

# Youth Program Curriculum

## Introduction

We at CenCal Cosmos set ourselves apart from the majority of our peers by looking at the long term. We are not interested in how successful our player or team is at U9, but in how successful they are as players and people at U18. Have we prepared the players optimally for the next level of soccer? Have we given them the tools to excel in life?

We pride ourselves on the quality individuals and coaches that we have placed with our teams and how those individuals commit to their roles and responsibilities in developing our children as players, and as people. This document is the framework by which we layout those roles and responsibilities. The guide that explains the best practices by which to develop age and developmental stage appropriate skills and also the foundation that has already been laid by a team's previous coach.

Within this framework every coach has the right and responsibility to make the choices that make them the quality coach that they are. The individual coach will determine what drills to use, when and for how long, or the best way to teach this tactic or that technique. However, the coach will also have the responsibility to ensure that they cover the techniques, skills, and tactics in a coherent way that fits into the overarching strategy of developing players with a complete skill set from U9 to U18. It is also the coach's responsibility to ensure that practices are run efficiently to maximize skill development within any session.

Within this scheme, the coach can take pride in the development of each player not only in the time that they worked together, but also in the part he/she played in what the player eventually becomes. Each coach is essential to that overall development whether laying the technical foundations or by building upon framework of all that has gone before.

Together we must eliminate the need to say "what on earth did your last coach teach you?"

## Training Sessions U9/10

Each coach will have the freedom to run specific training sessions as they choose. However, there is a specific structure that we would like each practice to follow:

### **Pre-Practice Activity**

**5-15 minutes**

(An activity that players can take part in alone, in pairs, or as a group as soon as they are ready and before practice starts – juggling games, keep away activities, etc.)

### **Technical Progression with Ball**

**15-20 minutes**

(Individual skill work with no defenders, ball familiarity, dribbling, passing, and receiving, juggling, heading, etc. – emphasize “learn it, master it, test your limits - end each warm up session with a competition (ball involved) – relay, coordination game, etc.)

### **Skill Progression**

**20-25 minutes**

(Start with a technical, unopposed exercise, which may progress directly from the warm up, gradually add pressure – time constraints, restricted defenders, numbers down defenders, even numbers, - add concept of playing both sides of the ball, objectives for attackers and defenders)

### **Scrimmage/Small Sided Games**

**15-20 minutes**

(Emphasize through coaching/constraints the aspects of the game addressed throughout the session, *trying and failing must be encouraged over playing safe!*)

### **Review/Cool Down**

**5 minutes**

(Must review, ask “why” we did things, give them homework to do before the next practice)

## Training Sessions U11/12/13

Each coach will have the freedom to run specific training sessions as they choose. However, there is a specific structure that we would like each practice to follow:

### **Pre-Practice Activity**

**5-15 minutes**

(An activity that players can take part in alone, in pairs, or as a group as soon as they are ready and before practice starts – juggling games, keep away activities, etc.)

### **Technical Warm Up with Ball**

**20-25 minutes**

(Individual skill work with no defenders, emphasize “learn it, master it, test your limits” - end each warm up session with a competition (ball included) – relay, coordination game, etc.)

### **Passing Exercise**

**5-10 minutes**

(Passing, moving, receiving exercise that will help transition into the main theme or can be included in the warm up)

### **Technical/Tactical Main Theme Progression**

**25-35 minutes**

(Start with a technical, unopposed exercise, gradually add opposition and counter-goals up to the point where you have the ball, opponents, teammates, direction of play, and goals. Here is where we must put the players in game situations so they can learn the decision-making process to solve problems on the field)

### **Scrimmage/Small Sided Games**

**20-30 minutes**

(Emphasize through coaching/constraints the aspects of the game addressed throughout the session, *trying and failing must be encouraged over playing safe!*)

### **Review/Cool Down**

**5 minutes**

(Must review, ask “why” we did things, give them homework to do before the next practice)

# Developing Players

The goal of each of our coaches and assistant coaches is to maximize the development of each of their players during the window in time that they work together. The following curriculum and list of expectations is designed to create a coherent system of development where players learn the skills that they are ready for at each stage. This also means that when a team moves to another coach they have a known, solid base to learn and master the next set of skills.

This curriculum is designed to target the most important skills and habits for players to develop at the right ages to create well rounded players at the U16-18 age group. This is our goal. A tactically astute team will be very successful at U9, but those same players will struggle at older age groups because of the training time devoted to tactics rather than technique. This also leads to players who develop a small, specific skillset which is unsuited to advanced play at the older age groups.

The most difficult thing for our coaches (and parents) at the younger age groups is the time that will be spent teaching habits that will not necessarily make the player or team more successful immediately. However, these are the habits that are paramount to a player's success ultimately.

Our goal is to create *soccer players* i.e. players who want the ball even in pressured situations, players who are capable in all soccer techniques (left foot, right foot, heading, slide tackling, shooting, passing, and dribbling, etc.), players who understand the game and can create their own solutions to new problems (different positions, advanced opponents, etc.), players who are excited about the game.

## The Curriculum

The curriculum for each age group has been broken down into a set of observable abilities, some of which will be tested on an ongoing basis through a modified iSoccer system. Others must be observed in game situations. All players will be tested on these things within the first couple of weeks of the season to create a baseline. These tests will be repeated periodically with a final set of testing at the end of the season. While a lot of what makes a good soccer player is intangible, this testing will give us a baseline for the next seasons planning as well as allowing us to evaluate our work in the previous year.

The abilities will be split into five sections: preparation, technical, tactical, physical, and psychological. At different age groups, more of the abilities may lie in one section than another as befits the developmental level of the players.

**Preparation** – This is the most under coached, yet the most important aspect of the game for a player to understand and utilize. Watching the best players in the world (playing against the best players) you will notice that 95% of the time they use only very basic skills; controlling and passing with the inside of the foot. However they seem to have a huge amount of time on the ball no matter how fast and athletic the players they are up against are. A large part of the reason for this is what they do before they receive the ball. Preparation. We will emphasize mastering these skills beginning at U9 with the two simplest and most effective habits.

Our players will be taught to stand sideways on to the ball when preparing to receive, i.e. in pairs passing they will not face each other. A habit that will be reinforced in possession and small sided games, etc. This habit allows a player to already be prepared to move the ball away from pressure using the easiest and most consistent skill (inside of the foot).

Additionally, our players will be taught to look around them all the time, but specifically checking over their shoulder when preparing for a ball to be played to them. This allows the player to control the ball into the most

beneficial space, or adjust their body to shield if a defender is too close. Requiring players to observe prior to receiving the ball gives them the platform to become decision makers and analytical thinkers about the game.

These are habits that may not provide huge improvements to the player's success in the short term but can absolutely transform a player's success at older age groups. The caveat being that it is incredibly difficult to teach at older age groups if it is not already a habit.

**Technical** – This area will provide the bulk of the material to be covered at the younger age groups. These are the tools of the trade. Our younger team coaches are charged with developing the number of tools their players have and their ability and confidence to use those tools. As the players get older their development changes into learning how and when to use those tools. A technical player has lots of tools, a skillful player knows how and when to use those tools to be successful.

