

St. Bartholomew Soccer Coaches' Manual

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WELCOME to another year of St. Bartholomew's Youth Soccer Program and thank you for volunteering your time and energies to help this program. The success of this program is due to the efforts of its coaching and support staff and we thank you for your help.

INTRODUCTION

THE ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S YOUTH SOCCER PROGRAM IS AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEAGUE. There are no league standings or championship. Our aim is to present a soccer program for children that will entertain and instruct in a healthy environment that is free from the pressures that a more competitive schedule may present. There are 18 teams and over 100 coaches support staff. Each team practice once a week (Monday through Friday) for one hour.

The games are held on Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, and Sunday afternoon. The first game begins at 8:00 am and each following game begins on the following hour. Coaches should make every effort to begin and end the games on time. This means coaches should have their teams at the field and ready to play. If it is raining or the field is not in a playable condition the Needham Soccer Club will have an update on their website. Canceled games will not be made up, but coaches may try to get together and have a game on their practice night.

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GAME POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Coaching technique and game strategy are the coaches' decisions. There are, however, some guidelines that coaches must follow.

1. Keep you team informed. You must call each member and notify them of changes or cancellations.
2. Never leave a practice or game until all the children have been picked up.
3. If there is a serious injury have someone call the parent or guardian or the alternate phone number. Do not leave the child unattended. Coaches should keep application forms with them at every practice and every game. **A courtesy phone call to one board member is required for any serious injury.**
4. Never argue on the field. If an opposing coach asks for your assistance or an opinion, offer it, but never argue on the field or in front of the players. If necessary, contact a director to help solve the problem.
5. Each child **will** play a minimum of two periods unless they are physically unable, or specifically ask not to play.
6. The coaches of the last game on Saturday will undress the field. i.e., remove the nets, the cones marking the corners, collect the game balls and put the nets at the end of the field against the building.
7. At the end of the game there is the traditional handshake.
8. One coach from each team is allowed on the field during a game to give instruction to the players. The coaches should be careful not to run into the players or interfere with a play.

GUIDELINES FOR REFEREES

Coaches on the field during play (one per team) are also acting as a referee. Therefore, all coaches should review these guidelines.

SAFETY FIRST

1. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT YOU DO is to blow the whistle and stop the game if a child is injured or appears to be injured. Blow the whistle, have all the children sit down on the field and let the coaches attend to the injured child. DO NOT start the game again until the injured child is off the field and the coaches are ready.
2. If the children pack too closely around the ball so that it looks like someone might get hurt, blow the whistle and have a drop kick.
3. If the goalie should drop to the ground to cover the ball, **blow the whistle & stop play**. Do not let the children try to kick the ball out of the goalie's hands.
4. Starting the game:
 - a. Be on time.
 - b. Get the game ball from one of the coaches.
 - c. Stand in the middle of the field and wait until coaches are ready.
 - d. Flip a coin or simply choose a team to kick-off, then alternate at the start of each quarter.
5. Ending the game:
 - a. End the game on the hour. Do not let the game run late.
 - b. Recover the ball at the end of the game and give it back to the coach.
6. Game rules
 - a. One coach is allowed on the field.
 - b. Play four quarters. Do not change sides of the field.
 - c. End the game on the hour, even if it means a 10 minute 4th quarter.
 - d. There is free substitution.
 - e. Call tripping and charging.
 - f. No sliding tackles.

MODIFIED PLAYING RULES

1. Size 4 ball
2. Equal number of players on each side of the field, 6 vs 6 or 7 vs 7
3. Teams should be separated by age and ability – be sensitive toward your players and be flexible.
4. Teams should always be co-ed.

