacity of a wild dog protecting its young. The ball is your baby and you are a wild dog keeping your baby away from predators. We are not condoning you to claw, bite and be nasty like a wild dog would. However, don't take crap from anyone on the opposing team. We are not telling you it is ok to foul, but we are telling you not to be casual, don't be tentative, just win it back or push them back. Of course, we need you to understand how to defend without diving in, leg stabbing, etc. Attack the ball by breaking down and close in with force and tenacity. Even if you don't get the ball, try to push the attack backwards. By doing this you will be sending a message to the opposing player that you are not there to share pleasantries. They will remember it if the message is sent enough times with the proper attitude.

Defend in Packs

To add to the wild dog analogy, your team needs to defend in packs. If you have ever watched a pack of wild dogs hunting they instinctually align and organize into formation, they understand angles, use teamwork, and their intent is to not swap phone numbers. You must coach your team to hunt in packs, with conviction and tenacity, and do it immediately after being dispossessed. The moment the other team wins the ball everyone in the pack of wild dogs should hustle to get behind the ball, tighten up the formation. At the same time, you need to send your wild dogs nearest to the ball to get it back or push it back right away. You need to keep the opponents head down, so they can't see their escape, play a ball over the top or in a window. This needs to become an instinct (like a pack of wild dogs) for your players. The whole team have to unify behind the ball in a tight formation immediately and those nearest need to go hunting for that ball before the opposing team can play it out of there zone. If done right, this tenacity should take 3 to 7 seconds. (If you don't win the ball back at least push them back towards their defensive third) Once you get the ball back, immediately find support in the largest open window and relocate yourself into an open window.

There are 3 very critical progressions in winning the ball back. Set up training sessions using the 3 to 7 second rule as a goal for repossession.

1. To regain possession, you must coach the team to form tight behind the ball (immediately) and those nearest need to create immediate, frantic pressure to aggressively win the ball back. (Wild Dogs)
2. Once you regain possession it is very critical to coach them to immediately get into space and the player with the ball needs to find a teammate in the biggest open space immediately to reset possession. A lot of times this is a 1 or 2 level drop pass.
3. After making the initial pass after repossessing the ball immediately move to open space to support your teammate who just received the pass.

It starts in the back

It is a goal to have 80% of all keeper possessions involve throw outs, roll-outs, and short distributions. Blasting goal kicks and punts generally result in a 50/50 ball with your team facing their own goal and results in asymmetrical development for your players. Backs and keepers will never make meaningful, possession-type touches on the ball. Building out of the back, even under pressure sometimes, means that in the short-term: you will lose the ball, you will struggle to get out of your defensive third and you will give up a bad goal. At some point it may even cost you a game. But over the long-term you will build skill, poise, and comfort with the ball among all positions and every player in a wider variety of high pressure settings. You will teach them to link play and have empathy with action. This will allow them to play anywhere on the field and enjoy the game for the rest of their lives.

This takes a lot of patience and practice. Make no mistake this will put your team at risk of heavy pressure and potentially a loss of confidence. Practice, encouragement and practice some more so that they are prepared. Sometimes it might be a coaching judgement call to punt or kick deep if the team confidence is shaken and you are at risk of embarrassment for a player or players. If this is needed please don't abandon totally. Go right back to practicing and encouraging playing out of the back the very next practice and be patient.

- A game for coaching this is a small sided scrimmage (5v5, 6v6, 8v8) using pop ups and a small field. Each team has a center back/keeper (no hands) in the formation and once the ball is possessed the ball must get back to the center back/keeper before you can build up for a shot. One rule of the game could be to make the center back/keeper a no challenge player to avoid any bad challenges and easier distribution to build confidence. This develops the ability to work out of the back and work back out of trouble to reset the buildup. Rotate to allow each player experience every position. If you have a full-time keeper let them also experience the other positions so they can have an appreciation and empathy for them. The by-product is build up towards the goal in a positional formation and learning how to dictate play direction while trying to solve the defensive pressure and shape. This also helps create empathy with action. Emphasize praise for possession behavior such as; decision making, passing accuracy, movement off the ball to support your teammate with the ball, and getting wide (using the whole field). Do not emphasize shooting or goals, in fact more than likely there may never be a shot or a goal the first several times you play this game and that is OK.

Windows

Windows, by definition, are openings to view in or out of. A teammate cannot get you the ball if you're standing on either side of the window because they cannot see you. Moving off the ball is a must for a team to keep possession. If your teammate has the ball you need to constantly check in and out of open windows. Sometimes a teammate may be under pressure and their only play may be to pass into a window even if someone is not there. As a teammate, you know what it is like to have the ball and have very few options, so get your butt into a window immediately to help your teammate out. Have empathy with action for your teammate! When you are in that window, square your shoulders to your teammate and show your whole body to provide the biggest target possible. Don't just stick your head into the window like peek-a-boo or run through it like a streaker. Let your teammate see you and communicate with them. While in the window awaiting the pass, always be looking for an opposing team member closing in on your position. Do not be a gawker, standing in the window staring. If you don't receive the pass within a few seconds, move 2-4 steps into a new window. This is a constant evolution of movement throughout to find open windows.

