



AURORA ARSENAL SOCCER CLUB

COACHES CURRICULUM AND GUIDELINES*

- Basic Training Session Format
- Basic Coaching Tools
- Methodologies
- Club Coaching Philosophies
- Team Management

Basic Training Session Format

In general, each practice should have a main theme (e.g., dribbling, passing/receiving, 1st and 2nd defender, etc.) and consist of three to four main steps, each designed to be progressively more challenging than the previous step...easy to hard, no pressure to pressure.

Make sure all the players are involved in each activity. Avoid having them standing in lines for extended periods of time...keep them active. Plan ahead so that the transition between steps is achieved quickly. Avoid lectures and minimize stoppages of play. Visual demonstration of a particular skill is much more effective than a verbal description, especially for the younger ages.

Maximize ball touches/minimize standing around, lectures, and stoppages of play.

I recommend that each player brings their own ball to practice to insure you have enough for everyone should you be working individually on something like dribbling.

Every training session should consist of a warm-up, small group activity or activities, large group activity, and cool down. The length of the training session generally should not exceed

the length of the age group's games. There are exceptions and deviations from this format that are acceptable, but they should be exceptions, not the norm.

Step 1: Warm-up (~1/4-1/3 of the training session)

The warm-up should consist of some technical activity focusing on skills that will be demanded from the players throughout the rest of the training session. For example, a dribbling training session should have players with a ball at their feet dribbling, not passing or heading. The warm-up should be relatively unrestricted with no pressure...lots of movement and ball touches interspersed with stretching. Because of our limited practice time you should incorporate the ball into the warm-up. You can introduce light pressure in the latter stages of the warm-up, which can be in the form of an opponent (e.g., 1v1), restricted space, restricted time, etc.

Steps 2 & 3: Small Group Activities (~1/3-1/2 of the training session)

Steps 2 and 3, the small group activity or activities, should consist of a drill and/or some small-sided games with design, rules, and scoring that help to emphasize the theme for the session. The best activities here look like soccer as much as possible, but still, because of their design, provide multiple repetitions of the desired skill. Step 2 could be a drill in keeping with your theme, but with some light pressure to start. Step 3 should be some sort of small-sided play...close to the real game, but usually with some restriction (e.g., # of touches, only score off the dribble, etc.) and/or incentive (e.g., head goals or volleys = 3 points, 10 passes in a row = 1 point, etc.) and/or alteration (e.g., multiple goals) to encourage and accentuate the practice's main theme.

Step 4: Large Group Activity (~1/4-1/3 of the training session)

The large group activity should consist of a larger-sided game that resembles the real game completely. This is the proverbial "scrimmage" and it is essential to helping the players transfer the skills of the training session into a game-like context. The final numbers here will likely never be 11v11, but the numbers should be larger than the small group activities. Regardless of the amount of time you set aside for this last step, try and let them play for the last 10-15 minutes on their own with no stoppages from you. Stand back and observe and except for praise or encouragement, remain silent. If you absolutely must correct or instruct, do so individually or as play continues or at the end of the session. Too much stoppage can be counter-productive. The players learn by doing. Make sure they end the practice experiencing the joy of just playing. That's what brings them back.

Basic Coaching Tools

Freeze Method

This is the traditional style of stopping play as the mistakes are being made and recreating the 'picture' for all of the players on the field. This tactic should be used sparingly to avoid breaking up the flow of the session. It is the most effective way to teach within your session.

Coaching in the Flow

This is prompting the players with information as they play. It is important to note that you can't use prompts for things that have not already been covered. For example, you can't yell to close the 'gap' if you have never taught the players what the 'gap' is. You also must be careful about when and how often you coach in the flow. Remember to let the players make most of the decisions and to coach them afterwards. Also, keep the information useful. Don't say things like you have to hit the net when you shoot. That is stating the obvious and doesn't help the players to understand the 'how'.

Coaching the Individual

When a mistake is made by an individual that doesn't warrant a 'Freeze' it is good for the head coach or an assistant coach to pull that player aside immediately and address the mistake with just them. Every player on the field should go home after every training session with some 'nugget' of information about their game and this is a great way to provide that.

Coaching at Natural Stoppages

When the play stops, often there is a mistake on the field that occurred. If the mistake is under the theme of your session you might use that natural stoppage in the game to do a little coaching. The flow of the training session is less interrupted as the play was already stopped anyway. Recreating the 'picture' is not as necessary in this scenario.

Jumping In and Playing

There might be situations when the coach can demonstrate something that they couldn't explain well. Jumping in to play should not happen too often and ideally the coach should only be on long enough to paint the picture. While participating as a player the coach should follow common sense about the intensity of their play.

Methodologies

Teach Players How to Train, not Just How to Play!

Not only do we need to teach the game of soccer to the kids, we also need to teach them how to train properly. They need to understand that once training begins there needs to be a level of focus and intensity that resembles that of a game. This concept will be more difficult

(impossible?) to teach with the younger age groups, but the coach will lead the way with this and adjust accordingly. Be prepared, don't spend too much time talking or setting up fields, and keep a fire in your eye.

Coach After the Decision, not Before!

In an attempt to make learning more meaningful and to help our players learn to make better decisions on their own it is important to allow them to make their own decisions in training and in games before we give feedback. Too often I still see coaches telling the player what to do with the ball when they have it instead of letting them decide and then 'COACHING' them after. You are not helping a player's long-term development by constantly telling them what to do...by making all the decisions for them.

Coach the 'Why' along with the 'What'!

