



**GRASSROOTS PLAYER
DEVELOPMENT
FRAMEWORK**

U.S. SOCCER COACHING EDUCATION

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

(ZONE 3)

(ZONE 1)

(ZONE 2)

Learning the fundamentals of the game in game like situations. Understanding the purpose & structure of the game, direction of play and basic rules.

Learning the basic understanding of attacking, defending and transition by playing together.

Learning the basic understanding of attacking, defending and transition by playing as a team (7v7).

Learning the fundamentals given his/her role, position and tasks in the team (9v9)

Learning the alignment of the roles, positions, and designated tasks in the team (11v11).

Development of the specific qualities of a player in their position to maximize their contribution to the result of the game

Development of the specific qualities of a player to be the best player in their position to win the game

Further development and mastering of the specific qualities of a player to create a winning team and the league

U6

U7-U8

U9-U10

U11-U12

U13-U14

U15-U16

U17-U18

U19-U20+

U6 "The ball is playing with me...I am playing with the ball."

U7-U8 "Playing with my friends."

U9-U10 "Playing as a team"

U11-U12 "Playing my role and position for the team"

GR U13+ "Being the best player that I can be for my role and position in the team"

U-15 & U-16 EXECUTE THE KEY QUALITIES SUCCESSFULLY

U17-U18 EXECUTE THE KEY QUALITIES SUCCESSFULLY IN ORDER TO WIN THE GAME

U-19 & U-20+ WIN THE GAME AND THE LEAGUE



U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



4v4

GAME MODEL: 4v4

AGES: 6 - 8

	DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS	DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS	KEY QUALITIES	ATTACKING PLAYER ACTIONS	DEFENDING PLAYER ACTIONS	PLAYER BEHAVIORS	COACH BEHAVIORS
AGE 6	<p>“The ball is playing with me... I am playing with the ball.”</p> <p>Learning the fundamentals of the game in game-like situations. Understanding the purpose and structure of the game, direction of play, and basic rules.</p>	<p>Activity based games that emphasize exploration and experimentation.</p> <p>Ball experiences in game-like situations.</p> <p>Exploring physical abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads and analyzes situations regarding the structure of soccer attacking/defending/transition • Takes initiative-creates opportunities instead of reacting • Wants to score • Shows comfort with the ball • Is involved and engaged throughout every game/training session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball 	<p>Small, incidental things are important</p> <p>Always in motion</p>	<p>Appreciate the things they take seriously, even if you don't</p> <p>Use routines to manage them during practice and games</p>
AGES 7 - 8	<p>“Playing with my friends.”</p> <p>Learning the basic understanding of attacking, defending, and transition by playing together..</p>	<p>Activities focused on the goals of attacking and defending and how to accomplish them</p> <p>Ball experiences in game-like situations with attention for the key qualities of a player</p> <p>Experiences of attacking and defending together (reading & decision making)</p>	<p>In addition to the KQs listed above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies (basic) knowledge of the cues • Understands where and when to move themselves and the ball • Confronts situations • Demonstrates bravery • Delivers on agreements and promises • Evaluates and reflects on their own performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack • Plus all player actions above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it compact • Keep it compact • Plus all player actions above 	<p>Short attention span</p> <p>Live in the moment</p> <p>Focus is on self</p>	<p>Exercises are short and to the point, reminders are necessary</p> <p>Talk about what happens, not what happened</p> <p>Accept their behavior and praise when they share</p>

A>D Defend as quickly as possible (transition is always a part of attacking and defending but is not a focus for the Grassroots Coach).

D>A Attack as quickly as possible (transition is always a part of attacking and defending but is not a focus for the Grassroots Coach).