It is paramount that we emphasize that a good soccer player has all of the tools. It is not acceptable for defenders to believe they don't need to know how to dribble, attackers don't need to know how to defend, and girls don't need to head or slide.

**Tactical** – This is the decision making aspect of soccer. At the younger age groups, this begins purely with developing their techniques into skills: when to dribble and when to pass, how/when to use passes as combinations to beat players, etc. As players get older they must be taught how to work in pairs and threes to create favorable situations for the team. Finally, at the oldest age groups, whole team tactics become more important: how do we defend/attack in different formations, against different formations, when winning/losing, etc.

The dilemma for our younger coaches is that spending time on tactics can significantly improve your chances of winning games. However, this is practice time that you cannot get back and is therefore lost from a player's technical development. Additionally, most tactics require reducing the techniques that players in specific positions/situations are able to utilize, which automatically leads to players deficient in some skill sets. For example, teaching defenders not to dribble the ball, etc.

**Physical** – Children develop physically at different rates. At the younger age groups, thought should be put into designing drills with the ball that require players to challenge themselves physically: jumping, short sprinting, quick direction changes, hitting the ground and getting back up, etc.

NO TIME SHOULD BE SPENT ON JUST FITNESS. However, every practice should be designed to include exercises that build fitness, while using the ball. For example: 1v1 to a ball. Players in pairs have two balls; one is the game ball and the other the 'goal' ball. The game ball is passed by one player into space. Once it stops moving, the players run to it and play 1v1. They score by hitting the goal ball with the game ball. The game then restarts in the same way. This game will provide significantly better soccer fitness than running two laps of the field. The players will work harder to try and win. But most importantly, they will be working on 1v1 attacking, defending, passing, and shooting at the same time.

At the older age groups, fitness without a ball must be restricted to a discipline tool only where short and sharp options are the most effective and efficient (1-5 pushups/sit-ups, sprint to the goal and back, etc.), as opposed to running laps, etc. that take up valuable practice time.

Older girls teams are recommended to spend some time working on single leg coordination and strength drills as an ACL preventative measure. Quick feet, agility, explosive power, etc. can be worked into technical warm ups without needing to devote significant portions of practice away from the ball.

**Psychological** – The psychological aspect of a soccer player's performance is huge. A confident player can be unrecognizable from the same player lacking in confidence. The coach has a huge role to play in developing the

psychological aspect of a player. The most important areas of a player psychology for a coach to develop are confidence, bravery, emotional stability, focus, and drive.

All of these traits are developing before they join us at U9, but the younger the player, the greater an impact a coach can have on these mental skills.

Confidence comes from belief in ability to be successful, i.e. having been taught a technique and mastered it at game speed, but also the recognition that failure is something that might happen but not something to be feared. We must design exercises that put players into success/failure situations continually and positively reinforce chance taking whether the end result is positive or not. Players must feel comfortable taking chances without fear of retribution from coaches, parents, or other players. Additionally players should be taught a “fix it” mentality where the mistake/failure is not the issue, but how quickly you work to fix it. In addition to the obvious benefits of getting the ball back, etc., this approach reduces the time that the player (and parents) has to dwell on the failure itself. At all age groups, a more robust, enduring confidence can be built by openly addressing success and failure on both a team and individual basis. If mistakes are not openly acknowledged then the enduring feel for the player is that they are shameful and must not be talked about. Every soccer player makes multiple mistakes every game. Those that learn from them and do not lose confidence as a result of them are the ones that are ultimately successful. Removing the taboo of making a mistake goes some way towards removing the fear of it.

Bravery is a trait that is developed through recognition of having encountered the situation before and having come through relatively unharmed. Addressing athletic plays (hitting the ground, heading, physical contact, etc.) as an inherent part of the game from U9 onwards helps reduce this issue. Parents must also be educated so that their fear is not transmitted to the player.

Some players are inherently predisposed to doing extra and trying harder. Put thought into designing practices that highlight those that have that drive, but that also require the other players to train that way also. Drive is a habit that can be developed like any other. Utilize iSoccer as a motivational tool for players to train outside of practice. Provide homework, etc. to encourage this habit also.

## Age Level Expectations - Under 8 Boys and Girls

### Preparation

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard (By End of Season)
Sideways Stance	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	2/5
Move to Receive Optimally	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	2/5

### Technical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Passing + Receiving (Inside Foot)	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Passing + Receiving (Outside Foot)	Outside Foot Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Dribbling	Cosmos Dribbling Course	Timed (+3s for Any Mistake)	
Striking with Laces	1 Touch Laces Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Moves	6 Moves – Scissors, Stepover, Cruyff, Dragback-Cruyff, Dragback, Step-Fake		
Heading	Exposed to		
Juggling	Juggling for Coach	Best of 3 Attempts	4
Forcing and Body Position	Game Situation	5 Times Pressing	2/5
Block Tackling	Game Situation	5 Times Tackling	1/3
Sidefoot Volley	Volley to Coaches Hands (5 yds)	#Successful Out of 10	4
Laces Volley	Volley to Coaches Hands (5 yds)	# Successful Out of 10	3
Sliding	Exposed to		
Shielding	Exposed to		
Receiving Aerial Balls	Exposed to		

### Tactical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Combine to Beat Player	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	1/3
Recover Behind Ball	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	1/3
Move to Support	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	1/3
Pressure/Cover	Exposed to		

### Physical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Acceleration	Dribbling Course		
Balance on 1 leg	Dribbling Course		

### Psychological

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Self Confidence	Game Situation	Attempting to Take on an Opponent	1
Bravery	Game Like Situation	Willingness to Head	1
	Game Situation	Make Physical Contact	1
Good Teammate	Game Situation	Positive Communication	1 in 5 mins

## Age Level Expectations - Under 9 Boys and Girls

### Preparation

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard (By End of Season)
Sideways Stance	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	3/5
Check Shoulder	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	2/5
Move to Receive Optimally	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	3/5

### Technical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Passing + Receiving (Inside Foot)	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Passing + Receiving (Outside Foot)	Outside Foot Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Dribbling	Cosmos Dribbling Course	Timed (+3s for Any Mistake)	
Striking with Laces	1 Touch Laces Test	# Successful out of 10	
Moves	6 Moves – Scissors, Steptover, Cruyff, Dragback-Cruyff, Dragback, Matthews		
Heading	Head to Coaches Hands (5 yds)	# Successful Out of 10	9
Juggling	Juggling for Coach	Best of 3 Attempts	8
Forcing and Body Position	Game Situation	5 Times Pressing	3/5
Block Tackling	Game Situation	5 Times Tackling	3/5
Sidefoot Volley	Volley to Coaches Hands (5 yds)	# Successful out of 10	7
Laces Volley	Volley to Coaches Hands (5 yds)	# Successful out of 10	6
Sliding	Exposed to		
Shielding	Exposed to		
Receiving Aerial Balls	Exposed to		

### Tactical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Combine to Beat Player	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	3/5
Recover Behind Ball	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	4/5
Move to Support	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	4/5
Pressure/Cover	Exposed to		

### Physical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Acceleration	Agility Course		
Balance on 1 Leg	Agility Course		

### Psychological

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Self Confidence	Game Situation	Attempting to Take on an Opponent	1/2
Bravery	Game Like Situation	Willingness to Head	1/2
	Game Situation	Make Physical Contact	4/5
Good Teammate	Game Situation	Positive Communication	3 in 5 mins

## Age Level Expectations - Under 10 Boys and Girls

U10 players are more developed and those in our program as U9s will be further along in their development. Although the players' skills are more developed, there is still the need for players to learn how to use their skills within the framework of the game. As a result, the curriculum is very similar to the U9 curriculum, with a relatively small number of new techniques, skills, and concepts. Again, this year is just one piece to their overall development, and a great amount of patience needs to be exhibited in the training of these players. Regardless of how good your team is, try not to rush your players' development of new skills at the expense of mastering and really understanding the nuance of existing skills and habits.