5. Footwear: sneakers or rubber cleated soccer shoes
6. Shin-guards must be worn at practice as well as all games **NO GUARDS – NO PLAY**
7. Only one coach from each team is allowed on the playing field during the game. All other coaches must remain on the sidelines. The coaches on the field should be the only people using the whistles.
8. All games start on the hour. Each game should be divided into 4 fifteen minute quarters. If the game starts late the first quarter should be reduced to ten.
9. There is no half time so oranges should be controlled by a sideline coach. They should be rationed throughout the game.
10. The start of play:
 - a. Ball must be kicked at half field. Initial kicker may not kick the ball a second time until it has been played or touched by a second player.
 - b. There shall be not off-sides.
 - c. There are no penalty kicks to be taken during these games.
 - d. A throw-in restarts the game after the ball has gone out of bounds. A second throw in must be allowed if the player commits a foul on the initial attempt. The coach should explain the proper method before allowing the player to rethrow.
 - e. Goal kicks restart the game after the ball has passed the boundaries at either end of the field on an attempt on goal. It must be last touched by an attacker. The goal kick may be taken from any point inside the goal area.
 - f. Corner kicks restart the game after the ball crossed the end boundaries when last touched by a defender.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S SOCCER 6 vs 6 (or 7 vs 7)

WHY 6 vs 6 (or 7 vs 7) SOCCER?

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

Soccer experts agree the 6 vs 6 soccer is far more beneficial in developing technical ability (dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.) for young players than 11 vs 11. Players in 6 vs 6 matches have many more “touches of the ball than players in 11 vs 11 matches.

COMPETITION

Each team will be involved in two simultaneous 6 vs 6 (or 7 vs 7) games. Coaches will divide their teams each Saturday or Sunday into two groups according to ability. Stronger players will play against stronger players, and less experienced players will play against the opposing team's less experienced players. This organization should provide confidence and enthusiasm, especially for inexperienced players.

LOGISTICAL

The popularity of St. Bart's Soccer has swelled many teams to 24 – 25 players. Coaches will find it much easier to provide equal playing time for players in two simultaneous 6 vs 6 (or 7 vs 7) games (two groups of 12) as opposed to dividing 11 positions among 24 – 25 players.

RULES OF 6 vs 6 (or 7 vs 7)

1. Only one (1) coach from each team on the field!
 2. One of the six (or seven) players must be a goalkeeper.
 3. Each team must be split into two equal groups for 6 vs 6 (or 7 vs 7) games. For example, if your team has 20 players present for your games, you must split into two groups of 10 players for the 6 vs 6 (or 7 vs 7) games.
 4. **All players must get EQUAL playing time!**
- 8:00 AM SATURDAY AND 2:00PM SUNDAY COACHES arrive early enough to set up nets! 3:00 PM SATURDAY AND 5:00 PM COACHES take down nets and put them at the end of the field against the building.

Youth Soccer Tips

Characteristics of U-6 Children

- Little or no concern for team activities
- Physical and psychological development of boys and girls quite similar.
- Eye hand and/or eye foot coordination most primitive.
- Love to run and jump.
- Prefer large soft balls and Nerf balls.
- Catching skills not developed.
- Can balance on good foot.
- NO SENSE OF PACE (GO FLAT OUT)*

* This refers to their racing about in games until complete exhaustion sets in, at which point they stop, breathe, then restart at torrid pace again.

Characteristics of U-8 Children

- Attention span beyond U-6 but still not extended.
- Inclined more toward group activities.
- Still in motion.
- Beginning to develop physical coordination (most can ride a two wheeler at this point).
- Still into running, jumping, climbing and rolling.
- More into the real balls through imitation of the big guys (Sports heroes are becoming important).
- STILL LACK SENSE OF PACE (GO FLAT OUT).

USYSA Recommendations

- Opposing parents/coaches and players should shake hands after each game.
- Do not record league standings.
- Do not record final scores.
- Participation awards for all – no trophies or awards just best team.
- Parents/Coaches, non-playing players, parents and spectators should be located not less than six (6) yards from outside the touchline nor should they be closer than 20 yards to the goal line. No individual should be allowed to run the length of the field except participants of the game.
- Parents/coaches should not coach or instruct players during game time.