U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



GAME MODEL: 7v7

AGES: 9 - 10

7v7

DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS	DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS	KEY QUALITIES	ATTACKING PLAYER ACTIONS	DEFENDING PLAYER ACTIONS	PLAYER BEHAVIORS	COACH BEHAVIORS
<p>"Playing as team."</p> <p>Learning the basic understanding of attacking, defending, and transition by playing as a 7v7 team.</p>	<p>Developing relationships with the other players, how decisions and movement affect others (teammates and opponents)</p> <p>Experiences in game-like situations for key qualities related to attacking and defending</p> <p>Experiences of attacking and defending as a team</p>	<p>In addition to the KQs of a 4v4 player:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligns own actions with the other players, positions Challenges opponents Deals with adversity Is proficient in 1v1 situations to create or to steal/regain the ball 	<p>U6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shoot Pass or dribble forward 	<p>U6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect the goal Steal the ball 	<p>Participate enthusiastically in competitive activities</p>	<p>Encourage them to try to win, but always be fair</p>
			<p>U7/U8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spread out Create passing options Support the attack 	<p>U7/U8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make it compact Keep it compact 	<p>Practice repeatedly to get better</p>	<p>Recognize their effort, give them things to practice on at home</p>
			<p>U9/U10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Create a 2v1 or 1v1</i> <i>Change the point of attack</i> 	<p>U9/U10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Pressure, cover, balance</i> <i>Outnumber the opponent</i> 	<p>Take losing hard, in practice and games</p>	<p>Focus on how they play and improve, not the results</p>
					<p>Want to know "why"</p>	<p>Guide them toward finding the answers themselves</p>
					<p>Need lots of positive reinforcement</p>	<p>Give plenty of praise</p>

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U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



GAME MODEL: 9v9

9v9

AGES: 11 - 12

DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS	DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS	KEY QUALITIES	ATTACKING PLAYER ACTIONS	DEFENDING PLAYER ACTIONS	PLAYER BEHAVIORS	COACH BEHAVIORS
<p>“Playing my role and position for the team.”</p> <p>Learning the fundamentals given his/ her role, position, and tasks in the 9v9 team.</p>	<p>Gaining fundamental understanding of the meaning of role, position and task in a team</p> <p>Experiences in game-like situations for the task specific Key Qualities of attacking and defending</p> <p>Experiences of position specific task execution during defending and attacking</p>	<p>In addition to the KQs of a 7v7 player:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remains calm and composed Is technically proficient to be effective Is coordinated in their movement Is adaptable and flexible in dealing with (unexpected) challenges and problems Articulates their own learning needs 	<p>U6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shoot Pass or dribble forward <p>U7/U8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spread out Create passing options Support the attack <p>U9/U10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a 2v1 or 1v1 Change the point of attack <p>U11/U12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Change the pace/ rhythm</i> <i>Switch positions</i> 	<p>U6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect the goal Steal the ball <p>U7/U8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make it compact Keep it compact <p>U9/U10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressure, cover, balance Outnumber the opponent <p>U11/U12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Stay involved</i> <i>Mark the player/ mark the area</i> 	<p>Ready and eager to learn</p> <p>Will try more complex tasks</p> <p>Notice indifferences and unfair treatment</p> <p>Players will develop at different rates (gender differences in maturation)</p> <p>Like to organize themselves without the coach</p>	<p>Come to training prepared with ideas to guide your players</p> <p>Encourage players to be creative and try new things</p> <p>Be consistent in what you say and how you treat individuals/ the team</p> <p>Organize groups to guarantee fun and challenge for every player</p> <p>Support their being independent and self-responsible</p>

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U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



GAME MODEL: 11v11

AGES: 13+

11v11

DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS	DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS	KEY QUALITIES	ATTACKING PLAYER ACTIONS	DEFENDING PLAYER ACTIONS	PLAYER BEHAVIORS	COACH BEHAVIORS
<p>“Being the best player that I can be for my role and position in the team.”</p> <p>Learning the alignment of the roles, positions, and designated tasks in the 11v11 team.</p>	<p>Gaining understanding of the meaning of role, position and designated task in a team</p> <p>Experiences of the alignment of position specific task execution during defending and attacking</p>	<p>All key qualities at U13+</p>	<p>All Player Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack • Create a 2v1 or 1v1 • Change the point of attack • Change the pace/ rhythm • Switch positions 	<p>All Player Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball • Make it compact • Keep it compact • Pressure, cover, balance • Outnumber the opponent • Stay involved • Mark the player/ mark the area 	<p>Engage in problem solving activities</p> <p>Challenge ideas</p> <p>Demonstrate mood shifts</p> <p>Differences between genders</p> <p>Do not always play fairly</p>	<p>Use guided questions to support their thinking/decision making</p> <p>Listen first and consider their perspective</p> <p>Be patient and consistent in your treatment</p> <p>Give each player individual attention and care</p> <p>Encourage self-regulation, e.g. refereeing own games at training</p>

