



U9-U10 Volunteer Coaches' Handbook

HOOVER SOCCER CLUB

RECREATIONAL DIRECTOR: PAUL WELCH

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Introduction

The Hoover Soccer Club would like to thank you for volunteering to coach a team with our HSC Rec League Recreational Program. Our entire Recreational Program depends on volunteers, and we are extremely grateful that you are willing to give your time to allow the players to participate and have fun playing and learning this fantastic sport!

Generally, we have two types of volunteer coaches – those who volunteered when they signed their child up to play, and the reluctant volunteers who received the famous soccer club request, which usually goes something like: “Mr. Jones, we have 7 players, including your son, who will not be able to play unless we find a coach. Do you know anyone who might be interested?”. Rest assured, we are not the only soccer club in the United States who find it necessary to make these requests! We realize that not every volunteer coach has experience playing or coaching soccer, but we believe that with a little help, you can do a great job and make a difference in every one of your players’ soccer development. All you need is the willingness, some organization and enthusiasm!

We have put this Coach’s Handbook together to help you in the areas required to develop your players and to help make your coaching experience a positive one. This handbook will cover every facet of coaching a U9 or U10 soccer team, including how to put a practice plan together, technical skills to focus on for players this age and how to handle coaching in a game situation. It will also cover other aspects of coaching in the soccer club environment, such as holding a parent meeting and answering some frequently asked questions.

Coaching a U9-U10 team starts the shift from constant fun games into the realm of actual coaching! **OF COURSE**, we still want to ensure players are having fun, **BUT** it should also be educational. The U9-U10 ages can be crucial for a player’s development, as many of them are getting introduced to techniques and skills in an educational framework for the very first time. These techniques and skills will stick with a player for a very long time, so it is in your players’ best interest to get the proper exposure and coaching. Do your best to make sure that the techniques you are teaching your players are correct! The “Technical Skills” section of this manual will help ensure you are teaching the appropriate skills in the correct manner.

We hope this handbook covers every aspect of being a volunteer coach for the U9-U10 ages in our HSC Rec League Recreational Program. However, if you have any further questions, or any issues arise during the course of the season that you need help dealing with, please do not hesitate to contact our Recreational Director at any time at recreationaldirector@hooversoccerclub.com. We are dedicated to supporting our coaches 100%!



Coaching Guidelines

U9-U10 Coaching Philosophy

The Hoover Soccer Club strives to make every members' soccer experience positive. We are here for the kids, their development as soccer players and for the love of the game.

The Process: The goal at these ages is to begin to introduce more complex soccer skills along with basic tactics, while continuing to keep the game fun for all players. Although this is the first year that teams will compete in an organized, city-wide league, we want to ensure that the focus remains on learning and player development. Please make sure that as a coach, that your daily focus is on this and not on strategies and actions geared towards game results.

Participation: All players, regardless of skill or athletic ability, should be included equally and made to feel that they are an equal part of the team. During games, all players should play at least 50% of the game time, and coaches should do their absolute best to ensure equal playing time for all.

Measuring Success: Do **NOT** try to measure your success based on the results of your games, but by the attitude and demeanor of the players on the field, their learning and understanding of what you are teaching, as well as how many of them return to play soccer the following season. In fact, the Hoover Soccer Club is not concerned with results, and there is no declared winner or standings within the league.

Player Development: While not everyone will participate in the game of soccer at the competitive level, our goal is to expose our recreational players to the basic fundamentals and skills appropriate for this age group. Any player who decides to transition from recreational to competitive after participating in the U9-U10 recreational ages should be familiar with age-appropriate topics, regardless of the competition level.

We recommend that this philosophy, as well as your own personal coaching philosophy, be emphasized to your parents before the season starts. A team meeting before your first practice session will help ensure that your team parents understand the goals for the season as well as the philosophy of the club.

For those who may have coached in the U4-U8 ages, players at the U9-U10 ages are very different. They are more capable of learning soccer specific techniques, both physically and mentally, though they still see the game of soccer as something that should always be **FUN!** Please be sure and note the important differences between these age ranges as you read through this handbook.

Understanding Your Players

One of the most important aspect of coaching any sports team at any age is to understand your players. In order to maximize a player's learning experience and performance, we need to understand the makeup of our players. Why are they playing soccer? What are the physical differences between players? What are their physical boundaries? What are their psychological differences? What are their cognitive limits? Understanding these questions will allow you to set the proper expectations for both players and parents, as well as allow you to more easily deliver a positive soccer experience.

Why a U9 or U10 Child Plays Soccer

There are usually a few reasons why a child plays soccer at these ages. The reasons why a child plays soccer as a U9 or U10 player start to become very different from younger ages. New reasons specific to the U9-U10 player are bolded below:

- Soccer is fun.
- An older sibling plays.
- **They want to be part of a team with friends.**
- **Soccer has become a hobby.**
- **They like the coach.**

Players at this age are looking for more than just fun. They still want to have fun, but it is not the sole reason for enjoying soccer. Players are eager to become part of a team, learn more about the skills involved in soccer, form friendships and build a relationship with the coach. Their soccer experience needs to be more encompassing. A coach needs to challenge the players while still keeping all the fun elements involved!

Psychomotor Characteristics

The physical differences between U7-U8 players and U9-U10 players begin to become more apparent. The following points describe some differences and similarities:

- An ever-growing skeletal system – same as younger ages
- Greater diversity between players in maturity and ability
- Improved coordination in fine motor skills – players should be challenged with more difficult techniques
- Prone to heat loss and related injuries – players should be given longer breaks so they can fully recover

Players at this age are continuing to get stronger physically and are able to perform activities for longer periods of time. However, they are also becoming more prone to injury due to physical strain and heat loss. While breaks can be more infrequent, they should be longer to enable players to sufficiently recover before continuing.

How do you recognize when players need a break? There are a few characteristics you can look for, such as shortness of breath, profuse perspiration, off-task performance (more than usual) and, finally,

player's asking. Recognize the changes in weather and adjust your breaks accordingly. It gets **HOT** in Alabama, even in the fall!

Cognitive Characteristics

Players at the U9-U10 age groups continue to evolve from the younger ages:

- Beginning to understand the concept of team
- Becoming more well-rounded – they have a sense of “me” as well as “team”
- They now can understand the concept of space and time
- They begin to think ahead and have an ability to recall specific information – this allows for limited tactical instruction
- Parents are generally no longer the player's biggest influence

Taking these characteristics and applying them to the game of soccer, there is finally a good relationship to the actual game! Coaches can begin to incorporate more and more soccer specific skills, and even tactics, into practice. A coach's focus begins to move away from just fun based activities. Coaches should increase their focus to the incorporation of soccer specific techniques and tactics through activities and small-sided games.

Psycho-Emotional Characteristics

Players are becoming more intense and serious about playing soccer at these ages. It is no longer the push of the parents that is the biggest influence over their recreational activities. Some characteristics of players at these age groups are:

- They identify with the team.
- They enjoy the company of their friends.
- They will begin to blame others for mistakes!
- Teachers and coaches are becoming more influential, often even more than parents!
- They still need lots of positive reinforcement – same as at younger ages.
- They are hurt very easily with negative comments.
- Players begin to show confidence when problem solving.

As mentioned briefly above, players at these ages can finally begin to play soccer! They should be exposed to more soccer like activities during practice. Instruction given should also become more complex, with simple soccer tactics and advanced technical skills introduced. Begin to include and build competition into your practices in activities and in your small-sided games. For help with what tactics and techniques to teach, please refer to the “Goals as a U9-U10 Recreational Coach” section of the manual.

Goals as a U9-U10 Recreational Coach

The Hoover Soccer Club is striving to create continuity throughout the Recreational program, as well as make sure that all its members have a positive soccer experience. A great way to start this procedure is to make sure that all our players are receiving good coaching on topics that are age appropriate. Below are the areas we have identified as topics that are appropriate to your age groups given the physiological and psychological state of the players:

Technical Coaching Topics

- Ball Mastery
- Dribbling
- Running with the Ball
- Turning
- 1v1 Moves
- Passing & Receiving
- Finishing

Tactical Coaching Topics

- Pressure Defending (1st defender)
- Cover Defending (2nd defender - U10 age group only)
- Role of the First Attacker
- Role of the Second Attacker

NOTE: Heading is prohibited at these ages!

These fundamental techniques have been identified because they are the next step in a player's development. Without mastering these fundamentals, more advanced soccer skills, such as advanced techniques and tactics, cannot be learned properly.

U9 – U10 Practice Coaching

Preparation & Organization

Practice organization is one of the most important attributes of a successful coach. This aspect can make or break a season in the eyes of a player and a parent. A coach's ability to facilitate well planned and fun activities without players standing around is very important at these ages. It reduces the amount of time young players have to misbehave or lose focus.

There are many quality online resources for soccer training sessions, available from both the Hoover Soccer Club and other sources. Our Recreational Director can make these available to you and help you find the type of resources you are looking for. However, if you wish to make adjustments, or would like to take a shot at developing your own practice session(s), follow the suggested progression below to get the best results. As you become more experienced, this aspect of coaching will become easier and easier.

Session Topic

Every practice session should have a theme. For example, 'Dribbling & Turning'. This should be your first decision when planning a training session. Focusing every practice on a specific theme is a great habit to get into, and this aspect will become more and more important as your players get older. Try to change the focus of your sessions weekly, as it will keep practice fresh and your players will get more from the season if they are challenged (indirectly) with new skills. Always remember to keep your practice sessions fun!

Choosing Activities

When deciding on which activities to include in your practice session, consider the following:

- Choose activities that will focus on your session's theme. Well thought out activities will indirectly teach your players the sessions theme.
- Choose activities that will allow for the ratio 1 player to 1 ball or 2-3 players to 1 ball. These types of activities will make sure that your players get a lot of touches on the ball. **AVOID DRILLS THAT INVOLVE LONG LINES AND EXCESSIVE STANDING!!!**
- **Activities:** The internet is your friend! There are literally thousands of activities focusing on many topics available online. Also, remember that our Recreational Director can help you find activities that fit the criteria and skill level you are looking for. Be careful that you consider the level of your players when choosing activities.

Practice Session Plan

Once you have selected your activities, put them into a practice session plan. When placing activities in your plan, make sure that they follow each other in a progression from easy to most difficult, starting with a warmup and ending with a scrimmage.

