

# VAA Community Soccer

## Coaches Manual



1. Welcome
2. VAA Vision and Mission Statement – Why are we here?
3. New coach checklist
4. So you're a coach! Now what?
  - a. 2 weeks before the season
  - b. 1 week before the season
  - c. parent meeting
  - d. during the season
  - e. end of season
5. How to structure the season.
6. How to structure a practice.
  - a. What to plan.
  - b. What to bring.
  - c. What to do.
  - d. Mid-season practices.
7. How to structure a game plan.
  - a. What to plan.
  - b. What to bring.
  - c. What to do.
  - d. How to watch a game.
8. Techniques vs. Tactics.
9. Age Group Curriculum, Characteristics and Expectations.
10. When things go wrong.
  - a. How to handle an uncooperative child.
  - b. How to handle an uncooperative adult.
11. References.
12. Glossary.

## Welcome!

There are many soccer coaching manuals available in print or on the Internet. However, most of these are oriented toward travel, or more structured programs, with many practice sessions and often fixed player positions. There is very little material specifically intended for soccer coaches in a recreational program.

Recreational programs typically have fewer practices, try to have the players experience different field positions, and emphasize fun and skill improvement over winning.

This manual was created for the coaches and players in the Valley Athletic Association Community Soccer program of Apple Valley, MN. This material is freely distributed and is property of the Valley Athletic Association. You may use or link to this manual free of charge, but please do not alter it. Please send any suggested changes to [bc@bjb.org](mailto:bc@bjb.org).

The VAA Recreational Soccer program cannot exist without our volunteer coaches, directors, commissioner and staff. We sincerely appreciate everyone's help in making our program fun and educational for the players.

This manual can also be found online at <http://www.bjb.org/soccer/coachinfo/>.

## **VAA Vision and Mission Statement – Why are we here?**

### **VAA Mission Statement**

The purpose of the VAA is to benefit the youth of our community by providing means for their athletic and social development through organized sports. As such, it is our goal to recognize the importance of all individuals and to conduct our programs in a manner that provides the opportunity for the development of all participants.

from the vaasoccer.com website:

Our goal is to provide a fun and positive learning experience for all our soccer players and a positive experience for everyone involved in the program.

What this all means, very simply, is that we're all here to have fun, get some exercise, have the kids enjoy soccer, learn a few skills, and to HAVE FUN! The coach sets the tone and example for the team. Coaches should refrain from negative talk to players, referees, parents or other coaches. If you keep a positive attitude, things tend to go well.

Some players, parents and coaches are looking for a more stringent competitive atmosphere that we do not provide. There are many other groups that offer that kind of experience.

## New Coach checklist

X	To Do	Notes
	Attend Coaches meeting	
	Attend Coaches clinic	
	Receive equipment bag and roster	
	Contact coaching partner	
	Contact parents	Introduce yourself. Provide: dates and times of first 3 meetings, your contact information, remind them to bring water, bring a soccer ball, dress for the weather, wear shin guards. We provide shirt and socks.
	Email	Get parents' email addresses. Send a welcome email.
	Plan the first practice	
	Plan the parent meeting	Remind all about sideline conduct. Kindness/encouragement towards players, refs, coaches.
	Create handouts for parents/players	Include: roster, practice/game schedule, snack schedule, contact information, any other soccer information
	Plan the second practice	
	Have the parent meeting	Include the elements discussed below.
	Plan subsequent games and practices	
	Enjoy the season!	
	Have and end of season "event".	Can be as simple as going to DQ.
	Return equipment	

## So you're a coach! Now what?

Congratulations! You're a coach! Whether you are an experienced, returning coach, or a first-timer, we greatly appreciate your involvement. This is a volunteer program and we cannot offer a safe and rewarding soccer experience without your help.

There are numerous rewards to coaching youth sports including:

- Having fun
- Getting exercise
- Improving (or learning) soccer skills
- Getting to know your child's peers and gaining familiarity with that age group
- Being a positive influence to children

Countdown to the season.

Two weeks to go.

About two weeks before the season starts, we have our outdoor coaches' clinic and meeting. There you will receive information about coaching, soccer rules and the season, including this guide. You will also receive your equipment bag (balls, shirts, socks, goalkeeper shirts) and the team roster. You will likely meet your assistant coach. If they are not at the meeting, it is a good idea to contact them by phone at your earliest convenience.

After the meeting, coaches are welcome to stay for a short "soccer 101" and Q&A session.

The outdoor Coaches' Clinic provides hands-on (feet-on?) information and practice in training your players and running practices. It is optional but recommended for all coaches.

Over the next week you should make contact with all the parents of the players. When you speak with them you should introduce yourself and provide team and meeting information:

- Field location
- Date and time of the first 2 or 3 team practices/games
- Soccer equipment - shin guards are mandatory, cleats are recommended
- Additional equipment – each player should bring a ball to practices, dress for the weather, bring water
- Your contact information

It is also a good idea to get an email address for each parent and put together an e-mailing list. It is a great way to keep the team updated during the season. You should send a welcome email reiterating the information you provided by phone.

Now you can begin to plan the first practice. Use the information in section 4 of this manual, and the sample drills and practice plans listed in the references.