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D>A Attack as quickly as possible (transition is always a part of attacking and defending but is not a focus for the Grassroots Coach).



PLAYER ACTIONS

		4 v 4	7 v 7	9 v 9	11 v 11
		U-6, U-7, U-8	U-9, U-10	U-11, U-12	U-13+
ATTACKING	U-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack • Create a 2v1 or 1v1 • Change the point of attack • Change the pace/rhythm • Switch positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack • Create a 2v1 or 1v1 • Change the point of attack • Change the pace/rhythm • Switch positions
	U7/U8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the attack • Create a 2v1 or 1v1 • Change the point of attack 		
A>D DEFEND AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE					
DEFENDING	U-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball • Make it compact • Keep it compact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball • Make it compact • Keep it compact • Pressure, cover, balance • Outnumber the opponent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball • Make it compact • Keep it compact • Pressure, cover, balance • Outnumber the opponent • Stay involved • Mark the player/mark the area
	U-7/U-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it compact • Keep it compact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure, cover, balance • Outnumber the opponent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay involved • Mark the player/mark the area 	
D>A ATTACK AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE					



U.S. SOCCER COACHING EDUCATION

PLAY-PRACTICE-PLAY OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION



U.S. Soccer developed and implemented the Play-Practice-Play methodology at the Grassroots level. Researched and developed by technical leaders, this player-centered approach allows coaches of all levels to help create training environments to fulfill the two basic needs of players of all ages: to have fun and to develop!

The game of soccer is very unpredictable and free-flowing. It's constantly changing between the moments of attacking, defending, and both transitional moments in between. Each of the three phases of Play-Practice-Play replicates those moments and are easy for the coach to implement. The environment provides players with what they like and with what they need to analyze the game, make decisions, be creative with their own solutions, and to ultimately become independent, critical thinkers.

U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

At the grassroots level, children learn and develop to their full potential through game-like experiences in an enjoyable environment which supports individual growth



THE 1ST PLAY PHASE



As children arrive at practice, they immediately start playing small games (2v2, 3v3, or 4v4, or a game with unequal numbers based on the available number of players). The coach's priorities during the first play phase are to welcome the players, ensure safety, and observe/monitor their behaviors while PLAYING.

There is an intention within this first phase based on the training session goal that the coach has selected prior to the session; the coach has an influence by using teaching actions, such as positive specific praise, key words, and asking guided questions.

These teaching actions help plant seeds for players to think about the goal while experiencing the fun of a small-sided game and to learn by making decisions, creating their own solutions, and solving the problems that the game presents. Empirical data has shown that children learn best when they experience periods of play in a safe environment where they can experiment and make decisions. The goal of this phase is to get players excited about training and primed to learn about today's training-session goal based on a real context that they have just experienced.

ATTACKING TRAINING SESSION GOALS	DEFENDING TRAINING SESSION GOALS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building up from own half to move the ball to the opponent's half • Building up in opponent's half to create chances • Score goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent the opponent from building up in their own half • Prevent the opponent from building up and creating chances in our half • Prevent the opponent from scoring

FAQ- When do the players warm up and stretch?

It's important to prepare their bodies for the motor skills and movements that they will use while playing. Improving flexibility is important to prepare them for practice or the game and also to help prevent injury. We see a decrease in flexibility as growth accelerates. Specific flexibility training through tag games or moving games are appropriate from the age of 11-12 (prior to puberty). It is also best carried out when players are warm after some movement. Coaches should consider the first break in play 1 as a potential time for stretching.