Warm Up: Every practice should start with a fun warm up consisting of walking, jogging, sprinting and stretching (the stretching element will become more important as your children get older). For instance, play a game of tag within a confined area. This activity will prepare your players for the movements required to play soccer, such as jogging, sprinting and changing direction. **NO LAPS!** Since when did you run in a circle while playing soccer?!

Main Body: Make sure this part of your session is the focus of the days training. Try not to deviate between different skills in one session, as this will only lead to confusion among your players. For instance, if your topic is dribbling, every activity you choose to do should focus on the technique of dribbling. You are not intensely focusing on dribbling and teaching the technique, but the activities you choose should require all players to dribble the ball and have close control.

Small Sided Game: Try to always include a small-sided game in your practice. Why? While drills and activities are fine, your players signed up to **play** soccer – do not forget this concept! Try to keep these games to small numbers, such as 3v3 or 4v4. Playing small number scrimmages allows players more touches and interaction with the ball, which aids their development. If you notice that some players are not touching the ball much, don't be afraid to throw another ball into the activity, maybe even two!

Cool Down & Recap: Every training session should finish with a cool down. Take the players from a running state, then to jogging and finally walking. Again, this concept will become more important as you move into the older age groups, but it is a great habit to start now. While you are cooling down, you should review the coaching points you made at the session.

Arriving at the Field

Be there first! Being the first person at the field sets a great example to your parents and players. Many coaches like to have another parent who can help out and/or fill in when necessary. Going back to communication being key, be sure to communicate if you are going to be late or absent!

Practice Session

The U9-U10 ages practice two times per week for one hour. A typical practice may flow something like this:

- **0:00 (Player Arrival) – 8:00:** As soon as your players arrive at the field, start them in the planned warm up. As players arrive, have them join in the activity and keep everyone moving.
- **8:00 – 18:00:** Once all your players have arrived and are involved in the warm up, look to move into your first activity without taking a break (unless conditions require).
- **18:00 – 21:00:** Players have been constantly moving for at over 15 minutes, and it should be time for a break. Give your players a water break and prepare for your next activity.
- **21:00 – 30:00:** Finish the water break and begin your next activity. As activities should progress from simple to complex, the time allotted for activities usually gets a little longer as practice progresses. Use your best judgement for activity duration based on the success and engagement of the players.
- **30:00 – 33:00:** Get another break. Take the opportunity to engage your players in Q&A if possible during downtime, especially if you have introduced something new!
- **33:00 – 43:00:** Finish the water break and begin your last activity or small sided game.
- **43:00 – 45:00:** Take a last short break and organize your scrimmage. Remember, we are focusing on short activity length with high energy! If the breaks seem too frequent, try upping the intensity and make sure you are not killing too much time in dialog and explanations.
- **45:00 – 56:00:** Try and end every practice with “The Game”. It will not hurt to end with a small-sided activity, **BUT** ask yourself this question: What is the most enjoyable activity for a soccer player? The answer: to play soccer! Always try and finish a practice with an even numbers scrimmage.
- **56:00 – 58:00:** Cool down.

- **58:00 – 60:00:** Final remarks and Q&A.

Coaching Styles & Guidelines

When coaching during practice, there are certain guidelines you can follow to ensure you have a successful practice:

Introducing Activities: Introducing activities should be done through explanation and demonstration. Explanation of activities should be done as quickly as possible. Bring your players in and talk quietly – players will be more attentive in this environment. When your players are huddled in, explain the general rules of the game and then let players play. Activity guidelines and how to play should also be explained through demonstration. Most players at this age learn better by doing rather than listening. Place players in their start positions for the activity then actually demonstrate the movements, actions or rules of the game. After the demonstration, let the players try the activity. If they are doing the activity incorrectly, stop them and explain the activity again while demonstrating what you want them to do.

Making Coaching Points: At this age, it is important that the activity does most of the teaching. When stopping players to make coaching points, do it in the form of instruction mixed with question and answers. Give the players brief instruction, and then follow up with questions. The beauty of asking questions is that it involves players in the learning process and will distract them from getting bored while you talk. When giving instruction by asking questions, be sure to keep them simple and short. Also, make sure that all players know the answer. One thing to try is making all the players scream the answer together. The best advice is to err on the side of saying less. If you get into a long, drawn out explanation, you are going to lose your players attention!

Positive Reinforcement: Keep everything you say to players positive. Make sure to praise everything that the player's do related to soccer, encourage good passing, dribbling, turning, stopping, etc.

Crowd Control: Always try to have an assistant with you when you practice. This way one person can be coaching and the other can be controlling players who are having difficulty with the activities or boundaries. Also, depending on your numbers, some activities may require a second coach to facilitate and give coaching points.

Water Breaks: Players at this age are still very explosive. They have high energy levels, but only for short periods of time. Give players short water breaks throughout you training sessions. Also take into consideration the weather, hot days take more breaks and cold days try to keep players moving for longer periods.

Cool Down: As players get older, they become more prone to physical related injuries such as muscle pulls and strains. At the U9-U10 ages, we want to introduce the concept of a cool down to help return the body back to normal after a session. It can be very short at these ages, but will help to start forming this good habit.

Final Remarks: At the end of every practice, finish with your final words. Have all the players sit down and answer questions on the day's activities as a group. Try and make sure no player is confused about the topic or details of the day's practice.

U9 – U10 Game Day Coaching

Starting at the U9 age, game day is different for a coach, as this is the first year there will be an official referee. Still, a coach's role on game day at the U9-U10 age groups is very important. Below are some guidelines on how to prepare for a game, effectively coach during a game, as well as some common failures of coaches and self-evaluation steps.

Preparation & Organization

Being prepared for game day is as crucial as your practice preparation. Your responsibilities on game day should include:

Arriving at the Field: Be there first! Being the first person at the field sets a great example to your parents and players. Be there to welcome them to the game. Arriving early will also allow you to survey the field to look for potential health and safety risks.

Warm Up: As with your practice sessions, have a thought out warm up for your players. It is recommended that you use at least two activities. Use activities that you have done recently in practice, as this will ensure that all your players will know how to play the games you choose. A good warm up activity must include jogging, sprinting, jumping, changing direction and includes all your players. A bad warm up activity is one where players stand in line waiting to touch a ball.

Player Rotation: At the U9 and U10 age groups, players should be exposed to all positions on the field, including Goalkeeper (though not all during a single game!). This allows for players to learn every position on the field and gain a better understanding of the game. However, be very careful when exposing your players to the goalkeeper position, as it has very serious repercussions in that games can be won or lost by the goalkeeper. Because of this fact, some players may not want to play in goal. Please do not force players to play this position, but be sure to make everyone understand the importance of the role and that a goal is not the fault of the goalkeeper.

After the Game: Make sure you congratulate your players after every game, win or lose. Do not sit players down and run the game play by play. Players are too young for this type of game evaluation. Keep your comments brief and allow them to leave.

Effective In-Game Coaching

First Half Observation: By the end of the first five minutes, you know the basic strength of your opponent, who their dangerous players are and what you may need to change, if anything. Make substitutions as needed to adjust and keep the game as competitive as possible while also considering equal playing time for your players. Take notice of the positives and negatives from the first half and relay them during the half time team talk.

Second Half Observation: Recognize any changes the opposition has made and make changes if needed. Make substitutions when necessary, and be aware of any players who may need a physical break. While you do not have to clock time for each player, you do need to make sure everyone plays at least 50% of the game. Your better players will usually get more time, but it can be easy to neglect some players in favor of better ones, especially during a very competitive game. Remember, the main focus should not be the score of the, but the experience and success of things you have been practicing.

Limit Coaching: Don't give excessive commentary and instruction. Let the players play. Remember, the game is the best teacher. Save your detailed instruction for the next practice.

Give Positive Instruction: If you do have to give instruction, convey it in a positive manner. For instance, don't say "Why can't we defend?". Instead, say "Get closer to the attacker!" or "Don't allow players to turn". Never act annoyed or angry when giving instruction to players. If you must reprimand a player, do it in private and never in front of teammates, friends or family.

Find the Moment: Don't scream instruction constantly during the game, as this is very distracting for players. Wait for the ball to go out of play or another quiet moment to give instruction. Even in this situation, make sure instruction is positive, simple and specific.

Speak Clearly: When you do give instruction to players, make sure you use basic wording and show a positive and confident demeanor.

Applaud and Recognize Good Play: Be the first to encourage good play.

The Last Resort: A player maybe making the same mistake constantly and not listening to instruction from the bench expressed in the correct manner. The best way to handle this situation is to bring the player off the field, talk them through the situation, tell them the correct action and then let them re-enter the field. If this does not work, then the topic of trouble may become an outline for the next training session.

Common Failures

Screaming at players: This discourages creative play and player innovation, and it is often a trait of an inexperienced coach. It usually means that the coach hasn't trained the team properly or prepared them for a game situation. Yelling usually has the opposite effect than the coach intends, as many players do not respond well to this type of stimuli. Most of the time, players cannot hear or understand the coach, and even if they can, they often choose to ignore the information.

Micro-managing or instructing players on the field: This discourages innovative play and learning. Remember that soccer is a fluid game and is ever-changing and moving. It is impossible for players to digest what a coach is trying to say, implement the information, and play soccer simultaneously. Micro-management typically results in a player making a mistake and turning the ball over.

Continuously arguing with the referee: This is distracting for players, plus it teaches them bad habits. It could also change a referee's outlook on the game and sway them in favor of the opposition.

Asking rhetorical questions and whining: Refrain from statements such as, "Where are my defenders?" or "When are we going to learn how to keep our shots down?". Remember, players are only human and will make mistakes. Not saying anything is more beneficial than making a negative comment.

Wanting to be the center of attention: Do not demand the focus of players, spectators or referees by screaming at the referee, screaming at players or talking to parents during the game. If there is **EVER** an issue with a parent, address it after the game is over. If emotions are running high, it is a good idea to schedule time to discuss the situation with the parent at your next practice to allow everyone to calm down. Sometimes, all that is needed is a little time for a parent to reflect on the situation.

Not paying attention during the game: Don't talk to parents, referees, players or assistant coaches during the game. Be attentive to what is happening in the game.