One week to go.

By now you should have made contact with all team member's parents and may even have your first two practice plans completed. If not, don't panic, there's still a week to go. Communication is important, so please be sure you get in touch with your team parents if you have not done so. As discussed in section 4, a well planned practice goes smoother, keeps the players involved and is far easier to run, so put the final touches on that practice plan this week.

It is also time to decide what you will discuss at the parent meeting and prepare handouts. Examples of information to include in the handouts:

- Team roster with contact information
- Practice and game schedule
- Snack/treat schedule
- General information about the program and your coaching philosophy
- A general statement of behavioral expectations (i.e. have fun, treat everyone with respect, no booing, no negative talk/actions towards refs, coaches or players, applaud all good effort, coaching only from the coaches, etc.)
- VAA Players Code of Behavior and Parents' Code of Ethics (these do not need to be signed and returned, but can be handed out for reference)
- Any information on soccer rules or appreciation

Parent meeting.

The parent meeting is the time give information about yourself and the season to the parents. It is best to do this as early in the season as you can, typically at the first practice. The parent meeting can be done before or after practice.

Before practice, your players might be a bit fidgety, but you'll likely have everyone's attention. Additionally, the before-practice meeting can cut into your practice time. Conversely, after practice, players may be tired and some parents may need to leave quickly to pick up other children or to get on with their day or evening.

Each coach will develop his or her own preference and order. For example, one can start the first practice by handing out uniforms, then briefly reviewing the handouts (emphasizing proper behavior at events) and allowing a short time for questions. Let the parents know that you are available for questions.

Ask the parents to inform you of any medical concerns. It is not your job to treat any medical conditions, but it is important that you are aware.

Emphasize the fun and community aspects of VAA soccer! Remind the parents that they should not be talking to the referees, unless they want to thank them after the game!

During the season.

Bring your practice or game plan to each meeting. Be prepared to deviate from the plan if needed, but it's helpful to have it there. When you are prepared and appear to know what you are doing, things will go smoothly and the players will respond.

While it is not your job to take care of everything for the team, it can be helpful to have some extra items such as an extra pair of shin guards, goalkeeper gloves, extra water and extra soccer balls.

As you observe your team in action, you will learn their strengths and weaknesses. That will help you to structure mid-season practices.

Teamwork is critical in soccer and you should emphasize this. Congratulate the players when they work together. Correct them when they do not.

Be careful to not "over coach". Players need to learn decision making skills, which becomes more difficult if every move and touch is dictated by the coach. Give the players many opportunities to touch the ball. See if they can figure out the solutions to challenges that occur on the field. It is said that "the game is the greatest teacher".

End of the season.

The end of the season always comes too quickly! It seems that just when the players have gelled and are acting like a team, just when they are able to execute the play you've planned and practiced, the season is over.

Hopefully each player has learned something about soccer and teamwork, and has gotten a little better in each. Hopefully new friends were made.

Most teams end their season with a loss. Even with the two-bracket system employed in most of the age groups, there are still only 2 teams who will win their final game. Regardless of the outcome, this is still a time to celebrate. It is especially fun to have a small "ceremony" in which each player can be called up, recognized and applauded. Many teams go out for ice cream or have some kind of similar activity to end their season. Some even have parties on a separate day.

However you choose to end your season, try to keep it fun. Even a winless team has other kinds of “victories” whether it is some successful passing, a number of shots on goal, or successful defensive play.

Great Idea... a parents vs. kids game. Whether you do this during the season or to end a season, a parent vs. kids game can be fun and educational. It is amazing how well a group of parents, many of whom have never played soccer, can play. Primary reasons for this are strength, vision, and an understanding of teamwork. In fact, even a very inexperienced parents team can handle most rec teams. However, it is also amazing how excited the kids get about this game. Even a team that is struggling with teamwork can quickly learn from the way the adults play. I have seen teams really come together after a mid-season parent vs. kids game. This is also a fun way to end a season. And yes, the kids always win!

## **How to Structure a Season.**

In a typical VAA soccer season there are approximately 6-7 practices and 8 games. For 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up, this is followed by a playoff tournament.

There are 2 or 3 practices before the first game, followed by 2 or 3 games. After this, practices and games alternate for the rest of the regular season (this is variable and depends on the number of teams in the age group). The High School division (8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade co-ed) follows a different pattern with 4 practices at the beginning of the season followed by approximately 8 games or scrimmages and the playoff tournament.

There are many ways to structure a season and it is beyond the scope of this manual to cover them all. A couple of examples are covered.

Whichever method is used, it is important to teach, drill and review basic soccer concepts. Players at all levels need many touches and repetitions with the basic skills.

One method is situational. The practices are based on the basic situations the team will face in a game. At the simplest level, these are offense (when we have the ball), transition to offense (as we get the ball from the other team), defense (when the other team has the ball), and transition to defense (as the other team gets the ball from us). Players, especially younger players, seem to have an easier time understanding basic, rather than complex, offensive and defensive concepts. Some say that it is more difficult to create (attack) than to destroy (defend). I think it is perhaps more natural for younger players to try to possess the ball and score than to prevent possession and scoring. The first practice can focus on basic dribbling and passing and the use these skills in a game situation. The next practice can introduce 1v1 defense. Subsequent practices can alternate with offensive and defensive concepts with each practice beginning with individual concepts and building to game situations as outlined in the next section.