### Preparation

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard (By End of Season)
Sideways Stance	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	4/5
Check Shoulder	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	3/5
Receive Inside Confronting Foot	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	4/5

### Technical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Passing + Receiving (Inside Foot)	Body Position Passing Test	As Above	
Passing + Receiving (Outside Foot)	Outside Foot Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Dribbling	Cosmos Dribbling Course	Timed (+3s for Any Mistake)	
Striking with Laces	1 Touch Laces Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Moves	U9 + Pull-Pushes and Double Touches		
Heading	Head to Coaches Hands	# Successful Out of 10	9
Diving Headers	Head to Coach	# Successful Out of 10	4
Juggling	Juggling for Coach	Best of 3 Attempts	15
Forcing and Body Position	Game Situation	5 Times Pressing	4/5
Block Tackling	Game Situation	5 Times Tackling	4/5
Sidefoot Volley	Volley to Coaches Hands (5 yds)	# Successful Out of 10	9
Laces Volley	Volley to Coaches Hands (5 yds)	# Successful Out of 10	8
Sliding			
Shielding	Game Situation		
Aerial Balls – Lace Cushion	Aerial Cushion Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Aerial Balls – Thigh Cushion	Aerial Cushion Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Aerial Balls – Inside Trap	Aerial Trap Test	# Successful in 45s	
Aerial Balls – Outside Trap	Aerial Trap Test	# Successful in 45s	
Bending (Outside Foot)	Exposed to		

### Tactical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Combine to Beat Player	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	3/5
Recover Behind Ball	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	4/5
Move to Support	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	4/5
Pressure/Cover	Game Situation		

**Physical**

<b>Ability</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Standard</b>
Acceleration	Agility Course		
Balance on 1 Leg	Agility Course		

**Psychological**

<b>Ability</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Standard</b>
Self Confidence	Game Situation	Attempting to Take on an Opponent	1/2
Bravery	Game Like Situation	Willingness to Head	1/2
	Game Situation	Make Physical Contact	4/5
Communication	Game Situation	Positive and Instructive Communication	3 in 5 mins

## Age Level Expectations - Under 11 Boys and Girls

U11s will be playing 8v8 for the last time. The field will seem a bit smaller and the game will be played at a faster pace than at U9 and U10. Since the game is faster, game speed is going to be important. Increased game speed comes with confidence and a certain comfort level on the ball. Technical development is still the focus, but there will be more tactical elements added at this age group.

### Preparation

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard (By End of Season)
Sideways Stance	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	4/5
Check Shoulder (+After Pass)	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	3/5
Receive Inside Confronting Foot	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	4/5

### Technical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Passing + Receiving (Inside Foot)	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Passing + Receiving (Outside Foot)	Outside Foot Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Receiving (Sole)	Sole Receiving and Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Dribbling	Cosmos Dribbling Course	Timed (+3s for Any Mistake)	
Striking with Laces	1 Touch Laces Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Moves	U10 + Maradonna and Stop-Goes		
Defensive Heading	Def. Heading Test	# Successful Out of 5	3
Attacking Heading	Att. Heading Test	# Successful Out of 5	3
Diving Headers	Head to Coach	# Successful Out of 10	4
Juggling	Juggling for Coach	Best of 3 Attempts	15
Forcing and Body Position	Game Situation	5 Times Pressing	4/5
Block Tackling	Game Situation	5 Times Tackling	4/5
Sidefoot Volley	Volley Test	# Successful Out of 10	9
Laces Volley	Volley Test	# Successful Out of 10	8
Sliding			
Shielding	Game Situation		
Aerial Balls – Lace Cushion	Aerial Cushion Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Aerial Balls – Thigh Cushion	Aerial Cushion Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Aerial Balls – Chest Cushion	Aerial Cushion Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Aerial Balls – Inside Trap	Aerial Trap Test	# Successful in 45s	
Aerial Balls – Outside Trap	Aerial Trap Test	# Successful in 45s	
Bending (Outside Foot)	Bending Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Bending (Inside Foot)	Bending Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Side Volleys	Exposed to		
Scissor Volleys	Exposed to		
Bicycle Kicks	Exposed to		

### Tactical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Combine to Beat Player	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	3/5
Recover Behind Ball	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	4/5

Move to Support	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	4/5
Pressure/Cover	Game Situation		

### Physical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Acceleration	Agility Course		
Balance on 1 Leg	Agility Course		

### Psychological

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Self Confidence	Game Situation	Attempting to Take on an Opponent	1/2
Bravery	Game Like Situation	Willingness to Head	1/2
	Game Situation	Make Physical Contact	4/5
Communication	Game Situation	Positive and Instructive Communication	3 in 5 mins

## Age Level Expectations - Under 12 Boys and Girls

U12 is a very interesting and challenging age group as the players transition from having played 8v8 for the last 3 years into 11v11 for the first time. The greater number of players on the field and the larger space are significant challenges in themselves.

The temptation is to spend significant practice time on walk-throughs and shadow play to teach the players how to make sense of the new positions and dimensions. While this is necessary to an extent, it is important to remain focused on the primary goal of player development. Teach the players the overriding principles of play in attack and defense and this will give a framework for them to expand that knowledge onto the bigger field.

For instance, if the players understand (from U11 and before) that defensively we want compactness and offensively we want width and depth, it should be fairly simple extrapolation for outside players to get a rudimentary understanding of how to position themselves. Similarly, concepts of support and penetration will expand from 8v8 to 11v11 and give the players a framework for understanding how to position themselves and move when in possession. Pressure, Cover, Balance plays a similar role defensively.

Obviously not all players will understand this as well as each other, and there are some specific instances that must be taught within the scope of 11v11 or that can be taught most quickly. For this purpose, teams should schedule coached scrimmages. This provides the benefit of teaching the concepts within the actual game, without having to imagine defenders/attackers, etc. which makes the game unrealistic and can be a sticking point for understanding for players. Also it serves the double purpose of keeping the players much more focused on the information.