An Approach to the Game for U-6 through U-10 Players

Many of our coaching role models have become bigger celebrities than their players because of their antics during the games. Throwing chairs on a basketball court, tossing towels in the air, or punching players coming off the field are emotional acts that catch the eye of the television producers and ultimately the viewing audience, e.g., you, the coach.

Obviously, these are not the kind of models we want youth coaches in America to emulate. But you know and I know ... unfortunately, those types are out there. Are players and their performance directly or indirectly affected by the behavior of the coach? You can bet they are. Consider for the moment the impression we make on a bunch of little children coming to play a sport they may never have played before, and we open up on them with a barrage of do's and don'ts regarding their conduct. Don't get me wrong, we need a sense of order in our training sessions, so setting a reasonable tone at the outset is a good idea. However, you can accomplish knowing the players and establishing standards in a very reasonable manner. Let's be perfectly clear at this juncture. Children enjoy soccer because it gives them the opportunity to kick a ball. Using this as our basic assumption, it is imperative that we use the *ball* as an integral part of our communication. Short verbal blips followed by chances for them to touch the ball and move about will get satisfactory results. They'll have fun and you'll maintain your sanity.

An erroneous assumption about youth soccer in America is that all children come into it with an enormous zeal to become great players. In many instances nothing could be further from the truth. Honestly, the overwhelming majority of the six and seven year olds play soccer in this country because their Mothers make that decision for them. So, given the developmental characteristics mentioned in Chapter 1 and some of the general premises upon which we as coaches are confronted with the very young player, let's examine some specifics:

1. They really would like to have fun playing soccer.
2. The basis of their enjoyment is derived from touching the ball.
3. Organize sessions that allow for minimal discussion and tons of opportunities for players to touch the ball.
4. Short training sessions are far more beneficial than long extended periods. (Training a young player longer will not necessarily make him better. It may even burn him out early.)
5. Small sided games are still the best means of spending time with them.
6. Play small sided games with uneven numbers 3 versus 2, 4 versus 3, etc.
7. Keep things are very simple. Do not get into tactics. You will regret it. They are not mentally mature enough to comprehend and perform.
8. Emphasize the positive. Do stop a session to point out difficulties, but also be sure to stop training and glorify a particularly good performance by a player. Mix it up.
9. Try to get into the session yourself. Have some fun.
10. Be sure to create situations where they must do most of the thinking. Set it up, step back, and observe. Let them sort it out.

The fundamental difference between kicking and passing is *thinking*. The fundamental difference between drills and activities is *thinking*. If you agree with the previous two statements, then surely you'll buy the premise that soccer is a player's game and our training should give the players as many opportunities to both *play* and *think* as possible. As coaches of very young children we are not strapped by the urgency or intensity of winning. We really have a chance to do something about developing individuals. Also enjoy this wonderful uncontrived freedom.

Coaching Without Playing Experience

One major problem that typically faces the volunteer coach of today is the lack of an extensive playing background. Most beginning coaches feel that the absence of this experience is a severe handicap. They often feel inadequate to handle the job at hand. This lack of playing experience *is* a liability when related to the coaching of highly competitive, mature players. In relation to young players (U-10, U-8, U-6), however, a playing background is not a necessity. The philosophy of this manual calls for patient, interested, fun-loving people who have time to spend assisting the overall development of youngsters.

A key to being a successful (and I *don't* mean winning) youth soccer coach is to draw upon your experience. If you grew up playing sports of any kind, you possess some knowledge of good and bad coaching techniques.

DON'T

1. Become frustrated.
2. Yell and intimidate.
3. Be afraid to adjust your training activities if the children aren't enjoying them.

DO:

1. Keep players active with a ball.
2. Vary the activities based on attention span.
3. Enjoy yourself.
4. Spread positive reinforcement to all players, not just the stars.