The basic idea here is to build from 1v1 up to 4v4 drills and small-sided games. A specific skill or situation is emphasized in each drill. For instance, practices on basic passing and receiving lead to practices on more accurate and faster passing and receiving including passing to the teammate's correct foot, leading a teammate and knowing when to pass.

As the team moves from basic drills to small 3v3 or 4v4 games in practice, the game should emphasize the skills and levels previously practiced. Players should be able to do a skill in both a controlled drill and a free-form 3v3 game. Your small-sided games don't have to be actual "games" with goals, but may be a game of controlled keep-away or have other modified rules for "scoring" (such as completing a set number of consecutive passes, maintaining possession for a given period of time, or moving the ball to a specific area on the field).

The two transition phases are typically the most difficult for teams. They provide both the most opportunity for teaching and scoring, and the most difficulty and danger!

Another method for structuring the season is positional. Here practices are based on the positions players may play on and responsibilities when the ball is in various parts of the field. For instance, after two or three practices spent on basic offensive and defensive principles, subsequent sessions are based on play in sections of the field. The field is split into zones and the practice is designed around the key skills for that area. A simple way to do this is to divide the field into thirds: defending, mid and attacking thirds.

Start with the defending third. In this area of the field, your motto should be “safety first”. A mistake in the defending third can lead to a score by the other team. Rough play in this area can lead to a scoring opportunity from a free kick or a penalty kick. Players need to know where their teammates are, and it is important to account for every attacker. The ball should quickly be played wide or long and kept away from the center area in front of the goal. Opposing players should be denied a clear shot on goal. Players should do what they can to protect the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper should be taught to focus, scan the field, and direct defensive players.

In the middle third, assertive possession is the key. In the younger age groups, there tends to be many loose balls in midfield. A team that can control the middle third usually controls the game. Teams can take controlled risks in this area but should not turn the ball over. More advanced teams can work on moving the ball from one side of the field to the other, called “switching fields”. Pass receiving skills are very important in this area of the field. Players at all ages should be taught to “cushion” the ball as it comes to them to quickly control it, and then move the ball away from defensive pressure. Other key skills in this area are shielding (protecting the ball), passing away from pressure, knowing when to pass, and penetrating into the attacking third.

In the attacking third, teams should be encouraged to take chances, especially to create a scoring opportunity. Creative play can confuse a defense. Key skills in this area include speed, accurate passing to the correct foot of a teammate, decision making, and 1v1 play. Since defenses want to control the area in front of the goal, there can be openings to bring the ball up the side and execute a crossing pass “into the box” (the penalty area). Younger teams should be encouraged to attack with at least 2 players and try their 1v1 skills. They should be taught when to hold the ball, when to shoot and when to pass. Older teams should use speed and timing to control the ball down the side and execute a crossing pass to multiple players “crashing the box” (onsides, of course!). In general, a player in the attacking third should look first to shoot, then pass, then dribble. If a shot is available, the player should shoot! If there is no clear shot, pass to a teammate. If there is not an available teammate, then dribble. The team should move the ball quickly to create openings and angles.

While offsides play is not to be encouraged (it does turn the ball over to the other team), it is a sign of assertive play and often shows that the team is on the right track

(provided they understand the offsides rule... repeated offsides violations needs to be corrected).

## How to Structure a Practice.

### Preparation

Well run practices start with a plan. If you have put together a set of activities with a common theme, the key aspects of the lesson are more likely to stick with the players. Teachers typically use lesson plans, and so should coaches.

This doesn't mean that you are anchored to that plan. It can certainly be modified, or ignored as appropriate, such as when a drill doesn't work as intended or less players show up than expected.

Here are some general guidelines:

- Most running should be done with a ball
- Less talking, more doing
- Minimal waiting in lines (unless the activity is intense or the players are already tired). Soccer is an active game and players should become accustomed to constant motion.
- Rule of 3 – most things in soccer come in 3's: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> attacker or defender, 3 thirds of the field, etc. Most skills and concepts can be broken into 3 component parts.
- Maximize touches on the ball
- Soccer is an athletic game. Have the players be in a ready stance while on the field or in a drill. This means on the balls of the feet rather than flat-footed.
- Activities that eliminate players usually eliminate the weaker players who need more work/touches. Instead of having an eliminated player sit out, have them practice a skill, like juggling, or have them join in the activity in some other way.
- Be flexible. If a drill is not going well or is too easy or hard, change it or move on.
- Emphasize the positive and give praise.
- Make corrections when something is wrong to prevent bad habits.
- Keep it simple.
- Have fun and be positive. It's contagious!

We typically only have about six practices in a season. Therefore, it is difficult to devote a practice to only a single skill, such as trapping. A practice should be devoted to a broader topic or set of skills such as Offense, Defense, or Passing. Most coaching manuals on the Internet or taught in classes are more oriented to a travel program with more practices and fixed positions.