THE PRACTICE PHASE



The Practice Phase is where the players will actively learn through continued guidance from the coach. This phase uses game-like activities - directional, located in the corresponding area of the field for the training objective, and free-flowing with attacking, defending, and both transition moments. The activities set up meaningful repetitions of today's goal.

There are three options (or challenge levels) in the Practice Phase: Core, Less Challenging, and More Challenging. Coaches start with the core activity and then decide to move to the less or more challenging activity to find the appropriate level of challenge for the players. Players build on their previous experiences from the 1st Play Phase and apply their own solutions with the coach's guidance.

Along the way, players will make mistakes and the coach continues to help by not only using positive reinforcement, guided questions, and key words, but also other teaching actions such as demonstrations, feedback, or directions. The coach also interacts with the players about the "why" of the desired behaviors. The goal of the practice phase is to help players further develop their solutions to the challenges presented in the 1st Play Phase.

5 ELEMENTS OF A TRAINING ACTIVITY

- 1. Organized:** is the activity organized in the right way? (is it safe and the ball stays in play?)
- 2. Game-like:** is the activity game-like? (attacking, defending, & transition)
- 3. Repetition:** is there repetition when looking at the overall goal of the session?
- 4. Challenging:** are the players being challenged? (is there the right balance between being successful and unsuccessful?)
- 5. Coaching:** is there effective coaching, based on the age and level of the players?

	4 v 4	7 v 7	9 v 9	11 v 11
	U-6, U-7, U-8	U-9, U-10	U-11, U-12	U-13+
ATTACKING	U-6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward U-7/U-8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack • Create a 2v1 or 1v1 • Change the point of attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack • Create a 2v1 or 1v1 • Change the point of attack • Change the pace/rhythm • Switch positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot • Pass or dribble forward • Spread out • Create passing options • Support the attack • Create a 2v1 or 1v1 • Change the point of attack • Change the pace/rhythm • Switch positions
A>D	DEFEND AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE			
DEFENDING	U-6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball U-7/U-8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it compact • Keep it compact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball • Make it compact • Keep it compact • Pressure, cover, balance • Outnumber the opponent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball • Make it compact • Keep it compact • Pressure, cover, balance • Outnumber the opponent • Stay involved • Mark the player/mark the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the goal • Steal the ball • Make it compact • Keep it compact • Pressure, cover, balance • Outnumber the opponent • Stay involved • Mark the player/mark the area
D>A	ATTACK AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE			

FAQ- What about technique?

Technique is the isolated execution of a soccer action, whereas skill is the execution of the technique in a context with decision-making. Within a game-like context, players learn fundamental skills (techniques performed in the context of the game) through playing. U.S. Soccer has developed a list of developmentally appropriate Player Actions (see figure 3) which coaches select as part of the training session goal. They are integrated with the Key Qualities which are also needed for the player to perform the action.

THE 2ND PLAY PHASE



The final phase offers players the opportunity to scrimmage now with larger numbers involved and with minimal interruptions; this is why the players came to training. The coach still has an influence through specific teaching actions such as key words and checking for understanding through guided questions.

It is also an opportunity to learn the Laws of the Game/Rules, as it mimics a game with using the max roster size for the age group. For instance, 7v7 has a max roster size of 12, so the final game is 6v6 and all players are encouraged to play and apply what they have learned in the previous two phases. In this final phase, the main priority for the coach is to check the effectiveness of his/her teaching actions from the 1st Play and Practice Phases. A half-time is built in to this phase, so that the coach can help players reflect on their first-half performance and look for solutions to challenges in the game related to today's training session goal. The coach now can use all previously used key words and guided questions, and help the player get organized for the second half of play.

Following the conclusion of the session, coaches should take a moment to check on the players' well-being, review the objectives of the training session, check for players' understanding of today's training session goal, and inform or remind them about the next training or game.

FAQ- When do they learn the rules (throw-ins, corner kicks, etc.)?

Within the holistic approach, players learn the rules of the game through playing and experiencing the moments when/where the rule occurs. The 2nd Play Phase provides many of these moments within a context that most closely resembles the game.