Head on a Swivel

Simply stated, this means you need to be constantly looking for the opposing team. If a thief is going to try and steal something from you, they are not going to politely ask you for it face to face. They are going to be sneaky, use force, or even gang up on you from the side or from behind and take it. Always be looking behind you and beside you so you don't get robbed. You should always be looking for your own teammates as well. When you get the ball, you should already know at least two options to play to your teammates and how to avoid the opposing team. There is no mistaken what the plan is for an opposing team. Their job and top priority is to steal the ball from you and beat you. If you wait to evaluate your options after you receive the ball, you may as well just give them the ball and expect to be substituted soon because that is too late and unacceptable. Knowing your surroundings; boundaries, and opposing team/teammate position needs to be a point of emphasis in all practices, small sided games, scrimmages, etc.

Soccer Training suggestions to help with quick decisions and "head on a swivel"

Small sided games of keep away and rondos are great examples that should be incorporated into every practice plan to create a culture of possession.

"Rondo": A game where one group of players has the ball while in numerical superiority (3v1, 4v2, 5v2, 6v3) over another group of players. The basic objective of the group with overload advantage is to keep possession of the ball while the objective of the group with fewer players is to win the ball back. All Rondo games should be on a smaller field to increase the speed of decisions in play. A rule could be two touches maximum to encourage anticipation and quick decision making.

Rondos help develop the following areas:

COGNITIVE. Rondos; the player is constantly perceiving and making decisions with respect to his teammates, opponents, position off the ball etc. For this reason, the capacity to make the correct decisions and the speed of play are improved when translated onto a full field.

TECHNICAL COORDINATION. Due to the way that the rondo is set up, it is necessary to have control of the physical movements and technical skills with respect to time and space, the game, the ball and opponents. Without the technical skills you will find yourself chasing instead of possessing the ball.

TEAM BUILDING. (mini-societies) With the type of work done in rondos, the understanding between teammates is improved, and the sense of “team” is also built.

CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSION. The nature of the rondo, with its limited time and space, forces the players to use various technical and tactical abilities to solve constantly changing problems within the game. This helps develop creativity.

COMPETITIVENESS. In the development of the rondo, the player’s competitive nature is improved. Players must fight to make space, learn how to counteract marking and how to win the ball back. Nobody wants to be the one making the mistake which leads to time in the middle.

PHYSICAL CONDITIONING. With rondos a team may work anaerobic resistance by varying the space, time, and number of players involved.

Across the Body

What does "Across the Body" mean? If a pass comes to you from the left, you want to let it run across the body to be received with your right foot, and vice versa. This means that you may have to move your body position based on passing accuracy or based on the opposing team pressure. Receiving the ball across your body, 9 times out of 10, will help open you up to see the field of play better and/or keep you between the ball and the opposing pressure. Show this to your team and remember that it takes “at least 7 times to be remembered and 10,000 hours of repetition.” This is part of sweating the details and it needs to become habit that a player will move, re-position, maneuver or whatever it takes regardless of the pass accuracy to receive the ball across the body. Most kids will only receive or trap a ball with their dominant foot, so you must create exercises or drills that force play with the less dominant foot.

Playing to the Correct Foot

At higher competition levels and to keep possession it is no longer good enough to just pass to a teammate. The older you get, the more talented and faster the opposing team gets, and the windows are smaller or open for less time. This is when you need to pass to the foot that is opposite of the heaviest pressure from the opposing team. If both feet have heavy pressure, then you shouldn’t be making the pass! Sometimes you can pass to a space near their correct foot that leads them away from pressure. That is "next level" kind of stuff if you can get your players to steer their teammates into space with a pass. Combining the “across the body” and “playing to the correct foot” are key components to helping your team have empathy and possess the ball for longer periods of time.

Communication

This is, without a doubt, the most understated detail of practice and training sessions. Your team needs to practice communicating. We weren't born with the ability to speak. We had to learn it and practice it. Soccer has its own language using words such as; support, square, diagonal, drop, through, switch, man-on, give-go, etc. We need to practice when to use these words and we need to practice vocalizing these words always when we are training. When you watch teams playing or practicing, the good ones are always communicating. The communication needs to be in a tone of understanding and empathy for each other. It also needs to be concise and timely to be effective. Communicating with your teammates can be the difference between keeping the ball and losing it. It can also be the difference between winning and losing.

