

Vaqueritos Parent Handbook: Spring 2026

Welcome to the Spring season! This handbook is your all-inclusive guide to our program's philosophy, season logistics, player milestones, and how you can support your child's technical development at home.

Program Overview Reminder

Here is a quick look at our structure for the season:

- **Duration:** The season runs for 10 weeks, beginning the week of **March 9** and concluding with our final Street Soccer Saturday on **May 23**. (The program will not hold sessions during PUSD's Spring Break.)
- **Training Philosophy:** We utilize U.S. Soccer's "Play-Practice-Play" model. Our professional coaching staff maintains a 12:1 player-to-coach ratio to ensure high-quality, intentional technical training using fun yet challenging ball mastery exercises.

Weekly Schedule:

- **Tuesdays @ Hilleary Park:**

U6, U8 & U10: 4:30 to 5:45 pm

U12 & U14: 6:00 to 7:15 pm

- **Fridays @ Meadowbrook Middle School:**

U6, U8 & U10: 4:30 to 5:45 pm

U12 & U14: 6:00 to 7:15 pm

- **Street Soccer Saturdays @ Meadowbrook Middle School:**

U6, U8 & U10: 9 to 10:15 am

U12 & U14: 10:30 to 11:45 am

The Player Pathway: Buckaroos to Vaqueros

Development isn't just about practice—it's about progress. This spring, we are introducing **Earned Milestones** to challenge every player to level up their game.

How it Works: We've broken the season into three-week segments focusing on **Ball Mastery (juggling, dribbling and ball skills)**, **Passing & Receiving**, and **Shooting**.

The Evaluation: Every third Saturday players will have the option to demonstrate their skills before our Competitive Directors and Coaching staff to earn their rank:

- **Bronze Buckaroos** (Foundational)

- **Silver Stallions** (Consistent)
- **Gold Gauchos** (Advanced)
- **Vaqueros** (Elite)

Clear Goals, Real Rewards: Parents will receive a detailed curriculum at the start of each period so players know exactly what they need to master. When a player levels up, they don't just get better—they get recognized with a signature award to mark their success.

Saturday Street Soccer and Assessments

The Vaquitos spring program has intentionally moved away from the traditional, rigid Saturday game format in favor of the Street Soccer style of play. The **Street Soccer** format mirrors how the greatest players in the world—from Pelé, Ronaldo, Messi—learned the game in their neighborhoods.

In a typical rec program, children are assigned to a fixed team, follow a set formation, and often deal with the sideline pressure of a "win-loss" record. Street Soccer Saturdays allow players to learn the demands of the game while providing the freedom to try things without the fear of failure or sideline feedback.

How It Works

- **Day-Of Team Formation:** When players arrive, there are no set rosters. Coaches divide players into small groups (3v3, 4v4, or 5v5) based on who is present. This encourages kids to make new friends and learn to play with different teammates every week. Please make every effort to be on time for efficient organization.
- **The Facilitator Role:** Our professional coaches don't "manage" from the sidelines with a whistle and a clipboard. Instead, they act as facilitators. They are only responsible to set up fields, organize teams, provide the balls, help with substitutions, referee and keep the game flowing.
- **Maximum Touches:** The Street Soccer format keeps every player constantly involved, maximizing their time on the ball, which is the fastest way to build "soccer IQ" and technical confidence.
- **Organic Creativity:** Without a coach shouting instructions, players are forced to solve problems themselves. They learn when to take a risk, how to communicate with their peers, and discover their own style of play. Our staff will encourage players to be creative and enjoy the game through friendly competition.

Assessment Saturdays

Assessments will take place **every third Saturday** of the program. Our goal is to keep the kids playing while providing a focused environment for those ready to test. During these sessions, players interested in testing will be pulled from the Street Soccer games and allowed two chances to meet their age groups testing standards.

Season Logistics

Season Dates: March 10 – May 23

- **Training Days:** Tuesdays (Hilleary Park) and Fridays (Meadowbrook Middle School)
- **Street Soccer Saturdays:** Saturdays (Meadowbrook Middle School)
 - **U6 to U10:** 9 to 10:15 am
 - **U12 to U14:** 10:30 to 11:45 am
- **Spring Break:** April 6-12 (No Sessions)

The Daily Flow (75 Minutes):

- **00:00–00:10 | Play 1:** Small-sided games upon arrival.
- **00:10–00:55 | Practice:** Speed-Agility-Quickness focus (5 mins); Juggle (5 mins); Exercise A (15 mins); break (5 mins); Exercise B (15 mins), or run concurrently as stations.
- **00:55–01:15 | Play 2:** Scrimmage. Facilitate flow and minimize whistles.

The Player Milestone Tracker

Players will be tested on these specific standards throughout the three phases of the season.

Phase 1: Ball Mastery (Weeks 1–3)

Objective: Confidence on the Ball.

Rank	U6 & U8	U10 & U12	U14
Bronze	1 juggle (drop-kick-catch); Dribble 10yds	3 juggles (bounces ok); 5-cone Dribble	10 juggles (bounces ok); Slalom
Silver	3 juggles (bounces ok); Pull-back	5 juggles (bounces ok); Step-over	5 juggles (no bounce); Cruyff Turn

Gold	5 juggles (bounces ok); Figure-8	5 juggles (no bounce); Figure-8 (both feet)	15 juggles (no bounce); Figure-8 (weak foot)
Vaquero	5 juggles (no bounce); Beat 1v1	10 juggles (no bounce); Skill to beat defender	30 juggles (no bounce); Beat defender 3x

Phase 2: Passing & Receiving (Weeks 4–6)

Objective: Connection & Awareness.