Self-Evaluation

After reading this, be honest with yourself. Are you a screamer or a coach who gives constant instruction? Change is hard, particularly if you have developed any bad coaching habits. Even the best and most experienced coaches make these mistakes. Below are a few steps to help you overcome these challenges as a coach:

- Sit down during the game. When you feel the urge to yell, sit down and force yourself to observe and analyze instead.
- Bring a clipboard, a pad of paper (or match analysis sheet) and a pen. When you feel the need to yell, sit down and make a note to yourself instead. At an opportune moment (preferable half time) let your players know what you wanted to express.
- Learn from the pros. Watch a professional game and see how much yelling and screaming the coaches do compared to just watching and observing the game itself. Less is more.
- Make a pre-game resolution to say less. For instance, cut down on what you would normally say by 50%. You will soon see that you will be far more effective as a coach.
- Take a deep breath and remind yourself it is only a game that is purely and simply for the kids. Your days of serious competition are over. Have some fun with the game, enjoy yourself a little more and stress yourself less!

Formations

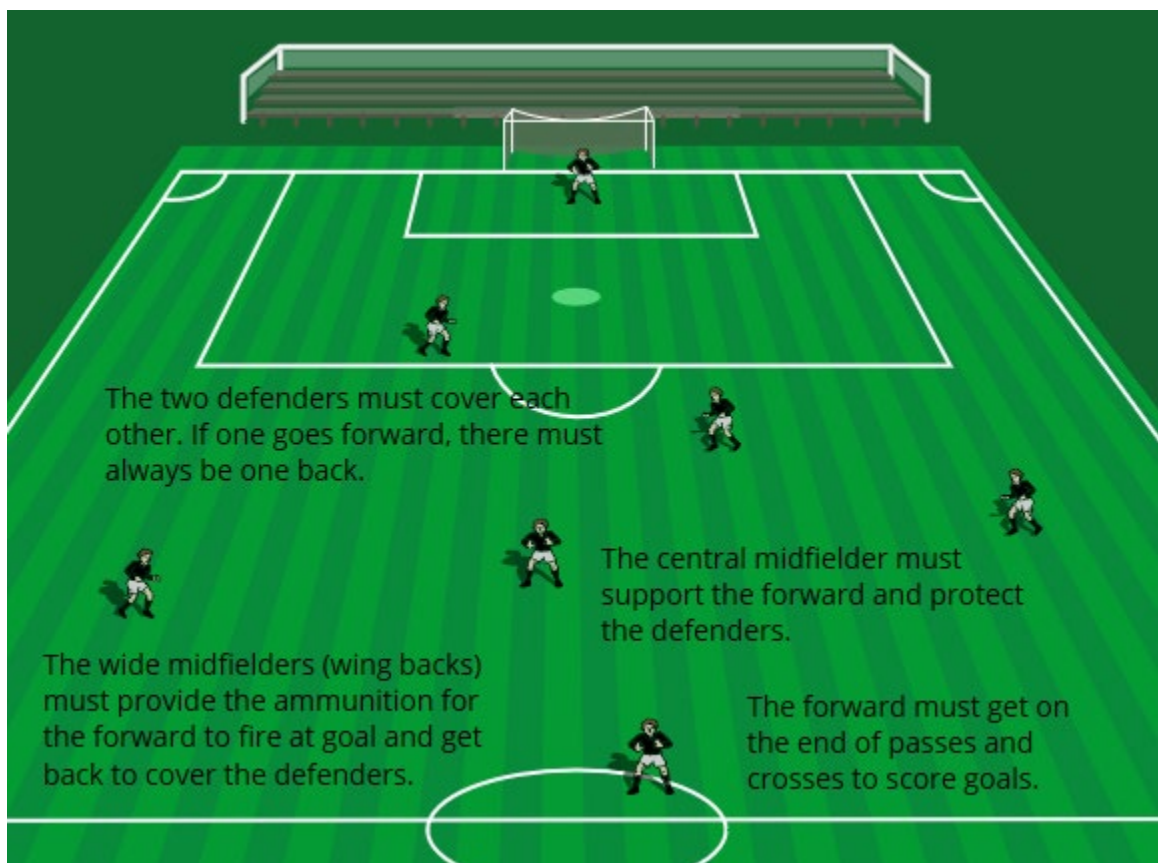
Setting up your team in a formation when they first transition to 7v7 (U9 age) can be as much a learning curve for a coach as it is for the players.

When coaching a team that hasn't played matches or worked on formations before, a coach needs to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the players on the team. Coaches will often put their weakest players in defense and their strongest players attacking up front. This is wrong! There needs to be balance throughout the team, and at these ages, all players should be getting to try all the positions.

1-2-3-1

The 1-2-3-1 is an ideal formation to coach positions and give players a good idea of what is expected as they move up to 9v9 and finally 11v11. This is because the responsibilities of each player are similar to the ones they will advance to. The first "1" equates to the goalkeeper. The next three numbers refer to the number of defenders, midfielders and forwards respectively.

Notice below how the players are staggered at angles in relation to each other. Do not set your players up in lines, zones or lanes. They must learn to work as a team as they shift to cover and support each other while moving up, back and side-to-side as a unit. As an example, don't let your two defenders sit back on the penalty box line while the rest of the team moves up to attack. Keep everyone connected and working together, and the players will find more success.



Defense

- Try to have at least one fast defender in the pair, as it is very helpful to have one covering player when your team has corners, free kicks and throw-ins in the opposition's half.
- One of the defenders needs to push up into the space created when the central midfielder attacks.
- The defenders need to learn how far they can advance and talk as they cover each other.
- They will learn together as they play matches and grow into their roles.

Midfield

- The two wide midfielders can play as wing backs, meaning they have a mostly equal role in attacking and defending. They need to get used to pushing forward while using the wide space to support the central attacker and dropping back to help protect the goal when they lose the ball.
- The central midfielder must support the forward and protect the defense. This player pushes into the hole behind the forward when the team is going forward, but drops deep when defending.
- Midfielders are pivotal to the team and usually see a lot of the ball. The central midfielder is an ideal position for your captain or most advanced player. However, do not always reserve this spot for the best player. Give all players the chance to experience this position.

Forward

- In a 7v7 game, the forward is ideally a player who can finish moves off. Because of the field size and support from the three midfielders, your forward does not have to be especially good at holding the ball. The central midfielder will do that.
- The forward should stay the furthest up the field of all the players in this formation. Since there is only the one forward, they should shift left and right to support the ball and get involved in the play as the ball moves.

1-3-2-1

This formation is for a more defensive strategy. Three defenders in the back provides a solid structure to build out of the back. Depending on your players, this defensive formation can transition into an attacking formation by pushing the two outside defenders into the attack. You can also push the central defender into midfield on the attack. This formation is NOT recommended if your defenders have a tendency to hang back and not get into the attack. You want to avoid a straight line of three players that never leave the top of your defensive box!



Defense

- It is good to have some speed for your outside defenders so they can push in to the attack
- When defending, the outside players should pinch in towards the middle and closer to the center back. When transitioning to the attack, they should move wider and then forward.
- The center defender needs to be the anchor and should almost always be found behind and at an angle from the outside defenders.
- The defenders need to learn how far they can advance and talk as they cover each other.

Midfield

- The two midfielders are responsible for the middle of the field, as the outside defenders will fill in the space on the wings.
- There is no central midfielder, so the two midfielders must balance each other in the middle.
- The midfielders should try to play at angles from each other, with one backing up the other when they go forward and vice versa.

Forward

- In a 7v7 game, the forward is ideally a player who can finish moves off.
- The forward should stay the furthest up the field of all the players in this formation. They should shift left and right to support the ball and get involved in the play as the ball moves.

Other Formations

Feel free to experiment with other formations if you see fit, but keep in mind the principles and points described above. At the U9-U10 ages, if players can learn these basics, they will be able to adjust to more formation options as they progress into 9v9 (U11-U12 ages) and finally 11v11 (U13+ ages).

Practice & Game Tips

You will encounter many difficulties and problems when coaching a U9-U10 team. When experiencing these problems or others you may encounter, remember that all players are different. Some players are more advanced than others both physically and mentally. Every player you coach will be different, so don't expect all players to react and learn in the same way.

Below are just a few of the problems you may encounter and some possible solutions:

PROBLEM: 'Billy' seems like he does not want to play. He picks daisies during practices and games.

SOLUTION: During practice activities, there is a simple solution – only do activities where every player has a ball. During your scrimmage at the end of practice, throw two or three soccer balls in, this way all players have a better chance of touching the ball. Games are a little trickier. Try to have 'Billy' take throw-ins or dead ball kicks, or just try some extra encouragement.

PROBLEM: You do not have enough soccer balls at practice.

SOLUTION: This is a difficult situation, but one that can be easily resolved. Use pairs or triples during your activities so that everyone can participate, and standing is limited. If you only have a few soccer balls, use small-sided games for practice. It is not the best situation for practice, but it solves the problem. If this is a continuous problem, please encourage your team parents to buy each player a ball and have them bring it to every practice.

PROBLEM: How do I pick teams for scrimmages at practice?

SOLUTION: Use your knowledge of the players within your team so that teams are evenly matched to play. Another way is to have a player give out numbers, you turn your back and then choose the numbers. Yet another way is to line the players up and give them a number 1 or 2 – you then have two equal teams.

PROBLEM: When we play elimination games at practice, the weaker players who need the most practice get knocked out first!

SOLUTION: If this is a big problem due to a wide range of skill level on your team, try to avoid elimination games. Rather than scoring by eliminating players, have players score by the number of successes within a time period. This allows players to stay in the game for the duration.

PROBLEM: Stronger players are not being challenged, and my weaker players cannot compete with the strong players.

SOLUTION: At the recreational level, you are always going to find that you have huge disparity between your players soccer ability. Ideas on how to get around this problem are as follows:

- If there is one exceptional player that is too good for your team, consider recommending them to move up to an older age group. Contact the Recreational Director in these extreme cases.
- When playing in pairs, match players by talent and experience.
- Reduce the space for stronger players.
- Make passing targets, etc. smaller or bigger depending on ability.
- During small sided games or scrimmages, give the weaker side an extra player or two to try and keep play even.

PROBLEM: How to pick who starts the game.

SOLUTION: At these ages, you should not always look to field your best team every time you start a game. Players should get an equal amount of playing time, and ALL players should have a chance to start the game throughout the season. Keep a record of which players you have started and make sure all players are given this opportunity.