In addition to Verbal communication there is Visual communication. Visual communication is the art of communicating by using gestures. It is important that you make eye contact with the person in which you plan to visually communicate with, so they can see your gesture. Examples of visual communication; pointing to the window in which you want the ball played into, pointing to the person you need someone to mark or who you plan to mark, pointing to the foot you want the ball played to, etc.

Verbal and Visual communication used together is a very effective tool, but they are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes you can use only a visual communication to keep from alerting the opposing team your plan verbally. Also, both forms of communication can be used to decoy or deceive the opposing team into thinking you plan to do one thing, then do another. Warning that if you use communication as a decoy or for deception it could also confuse your own teammates.

Win the space around the ball!

Win the space around the ball means; if the ball is in your area, be first to the ball and use your body to shield, so that you own the space between the ball and the opposing team member. If you simply only try to get to the ball first without using your body as a shield you will allow for a 50/50 challenge between you and the defender. If you use your body to win the space around the ball first, then you will have possession of the ball and that is what we want. By putting yourself between the ball and the opposing player you cause them to have to play through you and potentially foul you to get the ball. It is important to note that more than likely if you are running in to win the space around the ball you might be facing your own goal or an out-of-bounds line. It is important that as you run in to win the space around the ball that you know where your teammates are, because you will probably need to make a drop/support pass to relieve the pressure quickly. You may even need to verbally and/or visually communicate to help direct your teammate into a window for you to pass into to relieve the pressure.

This is sometimes instinctual for players, but for the most part a player needs to be encouraged to get themselves in between the opposing player and the ball. It is not always comfortable for players to want to be a human shield, so it needs to be demonstrated, encouraged and coached in repetition. Your players need to expect contact and learn how to play through it. Coaching this in practice should help them develop comfort with the contact and allow them to have the bravery and composure needed to do this against an opposing team in a game.

DON'T PANIC! And DON'T BE A HERO! Just PLAY SIMPLE

This is simple, isn't it? It is only simple if you are doing all the things above and have practiced them a lot. Panic on the soccer field is a lot of things, but most of all for a coach and other teammates, it is frustrating. "Panic" means that your player or players are not having empathy and not dealing with the pressure. This results in bombing a ball, turning it over, out of position, diving in, whiffing, fouls, etc. When you have players panicking on the field it may mean they need to spend more time training, they are tired, their head is not on a swivel, they are frustrated, or the opposing team or one-on-one match-up is better than your team or player. It can mean a lot of things, but you have got to coach your team to have composure and confidence and it takes patience and repetition of fundamentals. Practice with fast pace and pressure to help your player with quicker decision making so they can be decisive, confident and composed before receiving the ball and with the ball.

"Don't be a Hero" means; stay true to the plan and don't be selfish. Coaches, players and parents need to be on the same page and must believe in the long-term goal of player development. When players start doing their own selfish thing on the field, it becomes disruptive and potentially contagious. We don't need to try passes that are not there or try to switch an aerial ball 50 yards, when you know you can't consistently make that switch. We can't try the impossible through-ball, the lazy outside of the foot pass, not moving without the ball, or not getting back on defense. All these things and many more are not the formula to valuing possession of the ball and it is certainly not having empathy. We don't need heroes, we just need good fundamental teammates. Being a good teammate and doing the right thing for the team IS heroic. Sometimes the opportunity presents itself for individual heroics but let that come to you naturally. Don't force it PLAY SIMPLE.

Sometimes you need to go backwards to go forwards. That sounds funny, but in soccer it is truth. Don't force the ball forward. Remember the other teams job is to take the ball from you and try to score. If you constantly push the ball forward hoping it might work out you will just spend a lot of time turning it over, chasing on defense and digging the other teams goals out of the net. Don't get me wrong risk is sometimes needed and is sometimes rewarded, but try to encourage behavior for team possession (empathy with action) and not panicking or trying to be a hero. PLAY SIMPLE

The Challenge of Coaching

All the above takes enormous time and patience. It takes getting to know your players, how they learn, and trying different techniques all with a singular focus of trying to get an understanding that possession of the ball as a team is most valuable. Developing players to play the appropriate pass to the appropriate foot, make the pass that values possession over the hero through-ball, play a drop/support pass, use width instead of push forward to create a space, or create overwhelming pressure as a pack of wild dogs to win the ball back when dispossessed are hard things to coach. It is important, in coaching, to have a plan for every training session and have a plan B in case plan A is not sinking in. Always remember to praise the behaviors that you want repeated and never allow bad behavior to be tolerated. Ask questions, get help, be vulnerable, and be humble. Not one person has all the answers and sometimes a fresh perspective is all that is needed. Hang in there and remember, it is about developing young women and men to be good teammates and learn how to empathize with action.

Winning or Player Development, What is more important?