Be sure you've brought your equipment bag with extra balls, cones, small air pump and pin, extra water (optional), a small first aid kit, a whistle (optional), and of course, your practice plan!

A good practice starts with activities using one ball per player, then one ball per two players, etc., all the way up to a full scrimmage. We want players to get as many touches on the ball, and as many attempts at a new skill, as possible.

New skills and concepts are best taught early in the practice, before players are overly tired.

Here is a general guideline for a practice structure:

- Warm-Up – with the ball. This can be any kind of dribbling, juggling or short, controlled passing. The purpose is simply to get the blood flowing, practice ball awareness, and hopefully get the players focused on soccer. There can be some teaching, such as demonstrating juggling or dribbling technique, foot/ankle/knee position, keeping head up, etc.
- Initial skill(s). The ideas for today’s practice are briefly introduced. Most players won’t want to hear too much about how and why you chose these activities. If this is a mid-season practice, you can relate the activity to what happened in a previous game. Try to break the concept down into a skill that can be practiced with 1 or 2 players per ball.
- Small sided activities. While keeping the theme of the practice in place, move to 3 to 4 players per ball. These activities should start with very light or shadow pressure (a shadow player follows the ball carrier or pass recipient, is always there, like a shadow, but does not try to take the ball), and move to greater pressure as makes sense. Players must get comfortable with basic concepts before full defense is applied.
- Small sided game-like simulations. Now move to 1 ball per 5 to 6 players and simulate game situations. If the emphasis is on offense, then play 5v1 or 4v2. Or if the emphasis is on defense, use the opposite. Here is when you can repeat a situation, such as executing a throw-in so the defense doesn’t get it, or transitioning the ball from D to O.
- Optional full team scrimmage. Once the players have built some confidence in the day’s activities, have a 6v6 scrimmage (or 7v5 or whatever makes sense). You can modify the rules to emphasize the lesson. For instance, if the team needs to pass more, create a rule that there must be 3 or 4 passes before a goal can be scored. If more players need to be involved in the offense, require 3 or 4 different people to touch the ball before a goal can be scored. During this time, make corrections and reset the play. The players should listen for your whistle, or if you call “freeze”, so you can give a quick correction and restart the play.
- Optional two team scrimmage. If time remains, play a scrimmage with the other team at the field (if available). Make it a teaching game, emphasizing the lesson of the day.

For example, a basic 3&4 or 5-7 practice to work on better ball handling and passing:

- Warm-Up – fast dribbling in a small square (10x10 or 15x15 depending on number of players). Work on quick moves such as cuts to change direction (ball is on left foot, swivel hips to left and strike ball with the laces of the right foot to move the ball to the left), stopping the ball with the sole of the foot, step-overs, magic hop (hop with left leg and stop ball with sole of the right foot), pull-backs,

- etc. The area should be small to force players to change direction and play with heads up. You can add another dribbling drill or two if desired.
- Accurate passing – each player gets a partner, with 1 ball for each pair of players. Players must move around the outside of a 10x10 or 15x15 square (can be made smaller, smaller = more difficult) passing with their partner with each pass going through the square. Coaches should play very light defense to keep the drill moving. Emphasize accurate passing with good form (knee and ankle bent and locked, heel down/toe up, strike with inside surface of foot). The ball should lead the partner so only he/she can get it and not the “defense” (this may mean a pass to the inside or outside foot depending on the situation). The receiver must trap the ball appropriately, with the correct foot or leg surface, and control the ball before passing back. Specify the number of touches as appropriate.
  - 3 player drill – 4 groups with 1 ball for each group of 3 players. 1 and 2 are next to each other and 1 has the ball, 3 is about 10 yds away. 1 passes to 3 and then runs behind 3. 3 receives and quickly passes to 2 and then runs behind 2. 2 receives and quickly passes to 1 and then runs behind 1. etc.
  - triangle – 4 groups with 1 ball for each group of 3 players. 3 players spread out in a triangle and pass the ball while moving, pretending there is a defender.
  - Triangle + 1 – as above, but add a defender to each triangle. If the defender can steal the ball, they trade places with the last player to touch the ball. (3 groups with 1 ball per 4 players)
  - 4v2 or 3v3 keep away – 2 groups 1 ball per 6 players. Play keep away. Award 1 point when a team can complete 3 consecutive passes. Change teams as needed to keep things even.
  - 7v5 scrimmage – play 7 offense vs. 5 defense (or 4 D and a goalkeeper). Play regular game rules except the defense scores by passing the ball through either of 2 small goals, 1 on each side of the field near mid-field (encourages the defense to play the ball wide). Switch players around. Point out good off-ball movement and show players how to be open.
  - Penalty Shots – it is a great idea to end a practice with penalty shots. The players are tired which makes it more realistic.