### Preparation

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard (By End of Season)
Sideways Stance	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	4/5
Check Shoulder (+After Pass)	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	3/5
Receive Inside Confronting Foot	Game Situation	5x Receiving the Ball	4/5

### Technical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Passing + Receiving (Inside Foot)	Body Position Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Passing + Receiving (Outside Foot)	Outside Foot Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Receiving (Sole)	Sole Receiving and Passing Test	# Successful in 45s	
Dribbling	Cosmos Dribbling Course	Timed (+3s for Any Mistake)	
Striking with Laces	1 Touch Laces Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Moves	U11 +		
Defensive Heading	Def. Heading Test	# Successful Out of 5	3
Attacking Heading	Att. Heading Test	# Successful Out of 5	3
Diving Headers	Head to Coach	# Successful Out of 10	4
Flick Headers	Exposed		
Juggling	Juggling for Coach	Best of 3 Attempts	25
Forcing and body position	Game situation	5 Times Pressing	4/5
Block Tackling	Game Situation	5 Times Tackling	4/5

Sidefoot Volley	Volley Test	# Successful Out of 10	9
Laces Volley	Volley Test	# Successful Out of 10	8
Side Volley	Volley Test to Goal	# Successful Out of 10	5
Scissor Volley	Volley Test	# Successful Out of 10	6
Sliding			
Shielding	Game Situation		
Aerial Balls – Lace Cushion	Aerial Cushion Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Aerial Balls – Thigh Cushion	Aerial Cushion Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Aerial Balls – Chest Cushion	Aerial Cushion Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Aerial Balls – Inside Trap	Aerial Trap Test	# Successful in 45s	
Aerial Balls – Outside Trap	Aerial Trap Test	# Successful in 45s	
Bending (Outside Foot)	Bending Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Bending (Inside Foot)	Bending Test	# Successful Out of 10	
Chipping			
Passing <i>for</i> Teammate	Game Situation		
1v1 Defending (Arms)			
Bicycle Kicks	Exposed to		

### Tactical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Combine vs Dribble	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	3/5
3 Player Combination	Game Situation		
Support/Penetrate	Game Situation	# Successful Attempts Out of 5 Opportunities	4/5
Pressure/Cover/Balance	Game Situation		
Decision Based on Look	Game Situation		

### Physical

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Acceleration	Dribbling Course		
Balance on 1 Leg	Dribbling Course		

### Psychological

Ability	Test	Evaluation	Standard
Self Confidence	Game Situation	Attempting to Take on an Opponent	1/2
Bravery	Game Like Situation	Willingness to Head	1/2
	Game Situation	Make Physical Contact	4/5
Communication	Game Situation	Positive and Instructive Communication	3 in 5 mins

## Appendix A

### Pre-practice activity examples:

The 5, 10, or 15 minutes after a player arrives at practice, but before the entire group is ready to begin training, is usually spent conversing and messing around. We would like to use that time to allow the players to still get their social time, but to do so while actively improving their game. This time can provide countless extra touches, starts the mental process of switching from life to soccer, and can provide the first part of the physical warm up as well. It is important that this the coach plans this time to be effective, yet fun for the players, to ensure maximum participation, and potentially even players arriving deliberately early to take part in it!

While some explanation and oversight is necessary initially, the activities should be designed to allow the players to engage in them without coaching and to monitor themselves. Teach the activity during a session and let the players know that it will be a pre-practice activity in the future.

### Juggling



#### Juggling

There are unlimited ways that you can incorporate juggling into a fun and challenging activity, which works on touch, as well as agility, balance, and leg strength.

#### Specify touches

o Feet, thighs, head, right/left only

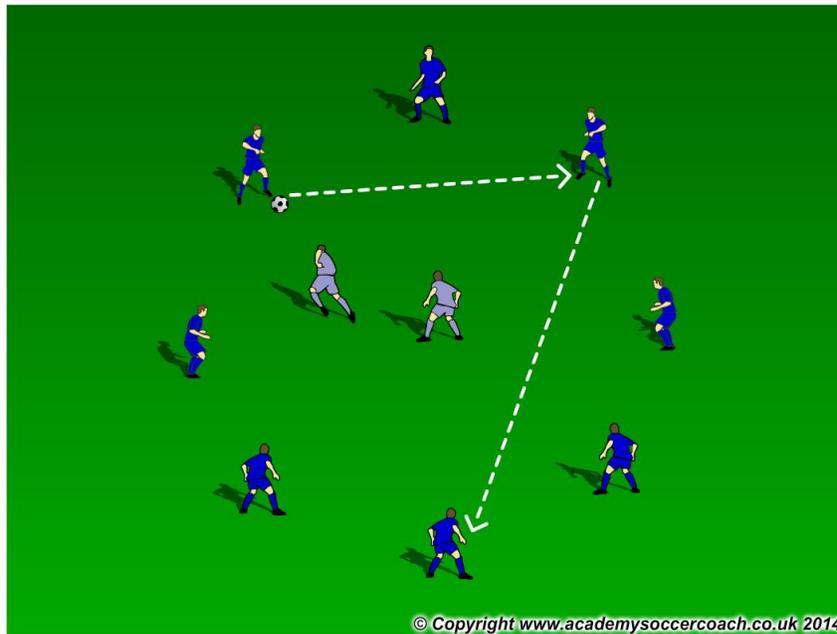
#### Specify order

o Left then right, 2 left then 2 right, foot then thigh, round the world

#### Groups

o Juggle in pairs/threes, pairs heading, horse, call the number o Long distance juggling

## Keep Away



### Keep Away

With 1 or 2 defenders in the middle and the rest of the team making a circle around them, you can have a keep away exercise that does not put too much stress on cold muscles but does provide valuable touches. Use various conditions to challenge the players:

- 1 touch
- 2 touch
- 4 touch
- 1touch/3 touch
- 2 touch different feet
- 2 touch different surfaces

## Pairs Heading Game



### Pairs Heading Game

Grid Size: 8 x 8 Square

Instructions: 2 pairs take it in turns to try and head to score on their opponents goal. The attacking team can run forward with the ball but must throw for their partner to head in order to score. Goals can only be scored below head height. If the attacking team does two headers in a row before scoring, they get 2 points, 3 equals 3 points, etc. A diving header to score adds 5. The defending team must be standing on their goal line to save, but may use any part of their body. Once the attacking team has attempted a header, the defending team becomes the attacking team and should transition as quickly as possible.

## Appendix B

### Leadership Development

One of the major reasons parents put their children in youth sports is to help them develop leadership qualities. While some children will naturally exhibit these qualities, and through being put in leadership situations, continue to develop them, it is important that we utilize some strategies to allow all of our players to develop these skills.

At the youngest age groups, we shouldn't restrict the leadership roles within the team to just a few players. Find ways to require all players to exhibit leadership at different times. This can include rotating who is the captain for games, but should incorporate much more than this. Analyze your practice and game routines for areas that players can be given extra responsibility. Then choose a couple of players who will be responsible for that for a given time period.