At LSSA we believe you can't win unless you are developing players. Not everyone will be the same, develop the same or have the same talent. We do however expect coaches to coach everyone the same fundamentals and sweat the same details. We encourage every player especially at the younger ages to move around the field and experience different positions. Exceptions would be if a player is not comfortable in a certain position, for example keeper. We do not want to force a player into a role in which it could negatively impact their confidence and development. Playing time and positions in games is the coaches role and responsibility to dictate for each player based on attendance to practice, injuries, work ethic during practice, comprehension/confidence of a position, etc. LSSA is not measured by trophies, championships, patches or medals so we encourage coaches to prioritize playing time and position decisions based on player ability, comfort and development while keeping a competitive balance. Winning is not the priority.

Players Must Play & Learn Different Positions

It is important to start kids out where they are most comfortable and most likely to succeed early in their soccer career BUT is also very important to routinely work them into uncomfortable situations too. This means you must challenge and coach your players to play different positions. They need to learn how to solve problems through trial and error. This may mean it makes you as the coach uncomfortable too and it may mean you lose a game. Well that is ok, you need to learn how to help your players through adversity and lift them up through the process. This goes for keepers too. Try to get everyone to try it and face the fear. Give proper instruction and safety equipment/awareness, then encourage everyone to try it. For no reason should a youth team have only one full time keeper. Try to have at least 3 or 4 in the game plan so they all get the opportunity to play in the field too. Please remember we are developing well rounded soccer players, not winning the world cup.

A good coach will teach their players the skills and tactics to play in a variety of positions. Moving players around not only gives them the opportunity to see the game from a different perspective, but it also gives them a better appreciation and respect for their teammates. For example, a forward who scores a bunch of goals is asked to go back and defend and then makes a mistake that results in a goal. This should teach them respect for the others and that position. Especially at young ages the super athletic kid plays forward and scores a lot of goals. This all changes around 12 and 13 when that player is no longer able to win just on athleticism alone. This is called pigeonholing a player and can result in them quitting the game out of frustration because they never learned the fundamentals of soccer and each position. This can also alienate their teammates and teammates parents. The best place to introduce new positions to your players is in practice and scrimmages so they can learn by trial and error and so they are prepared to play these different positions in a game. Also remember that players who normally play on a boundary need to be exposed to middle positions and vice versa. Boundary players are expected use the whole width of the field (chalk to chalk) and it is important for everyone to get this experience. Middle players must get used to having vision to pass and manage attackers from all angles which requires 1 or 2 touch quick decisions. This is also something everyone should experience.

Around 15 or 16 years old is when most kids have gone through maturation, they develop more of an affinity towards one or two positions. They usually know by this time where they are most comfortable on the field whether they want to play at (GK, defense, midfield, offensive field, etc). Before that, it is better just to let them have fun and try as many positions as possible to see which one suits them best.

Looking ahead, the High School & College coaches need players who understand and can play in at least two or three different positions, not one. They understand that players may become injured, ill, etc. and that players will need to fill in. They demand that the players be able to do so and simply do not want or recruit those players that can only understand the game from one position on the field. Another example would be a player getting a red card and you now need to shift into a man down formation. Coaches need to have versatile players to handle situations like this.

This is not easy if you have a vast disparity in ability on your team, but we are here to roll up our sleeves and use the best development practices to get it done. Do not throw in the towel, because of wins and losses. LSSA does not value winning more than we value the development and experience we provide to our soccer players.

Some reminders:

1. When we have the ball, we are ALL attacking and when we don't have the ball, we are ALL defending (if you are not thinking like this, you're teaching them one shape of the game).
2. To gain a real understanding of space and the two shapes of the game, YOU MUST NOT FORCE PLAYERS TO STAY IN POSITION like robots. They need to explore their space and learn to adapt, communicate, recognize, cover and adjust on the fly with their teammates.
3. They will only develop a true understanding of the game and the skills needed if they experience play in different positions (perhaps three weeks as a defender, three as a midfielder player and three as a forward in a 9-week season.)

Coaching Quiz:

Coaches, if the answer is YES to any of the below then you should be concerned about the proper development of the players:

1. Are you instructing your players to stay in one part of the field regardless of who has the ball?
2. Does your teams defending positions never cross half field?
3. Do you tell your players where to stand constantly (removing their ability to think)?
4. Within the course of a season are your players NOT given the opportunity to play in multiple positions?
5. When you watch your team play, can your team consistently fit in a quarter of the field regardless of who has the ball?
6. Does your teams goal keeper stay on their line regardless where the ball is?
7. Does someone other than the keeper consistently take the goal kicks?
8. Is your goal keeper told to punt every time?