PROBLEM: How do you make a small-sided game easier so players gain success?

SOLUTION: Increasing the size of the area and/or adding more attacking players will make a game easier for your players. Add defenders and reducing the size of the area will have the reverse effect. Another idea for making games easier is to add neutral players. Neutral players play for the team that has possession. This increases the number of attackers, thus creating numbers up against defenders. Add more neutrals to gain more success.

PROBLEM: Some of my weaker players never touch the ball in our small sided games and scrimmages?

SOLUTION: If this occurs, don't be afraid to play with more than one soccer ball. The more soccer balls involved in the game, the more touches your players will have, including the weaker players.



Team Administration

Season Kick-Off

It is important to get your season started on a good note with your players and their parents. The **BEST** way to do this is to establish good communication with your team!

Welcome Day

The first day you meet your team at the field will be your “Welcome Day”. Do not plan a full practice for this day. Instead, plan on spending the as much time as is required to get to know your parents and players. You can end the session with some fun games or a small-sided scrimmage to get things moving!

Parent Team Meeting

The first part of the Welcome Day should be your very first team meeting. At least one parent for each child on the team should be present, although encourage both parents/guardians to attend if it is possible with their schedule. During this meeting, you should cover the following topics with your team and parents:

- Introductions – let each parent introduce themselves and point out who their child. Introduce yourself as the coach and give a brief background of yourself. Do not be concerned if you have little soccer experience. Your parents will still be appreciative of your coaching role!
- Give a summary of your personal coaching style and general expectations you have as a coach from your players and parents.
- Ensure you have the correct email and phone contacts for all parents.
- Review your practice schedule and time. Be aware of any conflicts or potential conflicts that may exist.
- Discuss the “Season Schedule” section below. Determine if there are any conflicts due to vacations, other activities, etc. so you will be aware.
- Review the “Conduct Points of Emphasis” and “Risk Management” content from the “Managing Soccer Parents” section of this handbook. Politely reinforce the points regarding sportsmanship and sideline behavior. Also, make any necessary notes regarding your parents and players.
- Review the “Inclement Weather”, “Practice Space & Facilities” and the “Club Communication” sections of this handbook. It is **CRITICAL** that parents are aware of these policies and how HSC will communicate with them as a member.

Season Schedule – Spring 2022

Below are important dates for the upcoming season. Although the exact game schedule has not yet been released by CASL, playdate weekends are indicated below. You should plan on having **AT LEAST** one game on each of these weekends, and more than one game on some weekends.

- March 26th-27th: **First CASL Play weekend available dates**
- March 28th-April 1st: **Spring Break – NO PRACTICES**
- April 2nd-3rd: **CASL Play weekend available dates**
- April 8th-10th: **Pepsi Hoover Havoc Tournament - ALL U9-U15 Teams Participating**
- April 16th: **CASL Play weekend available date (**No play on Sunday, April 17th - Easter Sunday)**
- April 23rd-24th: **Trussville United Tournament - NO CASL PLAY**

- April 30th-May 1st: [CASL Play weekend available dates](#)
- May 7th-8th: [CASL Play weekend available dates](#)
- May 14th-15th: [CASL Play weekend available dates](#)
- May 21st-22nd: [CASL Play weekend available dates](#)

First Player Meeting

After your Parent Team Meeting, you should dismiss the parents to watch from the stands. From here, you should spend the remainder of your time getting to know your players:

- Learn your players' names and encourage them to learn the names of their teammates.
- Establish a coach/player relationship by giving some simple guidelines, such as "Please listen and do not talk when coach is talking," "When I say 'Huddle up!', everyone should jog into a tight group.", etc. This will vary based on individual coaching styles and personalities, but it is important you establish your ground rules and a good coach/player dynamic.
- Prepare a few simple activities to get the kids going and excited. Do not try to instruct on this first day – just let the kids have fun and gauge their skill level as they participate.
- End your session with a small sided scrimmage and high-fives!

Managing Soccer Parents

Parents have the biggest influence on whether players play soccer or not. Communication is key! Always keep parents updated about soccer policies and philosophies, as well as practice times, game times and any changes to your season schedule that may occur. The Hoover Soccer Club and the Recreational Director will assist in communicating these things, but parents and players both most easily respond to their coach.

Remembering that parents have a huge influence on their child's development, we must make sure that the feedback parents give to players, referees and coaches during and after a practice or game is positive. To ensure this is the case, please share these thoughts with your parents at your first coaches meeting.

Conduct Points of Emphasis

Support your child: Remember to encourage your child and the whole team. Encourage your children to work hard to improve skills, as well as emphasizing good sportsmanship. Implement a philosophy that hard work and enjoyment is more important than victory.

Always be positive: It is important to become not only just a role model, but a positive role model. Always try to applaud good play from both teams.

Remember children just want to have fun: It is your child that is playing soccer and not you. Encourage your child to create their own goals and support them throughout. Try not to impose your own standards and goals on them, but let them play the game for themselves. Did you know that 72% of children would rather play for a losing team than ride the bench for a winning team?!

Reinforce positive behavior: Nobody likes to make mistakes. When your child does, remember it is all part of learning. Always encourage your child's efforts, and only point out the good things that your child has accomplished.

Don't be a sideline coach or referee: Coaches and referees are usually parents like you or children like your son or daughter. Coaches at the club are volunteers who take time out of their busy schedules to help make your children's soccer experience a positive one. The Hoover Soccer Club asks you to refrain from coaching or refereeing from the sidelines.

Be a role positive model: We have all witnessed bad behavior and poor sportsmanship on the sidelines of youth sports. In **ALL** cases, each party feels justified in their actions, at least at the time. Realize that there is never a winner in sideline confrontations and antics, and that the loser of **EVERY** argument and incident is the kids. The Hoover Soccer Club strongly discourages poor sideline behavior and asks that every parent be a positive role model for their child as well as the club.

Risk Management

Below is a list of suggestions to help reduce liability in the case of an incident at the soccer field. Please read these carefully and communicate the appropriate items to your soccer parents:

- Strongly encourage parents/guardians to be present for all parts of practices and games. Besides the children seeking both peace of mind and wishing to show loved ones what they can do, this greatly reduces the chance of you primarily dealing with an incident, or worse, an emergency.
- As a precautionary step, inquire within your team or surrounding teams at your practice/game if there is anyone with medical experience. This is always nice to know just in case.
- Be aware of any medical condition such as allergies, asthma, etc. for players on your team. It is best to know this before you have your first practice!
- Have a list of contact information, including 2 or 3 phone numbers (not just parents but a backup such as a grandparent, uncle, aunt, etc.) for each player. There is an area in your handbook to store this information!
- As the coach, you should be the last one to leave a practice or game, unless you have confirmed that all players are in the company of a parent/guardian.
- Do not be alone with a child, even if your child is present. Always ask a second adult to remain if waiting for parents.

Inclement Weather

Bad weather can be a serious detractor to a soccer season. We are soccer players first and love the game, thus we never take the cancellation of a practice or game lightly. However, there are multiple factors at play in a decision to cancel any event. We must not only consider the safety of our players and parents, but also the condition of our facilities, which serve hundreds of families. While we always prefer playing to not, we must consider what is best for the club and its members when making these decisions.

Cancellations

If there is a weather threat prior to a practice or game, the Hoover Soccer Club will take the following steps to notify all its members:

- **Update Our Website*:** You may find the field status on the right side of the website homepage at www.hooversoccerclub.com, or near the bottom if you are on a mobile device.
- **Update StatusMe*:** StatusMe is a free service you may subscribe to that will send you an email and/or text alert in the event that a field status is updated. You may choose which facilities you wish to be notified about. Anyone who wished to take advantage of this free service must sign up at <http://www.statusme.com/statme/register.jsp>. There is a link on our webpage to this service.
- **Send an Email Notification:** If we determine that practices or games must be cancelled early in the day or even days before time, we may notify our members via email. Cancellations close to start time may not be able to be communicated in this manner.

***ATTENTION:** If conditions have changed, field status will be updated weekdays by **3 PM** and by **8 AM** on weekend game days. **No update indicates no change to the current listed field status!**

Practice & Game Interruption

If practices or games have already begun when inclement weather arrives, it may fall to the coach to make a decision regarding cancellation. If an HSC representative is present, they will make the call; however, there may be rare instances when a staff member is not available in person or by phone. If this happens, please adhere to the following guidelines:

- In the case of lightning within an 8-mile range, **everyone** must leave the field for a minimum of **30 minutes**.
- If another strike occurs before the 30 minutes expires, the 30-minute timer must start again.
- After 2 repetitions, or if the 30-minute window exceeds your practice or game time schedule, you must cancel and send everyone home.
- In the case of heavy rain that makes the playing surface un-playable or dangerous, please cancel and send everyone home.
- You may continue in the event that there is no lightning in the area and the rain is limited enough that the safety of the players is not compromised.

Dealing with inclement weather is an important matter, and one that the Hoover Soccer Club takes very seriously. We ask that all coaches err on the side of caution when dealing with dangerous weather!

Practice Space & Facilities

The facilities the club leases from the City of Hoover must accommodate many teams. We value our relationship with the city, and are always working to provide quality facilities for our members.

Recently, steps have been taken that will allow teams of all ages to have adequate space to practice and have the fields in good condition for game day. We also ask that our coaches help out with our facilities so that everyone can enjoy the game of soccer!

Starting & Finishing Practice

Please be considerate of other coaches, players and teams and do your best to begin and end your session at the assigned time. Do not interfere in the practice space of any team practicing before you – let them finish before you move into the space. Likewise, please end your practice and game sessions promptly on time if there is another team waiting. If your time is up and you still need to have your final remarks, take your team aside out of the practice space to do so.

Field Condition/Equipment Upkeep

While the City of Hoover maintains all fields, they are not present during practices and games to monitor and correct issues. If you see any dangerous conditions regarding the playing surface, goals, fences or other facility issues, please inform the Recreational Director **ASAP!** Coaches, **PLEASE**, we need your assistance enforcing the following when you are at the field:

- There should be **NO** climbing of the fences at any of our facilities! Not only is this dangerous, but it destroys the fencing over time.
- Do not allow players, or anyone else, to hang on the nets. The overall condition of the goals will be much nicer and sustainable if they are cared for.
- Do not allow your players to destroy the playing surface. This includes pulling up grass, digging holes or making marks with cleats, or anything else that may unnecessarily damage the fields.
- Please encourage everyone at the fields, children in particular, to be responsible and clean up the field area after practices and games. If everyone pitches in, it does not take much effort to keep our facilities clean. There should be adequate trash receptacles at all HSC field locations.
- Please make sure goals and benches are back in their proper positions on the field at the end of your session.
- If there is a severely worn out section or patch on the field, do your best to plan your activities around that space to give the ground rest. We understand that this is not always possible, especially during a scrimmage, but we ask that you do your best.