The Core Drill. This is basically like the 7v5 scrimmage described above. This basic scrimmage pattern can be used to teach or emphasize just about any skills. If the offense needs more help, play 8v4 or 9v3 (opposite if more D is needed). You can place any kind of restriction on the players based on the practice plan such as:

- 3 passes before a shot
- 3 different players must touch the ball before a shot
- must complete a pass to a player outside one of the touchlines before a shot
- must execute a give-and-go or some other technique before a shot

Mid-Season practices. Your mid-season practices can be based on your observations from games. For instance, if the team doesn't seem to have the knack of passing in games you can have a passing practice. However, it is better to have a plan for the season which can be slightly modified to give more focus to an area of team need.

Communication is often something teams need to work on. You can modify drills to focus on communication by having players “call” their passes, and wave or point to indicate where they would like to receive a pass. You can use the Core Drill and set up a situation the team needs to work on such as transition from defense to offense, or clearing the ball away from the goal (on D).

These are only some examples. A full set of drills and sample practice plans can be found at a number of the sites listed in the reference section including <http://www.bjb.org/soccer/coachinfo/>.

## **How to structure a game plan.**

### Preparation.

Just like for practices, it is important to have a plan for game day. It's not easy to be mobbed by 12 or 14 players all calling out their field position preferences in unison!

One of the goals in community soccer is to give a good soccer experience by having players play a variety of positions. You can ensure this by planning the lineup before you get to the field. You can even plan the substitution rotation. With that all set, you can then concentrate on watching the game. Any players that are off the field should be told what position they will be playing. They can then focus on the action in that area of the field and think about what they will do when they are in.

If you have 2 coaches, it is a good idea for one coach to be with the players waiting to be subbed in to watch the game with them and help them notice things. The other coach focuses on the game itself.

Lineup/formation templates are available on many web pages. Some can also be found at <http://www.bjb.org/soccer/coachinfo/>.

### What to bring.

In addition to your equipment bag with extra soccer balls, and of course your game plan, you can bring: cones, a small air pump and pin, a first aid kit, extra shin guards (optional), goalkeeper gloves (optional... some players will have their own), extra water (optional), some kind of paper and pen or small board and dry erase markers (optional... can be useful for explaining concepts to players).

### Before the game.

Have your players arrive at least 20 min before game time. First, it is difficult to use your game plan if some of the players have not arrived by the game start time. It also allows time for the team to have a good warm up.

The first thing players will want to do when they arrive at the field is to take shots on goal. This is not a good idea for cold muscles. Also, as players move in and out of the goal area retrieving balls, someone is likely to get hit. As players arrive, have them begin by dribbling in a confined area. This can progress to moving and passing, then finally to shooting. If the team has a favorite drill, this is a good time to use it.

One strategy is to use the same drills as the pre-game warm-up every game. This helps to create a routine. After doing this for a few games, the players might even start this routine on their own, without your direction!

Please do not allow your goalkeeper to warm up by receiving random shots from the field players. There is the potential for injury, and many of the shots will be unlike game conditions. In addition, the pre-game warm up should build the goalkeeper's confidence.

Have one of the coaches or another player take the goalkeeper to the side. Begin by tossing light ground balls for an easy save. Then move the ball around, keeping it on the ground. Remind the goalkeeper of the basics: eye on the ball, athletic stance (on the balls of the feet), scoop the ball with both hands and gather it into the body, have one or both feet behind the ball, do not step backwards, etc. Gradually move to tossed balls at chest level and finally a few overhead.

During the Game.

Many things are happening during the game. Your primary job is to be there for your players. Keep things calm on the sideline. Cheer for your team. Cheer for the other team. Set a good example.

At the same time, watch how the game is progressing. What are your players doing? What is the other team doing? How is your team reacting? Are they trying what you taught them in practice? Are there any particular things they should be doing? Is there a situation in this game that would translate well to a drill for next practice? Take notes.

Keep the mid-game instruction to a minimum. Sometimes you can call to a player who is out of position or not involved in the action with a positive correction. However, for the most part the players can't really hear you well and direction in the midst of play can be confusing. Save the corrections for the players who are out of the game or for your halftime talk.

At halftime, have the team get water, or snack if one is provided, and gather them together to talk. Point out what both they and the other team are doing well. Discuss small corrections to improve aspects of their play. Sometimes specific advice is needed, for instance that the right forward needs to make a centering pass earlier or a reminder of a drill they did last practice. Other times, the team needs more general direction such as being first to a loose ball.

At the end of the game, gather the team together once more. Congratulate them on the game. Try to think of at least one specific compliment you can provide. Try to refrain from heaping too much praise on the star players and take the opportunity to give a positive comment to the weaker players. Remind parents and players of the next game or practice and then send them on their way.

## **Technique vs. Tactics**

Simply stated, technique refers to what you do and how, and tactics are the when and why. More accurately, technique encompasses the individual and group skills players should learn and demonstrate throughout the season. Tactics is the execution of those skills in game or game-like situations.

Practices can be technical, tactical, or, more typically, a combination. A combination practice should start with technical skills and then move to the tactical application of those skills. Because of the limited number of practices in a recreational season, combination practices will typically be the best choice. A tactical practice might be appropriate for a more advanced team near the end of the season.

Examples of combination practices are given above in How to Structure a Practice.

## Age Group Curriculum, Characteristics and Expectations

### Kindergarten

- Some kids will lack basic coordination
- Keep it very simple and very fun
- “Swarm” soccer
- Need to engage the quiet ones
- Parents must stay at games and practices
- Get your video camera because it doesn’t get any cuter than this!