For Example:

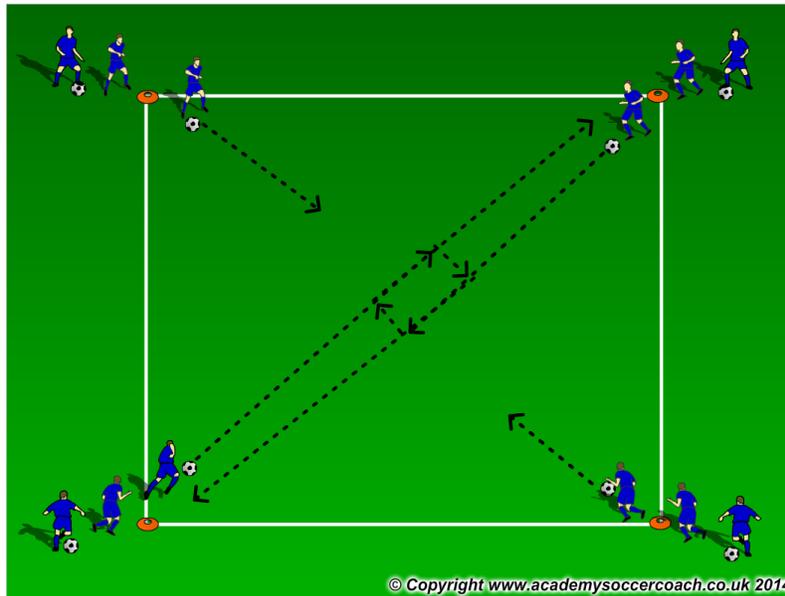
Picking which uniform to wear – At the end of the last practice before the game, have a couple of players be responsible for choosing the uniform that you will wear. Require them to talk to the whole team before coming to a decision and then communicating that to you.

## Appendix C

### Club Drills

Below are a few drills that are valuable for all ages. These drills emphasize something that is important that our players develop and should be used frequently within your sessions. They will also provide a familiarity in practice as our players move up through our club.

### Cutting Square



#### Cutting Square

##### Instructions:

Players line up on the corners of the square. Diagonally opposite players dribble towards each other with the laces of their right foot as quickly as they can. As soon as they pass each other, they cut using the outside of their foot to go around each other and dribble back the same way to the cone they left before stopping the ball for the next in line. The players at the other two cones do the same as soon as the way is clear. This is repeated with an inside of the foot cut, with left foot, by stopping the ball and spinning to dribble your partners ball back etc. The emphasis should be on training at the very edge of what your players are capable of. If a player never makes a mistake then that player is not trying to go fast enough. Mistakes should be fixed as quickly as possible. Challenge the players to do x number of successful ones in 1 minute etc.

##### Progressions/Variations:

To add more touches have the player at the end of each line perform footwork exercises with a ball until another player comes to the end of the line.

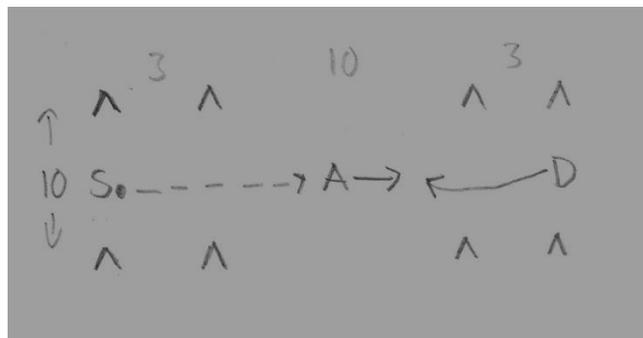
## Body Position Passing



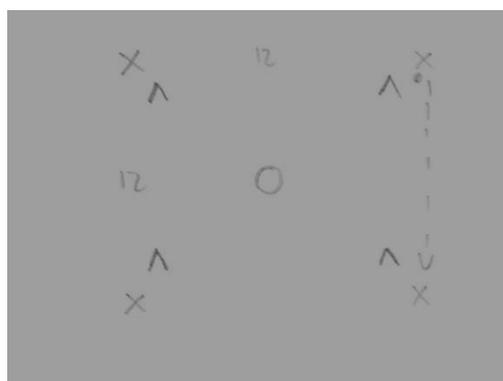
### Body Position Passing

The player without the ball stands sideways on to the player with the ball, checks their shoulder, and calls for the ball. As the ball is on its way, the player checks their shoulder again. The ball is controlled (stopped) with the inside of the confronting foot before being pushed towards the next line with the outside of the same foot. The player performs a turn at the second line before dribbling back to the first line by which time the first player should have looked and already be calling for the ball. Once the ball is passed, the player should now look again and position themselves the other way (to use the other foot to control). Initially focus on the players performing the drill correctly, checking their shoulder, standing the correct way, receiving and pushing out correctly, etc. Once the players are comfortable with this demand that they challenge themselves by going faster, not putting their foot down between control and push out, turn and pass exactly on the lines, etc. |

## Body Position 1v1



## Body Position Square



## Appendix D

### Efficient Training

Within the club system, we do not get nearly enough time to train our players. For this reason, it is paramount that we try to find extra time wherever possible and that we utilize our time in the most efficient way possible. We can find extra training time in a number of ways. We can increase the length of our practice by utilizing a pre-practice activity (as explained in appendix \*), we can assign homework such as juggling, working on a specific technique, or just a set number of touches per day or week, and we can use our pregame warm up as an additional mini-practice. There is, however, a lot of potential to get more out of the practice time that we are allotted.

An efficient training session means one where the minimum of time is wasted. With a little preplanning, putting cones down ahead of time, and having pinnies, etc. ready, this can be fairly easily achieved. For the Cosmos, however, the term is significantly more far-reaching than that. How can we get more out of every drill that we do, without (and this is really important) losing the focus of the drill in the first place? Can a technical drill involve a decision-making component, or a physical development one? Can a passing drill involve communication or a visual cue? Can a resting player get additional touches?

Start by looking at the drills that you use all the time. If there are 3 players in a line at any point, can the last player do touches, soccer boxing, or juggle. If you have 4 or more, can the last two players do 1 touch passing or juggling/heading in pairs? If the players have to move to another line after they have completed their reps can you add a speed ladder, hurdles, cones to dribble through, etc.? Or even just add a few lunges, sit ups, or push-ups while waiting.

Finally, perhaps the most beneficial and timesaving method of improving efficiency is combining the soccer development with the fitness training. Running outside of a soccer driven exercise should only be utilized as a discipline method, and even then, a short sprint is preferable to running a bunch of laps. Demand that technical exercises be done at game speed. This has the dual benefit of increasing fitness while also increasing how much technical value a player gets out of the exercise. Obviously learning a new move requires going through it slowly initially, but as soon as the players have the basics demand that they go as fast as they can and that they explode out of the move. 30s of game speed pullbacks or scissors will definitely get the heart rate up.

If the team is in need of fitness, we recommend doing a 1v1 ladder. Basically, set up a number of pairs of goals about 20 yards apart, with 5-10 yards between them. One player starts at each goal. The player with the ball passes to the player opposite and sprints to defend. There are no boundaries and the players can score in either side of the goal. Play for a minute and the winning player moves up the ladder, the losing player moves down.

## Appendix E

### Establishing a Culture

The most important thing that a coach can do upon taking over a new team is to put time and effort into establishing a positive team culture. A positive culture within the team leads to numerous benefits, all of which, in the long term, lead to better results (wins and player development). A positive team culture covers both on the field behaviors (practice effort, discipline, teamwork, etc.) and off the field conduct (team camaraderie, etc.).