Lost & Found

Any found items such as keys, wallets, phones, etc. should be given to an HSC representative or taken to the Hoover Soccer Club office located at 5336 Stadium Parkway Office Center, Suite 108, Hoover, AL 35244.

Lights

The last coach off the field every evening is responsible for turning off the lights. You may “dummy lock” the lock on the box after the lights are out. Please ensure there are no players or parents still on the field when you turn off the lights.

HSC Club Communication

The Hoover Soccer Club endeavors to keep its participating members up-to-date on a consistent basis. While we depend on our coaches to communicate details related to your specific team and schedule, we as a club would also like to keep our members informed of important club news, announcements and event information that will impact their experience as a member of HSC.

HSC utilizes the following systems to accomplish these goals. In the case of email communications, some users will need to proactively add our communicating email addresses to their email whitelist to ensure delivery.

NOTE: All of our email communications give the option to unsubscribe. Members may do so, but this may result in them missing out on important club news and information. Please know that we take our members' privacy very seriously, and we will never share information with any third parties.

GotSport

This is the registration system for all our programs. All registration and payment related confirmations and notices will be sent from this system from the email address **no_reply@gotsoccer.com**. **PLEASE ADD THIS ADDRESS TO YOUR EMAIL WHITELIST!**

MailChimp

HSC utilizes the MailChimp service to send direct email communications to our members. This system is used for sending out program information, news, field status updates, club events, newsletters and other targeted club communications. Emails from this system are sent from noreply@hooversoccerclub.com. **PLEASE ADD THIS ADDRESS TO YOUR EMAIL WHITELIST!**

Members are automatically added to our distribution list every registration season. They may choose to unsubscribe at any point during the season, but it is not recommended, as we utilize these emails to communicate important club information with our members.

StatusMe

HSC utilizes this system to publish field statuses for practices and games. This system can be configured to send email and SMS (text) messages whenever HSC field statuses are updated. You may view the current status of all HSC fields as well as sign up to receive notifications from StatusMe on our website at www.hooversoccerclub.com.

NOTE: If conditions have changed, field status will be updated weekdays by 3 PM and by 8 AM on weekend game days. No update indicates no change to the current listed field status!

Social Media

The Hoover Soccer Club regularly communicates with its members via Facebook and Twitter. Please consider following us on these platforms as an additional way to stay informed. Links to both our Facebook and Twitter accounts can be found on our website at www.hooversoccerclub.com.

Volunteer Coach Prerequisites

Anyone who wishes to become a volunteer coach with any state or national affiliated league must complete the current mandatory online safety courses as well as undergo a background check. Without completing these processes, a coach will **NOT** be listed on the official roster required to be on the sideline with the team for CASL games. The HSC Registrar or Recreational Director will provide all coaches information before the start of each season with detailed instructions on completing the required training as well the background check.

Background Check (Volunteer Disclosure Statement)

Any person (coach, assistant coach, volunteer, team manager, referee, board member, concession stand workers and administrators) who comes in contact or interacts with children on behalf of the Hoover Soccer Club at any point during the soccer season **MUST** complete a background check yearly.

Background checks expire on June 30th of each year, regardless of when they are submitted, so they must be renewed for every coach prior to every fall season.

It is important that **ANYTHING** other than a minor traffic ticket is disclosed on your background check. Even if the charge has been expunged or dismissed, you must disclose it. The more details provided, the quicker the report can be processed. You must also use your full legal name.

For more information, you may email registrar@hooversoccerclub.com.



CASL/Game Information

Central Alabama Soccer League (CASL) Season

All teams in the HSC Rec League from ages U9-U19 play their season games with the Central Alabama Soccer League (CASL). This league is made up of teams of like ages participating with around 20 clubs located in the Birmingham metro and surrounding areas. CASL is the largest recreational league in Alabama and exists to provide recreational level players an opportunity to enjoy the great game of soccer in a fun, relaxed and organized environment. CASL is **NOT** a competitive soccer organization. The league was established for the benefit of the recreational player, and it is unfair to them to be pitted against “travel” teams that are honing their skills for Division I or II play.

CASL divisions do not have standings, nor season champions, because, while everyone likes to win, winning the division is not what the league is about. Remember, the game is supposed to be fun, and the players should be enjoying themselves!

Spring 2022 Season

The Spring season will consist of (at most) 8 games for each team, usually half on your club’s home field and half away. Please refer to the previous “Season Schedule” section for play dates and blackout dates for CASL league play!

Specific CASL Game Rules for U9-U10 Age Groups

The following rules are specific to all U9-U10 teams participating with CASL for the Spring 2022 Season. Please familiarize yourself with these rules and make sure parents and players are aware!

- Each player is required to play at least 50% of the game.
- Each team will have 7 players on the field, including the goalkeeper.
- The game will be played with a size 4 soccer ball.
- Games will consist of two 25-minute halves with a halftime in between.
- Either team will be allowed to substitute on any normal substitution situation regardless of who has possession of the ball.
- There is **NO OFFSIDES**.
- Goalkeepers **ARE** allowed to punt the ball.
- Players will get a second throw-in attempt if first one is not legal. The second consecutive infraction will result in the other team getting possession of the throw-in.
- You are **NOT** allowed to club pass DI or DII (competitive) players onto a CASL team.
- Only **official** club rosters are used for the game day check-in procedure. If you are club passing a player, they will be required to have their official club roster attached to the roster of the team they are club passing on. The referee has the right to spot check any player at any time by, but not limited to, asking the player his or her date of birth and making sure that it matches the date on the roster. If a coach is caught playing an uninsured, non-registered player, they will be suspended from coaching in the league and will be subject to further discipline.
- **ONLY** coaches or managers that appear on the roster are allowed on the sideline.
- **NO** Jewelry can be worn during games, nor can a band aid or patch be used to cover jewelry.
- Intentional heading of the ball is **NOT** allowed.

Game Day Protocol

Please review the following information regarding protocol for game days within the CASL league. It is very important that these steps and guidelines are followed to ensure the best experience possible for players, parents and coaches.

Parents & Players

- Only players and coaches on the official club roster are allowed on the sideline where the team benches are location.
- All parents, relatives, siblings and friends must watch the game from the opposite sideline. Failure to adhere to this could result in your team forfeiting the game.

Rosters

- Coaches must present a printed or electronic copy of their official club rosters to the referees. **NO ROSTER = NO PLAY!!!**
- Only coaches listed on the roster will be permitted on the players' sideline. There is a maximum of 2 coaches allowed per official roster. You may have more than 2 coaches helping the team, but only 2 are allowed on the sideline on game day.
- Though rare, referees may ask for photo identification for coaches – failure to comply with this rule will result in coaches not being allowed on the sidelines with their team.
- If your roster is misplaced, please contact recreationaldirector@hooversoccerclub.com in advance of your game. (No one will be available on weekends to make roster changes or retrieve lost rosters!)

Club Pass (Guest Players)

- Coaches are allowed three club passes per game. (Players that are club passing must be from the same club.)
- Club pass players must have a copy of their valid official club roster. The coach will highlight the players that are club passing and attach that player's roster to their current roster.
- Club pass players must be registered players and must be the appropriate age in order to player pass. Younger players may guest play with an older team, but older players **CAN NOT** play down.
- On your roster, write in the name(s) of the players that you are player passing for that particular game. (A maximum of 3 players are allowed.)

Recording Game Scores

Winning coaches must phone in their game scores after each game. You can use your computer or mobile device to submit game scores.

1. Go to <http://centralalabamasoccerleague.com/phoneitin/> on your computer or mobile device.
2. Follow the on-screen instruction and use Pin# **1546** when prompted.

Field Closings (Cancellations)

- Please check the field status hotline or the appropriate club website in case of inclement weather on game day.
- If you are the home team coach and know that the fields are closed, please help by contacting your opposing coach ASAP, so they may contact their players.
- If coaches are not notified and show up at the closed field, this could result in your forfeit.

Respect for Referees

- Under **NO** circumstances should a parent or coach confront a referee during or after a game.
- Do not verbally harass a referee. If you must disagree with a call, do so quickly, calmly and let it go.
- A very large percentage of referees are learning on the job. Please be considerate, thank them for their time, and help to cultivate a healthy environment for Alabama's referees.
- Under no circumstances should anyone have physical conduct with a referee. Should this occur you will be severely disciplined and have possible criminal charges pressed against you.
- Foul language and abusive behavior towards anyone on the sidelines will not be tolerated by the Hoover Soccer Club.
- Failure to comply with the above rules may result in your suspension from the team and this season.

Spirit of the Game

We are discouraging teams from defeating their opponent by more than an 8-goal differential. We will be monitoring teams if we see a pattern developing. Should your team defeat an opponent by more than 8 goals you will receive a reminder email from the league, reminding you of the scoring rules. Your team is subject to possible sanctions if we see that this rule and the spirit of the game is not being adhered to. If you are up by more than 4 or 5 goals on your opponent there are things you can do to balance the game such as quietly removing one player from the field, require 5 passes before you can shoot, etc. Remember, this is about the children and you should be teaching them more than just soccer (good sportsmanship, etc). If your team is on the other end of that spectrum, please understand that sometimes a coach is trying to balance out the game and they might not be able to do so. If everyone works together, we should be able to play within the spirit of the game.