Conclusion

The Play-Practice-Play methodology helps coaches create enjoyable environments, with the ultimate goal of developing players to their full potential. The methodology has three main objectives:

1. Play-Practice-Play helps coaches create a player-centered environment. This means having a holistic approach to coaching that places the needs and motivations of all players at the forefront.
2. In order to help players transfer what they have learned in practice to games, this methodology provides players with multiple opportunities to experience realistic game moments and make decisions.
3. When using this methodology, coaching becomes much easier and training is more enjoyable for both the players and coaches.

All of these factors have been proven to increase motivation to make playing soccer a lifetime activity. Play-Practice-Play promotes fun, inclusion, and development. All the best on your soccer journey!



GRASSROOTS TRAINING SESSION MANUAL



FIRST PLAY PHASE

1	Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up the field according to the Play-Practice-Play training session plan. • Start with the final “play phase,” then add “practice,” then the first “play phase” inside of that. Think about how to transition from one phase to the next as quickly as possible. • Ask players to help, where appropriate.
2	Starting the first play phase with players arriving individually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome each player (and parent), individually. • When players arrive at different times, briefly explain the activity (30 seconds) and get them involved in first play phase (1v1, 2v1, 2v2, etc.). • If a single player arrives early, involve him/her in setting up or spend time together with the ball (unconditional attention).
3	Starting the first play phase with the whole team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring all players together to start the training session. • Think about your position and that of your players (sun/wind in your face, not theirs; use a circle/half circle where everyone is in the first row, etc.). • Collective welcome, brief explanation (30 seconds) of the first play activity: PEP: “picture,” “explain,” “play!”
4	Check and adapt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the “five elements of a training activity” from the training session plan, check the first four in sequential order (organized, game-like, repetition, challenging). • Adapt as necessary (clarify rules, adjust size of space, size of goals, numbers of players, balance the teams).
5	Key words and guided questions 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring players in (all together from various fields or address each field individually). • Once the first four elements have been checked, apply the fifth element (coaching) using the key words and guided questions from the training session plan. • No response needed, players continue playing to discover their own answers (e.g. “think about the following as you play, how can you create an opening?”). • This step should take no longer than one minute.
6	Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued observation based on the first four elements. • Guided question and key word reminders plus specific praise when players show desired behaviors based on the goal and objectives of the training session.
7	Key words and guided questions 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring players in (all together from various fields or address each field individually). • Same questions as #5 & #6. • This time players share their answers with the coach and/or each other. • Interact with players about the “why” of the desired behavior. • This step should take no longer than two minutes.
8	Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued observation • Key words and guided question reminders plus positive, specific reinforcement when players show desired behaviors based on the goal and objectives of the training session.