Rank	U6 & U8	U10 & U12	U14
Bronze	5yd Pass into 4ft gate (2/5)	8yd Pass into 3ft gate (3/5)	12yd Pass into 2ft gate (3/5)
Silver	Stop rolling ball in "2 steps"	Receive & turn 90° in "2 touches"	Receive "across the body"
Gold	3 partner passes in a row	"Wall-Pass" with a coach	5 one-touch passes with partner
Vaquero	Accurate pass at mid-speed running	Accurate pass at mid-speed running	Disguised pass (look away)

Phase 3: Creating & Finishing (Weeks 7–9)

Objective: Scoring Chances.

Rank	U6 & U8	U10 & U12	U14
Bronze	Hit open net from 8yds (Laces)	Hit net from 12yds (Laces)	Hit net from 18yds (Laces)
Silver	2/5 goals into "corners"	3/5 goals into "corners"	4/5 goals into "side-netting"
Gold	Score with Weak Foot (1/3)	Score with Weak Foot (2/5)	First-time finish from rolling cross
Vaquero	Score after a move in Street Soccer	Score in 1v1 breakaway vs. Keeper	Chip the keeper or "Finesse" finish

Technical "Cheat Sheet" for Parents

Use these definitions and cues to help your child practice the right mechanics at home.

- **Passing (The Push Pass):** Form an "L-shape" with the foot. Plant your standing foot exactly at the target. Strike the center of the ball with the inside (arch) of the foot.
- **Receiving (The First Touch):** Play "Catching the Egg". The cue is: *"Don't let the egg break on your foot."* Cushion the ball by slightly withdrawing the foot on contact to keep it within one step of the body.
- **Power Shooting (The Laces Strike):** For a laces strike, keep the toes pointed down to the grass and lock the ankle. Strike through the ball and land on the kicking foot.
- **The Skill Move Exit:** A skill move fakes out the defender, but the "Exit" is what beats them. Immediately after the fake, use the outside of the opposite foot to explode into the open space.

The Vaquero 10: Skill Move Glossary

1. **The Body Feint (The Faint):** Exaggerated step to one side without touching the ball, dip shoulder, and exit opposite.

2. **The Scissors (Inside-to-Outside):** Circle the foot around the front of the ball starting from the inside and moving to the outside. Exit with the opposite foot.
 3. **The Step-Over (Outside-to-Inside):** Distinct from the Scissors. Circle the foot over the top of the ball starting from the outside and moving to the inside. Exit by pushing the ball away with the same foot.
 4. **The Matthews:** Quick inside-foot hop touch, instant outside-foot flick.
 5. **The Cruyff Turn:** Fake a shot, hook the ball behind the standing leg, and spin.
 6. **La Croqueta:** Fast lateral slide from the inside of one foot to the inside of the other.
 7. **The Roll-Over:** Sole of the foot drags the ball across the body.
 8. **The Zidane (Roulette):** 360-degree spin dragging the ball with both soles.
 9. **The L-Turn:** Pull back with the sole, ping behind the heel at 90 degrees.
 10. **The Rainbow:** Trap between heel/toe, roll up the leg, flick over the head.
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Age-Appropriate Backyard Practice Guide

Set up these simple games in a driveway or small yard (no full-size goals required).

U6 (Ages 4-5)

- **Phase 1: *Jungle Maze.*** Scatter random objects; dribble through without touching "trees." Use pinky and big toe. | *Body Part Tag.* Player shadows you dribbling. Call a body part to stop the ball with (knee, nose, sole).
- **Phase 2: *Gate Hunter.*** Pass through a 4ft wide gate to your feet. | *Catching the Egg.* Roll ball to player; they must cushion it to stay within one step.
- **Phase 3: *Rocket Launchers.*** Big step back, strike stationary ball hard against a fence/wall. | *Target Wall.* Strike a drawn chalk box or sideways lawn chair from 8 yards.

U8 & U10 (Ages 6-9)

- **Phase 1: *Technical Figure-8.*** Dribble a tight figure-8 around two bottles. | *Skill Gauntlet.* Dribble at a chair, execute a move (Pull-back, Step-over), and accelerate away.
- **Phase 2: *Distance Bowling.*** Pass through a 3ft gate from 8 yards. Lock the ankle. | *Clock Turn.* Roll ball and call "Left" or "Right." Player receives and turns 90° in one touch.
- **Phase 3: *Side-Netting Snipers.*** Place boxes 6ft apart. Pass/shoot precisely inside the edge from 12 yards. | *Weak Foot Wall-Ball.* Strike against a wall using *only* the non-dominant foot.

U12 & U14 (Ages 10-13)

- **Phase 1: *High-Speed Slalom.*** Sprint dribble through 5 wide objects using laces. | *Vaquero 1v1.* Lunge at the dribbling player; they use an advanced move (Cruyff, L-Turn) to escape.

- **Phase 2:** *The Half-Turn*. Firm pass; player receives with the "away foot" to instantly open hips. | *Disguised Mirror Pass*. Player looks at you to sell a fake, then snaps ankle to pass through a 2ft offset gate.
- **Phase 3:** *First-Time Fence Strike*. Roll ball firmly across yard; player runs onto it and strikes fence without stopping it. | *Finesse Chip*. Player chips the ball into a bucket/bin from 15 yards to simulate chipping a keeper.