The Challenge of Parenting a Player

We all want our kids to be successful, but it doesn't happen overnight. We need to help parents understand that the principles of what we are trying to develop in our young players are transferrable to everyday life. Having empathy with action, sweating the details and practicing the fundamentals are all part of developing the discipline to have a good work ethic and to be a good teammate. Encourage your parents to have a constructive open dialogue about their child's development, position, playing time, work ethic, etc. with you at the appropriate time. After practice or day after a game are good suggestions. Please help parents understand that encouragement and positive praise is crucial to their child's development. Whether it be a referee call, opponent team parent or player or even their own child your team parents need to refrain from dissent. Keep it positive and remember we are dealing with amateur youth sports and we should be positive role models and good examples. Every parent signs a code of conduct before every season. Please take the time to go over this with them before the season gets started to make it deliberate so that they understand the severity. We all need to help hold each other accountable and make sure that the if a parent is behaving without class it is a parent from the opposing team, not LSSA. Please take the time to get to know your parents and be approachable. We as coaches do not need to be best friends with every parent, but we need to be open to friendly conversation and communication.

Coaching Points & Notes:

Movement off the ball:

- Stand big in the window with your body open and shoulders square for a pass (Analogy that sometimes work; pretend you have eyeballs on your shoulders and you want both eyeballs looking at your teammate to receive the ball)
- Always looking around at the opposition receiving the pass to anticipate the turn, pressure, drop, through pass, run, etc. “head on a swivel”
- If you do not get the pass move to another window
- If your teammate in an adjacent position decides to carry into your space, find a support window to allow for 2v1 positive or drop outlet.
- Anticipate the 2nd ball coming from traps, juggles, 50/50's, balls in the air. Most aerial or well struck balls will bounce off the target so be ready to intercept or collect the second ball.
- Drop deep enough for support to allow a first touch and a pass (2 touches) comfortably avoiding a 50/50 and pressure
- If you are a wide or boundary position sprint to the chalk or touch line and face the field of play. Use the whole field and stretch the defense.
- We MUST have EMPATHY with Action for our teammates. Which means work hard off the ball to support your teammate with the ball and communicate effectively to keep them out of harm's way. Get in behind the defenders (playing behind the fence) for a penetrating pass as much as possible.

With the ball:

- Preferred no more than 3 touches; 1st touch settles the ball or directs your next play and out of trouble, 2nd touch is a pass or separation dribble, touch, move, etc. to lead to the, 3rd touch which is a pass or a good shot.
- Play the direction you are facing unless you have looked, and/or your teammate has communicated your ability to turn or open up.
- Always keep the ball close to you
- Use your body to shield and be big and be strong. Do not lose leverage by getting small or allowing the opponents to shoulder in on you
- Don't dribble the ball into pressure or off the shin guards of the opposing team. Turn/pivot then shield the defender off and find help. Grenade dribbling: dribbling into an explosion of feet, shin guards, etc. Don't force the ball into pressure or forward.
- Don't show pressure the ball. In other words, if the opposing player is near you don't try to cut the ball right in front of them or don't open up to let them in for a 50/50.
- If you are open with a good angle to goal in or around the attacking 18 then shoot unless the following; you have a teammate in a better position for a much easier attempt or you have more space to take to get a closer 1v1 with the goalie.

Passing & Receiving:

- Use all available options (360 degrees) to make sure we keep possession. This can only be done if you have your head on a swivel and your teammates communicate.
- No hero passes to force play forward
- Use your keeper under major pressure in the middle or defensive third to reset
- Do not pass into pressure. Look for teammates in a window of space ALWAYS! And ALWAYS! get into a window of space for a pass.
- Pass to the appropriate foot of your teammate. Away from pressure
- ALWAYS Receive passes across your body regardless of dominant foot
- Expect to one touch back/drop/support if you are under tremendous pressure
- Have balance and have your feet under you. Plant foot aimed in the direction you plan to pass and follow through. Be confident and commit to making a good pass.
- Your first touch must direct you away from the opponent. (don't kill the ball at your feet) For this to work you must be looking around for the opponent prior to getting the pass to make this decision before receiving the ball. "head on a swivel"
- Make sure you are in space enough to take 2 touches comfortably
- Direct aerial balls towards teammates when under pressure rather than trying to trap it for yourself so that you don't give up the second ball
- Don't deliver a rocket, but don't hit it with your purse either. A well struck, rolling pass is the easiest to manage.