Use the general education you've received from school and life to help develop your player's minds, bodies, values, etc. Don't place yourself above these boys and girls or you'll never be approached for assistance. Be organized, but be aware of the problem related to over-organization, (i.e., boredom).

Follow general human nature concepts related to dealing with the attitudes and habits of your players. We must understand that every child has needs. These become apparent over a period of time in practice. The needs range from attention to the development of self-confidence. They include love, discipline, the desire to improve,

friendship, etc. Try to determine each child's need, and then attempt to fill at least part of it. Your discipline problems will be greatly reduced as these needs are taken care of.

The area of child-rearing sheds a lot of light on proper youth coaching. Many of the general techniques used in guiding children into adulthood can be used successfully. *Use* what worked for you in this area. *Lose* what didn't work.

To get the most out of your soccer experience, utilize all of your assets. The characteristics that make you a success in relationships in business or with people are all useful.

If you're going to put some time into the development of young soccer players, you're going to have to put some time into developing yourself. You'll have to gain insight into teaching methods, dealing with children, coaching development, etc. The following are some suggestions.

1. Attend Coaching Clinics. Learn from coaches who know how to teach. Take part in the coaching courses that your State Association offers, (F.E.D. licenses). Attend other coaching clinics that occur in your area as well. There is no better learning experience than this. You learn to develop skills, to improve fitness, to organize and handle players, and how to teach tactical aspects to various age groups.
2. Read Soccer books, the more opinions & methods you come across, the better off you'll be.
3. Watch higher levels of play. Go see the best college games in your area. View U-19, and High School soccer. If there is a professional team in your area, take your players, the better they will be able to learn what you teach.
4. Ask and take the advice of experienced coaches in your area. Realize that we don't teach 19 year olds the same as 16 year olds but there are similar principles.

We've talked about some of the areas that you need to improve yourself in as a coach. Now, let's talk about some of the methods that will help improve your players over the years. It's very easy to let time go by and not accomplish our maximum in most areas of life. Related to player development, here are some suggestions to insure that your players are always moving forward.

Set goals for your players. All of us tend to stagnate unless we pursue both short and long term goals. Assist your players in setting soccer development goals. This idea will help them become better soccer players as well as more responsible people. Young players should be given specific, attainable goals (e.g., Billy, I'd like to see you win the ball five times today; Susan, I'd like to see you get 3 shots on goal today, etc.). As the initiator of these goals, you must know when they have been achieved and when to go on to other goals. Keep track of the goals you have established in written form and update them regularly. The goals you set for players should fall somewhere in the range between

attainable and challenging. Be careful to match the difficulty of the goal to the ability of the individual. Also be sure to give important feedback to small and large achievers alike.

Tactics for the Developmental Player

This is a very brief chapter because there is not a great deal to say about tactics for the developmental player. Often we are asked, by the newly appointed coach, for a system of play for his U-6 year-old team. The system of play that we give is to simply say, "Allow them to play." The often heard response to that is, "But you don't understand coach. I want them to play a good systematic game of soccer." Well, quite frankly, the bottom line is . . . they simply can't.

As technique refers to the player and his ability to accommodate and/or control the ball, tactics involves the player's technical abilities, the confrontation of the opposition and his means of placing the ball to other players on his team to successfully achieve the objective of scoring goals and winning games. The developmental level player (a player of age 6, 7, 8, 9) usually cares little about anything that has to do with many of the players on his team, let alone those of the other team. Further, he spends most of his time chasing the ball so that when he finally does get it he is not terribly happy about giving it up. Tactics are looked upon as a player's conceptualization of the game. It is only after a young player has the physical and technical control at hand that he can perceive and implement these thoughts toward the objectives of the game. Imagine for a moment the U-8 or U-7 player working as hard as he can to get the ball in a soccer game on Saturday morning. Having gotten the ball, he begins to dribble it as quickly as he can. On the sidelines his coach and/or family or friends are imploring him to "pass it, pass it, pass it." I happen to think there are probably three rather good reasons why he doesn't. The first reason is that technically he is unable to dribble the ball at a fast speed, keep his eyes up and find one of his teammates to which to give the ball. Secondly, due to his physical development (or lack thereof), and his mental concentration on his dribbling, he is so affixed to the ball he can't pass it. But the third consideration is the one I think is the major reason why he doesn't pass. At this age of his physiological development, he knows overtly or intuitively that if he passes it he won't get it back.