It is far easier to take the steps necessary to establish a positive team culture from the outset than it is to turn around a failing one. The coach must actively plan their interactions with the team to build the required culture from the very beginning. Sadly, in youth sports this culture does not solely reside within the players, as no matter how effective the program to build a culture within the team is, it will be undermined if the parent group is not on the same page.

At the beginning of a new season, with a new team, even the most confident and talented of players (and their parents) are a little nervous and apprehensive about how the season will go and what their role will be. The smart coach will use this to their advantage to instill positive behaviors, before anyone (player or parent) gets too comfortable and as such becomes very difficult to change.

### Setting the Stage

Start with the preseason meeting. Be very confident, definite, and specific about what the expectations are, on and off the field, for both players and parents. Explain the value of these expectations and the potential consequences of not living up to them. Make it clear that a positive team culture will have more effect on a successful team than any talented player. Put specific expectations in writing, but be prepared to uphold them. Demonstrate that these behaviors are non-negotiable and anyone who is not willing to adhere to them is welcome to play for a different team.

### Training

Think about the things you expect of your team in the training sessions: effort, discipline, self-motivation, willingness to take risks, focus, support of teammates, etc. How can you design sessions that emphasize these things and, more importantly, make it clear to you and everybody else when your standards are not being met?

For the first few sessions of practice, focus on technical drills that can be done at high intensity and demand that players push themselves to the very edge of what they are capable of. Do not allow your players to become comfortable. Focus your attention on the effort and the intensity rather than too much stopping and coaching technique. Additionally, 1v1 and 2v2, drills are good options as they do not provide players with a place to hide.

Demand that, in all these things, the players' effort and focus is first rate, and additionally that they do not give up after any mistake or after losing the ball. Provide a simple punishment (1 push up, 1 sit up, etc.) for the first time a player loses focus, gives up, or forgets a detail for a drill, but be willing to increase it for each subsequent mistake.

Hopefully, the players will be desperate to impress you in these first few practices, so you should be able to set this bar really high with little resistance from the players. However, at some point the intensity will inevitably drop. Even though it may still be higher than you expect, make sure you jump on this lapse. Even if it is only one or two players that have dropped off. Give the whole team a sprint, while explaining the importance of training at the highest intensity and that it is the team's responsibility to ensure that this happens. After doing this a couple of times the team should now be used to training outside of their comfort zone, and also policing themselves (to a certain extent) to ensure that they continue to do so.

At this point, it is the right time to start adding drills to training that are easier to hide in, or do not require that same level of intensity. However, keep looking for the opportunity every couple of weeks to reinforce the culture that you set, as the bar will inevitable drop slowly over time.

The benefits of a team that trains on the edge and self-polices are massive (more touches, players challenging each other more, more fitness gained from the same drills, technical skills practice at game speed, etc.) and more than justify the effort to create the culture.

## **Parents**

Sadly, parents are often the biggest problem on a team and the hardest to control. They can be treated, however, with the same philosophy as the players. Set your standards for parent behavior high, on the sideline, during practice, interacting with the manager, each other and the players, etc. Early in the season actively look for any potential issues, no matter how small and insignificant they may seem. During game time, you may ask an assistant to listen specifically to parents for a while if you need to concentrate on the game.

Once you have found any sort of issue, act on it quickly and with the whole parent group. It isn't necessary to name specific parents initially, but make it clear that what you heard was not acceptable and while it may seem insignificant, the details are what really matter. Explain the culture of excellence and attention to detail that you are creating within the team, and that the players look to the parents as role models, therefore you expect the same standards of them. Obviously, this is a generalization of a possible parent issue; please talk with the DOC about specific issues, especially if you are not 100% certain how to handle them.

## Appendix F

### Alternative Training Sessions

There is no substitute for touches on the ball. For this reason, the vast majority of our training should take place at the field (or in a gym) where the players are required to get as many touches on the ball as possible and are put into game like situations. However, sometimes this is not possible (bad air days, field closures, etc.) and additionally there is a significant advantage to doing alternative sessions. An alternative session, in this case, means watching a game (live or on TV), going over tactics/decision making on a white board/iPad, or using a tool like Subbuteo.

One of the biggest complaints about the soccer players that are produced in the US is that they lack vision. This has a major correlation to how little soccer they watch. A good soccer player needs to be able to *see* the field from two different viewpoints; the one that they see with their eyes, from ground level, but also as a schematic from above. The best players process what they see with their eyes to give them a picture in their mind from above, as this viewpoint makes it significantly easier to understand space for passing or to recognize team shape.

One of the most difficult things for a coach is to recognize that the schematic view of the game that they process is nothing like the ground level view of the game that their young players see. For this reason, it is really important that we introduce our players to this concept early and continue to use it as often as possible.

The easiest way to start is by presenting the team shape (starting line-up, etc.) in a schematic view, either using a whiteboard, paper, or even cones on the ground. Include field markings where possible to help the players understand what they are seeing. Additionally, you can utilize these same techniques when explaining any aspect of practice that requires spatial awareness. Use the whiteboard or cones to either explain the organization of the drill prior to running it or after the drill to ensure understanding.

Finally, take advantage of practice times when we cannot be on the field (or downtime at tournaments) by scheduling an alternative session. Watch part of a game or some YouTube clips, show part of one of your team's games if you have someone video them, or use the whiteboard to discuss things about your shape or how your formation may interact with different formations. In these settings, it is really important to make the session as interactive as possible since it is easy for the players to lose focus. Ask lots of questions, provide each player or groups of players with specific things to look for or analyze. Allow them to present what they see back to the team. The beauty of soccer is that the players are the decision makers, this is a great way to encourage and develop that trait.

## Appendix G

### 1v1 Defending

Individual defending is one of the areas of the game that is most neglected by coaches. This is disappointing because it has such a huge impact on a team and can be vastly improved by a few simple techniques.

#### Approach

The first part of individual defending occurs while the ball is still en route to the attacker. The defender must approach the player as fast as they can to limit the time that the attacker has upon receiving the ball. Further, the defender must curve their run in order to make it clear which way the attacker is going to have to go. This allows the rest of the defending team to begin adjusting their positions as early as possible.

As the attacker is about to receive the ball, the defender must slow down so that they are under control if the attacker tries to beat them with the first touch. The defender must now find the quickest and best time/way to get into the defensive position.

#### Defensive Position

For our purposes, defensive position is the location and body position the defender needs to occupy when pressing the ball. The defender should be fully sideways on and close enough (laterally) to reach the far shoulder of the attacker with one hand. The defender should be as far back from attacker as they can be, while ensuring that the attacker has to cut square or backwards to go behind them. Learning to point the toe of the front foot forwards can help the defender gain several inches in body position. The weight should be mostly on the foot nearest the attacker/ball so that the defender is ready to step with the furthest foot back towards their own goal.

Knees should be bent and eyes on the ball. Arms should be in a good balance position, but low by the defenders sides.

#### Jockeying

The defender should step with the furthest foot first when moving backwards in order to keep the feet far enough apart to stay balanced and ready. The defender should move laterally to stop the attacker going behind them or too far in front and so as to stay in the defensive position. The defender must not over react to small movements or fakes by the attacker.