Throw Ins:

- Be sure to throw the ball to their feet or somewhere on their body so they can control the ball. (no bouncing balls)
- Always have the ball cocked over your head so that you can throw quickly. (don't constantly reload)
- Fake your throw in a direction to create open space somewhere else.
- We should have at least one runner and/or checker so that we are not all standing still. You may throw it to the stationary target, but the other movement will help clear out defenders.
- Once you throw in you must step into play and immediately get into space as a passing option.
- Both feet on the ground, behind the line and the ball must go behind your head

Opponent has the ball:

- Breakdown on defense; do not dive in; let them make the mistake and attack that mistake; stay low, keep your feet under you, ready your hips for sudden turn or changes of directions.
- When we lose the ball those furthest from the ball must get behind the ball in a tight formation, those nearest to the ball must provide instant pressure, but under control with your hips & shoulders over your feet (breakdown) not allowing them to be comfortable or kick over the top. "Hunt like a pack of wild dogs!" Positions in proximity of the ball should double team FIRMLY if possible. "Wild Dog!"
- Once you win the ball back; shield the ball and find a teammate in space for support immediately and move into a window of space. DO NOT FORCE FORWARD AND GIVE IT BACK TO THEM.
- Get into our formation shape and make it tight; be in a defensive stance/position and anticipate the pass or 2nd ball. Trust your teammates to cover their zonal area (do not roam out of position).
- If you must clear the ball do it wide (aim for the opposing teams corner flags) and do not give up corner kicks.

Marking & Defending – don't take crap from anyone on the other team (no offense)

- Marking should be tight if your mark is a pass or through ball away
- Stay in formation and don't give openings for the opponent to play through you
- Run with the mark and cut them off their run; using your shoulders, getting in front of them, stunting their ability to get to full speed. (A horse cannot run if you don't open the gate)
- Play physically (not dirty) and let the ref make the call. "Wild Dog"
- Don't leg stab and dive in
- Communicate with each other about overlaps, through balls, runners, etc.
- Pick up your teammates mark if your teammate becomes out of position, falls, etc.

STYLE OF PLAY: GENERAL

The key elements for coaches and players that define the style of play

MATCH

OFFENSIVE STYLE

All teams will be encouraged to display an offensive style of play based on keeping possession and quick movement of the ball.

QUICK TRANSITIONS AND FINISHING

Speed of play, avoiding over-dribbling, looking for an organized and quick movement of the ball and finishing will be encouraged in all age groups.

POSITION SPECIFIC

A team must be organized defensively, keeping their specific positions in the formation. However, players will look for spaces and movements to support forward when attacking by moving away from their original positions.

FORMATIONS

4-3-3 FORMATION

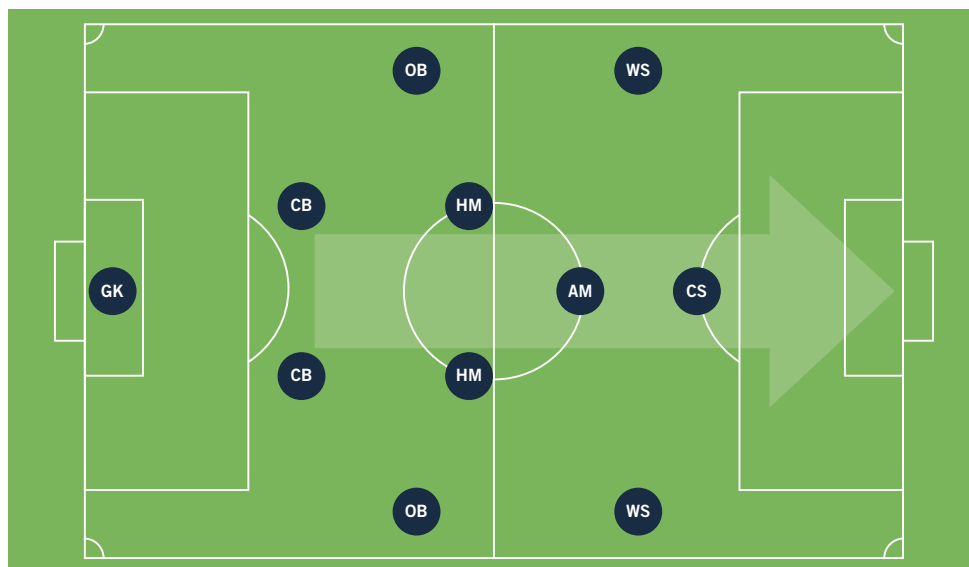
Teams will use the 4-3-3 formation, either in its 4-2-3-1 or 4-1-2-3 variations. Teams in the advanced stage (U15 onwards) can also use a 4-4-2 formation with a diamond in the middle. This system (4-4-2 diamond) provides more space in the wide areas of the field for the outside backs to move forward and join the attack.

BACK 4

All formations used by the teams in 11-a-side games must keep a back 4 line. The back 4 provides consistency in defense and allows space for the outside backs to move forward when attacking.

9v9

Teams playing 9v9 soccer are strongly encouraged to use the 3-2-3 formation. This formation helps players express the principles of play specified in this document. This system allows for better adaptation to a 4-3-3 formation as the players progress to 11v11.



◀ This is the 4-3-3 formation in its 4-2-3-1 variation. This is a well balanced formation in attack and defense with two holding midfielder players and one attacking midfielder.