Telling a player 'what' to do only means that you know what to do. Explaining to a player 'why' to do something gives them the knowledge they need to not need you the next time the same or similar problems in the game arise. Teach our players what elements in the game are important to know in making the decision they made. For example, you should play a ball over the top of the defense when...their back line has no depth, there is room between the back line and the goalkeeper, the goalkeeper doesn't come off their line, you have a teammate who is making a penetrating run, they are pressuring us high when we play to our forwards' or midfielders' feet, etc.

Connect Training to the Competitions!

Remind the players of the week's training topic(s) before a game and demand that you see improvement in those areas. This will help the players to understand that training has a direct connection to the competitions. It also helps the coach to evaluate the success or lack of success their training sessions are having on the team.

Reach Each Kid at Every Training Session

Every kid on your team who attends training should get the three things from you every single training session...

- 'Hello' - This helps the coach get immediate insight into what 'baggage' the player is bringing to the field. You can tell from the responses you get who you can be hard on and who might need some extra slack.
- 'Correction' - At least one piece of constructive feedback about something they need to do better within the topic of the session. Sometimes we get enamored with our better players when in fact they may need this feedback the most.

- 'Compliment' - No matter how confident someone is they need to hear about something they did well at least once a training session. It might be hard to find something for the weaker players, but there needs to be something! Catch them being good!

Club Coaching Philosophies

The AASC is a recreational club in a recreational league. Because of our limited practice time and relatively limited practice space our primary focus should be on the three "t's"...technique, technique, technique. Of course, tactical issues will arise anytime two players play with, or against, each other, but tactics, particularly at the younger ages, should not be concentrated on at the expense of technique. There's not a player in our club whose skills are where they could or should be. Technique can always be improved upon, no matter how good we are. Technical skill must be the base upon which we build the kids' development.

Soccer, more than most, if not all, team sports, demands independent thought. You will hear phrases/terms like 'speed of play' and 'the game is the best teacher'. Obviously, at the youngest ages or with the most inexperienced players, the coach is required to instruct more, but as players mature we must allow them to make their own decisions on the field and to learn from those decisions. Their ability to continually process all the information that is constantly changing on the field and to quickly decide and act on the proper response (i.e., 'speed of play') will determine their development and progress in the game as much as their technical skill. Those players that have to wait for the coach or their parents to tell them what to do will be lost.

Ultimately, we, as coaches, must provide the proper environment to maximize the players' enjoyment of the game and their ability to learn and improve...it must be fun. Without enjoyment and improvement the kids will not develop a passion for the game and eventually they will stop playing.

Accountability

At the older ages (i.e., U10+), and particularly on Travel teams, we need to start making our players accountable to themselves and their teammates for everything under their control. Be careful not to hold them accountable for something they have little or no control over. For example, you can't hold a 12 year old accountable for being late to training, but you can hold them accountable for their behavior once they get out of the car. Are they already in gear

(changed in the car)? Are they hustling to the field (not strolling to the field like they are on the beach)?

Purposeful Soccer

At the older ages (i.e., U10+), and particularly on Travel teams, it is imperative that coaches demand that all soccer be played with purpose and thought. The intent must be measured and coached over the result. A player who blasts the ball down the field without evaluating the 'elements of the game', but who is successful in springing a teammate through to goal must be coached. A player who tries to make the right play based on the 'elements of the game', but who is unsuccessful in executing the thought should be praised and then coached on execution.

Autonomy

Our players will take ownership of their development and of their team. We will let them figure out how to solve problems on the field without the advice of their coaches. We will let them hold each other accountable for decisions that affect the team. We will give them as much control as they are ready for of their team and the operations of their team.

Responsibility

Each one of our players needs to be encouraged to take responsibility for their level of input into practices and games. Too many times players are allowed to stay in their comfort zones and go through the motions during training sessions and games. These are the players that make the safe play all of the time to avoid making a mistake. These are the players who think a good day is a day when coach doesn't correct me.

The Soccer Parent

The old adage..."I would love to coach a team of orphans!" is both true and dangerous. The reality is you don't coach orphans and their parents are a greater influence on them than you are. If you take the approach of leaving the parent out of the equation of the development of the player you are fooling yourself. The more you communicate with parents and the more you involve them in the process the greater the affect you will have on the individual players. We recommend a preseason parent meeting, regular emails to the parents as a group updating them on the team's progress or summarizing your thoughts on a recent game, and direct communication with individual parents any time you have an issue with their child.

Coach Collaboration

The head coach and the assistant coach should communicate in advance what the plan is for each training session to make sure that they are together in making the session the best it can be. The head coach runs the session and makes most of the coaching points to the group. The assistant coach in that session will do most of the individual coaching.

Team Management

Training Sessions

Be prepared for training. Players are expected to come to training prepared to train hard. They will figure you out if you are not prepared and you are making it up as you go. Take your time in setting up the session so that once you start each activity flows seamlessly. Create a training environment that is game-like.

Players' Appearance

Make sure your players are dressed like soccer players. We recommend that players wear white or light grey shirts. They must wear shin guards, preferably inside their soccer socks (not outside!), and their socks should be pulled up. Soccer balls should be properly inflated at all times.

Commitment Policies/Expectations

Each coach is left to set team rules and policies as they see fit. The role of the club is to make sure the rules of your team are clear, consistent, and measurable.

- **Clear** - Make sure you clearly communicate all of your team rules at the opening parent/player meeting. Put the rules in writing and send the DOC a copy of your rules. Equally important are the consequences of breaking the rules. Make sure everyone is aware of what the consequences are in advance.
- **Consistency** - Make sure you are consistently implementing your rules. Say what you mean and mean what you say. The worst things you can do is set rules and then not enforce them or enforce them only when you feel like it. You are better off with no rules at all.
- **Measurable** - In order to be consistent with your rules they should be measurable. For example, you can't say playing time is affected by practice attendance and then not take accurate attendance at training.