Tactics for the developmental level player are very stifling because they interfere with his freedom of learning to participate in the game. If there is too much intrusion into his anticipation in the game at the early ages, by the time he is of the age where he could enjoy the tactical implications, he will have burned out. To that end, those coaches dealing with very young players who feel desperately in need of a system, please understand a system implemented too early can stifle and discourage as many players as it might win games. Systems of play for very young players can best be called "Agricultural Soccer" since they dictate that players be "planted" rather than playing

At the young age the system is known as beehive, bunch of bananas, grapes or whatever you want to call it, so long as they are running freely and touching, touching, touching the ball. We do not strap them with tactics, we do not involve their mind to such an extent that they lose out on the sheer joy of touching the ball and playing the game.

If tactics is an imperative with some of our coaches, it is well for them not to deal with the developmental level player. Those coaches should consider working with the advanced U-14, U-16, U-19 players.

We can accommodate tactics at this level by throwing the ball in the middle of six players and saying, “you two play against those four.” However, to stop it, analyze it, describe it or dissect it are all means of boring young players. We can’t allow ourselves to become hung up with tactics. Too much, too soon is informational overload, and this will burn them out too early.

A second area of concern is giving praise. Too much can be as harmful as none at all. At times we tend to overdo the building up of superior players and give nothing to the less developed ones. Players who constantly hear “good shot, great move, etc. may lose the motivation to continue the hard training on their own, which is needed to become complete players. If they receive too much reinforcement they might not have the need to reach their full potential. Ration praise. It can help; it can hurt.

Finally and this may be the most important concept to grasp, as a novice coach: **We improve at what we practice.** This is not a profound statement but is a fact. Therefore let’s all accept that the game itself is the best teacher of all. When we rehearse the game, in a fun-filled environment, we will improve. Honest! If you have any doubts about being an effective coach, let them play, you will in fact develop many players. Consider the children that grow up in countries without a coach until the age of twelve, typically. They play in groups of 4, 6, 10, etc., in backyards, on beaches and any place near their home. They make their own rules and play until they fall over. This is where the love of the game begins. As they approach maturity, they have all the tolls they need to go on to higher levels of play. In the backstreets these young players don’t learn about positions, restarts, and systems. They learn about dribbling, shooting, passing and Fun! Give these children the game, and you will be a fine coach.

Your Philosophy

You must have a clear cut idea of what you want to achieve as a coach. This need is basically your personal philosophy of coaching. You must decide what’s important and then use your attributes to achieve these goals. Consider ideas like:

1. Winning vs. losing
2. Teaching the skills, even though you are likely to lose games to teams that rely on playing physically. The skilled players will be better in the long run.
3. Total development vs. single position improvement.
4. Relation of parents and spectators to players, referees and opponents.
5. Playing Soccer vs “Kick and Run”.
6. Development of all players on your team.

These ideas and many more will be part of your personal philosophy. As you form these ideas you must have the ability to communicate them to everyone involved with your team (players and parents alike). One way to achieve this is to call for a team meeting prior to the commencement of your season. Invite your children and parents to a cook-out, and at some point of the evening sit everyone down and explain how they can help you achieve the maximum benefits for their children. Ask their help in areas like:

1. Not yelling at players.
2. Not applauding bad habits (i.e. constant long kicking).
3. Not yelling at the referees or opponents.
4. De-emphasizing winning/losing.

If you can get to these people early and explain what you need to give their children the best possible experience, they will help you. Give it a try!