2022 CASL Participating Club Field Status Information

Alabaster Soccer Club - www.alabasterparks.org - (205) 337-9555

Nik McCrimon - nmccrimon@cityofalabaster.com - (205) 378-4055

(BUSA North) Mountain Brook Soccer Club, (BUSA South) American Soccer Club, (BUSA) Soccer Club Highlands Field, (BUSA) JCC Field - www.birminghamunited.com - (205) 969-8729

(BUSA) Fultondale - Darian Howell - (205) 281-7950

(BUSA) Game Day - Jim Jeter - (205) 529-2941

Calera Soccer - Jeff Stewart - (205) 504-1660

Gardendale Soccer Club - www.socceronline.org - (205) 631-2323

Helena Soccer Club - (205) 482-7045 - helenaparkandrec.org - (205) 620-2877

Brian Gaskins - bg0113@att.com - (205) 968-4264

Homewood Soccer Club - www.homewoodsoccer.com – (205) 874-9182

Chris Rogers - cyr1001@jagmail.southalabama.edu - (205) 807-2177

Hoover Soccer Club - www.hooversoccerclub.com - (205) 402-7330

Paul Welch - recreationaldirector@hooversoccerclub.com - (205) 249-1691

Hueytown Soccer Club - www.hueytownsoccer.com - (205) 215-4109

Shannon Jennings - (205)-238-0999

Montevallo Youth Soccer - www.cityofmontevallo.com

Shane Baugh - (205) 527-3755 or (205) 665-0405

Moody Soccer Club - moodysoccerclub.net

Lilla Brasher - (205) 296-1555

North Jefferson Soccer Club (NJSC) - www.njsoccerclub.com - (205) 586-1947

NorthStar Soccer Club- McLendon Park - www.northstarsoccerministries.org

Michelle Chambers - (205) 218-3157 or Paul Neville - (205) 243-4021

NorthStar Briarwood First Christian Church Field - (205) 776-5603

Ryan Leib – (205) 218-1392

Springville Sports Complex - www.springvillesoccer.com - (205) 706-4515

Alex Wolf - (205) 467-9665

Trussville United Soccer Club (TUSC) - www.trussvilleunitedsoccer.com

Jeremy McLane - (205) 365-3356

Vestavia Soccer Club - Liberty Park - www.vestaviasoccer.com - (205) 413-4866 -

amyvhsc@bellsouth.net

Ryan Ferris - (205) 283-7814 or Amy Disko - (205) 529-3047

Rescheduling

Practices missed due to inclement weather may be made up based on availability and field conditions. Please work with the Recreational Director for options if you have a session cancelled due to inclement weather. Game reschedules will be handled in the following manner:

- Coaches on each team must communicate and come to an agreement on a makeup date and time. It is recommended to try and have at least 2 dates/times that would work in case there is no field or referee available for your first choice of dates.
- The **HOME TEAM** coach must submit the requested makeup date **AT LEAST 7 DAYS** in advance to their program director. If you are the home coach, send your request to Paul Welch at recreationaldirector@hooversoccerclub.com.
- Your request will be turned in to the CASL registrar and you will be notified via email if the reschedule is approved or denied.



Technical Skills

Section Summary

This section outlines technical topics that players in the U9-U12 age ranges should learn. Some of these topics contain aspects that may not be covered until the players are in the U11-U12 range. For example, passing – the younger U9-U10 age players should mainly focus on the basics of short and mid-range passing, while older ages will move into more complex techniques such as curling and chip passes. For guidance, refer to the “Technical Coaching Topics” heading found in the “Coaching Guidelines” section of your manual. However, at the end of the day, use your judgement as a coach and teach the aspects that correspond to the skill level of your players. Just be sure to try and progress from simple to complex, and make sure that your players are learning the basics before moving on.

Dribbling

Dribbling is the technique used by players to maneuver the ball down the field and through tight areas where defenders are trying to steal the ball. When players are dribbling, they need to keep the ball close so they can stop the ball, change direction or perform a move. Without total control, players cannot execute any of these actions. When working on dribbling technique, the following aspects should also be taught:

- Ball mastery
- Turning with the ball
- How to do a move to beat a defender
- How to stop with the soccer ball

The aim of a coach is not to overload their players with information, but to teach techniques that players can get to know very well and feel comfortable using in a game. Turning with the ball and completing moves and fakes are very important when playing soccer. These skills enable players to keep possession of the ball under varying pressures and/or create attacking opportunities for themselves or teammates. Teaching your players a variety of moves and turns enables them to experience different techniques and determine what comes most naturally to them and where they might excel. You will find that different players will choose and feel more comfortable with certain moves or turns than others.

The technical aspects included in this section include:

- Dribbling
- Running with the ball
- Shielding the ball
- Turning
- Moves & fakes
- Hesitation moves

Dribbling Technique

Technique

- **Dribble with all surfaces of both feet:** inside, laces, outside and sole.
 - Inside of the foot is used to change direction – the ball moves across the player's body.
 - Outside of the foot is used to change direction – the ball moves away from the player's body.
 - Sole of the foot is used to change direction – the ball can move in any direction.
 - Laces are used to dribble in a straight line.
- **Rhythm:** Every stride, take a touch on the soccer ball.
- **Close control:** Players should be able to take just one step in between touches on the ball. Rhythm should be touch, step, touch, step, etc.
- **Bend your knees:** Every time the foot strikes the ball, the knee should be directly over the ball.

- **Center of gravity:** Lean slightly over the ball and stay as low as possible.
- **Head up:** When dribbling, players should have their heads up looking for options. Players should take a look up in between touches of the ball.

Best Used

- To gain ground
- To go past an opponent
- To set-up for a shot on goal
- To relieve pressure
- To keep possession
- To attack space

Problem Areas

- Ball is not under control – it is too far away from the feet.
- The player looks down too much.
- Legs are too straight.

Running with the Ball Technique

When running the with the ball, players should either have space in front of them or space at the side of a defender that they can attack.

Technique

- Use the strongest foot.
- Player should be facing the direction they intend to go, with hips and shoulders facing forward.
- Point the toes of kicking foot down and slightly inward.
- Use the outside of the laces to strike the ball. **No Toes!**
- Strike the equator/middle of the soccer ball.
- The knee of the striking foot should be over the ball as contact is made.
- The player's body weight should be forward with knees bent as they run.
- Players should still have control of the ball. The ball should be pushed 2 to 3 feet in front of the player.
- Cover ground in between touches as quickly as possible.
- Try to get your head up in between touches on the ball to look around and weigh options.

Best Used

- To cover ground quickly
- When there is a lot of space in front of you
- To relieve pressure
- To attack space

Problem Areas

- Ball is too close and doesn't allow player to move at full speed.
- Ball is not under control – it is too far away from the feet of the player
- Player looks down too much.

- Legs are too straight.

Turning Techniques

Turns are used to change direction and/or turn away from an opponent. Below are 6 basic turns which should be practice and learned.

Technique

- **Inside Hook:** Use the inside of your foot to hook the ball directly behind you and across your body. As you hook the ball, you turn 180 degrees. If you use your right foot to hook the ball, turn to your left and vice versa.
- **Outside Hook:** Use the outside of your foot to hook the ball directly behind you. As you strike the ball behind you, turn 180 degrees. If you use your right foot, turn to your right and vice versa.
- **Drag Back:** Stop the ball with the sole of your foot. Then roll the ball directly behind you and turn 180 degrees. If you use your right foot, you should turn left and if you use your left foot, you should turn right.
- **Cryuff Turn:** Place your non-kicking foot next to the ball, approximately 3-4 inches away. Fake like you are going to strike the ball. As your foot approaches, bring it around the outside of the ball, then lightly strike it through your legs and behind you using the inside of your foot. If you use your right foot to strike the ball, then turn to your left and vice versa.
- **Step Over:** As the ball is still in motion act like you are going to strike the ball, and as your foot approaches the ball, step over it. Once you have stepped over the ball, turn 180 degrees and push the ball the other direction using the outside the same foot.
- **Stop Turn:** As the ball is moving, stop the ball with the sole of your foot. As you stop the ball, take a first step over it using the same foot you used to stop it, and then take another step. Turn 180 degrees and push the ball the other direction using your dribbling foot. If you stop the ball with your right foot, turn right and vice versa.

General Coaching Points

- Look at the ball when executing a turn.
- Bend the knees during every turn.
- Accelerate out of turns.
- **Close control:** The ball has to be under control to turn effectively.
- Over-exaggerate every turn.

Problem Areas

- Ball is not under control when dribbling, so players cannot turn effectively.
- Legs are straight, making it hard for players to accelerate out of turns.
- Players do not push the ball out far enough in front to accelerate onto.
- Ball gets stuck under a player's feet when trying to do a turn.
- Ball is not pushed directly behind a player, thus allowing defenders to steal.
- Players turn the wrong way.

Moves & Fakes

Move and fakes are techniques used off the dribble to beat a defender 1v1, fake out defenders in 2v1 situations, change direction and set up shots on goal. Below are some moves and fakes that range from basic (Matthews) to very difficult (Ronaldo). When teaching moves and fakes, the internet is your friend! There are endless videos and tutorials with players and coaches giving detailed instruction. Below are just a few to get you started!

Technique

- **Matthews:** Step widely to one side of the ball then shift your body weight onto that leg, drop your shoulder and bend your knee. Then, come out of the move in the opposite direction, moving the ball with the outside of the opposite foot.
- **Scissors:** Step around the ball in a circular motion with one foot (foot should go inside and across your body, out and back around), shift your body weight to that side, drop your shoulder and bend your knee. Come out of the move in the opposite direction by using the outside of your other foot to move the ball in the opposite direction.
- **Huddle:** While dribbling, use the sole of your foot to role the ball directly across your body (not forward) and then come out of the move using the inside of your other foot to take the ball forward.
- **Double Scissors:** Step around the ball in a circular motion with one foot and bend your knee. Then step around the ball in another circular motion using the other foot and bend your knee. Come out of the move using the outside of the foot you first used to step around the ball and move the ball to the side.
- **Ronaldo:** While dribbling, use the sole of your strongest foot to role the ball across your body (same as Huddle). However, as the ball comes across your body, step over it using your other foot and then continue to dribble away.

General Coaching Points

- Over-exaggerate every fake and move.
- Make sure to look at the ball while executing a move.
- Bend the knees so you can accelerate out of every move.
- Use close control when dribbling.
- Perform moves at game speed.

Problem Areas

- Ball is not under control when dribbling, and so the move is not executed successfully.
- Move is done either too close or too far away from defenders.
- Players do not accelerate out of a move.
- Players come out of a move too straight and directly into defenders.
- Players push the ball too wide out of a move and allow defenders to recover.

Hesitation Moves

Hesitation moves are best used when a defender is running alongside the attacker. They fake the defender into thinking that the attacker is going to stop the ball, thus making the defender slow down.

