Youth Academy Philosophy – U8 to U11

At CenCal Cosmos our primary goals are all long term. We plan fiscally to ensure long term sustainability, we create mentoring and professional development situations for the long term development of our coaching staff and most of all we focus on the long term development of our players.

A key component of our commitment to this long-term development is our academy-style U8, U9, U10 and U11 program. This document is designed to explain how the Youth Academy system works and its benefits.

Design

In our Youth Academy all players of the same age and gender train together twice a week. Initially, the Club and one of our Youth Academy Directors are responsible for planning and implementing the training session. The head and assistant coaches of each team act as additional coaches to ensure a significant amount of 1 on 1 contact, support and instruction throughout the session.

The team coach may hold additional practices on free weekends and is primarily responsible for pre-game sessions and game time coaching. The YAD's and the Director of Coaching will continue to oversee these events periodically.

Towards the end of the season the team coach takes over more of the session design as teams begin to focus towards their own team goals.

Tryouts and rosters

The rosters of multiple teams in the same age group are somewhat fluid, in order to ensure that the players' development is most effectively served by the group that they are with for games. In practice, this means that team rosters are typically not set following tryouts, but instead after the coaching staff have had a reasonable period of time to work with and evaluate the group of players (2-3 weeks). Additionally this initial grouping of the players will be reevaluated periodically to ensure that the players continue to be grouped in a way that most effectively promotes development. Rosters are usually reevaluated after spring season and before fall season. Typically, the grouping will consist of creating as small a talent diversity within the group as possible, although there are other factors that are also considered. At this age there are 3 main areas that determine a players overall soccer ability; technical, physical, and maturity. All three of these factors are considered in choosing the best team to place the child on to gain the maximal development.

It is important to note that players commit to the academy, and not to any specific team or coach. This is important as they may not be placed with that team/coach or may be moved to another team during the year if it is deemed to be in that player's best interests.

We do not cut players from the academy as it is our belief that a player's ability at 7 is not a reliable indicator of their ability at 18 given quality training. However, we also do not want to put players into a situation where they cannot be successful in games, since developing a love of the game is perhaps the biggest goal at this age.

Additionally, we will continue to invite new players to training and onto our teams throughout the year. A player who misses tryouts should not be deprived of the chance to develop with quality training for a whole year. Once the rosters of all teams are full, new players will be admitted to the program on a training only basis (no registration fee) until there are sufficient new players to add an additional team. This event may include a reorganization of the rosters.

Benefits

Training

 A coach working with a group of 10, 8 or 9 year olds spends 90% of his/her time keeping the group focused and ensuring that the drill is performed effectively. This leaves very little time for individual attention. However, that same coach would spend about the same percentage of time working with a group of 30. In this way, we now have 4-5 other coaches who can focus on providing as much 1 on 1 attention as possible.

Within the session, players may be grouped according to ability in any particular drill. This allows those players that need extra time to master a skill or technique to be given the support that they need, while those that need to be challenged by greater speed or difficulty are served equally. For example, athleticism is perhaps the biggest determining factor in the effectiveness of a player at younger age groups. Sometimes very technical, but less athletic, kids are not able to compete on a first team but in our system are still able to be pushed by those kids in the training environment.

In addition, with the sessions designed by someone other than the coach of the team, we can ensure that the long term, technical, tactical and physical development of the player is the primary driver of the sessions. This is in contrast to the conventional system where practice planning is driven by wins and losses and being more effective in the next game, and can lead to areas of the game being neglected. Our curriculum is designed to develop the complete player and thus it is paramount that we keep an eye on the big picture in developing our sessions. Many of the technical habits that we are developing in our players will not show their real worth until the player is significantly older, but can be taught much more easily and effectively at the younger ages.

Game play

As players develop at different rates, in all three aspects mentioned above, it is not always appropriate for a player to remain with the same group for the entire year. Specifically speaking, a player develops more slowly if he/she is above or below the majority of their teammates.

A player who is more advanced than their teammates tends to overemphasize dribbling and does not develop in the areas of passing and positional discipline.   A player who is less advanced than his/her teammates tends to pass the ball too quickly at the expense of dribbling and in the worst case scenario doesn't want the ball at all.

Additionally players may become comfortable and accustomed to just playing a specific role with one group of players and therefore moving that player to another group can open up new parts of the game for them.

Responsibilities and Reporting

Senior Youth Academy Director

Providing practice plan to YADs and coaches ahead of the session
Determining cancellation and change of time/location and communicating to individual coaches and YADS
Overseeing and implementing testing
Communicating to parent group any changes in rosters or direction in training etc.

Youth Academy Director

Helping coach choose appropriate tournaments
Overseeing some games and warm ups to ensure quality control
Helping coach provide additional activities (indoor, futsal etc)
Mentoring coach with practice and game coaching, organization of games and activities and dealing with parents.

Coach

Planning practice as required by YAD

Coaching players individually, in groups and as a whole during sessions

Planning and coaching warmups and games

Organizing and coaching additional activities (indoor, futsal etc.) with manager

Communicating any info on practice changes to manager

Scheduling games and tournaments with manager and YAD

Communicating with parents regarding player performance and team direction (with YAD)