#### Separating the attacker from the ball

With the defender in good defensive position, the attacker has only two ways to get past the defender. They can run in front of the defender or behind the defender. There are limitless ways that the ball can get past the defender (moves, passes, etc.) but only those two ways that the attacker can.

If the attacker tries to run in front of the defender, the defender must step with the foot furthest from the attacker along the path that the attacker is going to run. In the case of the attacker trying to dribble past the defender, this is in the direction of the ball. At the same time, the defender must stick out his arm on the side of the attacker. The defender must continue to run along the path (towards the ball) with both arms out. The defender should now have possession of the ball with the attacker behind him.

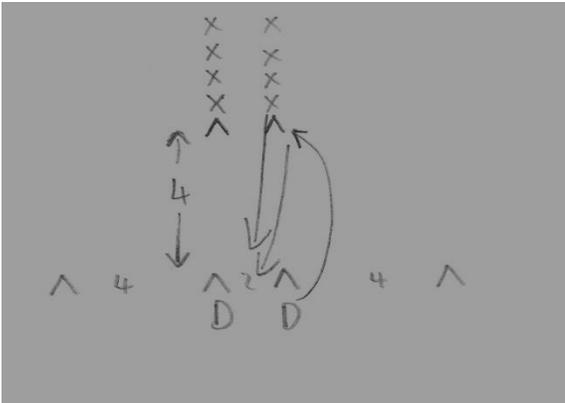
It is important that the defender steps and then sprints along the path to the ball and looks at the ball otherwise a foul is likely to be called. The defender is NOT trying to stop the attacker from getting to the ball. That is a foul. The defender is merely running towards the ball on the line that the attacker was going to take.

If the attacker tries to run behind the defender, the defender steps towards the space the attacker is trying to get to (the ball) with the furthest foot again but this time sticks out the other arm. Again the defender must ensure that he/she is only moving towards the space/ball (not across the run of the attacker) and that he/she moves at full speed.

This should be trained initially from a stationary position and then with an attacker dribbling with the ball (see drills below). The defender should not have his/her arm in front of the attacker initially, as this allows the attacker to prepare how to move/avoid the arm.

## Drills

### Face to Face Face-off



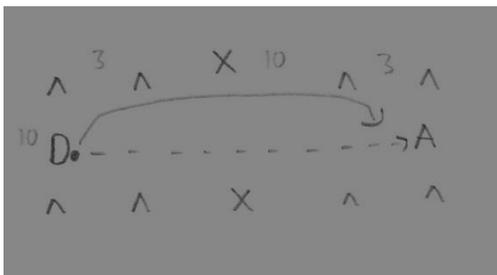
- D sprints to press A and force towards center of drill
- D stops in defensive position
- After D stops, A sprints forward to go through center cones
- D performs defensive footwork to get to ball first
- Repeat with A sprinting behind D to other balls

### Separation drill

1 - D starts in defensive position on A (with ball). A takes 2-5 small slow touches. D jockeys maintaining appropriate position in relation to the ball. A takes big touch past D and explodes to ball, D does footwork to spate A from ball.

2 – As above, but A passes ball to a third player and explodes behind D for 1-2. D performs defensive footwork to prevent attacker getting into space behind her.

### 1 v 1 (+2)



- D passes to A and curves run to press
- A scores by getting ball under control into D's end zone
- D scores by getting ball into A's end zone
- A+D can use X's but only have 1 touch
- Basically D has to defend against dribble or 1-2

## Appendix H

### Juggling Program

Juggling is one of the easiest ways for a player to improve on their touch. It requires only a little space, no equipment (except a ball), and no extra help. Players who spend just 10 minutes a day juggling will see very quick improvements. As such, we encourage our players to do as much juggling as possible and we have a recognition program for those players that buy in to practicing and achieve milestones.

Initially it is a good idea to allow the player to use the thigh as well as the feet as this allows for a faster a progression, and therefore a quicker reward for the work, however, for our testing purposes player must use their foot only.

Players will be recognized on the website and periodically on Facebook as they achieve new milestones. Players may test in front of a coach before or after practice and only get 2 attempts in any day. Only scores achieved under these conditions will count.

Acknowledgments will be for the following milestones

10 – U8 and U9 only

25

50

100

250

1000

Active record holder – active player with the highest score

All-time record holder – active or former player with highest score ever

## Appendix I

### Conditioning

Conditioning is hugely important in soccer. A player must decide whether and how hard to run based on tactical factors, not how much energy they have. A player who is just trying to find the energy to get to the ball doesn't have the ability to think through what they will do with it once they get there, never mind have the fine motor control to execute the pass, turn, or shoot.

However, and this is a really big however, that does not mean that a significant portion of training should be turned over to conditioning. This brings us back to the concept of efficiency discussed in Appendix D. At CenCal Cosmos, we will never take time in training to do exercises that are purely conditioning except as a consequence. On the other hand, there are countless soccer drills that include a significant amount of conditioning as well as conditioning drills that can be modified to include a ball.

Below are some suggestions for conditioning activities.

#### 1v1 Ladder

Put two cone goals 20 yards part to make a small field. Repeat this moving down the field every 10 yards or so to create a ladder of 1v1 fields without sidelines. Player 1 starts with the ball at his goal. He passes to player 2 (at the other goal) and runs to defend. The players compete to score on their opponent's goal. There are no out of bounds and goals can be scored on either side of the goal. Players are not allowed to goal tend. Play restarts with a pass from the goal scorer (as above) after every goal. Play for 45 sec.-1 min. Winner moves up a rung and loser moves down.

#### 1v1 to a Ball

As above, but with less set up. Players are in pairs with a ball each. 1 ball is the goal ball and the other is the game ball. Player 1 passes the game ball in any direction. Once the ball comes to a complete stop, the players sprint to the game ball and play 1v1 to score by kicking the ball against the goal ball. Play then restarts as above. Each round should last 45 sec.-1min.

#### Zigzag Soccer

Cones are set up in two mirror image zigzags about 20 yards from a goal. The inside cones the zigzag on one side should be 2 yards from those on the other. The distance between the cones within the zigzag can be 5-15 yards and don't have to be uniform. Each zigzag should be exactly the same as the other, though. A player should stand by each cone, with the teams designated by which zigzag they are part of. When the coach says go, the two players nearest the goal run around the zigzag (outside the cones and past their own players) till they can tag the last player in their zigzag line. That player runs and tags the next and so on down the line. The players remain at the cone of the player they just tagged. The two players nearest the front run through the cone gate (where the original players were standing) and play 1v1 to score on the goal (the coach has already served a ball). The coach or a player may be the goalkeeper. Once a player scores, the goalkeeper has the ball, or it has gone out of bounds, the players run around their team to tag the last player again.

## Appendix J

### Testing program

- errors

### Body Position Passing Test (# in 45s)

Player receives ball from Coach, passes to himself past cone and then back to coach

- not sideways on
- not 2 touches
- not inside of foot
- not to coach in square
- not around cones



### Outside foot passing test (# in 45s)

Player receives ball from Coach, passes to himself past cone and then back to coach

- not to square
- not 2 touches
- not outside of foot
- not to coach in square
- not around cones



### 1 touch laces test (# in 45s)

Player receives ball from coach, passes back 1 touch with laces

- not 1 touch
- not laces
- not to coach in square
- not on ground



### Heading Test (# out of 10)

Coach throws gentle pass for player to head back.