STYLE OF PLAY: SPECIFIC

Most relevant points of each of the four key components

TECHNICAL

PASSING & RECEIVING:

Passing the ball on the ground with pace from different distances and receiving the ball while keeping it moving will be encouraged in all age groups.

SHOOTING

Players must develop the ability to shoot from different distances. All players will be encouraged to shoot from any distance during the game.

BALL CONTROL AND TURNING

Players will be encouraged to keep close control of the ball and use different turning techniques to move away from the defender.

TACTICAL

PLAYING OUT FROM THE BACK

All teams must feel comfortable playing the ball from the back through the midfield and from there to the final quarter of the field.

POSSESSION & TRANSITION

All teams must try to keep possession of the ball playing a one-two touch game. Players will be encouraged to support and move, thus creating passing options. Once the possession game is consolidated the team must learn how to transfer the ball in the most efficient way from one area of the field to another.

OFFENSE-DEFENSE QUICK TRANSITION & VICE VERSA

When possession is lost, players must react quickly and apply pressure to regain the ball. Once possession is regained, players will be positioned immediately to counter-attack.

PHYSICAL

SPEED & AGILITY

These qualities will be evident in the game from the early ages.

ENDURANCE

Individual players and teams will train to be resilient to high-intensity action .

STRENGTH & POWER

Strong players develop their speed more quickly, prevent injuries and are more competitive in games.

PSYCHOSOCIAL

RESPECT & DISCIPLINE

Players will adapt to a role on the team and respect teammates, coaches, referees and opponents.

COOPERATION

Each player will be part of a unit, and will cooperate with teammates to achieve the objectives for a given task, session or game, as well as for the entire season.

COMPETITIVENESS

Competitive players will be rewarded for their effort and focus.



PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

For the coach, for the player and for the team

COACHES

1. Possession games are a means to improve both the technique and tactical understanding of the players.
2. Opposition will be encouraged to increase the competitiveness of the players.
3. High-intensity games based on speed and agility. Short but intense working-periods.

PLAYERS

1. **1, 2 or 3 touch maximum:** Minimizing the number of touches improves the speed of play.
2. **Keep the game simple:** Do not force situations, over-dribble or be careless with the ball.
3. **Keep the ball on the ground:** A ball on the ground is easier to control and can be moved more efficiently by the team.
4. **Accuracy and quality of the pass:** Passing must be firm and accurate, with the proper weight.
5. **First touch:** Make a clean, controlled first touch without stopping the ball. Take the touch away from pressure and into free space.
6. **Perception and awareness:** All players with or without the ball should constantly scan the field.
7. **1v1 situations:** Encourage determination to regain control of the ball in defense and keep it simple in attack by taking a touch to the side, at speed, to beat the defender.
8. **Individual transition:** Players must react quickly when possession change from offense to defense and vice-versa.
9. **Shooting:** Always keep an eye on the goal. All players are encouraged to shoot.
10. **Take risks:** Soccer is an error prone sport and mistakes are part of the game and learning process. Players are encouraged to take risks in training session to increase the speed of play.



PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

For the coach, for the player and for the team

TEAM

1. **All players attack and all players defend:** All players must be involved in the game as a unit.
2. **Numerical advantage:** Soccer is a game of numbers where we try to create a numerical advantage in attack and avoid being in a numerical disadvantage in defense.
3. **Flow of the ball:** The ball should flow from inside (of the space) to outside and outside to inside. Balls out wide are more secure and the ball in the middle increases the options of play.
4. **Triangle principle and passing options:** The player in possession of the ball must receive constant support and have at least two passing options.
5. **Speed of play:** Quick movement of the ball creates 2v1 situations.
6. **Movement off the ball:** Find the best available space to create passing options for the player in possession of the ball.
7. **Pressure as a unit:** Organized pressure forces the opponents to commit errors.
8. **Transition:** Improve transition by reducing the number of passes needed to arrive at the target area or the opponent's goal.
9. **Direction of the game:** The game flows in two directions. Keep the essence of the game in the majority of your practices.
10. **Take initiative during the game:** Team breakdowns will occur. The team must be capable of adapting to new situations and imposing its own style of play during the game.



System of Play

Position Numbers and Player Profiles



Team Organization



DEVELOPMENT FIELD - 47x30 yards

- U9 and U10 - **7v7** - 14 players per team
- 7v7 formations promote a good distribution of the players on the field and provide a versatile framework to introduce simple tactical elements at an early age
- Formations are focused in the development of attacking elements of the game
- 1-2-3-1 formation: designed to develop passing and movement of the ball
- 1-3-2-1 formation: designed to promote forward runs and 1v1 situations



SMALL SIDED FIELD - 75x47 yards

- U11 and U12 - **9v9** - 16 players per team
- On a bigger field 9v9 formations are ideal to keep developing attacking elements of the game and introduce basic defensive concepts working as a unit
- 1-3-2-3 formation: designed to provide space in midfield areas and provide multiple attacking options at front
- 1-3-3-2 formation: designed to understand basic defensive organization and promote build up play

System of Play 1-4-3-3



<TTPM> POSITION PROFILE

<T>

TECHNICAL.