Pre-Season may be able to:	Should be able to learn:	May be able to handle:
Simultaneously walk and chew gum	Run and dribble	“heads up” dribble, dribbling with both feet
Pay attention	Pay attention	Pay attention
Basic short pass	Controlled short pass	Short pass leading a teammate
Understand that sharing the ball is a good thing.	By the end of the season, some players will move away from the pack.	Dribble out of trouble and dribble past someone.

From Pill’s Drills, <http://www.eteamz.com/soccer/pills/u-6.htm>:

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF U - 6 PLAYERS

- Short attention span.
- Can attend to only one problem at a time.
- May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- May or may not understand or remember: what lines mean on the field; what team they are on; what goal they are going for. We need to be patient and laugh with them as they get 'lost' on the field.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often. Give "hints", don't criticize.
- Need generous praise and to play without pressure. No extrinsic rewards (trophies, medals, etc.) should be given for winning.
- Prefer "parallel play" (Will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates. Thus, a 3 against 3 game is, in reality, a 1 against 5 game because they all want the ball at the same time.
- Very individually oriented (me, mine, my).
- Constantly in motion, but, with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly.
- Development for boys and girls are quite similar.
- Physical coordination limited. Eye - hand and eye - foot coordination is not developed. Need to explore qualities of a rolling ball.
- Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc.
- Catching or throwing skills not developed.

- Can balance on their "good" foot.

**THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT**

- Most players cry immediately when something is hurt. Some cry even when something is not hurt.
- No matter how loud we shout, or how much we "practice" it, they cannot or will not pass the ball.
- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field in need of a toilet.
- The only player to hold a position is the goalkeeper (if you play with one). Don't even consider teaching positional play.
- Twenty seconds after the start of a game, every player will be within 5 yards of the ball.
- Several players will slap at the ball with their hands, or pick it up. Several parents will yell at them to not do that.
- A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get 99% of the player's attention. By all means, stop whatever you are doing and go watch for a couple of minutes!
- During a season, you will end up tying at least 40 - 50 shoelaces.
- They will do something that is absolutely hysterical. Make sure that you laugh!

**Girls 1-2**

- Some want the ball; some aren't sure if they want to be there.
- Great variation in physical skills, endurance and assertiveness.

**Boys 1-2**

- Lots of energy but not much direction
- Some understand team concepts but many just want the ball

<b>Pre-Season may be able to:</b>	<b>Should be able to learn:</b>	<b>May be able to handle:</b>
Pay attention	Start to act like a team	Dribble with all sides of both feet
"heads up" dribble	Beginning shielding, a few dribbling moves	Dribble out of trouble
Passing or other basic techniques	Proper technique for passing, shooting, and other basics	Dribble past someone
		Soft first touch

From Pill's Drills, <http://www.eteamz.com/soccer/pills/u-8.htm>:

**CHARACTERISTICS OF U - 8 PLAYERS**

- Attention span is a bit longer than U-6 players but still not at a "competitive" stage
- Inclined towards small group activities.
- Always in motion: scratching; blinking; jerking; rocking....

- Easily bruised psychologically. They will remember negative comments for a long time. Shout praise. Give "hints".
- They want everybody to like them.
- Developing physical confidence. (Most are able to ride a two-wheeler.)
- Starting to imitate older players or sports heroes. Want the same "gear" as them.
- Lack sense of pace. They go flat out until they drop.
- Skeletal system growing rapidly. Often results in apparent lack of coordination.
- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed. Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. Make sure that they get adequate water breaks.
- Limited understanding with personal evaluation. "If they try hard, they performed well" regardless of the actual performance. Thus, they need to be encouraged constantly, and asked, "Now, can you do this?"
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play, and remembering what goal they are going for... but, in the heat of battle, they will sometimes still forget. They still find it difficult to really be aware of more than one thing at a time.

#### **THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT**

- There will be at least 200-300 falls during the season, but now they will usually pick themselves back up.
- The puddle in front of the goal is still too tempting to resist.
- Keep a spare pump in your bag, as the players usually do not realize that their ball is flat until they try to kick it, or the coach tells them that it is flat.
- Some of the girls are a lot tougher than the boys.
- They will still want to wear a pinnie, even when the color is identical to their shirt.
- It will be impossible to remember who is whose best friend as you try to make up teams.
- They will wear their uniform to bed.