After the attacker has made the defender hesitate, they burst forward at pace into the space and lose the defender.

Technique

- **Overmars:** While dribbling, fake as if you are going to stop the ball by bringing your foot directly over the ball, and then continue to dribble by pushing the ball forward with the inside of the foot.
- **Henry (pronounced 'AHN-REE'):** While dribbling, stop the ball using one foot. In the same action, knock the ball out again using the inside of your other foot.

General Coaching Points

- Over-exaggerate stopping the ball. The defender needs to think that the ball is going to stop.
- Make sure to look at the ball while executing a move.
- Bend your knees so you can accelerate out of every move.
- Use close control when dribbling.
- Perform moves at game speed.

Problem Areas

- Ball is not under control when dribbling, and so the move is not executed successfully.
- Move is done either too close or too far away from defenders.
- Players do not accelerate out of a move. No change of pace!
- Players come out of a move too straight and directly into defenders.
- Players push the ball too wide out of a move and allow defenders to recover.

Shielding the Ball Technique

Shielding the ball is a technique used by a player to keep possession of the ball when under extreme pressure. It involves moving and using the body to hold on to the ball more so than manipulating the ball.

Technique

- Use the furthest foot from the defender to control and move the ball.
- Use the sole of the foot to move the ball.
- Use your non-kicking foot for balance.
- Put your body in between the ball and the defender.
- Keep your body at a right angle to the defender.
- Keep your arm out, making sure not to push, but to feel the defender.
- Use the outstretched arm to keep space in between the ball and the defender.
- Move away from the defender laterally or backward.
- **Decision-making:** If the defender stays behind the player and applies pressure, continue to shield the ball. If the defender tries to steal the ball, use a fake and try to turn them – keep your body perpendicular to the defender and in between them and the ball.

Best Used

- To keep possession

- To waste time
- To relieve pressure

Problem Areas

- Ball is too close to your body and allows the defender to steal.
- Body is not at a right angle and allows defender to steal.
- Arm is not fully extended and allows defender to steal.
- Player is not balanced and loses possession.
- Player doesn't feel the defender and turns into pressure.

Passing & Receiving

Players at this age have the body structure and mechanics to be able to pass and receive the ball with the correct technique. Exposure and mastery of these techniques is very important for players at these ages. Without a good technical base, players will not be able to move on to more complex aspects of the game such as possession, combination play, etc.

The technical aspects included in this section include

- Inside of the foot passing
- Outside of the foot passing
- Receiving the ball with the inside of the foot
- Receiving the ball with the outside of the foot
- Striking the ball with the laces
- Curling the ball
- Chipping the ball
- Receiving the ball out of the air with the thigh
- Receiving the ball out of the air with the chest

Inside of the Foot Passing Technique

Technique

- Look at the target
- Approach the ball slightly side on
- Non-kicking foot should be placed next to the ball (roughly 3-4 inches away)
- Toes of the non-kicking foot should be pointing directly at the target
- Knees bent
- Ankle locked with toes pointing slightly up on kicking foot
- Strike through the center of the ball
- Follow through towards the target
- Look at the ball as you strike it
- Body leaning slightly forward (keeps the ball low)
- Hips and shoulders should be facing the target after passing the ball.

Best Used

- Accurate passing over the most distances
- Shooting over short distances
- Combined group play
- Quick restarts

Problem Areas

- Kicking foot is not square to the ball

- Toes of kicking foot are not pointed slightly up
- Ankle is not locked
- Non-kicking foot is too close or too far away from the ball
- Non-kicking foot is too far behind the ball
- Follow through is across the body instead of towards target
- Player is off balance after kicking (kicking foot should not be grounded)
- Ball is not struck through the center of the ball
- Shoulders not facing the target

Outside of the Foot Passing Technique

Technique

- Look at the target
- Approach the ball straight on
- Non-kicking foot should be placed next to the ball (roughly 3-4 inches away)
- Knees bent
- Knee over the ball as you strike
- Toes pointing down and slightly in with ankle locked on kicking foot
- Strike through the center of the ball
- Follow through towards the target
- Look at the ball as you strike it
- Body leaning slightly forward (keeps the ball low)

Best Used

- Passing off the dribble
- Passing over short distances
- Guiding the ball into the goal from close range
- Combined group play - releasing the ball for a give and go or overlap
- One touch passing when under pressure

Problem Areas

- Player is reaching for the ball
- Non-kicking foot is not placed close enough to the ball
- Ankle is not locked when striking the ball
- Non-kicking foot is too close to the ball
- Ball is not struck through in the center
- Shoulders not facing the target
- Follow through of kicking foot is not to the target

Receiving Ground Passes with Inside of the Foot

Technique

- Players should always be ready to receive the ball – “on your toes”
- Players should be facing/square to where the ball is coming from
- As the ball travels, move into position and stay behind the path of the ball
- Judge pace of the ball
- Non-kicking foot is used for balance and should be set as you receive the ball
- Toes of the receiving foot should be slightly pointed up with a locked ankle
- Receiving foot should first move towards the ball and then cushion it as it arrives by moving the receiving foot backwards to reduce its pace
- Receiving foot should not be grounded

Best Used

- Bring the ball under control from a low driven pass or a ground pass
- Preparing the ball for passing, dribbling or shooting
- Beating an oncoming/rushing defender
- Taking the player away from pressure/defender
- Taking the player into space
- Laying the ball off for another player

Problem Areas

- Player doesn't move into position to receive the ball quickly enough
- Player does not cushion the ball and it bounces off too far
- Player does not move first towards the ball and it ends up underneath them
- Player is flat footed and is not ready to receive the ball
- Pace of the ball is underestimated
- Non-kicking foot does not balance a player when receiving the ball
- Player reaches for the ball with receiving foot and is off balance when receiving

Receiving Ground Passes with Outside of the Foot

Technique

- Players should always be ready to receive the ball – “on your toes”
- Players should be sideways on when receiving the ball with the outside of the foot
- Shoulder on the side of receiving foot should be pointing at the player passing the ball
- Judge pace of the ball
- Non-kicking foot is used for balance and should be set as you receive the ball
- Toes should be slightly pointed up on receiving foot
- Receiving foot should be slightly off the ground
- As the ball gets close, point the toe of the receiving foot inwards

- As the ball strikes the foot, guide it into the desired area
- Pivot off the non-kicking foot

Best Used

- Turning a defender who is closely marking
- Shielding the ball from a defender who is marking closely
- Setting a player for a pass and/or dribbling after turning
- Prep touch for shooting
- Taking the player away from pressure/defender
- Taking the player into space
- Laying the ball off for another player

Problem Areas

- A player shoulders are square to the passing player and not side on
- Player does not cushion the ball and it bounces off too far
- Player is flat footed and is not ready to receive the ball
- Pace of the ball is underestimated
- Non-kicking foot does not balance a player when receiving the ball

Passing Over Distance/Striking the Ball with Laces

Technique

- Approach to the ball at more of an angle than an inside of the foot pass
- Non-kicking foot should be placed at the side of the ball, roughly a foot away
- Point the toes of your non-kicking foot at your target
- Bend the knee of your non-kicking foot
- Lean slightly over the ball
- Strike the ball using the inside of your laces
- Point your toes down and slightly angled with a locked ankle
- Strike through the middle of the ball
- Striking foot follows through the ball and lands slightly across your body.

Best Used

- Passing over distance
- Shooting
- Clearing the ball from defense
- Switching Play
- Free Kicks

Problem Areas

- Non-kicking foot is placed too wide resulting in slicing the ball
- Non-kicking foot is placed too close
- Non-kicking foot is placed too far behind and the ball rises too much

- Follow through is not towards target
- Shoulders not facing the target
- Player strikes the wrong part of the ball

Chipping Technique

Technique

- Angle of approach is almost straight
- Step to the side and slightly behind the ball (the player should slightly reach for the ball)
- Strike the bottom part of the ball
- Strike the ball using the front part of the laces
- Leg should follow through with the knee finishing high
- Lean back slightly at impact
- Cleats should finish facing down
- Look for height over power
- Keep eye on the ball at impact

Best Used

- Shooting if goalkeeper is off the line
- Through passes to forwards if defenders are in the way
- Passes over defenders

Problem Areas

- No follow through
- Players use their toes and the ball goes straight instead of up
- Players lean over the ball
- Don't strike the lowest part of the ball
- Run up is too wide and players slice the ball

Curling Pass/Shot (Banana Pass/Shot)

Technique

- Approach the ball from the side at a steep angle (at least 45 degrees)
- Use the inside of the big toe/inside of the foot to strike the ball
- Non-kicking foot should be placed near to the ball (2 –3 inches)
- Strike the ball off center on the side nearest to the non-kicking foot
- Lock the ankle with toes pointing up when striking the ball
- Bend the knees, especially the non-kicking foot
- Follow-through should be high and across the body
- Players should end facing the target

- To make the ball rise, lean back slightly and strike the ball at its lowest point

Best Used

- Passing over all distances
- Shooting
- Free Kicks
- Passing around defenders

Problem Areas

- Players use wrong part of foot
- Players strike the wrong part of the ball
- Non-kicking foot too far away
- No follow through
- Approach is too straight

Receiving Air Balls with the Thigh

Technique

- Be ready to receive the ball
- Players should be facing/square to where the ball is coming from
- Judge the pace and flight of the ball
- Non-receiving foot is used for balance and should be set as you receive the ball
- Thigh should start in the air
- As the ball comes into contact with the thigh, cushion it by moving the thigh back and taking the pace off the ball

Best Used

- Bring down a driven or lofted pass
- Setting up for a pass
- Setting up for a volley or shot on goal
- Taking the player away from a pressuring defender
- Taking the player into space

Problem Areas

- Player is not square when receiving and the ball bounces off the thigh and past the player
- Pace of the ball is underestimated
- Selection of controlling surface is incorrect due to misjudging the flight of the ball
- Non-kicking foot does not balance a player when receiving the ball
- Ball is not cushioned and it is miss-controlled

Receiving Air Balls with the Chest

Technique

- Be ready to receive the ball
- Face the direction where the ball is coming from
- Judge pace and flight
- Both feet are used for balance and should be set as the ball is received
- Receive the ball with the top of the chest
- Direct the ball down
- As the ball meets the chest, depress the chest and direct the ball to the floor

Best Used

- Bring down a lofted pass
- Setting up for a pass, shot or dribble
- Taking the player away from a defender
- Taking the player into space
- Lay off for another player

Problem Areas

- Ball bounces off too far
- Pace of the ball is underestimated
- Selection of controlling surface is incorrect
- Misjudged flight of the ball
- Player is not balanced when receiving the ball
- Ball is not cushioned

Finishing

Finishing in soccer is the most difficult aspect of the game – not necessarily the technical aspect of shooting the ball, but the ability to put the ball in goal with all the pressures involved, both physical and psychological. For example, the physical pressures from the goalkeeper and defenders, as well as the psychological pressures such as the result of the game, time gone in the game, adrenaline, etc. The best finishers in the world are not necessarily the best technical strikers of the ball, but they can deal with the pressures of the game and still have the presence of mind to put the ball in the goal!