- not forehead
- not sideways on
- not hitting the ball
- not to coach in air (with 1 step)



### Juggling Test

Player has 3 attempts to juggle. Only feet count, but all surfaces may be used.

- not 1 touch
- not laces
- not to coach in square
- not on ground

### Side foot Volley Test (# out of 10)

Coach throws gentle pass for player to side foot volley back

- not inside of foot
- not to coach in air (with 1 step)



### Laces Volley Test (# out of 10)

Coach throws gentle pass for player to side foot volley back

- not laces of foot
- not to coach in air (with 1 step)



### Aerial Cushion Test (# out of 10)

Coach throws looped ball (about twice players height) player cushions and plays back

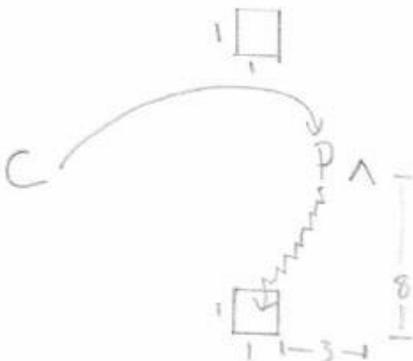
- wrong surface
- controlled outside of square
- not to coach in square



### Aerial Trap Test (# in 45s)

Coach throws looped ball (about twice players height), player traps and dribbles to square

- wrong surface
- dribbled to wrong square
- not stopped in square



## Appendix K

### Skill Acquisition

There has been an awful lot of research recently into the mechanism of skill acquisition. We would recommend that all coaches and parents read 'Bounce' by Matthew Syed and 'The Talent Code' by Daniel Coyle. These books give a great overview of how people develop skill and the environment, coaching, motivation, and practice that is required to become an expert in anything.

### Practice

It has been discovered that on average it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in any complex discipline (music, chess, sport, etc.). However, the sheer volume is not enough. Deep or purposeful practice must occur for a player to really improve at a dramatic rate. This kind of practice is the kind that requires complete focus of the conscious part of the brain. The type that is challenging to the extent that the player has to commit all of his/her focuses to the task at hand.

This type of practice is a learned skill all of its own, however, the time spent on this will have innumerable payoffs in the future. In the section on Culture, we addressed teaching the team and players how to train. This incorporates teaching them how to do purposeful practice. The vast majority of players are not comfortable training this way, so like in most other things, it is a habit that we must build; by repetition, by demanding it, and by making the alternatives less comfortable.

What kind of practice is purposeful practice? It is practice on the very edge of what the player is capable of, it includes making mistakes, analyzing the mistakes and making adjustments to be more successful. Obviously, with different ages and levels of kids, this means very different things. There are some key mechanisms that we can use to create these characteristics though.

The first is to make sure that the player knows that the coach is watching at all times. If a player feels like they are not being evaluated by the coach, they tend to slack off, go to autopilot, and stop focusing their entire conscious mind. Design drills that have a manageable number of players doing the same things in the same area so that one coach can feasibly see them all at the same time. Position yourself to be able to see all of the players at the same time. Single out players for correction, congratulations, or to demand more effort. Make the kids 'know' that you will catch them when their effort slips, but also when their effort is exemplary.

As players become more accomplished at a task, you can use various methods to keep the intensity in their training. You can use time, by requiring them to do x number of successful things in a specific time. Give specific guidance of what counts as a successful attempt (i.e. the header must be caught by the server etc.) and call out players that you see counting unsuccessful attempts (calling out just means letting them know that you saw what they did, a verbal berating is far from necessary). You can use competition, by having the players play a game involving the skill against another teammate or team of teammates. Again, you must be the arbiter of correct technique, always. Finally, you may make the exercise more challenging by using a smaller ball, a smaller target, add more defenders, make the space smaller, use only certain surfaces, etc.

Additionally, we must give the players feedback as much as possible to improve their performance. In technical drills, this can be pretty much constant by providing players with little pieces ("toe down", "lock your ankle", "do it quicker") that do not require stopping the practice or even the player. In more complex drills that become less technical and more tactical, we need to make sure that we don't "over coach". This means trying to coach too many things. If you ask

a player to focus on ten things they will end up ignoring them all. By narrowing it down to 2 or 3 until those are set, and then adding a couple more you allow the player to learn naturally.

Over coaching does not necessarily mean stopping the drill too often. If you are making one point, and the player continues to make that same mistake, you **MUST** continue to correct it. Allowing them to do it wrong sometimes just increases the length of time that the old habit will remain. A drill should move from more stoppages to less as the players grasp the info that you are trying to pass on. Once the drill is working smoothly, then you can determine whether to add another coaching point and start making more stoppages. You **MUST** continue to correct when a player makes the original mistake though.

## **Motivation**

As we have players enter our club at U8, they will already have variable levels of skill and athleticism. The bigger, faster, stronger, and more technically able kids will stand out initially, but who will end up being the best player when they leave our club at 18? Typically, this will be the most motivated. The most motivated player will train more, and crucially, train deeper.

The level of motivation that a player has upon entering the club will vary from player to player. What we have to recognize is that, just like skill, this is something that we can affect. As a good coach, we can increase the internal motivation of our players. This does not mean that we start each practice with a rousing battle speech (think Braveheart), it means that we are conscious of what we say, do, and how we structure our training and club to provide motivational triggers.

The first is how and when we interact with the players. Our job as coaches, in its simplest form, is to reward good behaviors and punish bad ones. Neither reward nor punishment need to be excessive, but they should be immediate. Many coaches therefore reward success or being good. The problem is that being good at a specific technique or skill is not a behavior in itself, and does not lead to the player being good at other techniques or skills. In fact, a player who is rewarded for being a good passer with their right foot (or good at doing the scissors) is less likely to try and use their left foot (or do the cruyff) because they may not get rewarded for that as they are not as good.

The key factor to reward is effort. A player that tries really hard to pass with their right foot correctly, and is rewarded for the effort regardless of the outcome, is more likely to seek opportunities to pass with their left, knowing that as long as they try hard they will get praise. If the player is continually rewarded for this effort, then trying hard will become a habit. Clearly, a player that tries hard, that practices purposefully, is then one that will learn quickest, especially in an environment where the coach is providing the best technical information.

There are other, subconscious, motivational triggers that we can employ as coaches such as bigger, more obvious rewards for sustained commitment and effort. These should be incorporated in conversation or otherwise demonstrated to players. Prime examples are the opportunities to make a higher team (or train with an older one), to be nominated or make PDP or ODP, or to play in college or professionally. Some of these can be overt references, but often are better if they appear subconsciously such as referring to, or showing video of local players who have achieved things in college and beyond, or using terms like college-effort or professional effort, etc. Sometimes it is a very small, chance encounter that fires up a player internally to put the extra work in. A trip to watch and meet a college team, or a professional player coming to practice may be all that it takes for any particular player.