### **Girls 3-4**

- Great age group.
- Half the team will try to play seriously and half the team will be "enjoying nature"

### **Boys 3-4**

- A great age group!
- Very coachable
- Understand basic team and individual concepts
- Love "trick" plays
- Starting to lose goal keepers (less want to play or try that position)
- Boundless energy

Pre-Season may be able	Should be able to learn:	May be able to handle:
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<b>to:</b>		
Pay attention and act like a team	Pay attention and act like a team	Basic attacking and defending ideas. 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> attacker, 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> defender. Introduce team shape, attacking with support, team defense.
Dribble with all sides of both feet, dribble out of trouble, dribble past someone, shielding	Dribble with all sides of both feet, dribble out of trouble, dribble past someone, shielding	Heading
Soft first touch	Receiving the ball with multiple parts of the body	Receiving the ball with all parts of the body
Understand basic 1v1 concepts	Understand 1v1 and 2v1 concepts	Introduce 2v2 concepts
Correct passing and shooting technique	Passing with inside and outside of both feet, shooting with both feet (laces)	

From Pill's Drills, <http://www.eteamz.com/soccer/pills/u-10.htm>:

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF U - 10 PLAYERS:**

- Gross and small motor skills becoming more refined and reliable. Boys and girls begin to develop separately.
- Ability to stay on task is lengthened. They have the ability to sequence thought and actions.
- Greater diversity in playing ability and physical maturity.
- Skills are emerging. Becoming more predictable and recognizable.
- Some children begin moving from concrete thinking to abstract thinking.
- Able to pace themselves, to plan ahead.
- Increased self-responsibility. They remember to bring their own equipment.
- Starting to recognize basic tactical concepts, but not exactly sure why certain decisions are better.
- Repetition of technique is very important, but it must be dynamic, not static.
- Continued positive reinforcement needed.
- Explanations must be brief, concise, and mention "why".
- Becoming more "serious". Openly, intensively competitive, without intention of fouling.
- Still mostly intrinsically motivated. Peer pressure starting to be a factor.
- Adult outside of the family may take on added significance.
- More inclined towards wanting to play instead of being told to play. Will initiate play more.

## THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT

Some coaches say that the 9 and 10 year-old players are beginning to "turn the corner" and starting to look like real soccer players. However, games are still frantically paced and unpredictable for the most part. These players are starting to find out how much fun it is to play the game skillfully, but they will still stop and laugh if the referee gets hit in the backside with the ball during a game. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They start to understand offsides, but still forget themselves when the goal is in front of them.
- They will really beat up on each other during practice... especially boy's teams.
- During a game, the parents will scream out "HAND BALL" or "COME ON REF, CALL IT BOTH WAYS" at least fifteen times.
- They might cry after the game if they loose, but will forget it if you ask them if you want to go out for ice cream.
- You might actually catch them practicing on their own without you telling them to do so.
- Their parents are telling them to do one thing during the game, you are telling them another thing, but what they end up doing might be what their friend is telling them to do.
- You will see a pass that is deliberate. You might even see a "back pass".

## Girls 5-7

- The best division!
- Very coachable
- Excellent understanding of teamwork
- Need some "social time" before a game or practice
- Watch out for personality conflicts or cliques

## Boys 5-7

- Coachable, but think they know it all
- Watch for and curb language or potentially inappropriate (immature) behavior

Pre-Season may be able to:	Should be able to learn:	May be able to handle:
Understand and use basic attacking and defending ideas. 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> attacker, 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> defender.	Communication, Basic support, Switching the point of attack, Pressure and Containment. Near and far post runs, crossing passes.	
Dribble with all sides of both feet, dribble out of trouble, dribble past someone, shielding, Heading	Dribbling at speed in traffic.	Offensive and Defensive heading

Receive the ball with all parts of the body	Chipping, Long passes, Receiving the ball away from pressure	Accurate, purposeful long passes
Understand or use basic 2v2 concepts	Understand or use basic 2v2 concepts	Introduction to 3v3 roles and concepts.
Pass with inside and outside of both feet, shoot with both feet (laces)	Stronger and more accurate shooting	

From Pill's Drills, <http://www.eteamz.com/soccer/pills/u-12.htm>:

**CHARACTERISTICS OF U - 12 PLAYERS:**

- They begin to develop the abilities to sustain complex, coordinated skill sequences.
- Some of the players have reached puberty. Girls, in general, arrive earlier than boys.
- Most players are able to think abstractly and are thus able to understand some team concepts that are foundational to the game.
- They are beginning to be able to address hypothetical situations, and to solve problems systematically.
- They are spending more time with friends and less time with their parents. They are susceptible to conformity to peer pressure.
- They are developing a conscience, morality and scale of values.
- Players tend to be highly self-critical. Instruction needs to be enabling. Show them what can be done instead of telling them what not to do.
- Although they are more serious with their play, they are still mainly involved because it is fun.
- They are openly competitive. A few may foul on purpose.
- They are looking towards their role models and heroes in order to know how to act.
- They have a more complex and developed sense of humor.

**THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT**

Some coaches say that the 10 and 12 year-old players have "turned the corner" and are looking like real soccer players. However, games are still frantically paced and a bit unpredictable for the most part. These players know how much fun it is to play the game skillfully. As a result, we begin to see some the players drop out who recognize the importance of skill and become discouraged with their lack of it. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They will yell at their teammates when they make a mistake.
- They will openly question the referee's decisions.
- Players will encourage each other.
- They will pass the ball even when they know that they will not get it back.

- Team cooperation is emerging. They will run to a spot, away from the play, even when they know that they might not get the ball.
- They will point out inconsistencies between what you say and what you do. They are "moral watchdogs".
- The difference in skill levels between the players is very pronounced.
- Some players might be as big as you are, some might be half your size.
- They will get together with their friends and be able to set up and play their own game.