<T>

TACTICAL

<P>

PHYSICAL

<M>

MENTAL

Position Profile: Goalkeeper



#1 GOALKEEPER

- + Collecting, handling & serving with hands & feet.
- + Receiving aerial service (all angles, distances)
- + Tackle, regain possession one v one

- + Command, direct team during re-starts
- + Organize, direct team actions in own half
- + Transition to attack- possess or penetrate

- + Power, acceleration and explosive movement
- + Aerial mobility maximize height and reach
- + Maximal Speed of Reaction

- + Alert and focused, constant assessment of play
- + Lead- confident, decisive mentality
- + Resilient- re-focus on targets, objectives

Position Profile: Outside Backs



#2, 3 OUTSIDE BACKS

- + Collecting the ball efficiently, serve, run fwd.
 - + Full passing range, crosses from flank channel
 - + Tackle, intercept, regain possession of ball
- + Recognize, execute penetration on flanks
 - + Organize and direct #7, #11 in defending role
 - + Central channel balance, cover for #4, #5
- + Speed endurance- repeated explosive runs
 - + Acceleration- change speed response to ball
 - + Endurance, box-box range for the full match
- + Confident competitor in one-one isolation
 - + Confident in attacking and defending roles
 - + Alert, immediate response in transition

Position Profile: Center Backs



#4, 5 CENTER BACKS

- + Marking, tracking, intercepting and tackling
- + Heading, 1-touch passing on aerial serves
- + Passing to penetrate (all service types)

- + Decide, execute- mark opponent or mark space
- + Build-out, possession, tempo in central channel
- + Organize, direct outside backs and c. midfielders

- + Aerial- max. use of height, explosive movement
- + Rx Speed- adjust to ball, opponent movement
- + Agility- change direction in response to cues

- + Decisive leader- command and direct teammates
- + Control and composure under pressure
- + Focus- assess and prepare when ball is away

Position Profile: Center Midfielder



#6, 8 CENTER MIDFIELDER

- + Marking, tracking, intercepting and tackling
 - + Collect, turn, re-direct to all regions of field (360)
 - + Passing to penetrate (all service types)
- + Primary option for build out and possession
 - + Defensive control centrally in front of backs
 - + Penetrate- movement, passing or running w/ ball
- + Mobility- multi-directional, box-box, centrally
 - + Speed endurance- intermittent, intense actions
 - + Explosive movement- max. acceleration
- + Energized- maximal effort to connect the team
 - + Game Awareness- control tempo & speed of play
 - + Self-less- effort to connect all parts of the team

Position Profile: Attacking Center Midfielder



#10 ATTACK C. MIDFIELDER

- + Collect and turn under pressure.
 - + Passing- penetration and goal-scoring chances
 - + Dribbling or striking to score goals.
- + Mobility- create separation from opponent
 - + Create scoring opportunities for teammates
 - + Transition- join 1st line of defending pressure
- + Explosive movement- separation from opponent
 - + Acceleration- change direction or change speed
 - + Strength-shoot from distance, challenge for ball
- + 360 degree awareness- mental focus
 - + Ambitious attacking mentality
 - + Perception- focus on multiple, complex cues

Position Profile: Wingers



#7, 11 WINGERS

- + Flank service at high pace w/ either foot
- + Running with the ball, high pace (penetration)
- + Ball preparation, dribbling and ball manipulation

- + Transition- react, recover as 1st flank defender
- + Mobility to create team crossing opportunities
- + Mobility, timing of runs for central goal scoring

- + Speed endurance, high pace, frequent transition
- + Acceleration- with and without the ball
- + Agility- efficiency in changing direction

- + Ambitious penetrating attitude
- + Patience- prepared to max opportunities w/ ball
- + Focus- constant attention to game cues w/o ball

Position Profile: Center Forward



#9 CENTER FORWARD

- + Scoring- one-touch on demand (head and feet)
- + Receive, secure ball under pressure
- + Able to turn and face the goal (Penetrate)

- + Mobility, timing to optimize scoring chances
- + Recognize, attack the spaces behind the defense
- + Pressure, contain opponents' build out

- + Speed Endurance- repetitive explosive runs
- + Strength- compete for possession
- + Explosive movement- compete for aerial service

- + Persistence- remain in advanced position
- + Aggressive attitude to compete for the ball
- + Alert, anticipate positive opportunities