What surfaces can be used to finish the ball?

As a general rule, a player should use the inside of their foot for accuracy when shooting from close range, and the instep (top of the laces) for power when shooting from distance. If you higher levels of soccer, you will recognize that players will use all different surfaces to put the ball in the goal. When teaching younger players, it is best to focus on the general technical aspects first. This will give your players a good foundation from which to build.

Finishing for Power – Instructional Coaching Points

- Eyes should be on the ball when striking, with the head down and locked firmly onto the ball.
- Approach the ball slightly side on.
- Place the non-kicking foot next to the ball with the toes of this foot aiming at the target.
- Bend the knees, and get low to the ball
- Body weight should be slightly over the ball.
- Use the instep (top of the laces) to strike the center of the ball. How does a player get the top of their laces to strike the center of the ball? Players should point their toes straight down and slightly out. This will enable them to get their laces onto the ball.
- The ankle of the kicking foot should be locked with the toes pointing down. Loose ankle = no power!
- The knee of a player's kicking leg should be over the ball on impact.
- After connecting with the center of the ball, follow through with the whole body and land on the foot that struck the ball. This puts the power into the ball.
- After striking the ball, the player's shoulders and hips should be facing the target. Controlling these body mechanics will help with accuracy.

Finishing for Accuracy – Instructional Coaching Points

When teaching players to finish with the inside of the foot, you are basically teaching them how to pass with the inside of the foot – there is very little difference! Please refer to the section containing passing technique for details.

Question and Answer Coaching Points

Q: Which part of the foot should we use when shooting from distance and for power?

A: Instep (laces).

Q: Which part of the foot should we use when we are shooting from close range and for accuracy?

A: Inside.

Q: Should we get low to the ball or have straight legs when we shoot?

A: Knees bent.

Q: Locked or loose ankle when we strike the ball?

A: Locked.

Q: Head down on the ball or looking up?

A: Head down.

Q: Where should we follow through to after we struck the ball?

A: Towards the target.

Teaching Guidelines

Give brief instruction about the technique but don't overwhelm your players with a lot of specifics. Keep most of your coaching points to questions and answer. Keep this aspect fun.

Defending

At the U9-U10 age groups, a coach should start to introduce the principles of defense to their players. What aspects of defense should a coach begin to teach? A coach at the U9 age group should begin to teach the principles of immediate pressure and delay. At the U10 age group, we should start to master the aspects of pressure defending as well as introduce the concept of cover. As players move into the U11-U12 ages, they should have these earlier topics reinforced and be introduced to the concepts of balance and concentration.

Principles of Defending

Immediate Pressure

The player closest to the ball applies immediate pressure. This player must determine whether they can immediately win on the ball, force the attacker into a mistake, or just delay the opponent. Often, the player applying pressure may not directly recover the ball, but force the opponent to lose possession. Players applying immediate pressure can help delay an attack by getting into a position that denies the opponent the opportunity to play the ball forward.

Delay

Delaying the opponent's ability to play forward by applying pressure helps the defending team recover and organize. Delaying the opponent is the primary task of the pressuring defender closest to the ball – not winning possession of the ball! When delaying the opponent, defenders must be patient and controlled in their approach so as to not make a rash challenge and get beaten easily. During this time of delay, the pressuring defender may also attempt to dictate the direction that the attacker may go, through their positioning.

Cover

While the pressuring defender is attempting to delay the attack, all other players should be recovering into defensive positions. Most important are the player(s) giving cover to the pressuring defender. Covering players must take positions so that a pass, shot or dribbling opponent cannot easily penetrate the remaining defenders should the pressuring defender be beaten. We refer to the role and function of these players as providing defensive cover.

Balance

As a team concentrates their defense in the area of the ball, defenders away from the ball (opposite side of the field) must position themselves to cover vital spaces (central areas) in order to prevent attackers from making penetrating runs into these spaces to receive the ball for an attempt at goal. All players who are on the opposite side of the field must seek positions in which to provide balance to the defense.

Concentration

As players recover toward their own goal and organize their defense, the objective is to limit the time and space for the opponent by concentrating their numbers in the area of the ball. Defenders also

recover centrally towards their own goal in order to limit the opponent's ability to directly attack the goal. When teams concentrate their into the middle of the field, this can be referred to as PINCHING IN (or SQUEEZING). When stepping forward to meet the opponent we refer to that as PUSHING UP.

Control and Restraint

Players must be disciplined and play "under control" when challenging for the ball. Too often, players make poorly timed, off-balanced attempts to win the ball. Players should restrain from tackling until they are confident they will win the ball. Those players who rush in to challenge or over-commit to intercept a pass leave themselves and their teammates exposed. Recognizing when to challenge requires players to be in the correct defensive position and ready to act.

Roles and Responsibilities of Defenders

Pressure

- Closest player applies pressure to the ball to regain possession if possible.
- Deny penetration of any kind (pass or dribble that beats defenders).
- Select proper angle of challenge based on area of the field (direct attacker to least dangerous space or towards cover help).
- Control speed of the challenge.

Cover

- Can be several players.
- Provide cover for pressuring defender.
- Select proper angle of cover (approximately a 45-degree angle).
- Maintain proper distance of cover (should be close enough to close down immediately or challenge for the ball if the pressuring defender is beaten).
- Responsible for tracking attacking players making forward runs.

Balance

- Remaining players provide balance.
- Pinch in towards the center of the field to "lock up" vital areas.
- Track attacking players away from the area of the ball.
- Maintain balance (shape) of team defensively.

Depth

- Describes the collective play of all players.
- Pressure, cover and balance together provide depth in defense.

How and When to Tackle

When the pressuring defender does try to win the ball from an attacker, there are three main ways they can tackle (the term tackle means an attempt to win the ball, and not necessarily a slide). These are the poke tackle, the block tackle and the slide tackle.

Poke Tackle

When is the Poke Tackle used?

A defender uses the poke tackle when an attacker is dribbling directly at them. The defender waits until the correct moment, usually when the attacker pushes the ball out a little too far, and then uses their front foot to poke the ball out of the path of the attacker and into space. Experienced and highly skilled defenders can use the poke tackle to pass the ball to a teammate.

Coaching Points

- Use the front foot to poke at the ball.
- Weight should be on the back leg.
- Use the back foot for balance.
- Never put weight on the front foot when tackling! If the defender misses the ball, they will be off balance and unable to recover quickly.

Problem Areas

- The defender dives in and puts all their weight onto the front foot. They are now off balance and unable to recover.
- Challenge is mistimed – the defender becomes impatient, does not wait for a mistake and dives in.

Block Tackle

When is a Block Tackle used?

A block tackle can be used in two situations:

- In a 50/50 challenge
- When an attacker is dribbling and has pushed the ball out too far

In both situations, the defender must time their challenge and must connect with the ball at the same moment as the attacker.

Coaching Points

- Note the timing of the challenge.
- The defender can block with either foot depending on the side of the ball.
- Muscles in the blocking leg must be tensed with the toes pointing slightly up and the ankle locked.
- The blocking foot should be slightly off the ground and hit the middle of the ball.
- The player should power through the ball. Failure to have the ankle locked and power into the tackle may result in a injured foot for the defender.

Problem Areas

- The toes are not pointed up and ankle is not locked.
- The attacking player is able to push through the ball and come out with it.

- The tackling foot is on the ground when challenging. In this case, the attacker strikes through the middle of the ball, the ball goes over the defender's foot, and the attacker comes out with the ball.
- Mistimed challenge – going too late into a challenge usually results in a free kick.

Slide Tackle

When is a Slide Tackle used?

The slide tackle is a pressuring defender's last resort! The attacking player has usually beaten the defender on the dribble or got to the ball first in a chase. The defender must now recover and try to challenge in a way that will win the ball and not result in a free kick. The defender recovers to the side or just behind the defender. They then dive to the ground (feet first), slide onto the side of the thigh, reach forward with the extended foot, and knock the ball out of the attacker's path. Experienced and highly skilled defenders can time a sliding challenge to connect with the ball the same time as the attacker (like a block tackle), stand up, and come away with the ball.

Coaching Points

- Slide to the side of the attacker.
- Slide sideways onto the side of the thigh.
- Make yourself as long as possible to get your challenging foot in front of the attacker.
- Which foot to challenge with? If the attacker is on the defender's right-hand side, the player should look to slide onto their right thigh and win the ball with their left foot and vice versa.

Problem Areas

- The defender slides straight into the attacker, resulting in a free kick.
- The defender doesn't get full extension when sliding
- The defender mistimes the challenge, again resulting in a free kick.

Decision to Tackle

This is probably the most difficult part of defending, especially for young players. Knowing when to challenge an attacker and making the correct decision requires practice and repetition. Although difficult, there are many visual cues that attackers give as well as verbal cues that teammates can give to aid in this decision.

Below are cues that defenders should act upon and try and win the ball as opposed to delaying the attacker:

- The attacker misplays the ball (loses control), either with their controlling touch or when dribbling.
- The attackers attempted pass, long or short, does not have enough pace to get to its target. Defenders in this situation should look to either make a challenge as the ball gets to its target, or look to intercept.
- The attacker has their head down to look at the ball. This is a great time to make a challenge.
- The attacker is within shooting distance. The defender should be looking to challenge the ball in order to stop the shot on goal – now is not the time to delay!

- There is a covering defender in a good position, and they have communicated to the pressuring defender to challenge the ball.

These situations can come at any point during a game. The coach's role is to teach defenders how to recognize these situations and use the correct challenge to win the ball.