## High School

- Very independent
- Do not want to run drills
- Very social division
- Players have many time conflicts (activities, jobs)

<b>Pre-Season may be able to:</b>	<b>Should be able to learn:</b>	<b>May be able to handle:</b>
Drive to games	Arrange schedule to make games and practices	Showing up to games!

## Goalkeeping

Unfortunately, a season doesn't offer enough time to really focus on the critical skill of goalkeeping, however you should devote some practice time to the basics. Some players will naturally gravitate towards this position. In the K, 1-2 and 3-4 divisions, all players should play at least one-half in goal during the season. Most won't know if they like it until they try.

In 5-7 or HS divisions, most teams will have one or two players who enjoy this position and can switch off.

At all grade levels, there are 3 key areas in which to focus goalkeeping skills:

- Vision – players should learn to visually track the path of the ball so they can anticipate where the ball will be after a shot. This is primarily practiced by playing catch and being in goal. Another way to do this is to stand behind the goal and watch while players shoot on goal.
- Footwork – once one can anticipate the path of the ball, the next key “step” is to get to that spot so the body will be directly in the path of the ball. Sometimes a spectacular diving save is the result of the keeper being out of position!
- Catching – or fingerwork. The keeper should learn to catch the ball in the curved fingers and not in the palm. A simple game of catch is great practice for catching.

These basic skills can be practiced at all age levels.

## **When Things Go Wrong**

### **How to handle an uncooperative child.**

Despite best efforts, sometimes a player exhibits unacceptable behavior. This is not a regular occurrence, but can range from belligerence to tantrums to unruly or potentially violent behavior depending upon the age and situation.

The coach is not expected to be a surrogate parent or a disciplinarian. At the younger age groups, parents should attend all games and practices. This should be made clear at the parent meeting. Coaches can assign a “time out” to a player, but anything more significant should be referred to the parents and/or age group director. This is even true in the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade age group.

At the HS age level, parents will rarely be present and sometimes the players have paid their own registration. Play is typically friendly, but can get more intense as the season progresses. Players understand being “benched” for improper conduct. Any situation needing greater intervention should be referred to the parents and/or age group director.

### **How to handle an uncooperative adult.**

Occasionally an adult becomes unruly at a game or practice. This behavior can be directed at a coach, referee, child or another adult. This might not be malicious, for instance, if a parent feels their child has received unfair treatment on the field.

A situation like this should be dealt with in a respectful manner. The adult should be reminded that children are listening and that everyone at the game needs to act in a sportsmanlike manner, regardless of what is going on at the game.

The coach should use their best judgment in this kind of situation. No one should put himself or herself in danger. If a coach has a recurrent problem with an adult, this should be reported to the age group director.

It is important to have a parent meeting at the beginning of the season as listed previously in this guide. Parents and players need to understand the expectations right at the beginning of the season. One frequently hears stories of unruly adult behavior at children’s sports events and it is in everyone’s best interest to keep this out of VAA sports.

## References

1. <http://www.vaasoccer.com/> the VAA Soccer website
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5. <http://www.footy4kids.co.uk/> an excellent website with drills, practice, ideas, etc.
6. <http://www.soccer-for-parents.com/> another excellent site. Many drills, manuals and lesson plans at <http://www.soccer-for-parents.com/soccer-drill.html>
7. [http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/download/273\\_statewide\\_curriculum\\_u6\\_u12\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/download/273_statewide_curriculum_u6_u12_2_.pdf) - The Massachusetts Youth Soccer Statewide Curriculum
8. <http://www.eteamz.com/soccer/pills/> - Jeff Pill's Drills

## Glossary

Touchline	Sideline of the field
Trap	Stop and control the ball
Goal line	Endline of the field
Goal box	Rectangular area in front of the goal
Penalty area	Larger rectangular area in front of the goal
Penalty mark or spot	The center mark midway between the penalty area and goal box from which penalty shots are taken
Indirect free kick	A kick after a restart that must touch another player (either team) before a goal can be scored.
Direct free kick	A kick after a restart that can be shot directly on goal.
Penalty arc (or “D”)	“D” shaped semi-circle at the top of the penalty area outside of which all players must stand during a penalty kick.
Mark	Cover an opposing player.
“Mark up”	Cover the open player
Goal Kick	A restart by the defense after the offense kicks the ball over the goal line (but not into the goal)
Corner Kick	A restart by the offense after the defense kicks the ball over the goal line (but not into the goal)
Kick Off	A restart in the center of the field after a goal is scored
Throw-In	A restart after the ball goes over one of the (side) touchlines.
Slide Tackle	A tackle (attempt to dislodge the ball from a player) executed by sliding on the ground. A potentially dangerous play, but very effective if executed correctly (and safely).
“Build A Wall”	A defensive play against a free kick taken by the offense near the defender’s goal. Two or more defensive players stand close together, side by side, to make it difficult for the kicker to kick into the goal.
Penalty Kick	A kick after a foul in the penalty area. Only 1 kicker and 1 goalkeeper are allowed in the penalty area for the kick, taken from the penalty spot.