GRASSROOTS TRAINING SESSION MANUAL



PRACTICE PHASE

9	Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly transition from first play phase to practice phase by organizing players, removing cones, adjusting goals, balls, etc. • Involve players, e.g. make a game out of it.
10	Starting the first practice phase activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about your position and that of your players (sun/wind in your face, not theirs; use a circle/half circle where everyone is in the first row, etc.) • Review the key word(s) from first play phase so players recognize the connection to what they did earlier. • Brief explanation/demonstration of the first practice exercise: PEP: "picture," "explain," "play!" • This step should take no longer than one minute.
11	Observation/adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the "five elements of a training activity" from the training session plan, observe the first four in sequential order (organized, game-like, repetition, challenging). • Adapt as necessary (clarify rules, adjust size of space, size of goals, numbers of players, balance the groups).
12	Key words and guided questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring players in (all together from various fields or address each field individually). • Once the first four elements have been checked, apply the fifth element (coaching) using key words and guided questions from the training session plan. • Interact with players about the "why" of the desired behavior
13	Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued observation based on the first four elements. • Pay closer attention to elements #3 and #4 (repetition and challenge). Observe the balance between successful and unsuccessful actions as well as the numbers of opportunities players get to experience the goals and objectives of the training session. • Adapt as necessary (clarify rules, adjust size of space, size of goals, numbers of players, balance the groups). • Apply the fifth element (coaching) using key words and guided questions reminders plus specific praise when players show the desired behavior.
14	Additional teaching interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Coach's Tool kit (see document). • Players must be able to see and hear the coach/each other. • Provide a demonstration (e.g. technical focus). • Use teaching interventions when appropriate throughout the practice phase. • This should take no longer than two minutes.
15	Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued observation based on the first four elements. • Pay closer attention to elements #3 and #4 (repetition and challenge). Observe the balance between successful and unsuccessful actions as well as the numbers of opportunities players from both teams/ groups get to experience the goals and objectives of the training session. • Adapt as necessary (clarify rules, adjust size of space, size of goals, numbers of players, balance the groups). • Apply the fifth element (coaching) using key words and guided questions reminders plus specific praise when players show the desired behavior.
16	Collective summary of practice phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about your position and that of your players (sun/wind in your face, not theirs; use a circle/half circle where everyone is in the first row, etc.). • Recap the practice phase (takeaways based on key words and answers to guided questions). • Interact with players about the "why" of the desired behavior. • This should take no longer than two minutes.

GRASSROOTS TRAINING SESSION MANUAL



SECOND PLAY PHASE

17	Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly transition from practice to second play phase by organizing players, removing cones, adjusting goals, balls, etc. • Involve players, e.g. make a game out of it.
18	Starting the second play phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about your position and that of your players (sun/wind in your face, not theirs; use a circle/half circle where everyone is in the first row, etc.) • Review the key word(s) from the practice phase so players recognize the connection to what they did earlier. • Brief explanation (30 seconds) of the second play phase: PEP: "picture," "explain," "play!" • No referee (players take responsibility for their own game in applying the Laws of the Game).
19	Coaching in the flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key word and guided question reminders plus specific praise when players show the desired behavior (based on the goal and objectives of the training session).
20	'Halftime talk'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective evaluation of the first half. • Select appropriate key word(s) & guided question(s) from the training session, based on first half observations. • Players answer. • Interact with players about the "why" of the desired behavior. • This should take no longer than five minutes.
21	Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided question and key word reminders, plus praise when players show the desired behavior.
22	Collective summary of the training session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective evaluation of the training session. • Check for understanding using questions focused on the key words. • Players share answers with the coach and/or each other. • Interact with players about the "why" of the desired behavior.
23	Ending the session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect all equipment, involve players. • Positive, specific feedback, organize players for week ahead, say goodbye to players and parents (unconditional attention).

U.S. SOCCER COACH'S TOOL KIT



ON THE FIELD

WHAT - TEACHING ACTIONS	PURPOSE OF THE ACTION	WHEN - THE MOMENT OF APPLICATION
CHECK - ADAPT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe and check the created situation on the field, adapt if necessary based on the Five Elements of a Training Activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing In the flow (sideline coaching) Planned stoppage (break) Natural stoppage (ball out of bounds) In the situation (freeze)
GIVE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce effective actions in order to use it again in similar situations Motivate players 	<p>The application of coaching actions can be a single action or combined actions during different moments.</p>
USE OF KEY WORDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support players to focus on cues and/or desired behavior 	
ASK QUESTIONS (and collect answers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use guided questions to force players to think about cues and/or desired behavior Check for understanding Reflect 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the situation (freeze): combination of demonstration, Q&A and feedback Planned stoppage (break): Q&A and encourage players to focus them
DEMONSTRATE (player and/or coach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model desired behavior Visualize the situation Check for understanding 	<p>BASIC MODEL OF TEACHING (LEARNING CIRCLE)</p>
GIVE FEEDBACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect information on players' behavior related to the objective of the activity 	
COMMAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell players what to do 	
APPLY THE LEARNING CIRCLE (as a concept)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a combination of coaching observation and player reflection to get players thinking about and/or modeling the desired behavior and applying their newly learned abilities 	



U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS COACH EDUCATION

PLAY-PRACTICE-PLAY (PPP) MODEL:
AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH

INTRODUCTION



When children arrive at practice they have little desire to stand in lines, run laps, perform drills, or be lectured, they simply want to have fun, connect with their teammates, and learn through engaging and enjoyable activities. If you want to create a practice environment where your children (players) have fun and are motivated to learn, you must first understand why they play soccer. They play soccer because they love the game! Therefore, it is important for coaches to keep these factors in mind when creating and designing their practice environments. As for practice design, the debate about the optimal quantity, quality, type, sequencing and combination of learning activities during Zone 1 development (ages between of 6-12), is ongoing within the athlete development and performance literature.¹⁻⁷

While there is no single best approach to practice design,⁵ athlete development research indicates that participation in different types of learning activities (i.e., child-led or adult-led, structured or unstructured) such as 'informal play'⁸, 'deliberate play'^{1,2,9-11} or more structured activities such as 'deliberate practice'¹² are important influences in the athlete development process.⁵ Recent studies, specific to soccer, indicate that high levels of engagement in low structured informal play or soccer specific deliberate play activities are an important component in the athlete development process and practice pathway of high-level performers.^{4,8,13-14}

PLAYERS LEARN:

what they like	intrinsic motivation as the driver for learning
what they need	transfer, no gap between the training and the game
to read, analyze and decide	how players perceive and explain a situation is the driver for their behavior
to be creative	looking for solutions
to reflect	thinking about experiences and how to use experiences
to learn	developing and improving learning habits
to be independent critical thinkers	independent/social and responsible/accountable adults

U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

At the grassroots level, children learn and develop to their full potential through game-like experiences in an enjoyable environment which supports individual growth



EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE DESIGN



The U.S. Soccer Coach Education Department is committed to an evidenced-based approach to coaching education and player development. Evidence-Based Coaching (EBC) focuses on integrating three key components; 1. The best available research on player development, 2. Coaching expertise and, 3. An appreciation of the needs and values of the learner (i.e. player). With that, in an attempt to create a developmentally appropriate practice environment, U.S. Soccer has adopted a three stage practice plan model (i.e., Play-Practice-Play¹). This approach aligns with the best available research on athlete development pathways and is designed with the intent of maximizing player enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and skill development.^{2,15-16}

THE 3 PHASE TRAINING SESSION: PLAY-PRACTICE-PLAY MODEL (ZONE 1 DEVELOPMENT)

TRAINING PHASE	PHASE 1: FIRST PLAY	PHASE 2: PRACTICE	PHASE 3: SECOND PLAY
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning by playing • Deliberate play (Cote) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and quality improvement through game like activities • Play-Practice activities (Lauder) • Teaching Games for Understanding (Griffin & Butler) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextual learning by playing the game • Let them play (Fonseca, Tamarit)
PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fun introduction to practice • Games orientate players to the training goal (2v2, 3v3, 4v4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities/game-situations focuses players on the training goal • Conscious learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training goal in the game format (based on maximum roster size) • Opportunity to implement their learning
ACTIVITY CHARACTERISTICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun, inclusive, implicit learning, creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun, actively involved, repetitions, challenging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun, even numbers, position rotations, rules
TEACHING ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring ('the game teaches') • Five elements (1-5) • Key words • Guided questions • Positive reinforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active teaching • Five elements (1-5) • Key words • Guided questions • Positive reinforcement • Demonstration • Feedback • Learning circle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Checking for understanding • Five elements (1-5) • Key words • Guided questions • Positive reinforcement • Feedback

STAGE 1: PLAY - 'DELIBERATE PLAY'



When players arrive at practice it is important that coaches create an environment that is engaging and enjoyable. One way to engage players is through low structured small sided games (i.e., 2v2, 3v3, 4v4) also referred to as 'deliberate play' in the athlete development literature.^{2,16} 'Deliberate play' refers to smaller, informal game-like representations (i.e. small-sided games) of the official game format and are designed primarily for the purpose of enjoyment¹. These 'deliberate play' games are ideally governed by the players while being loosely monitored by the coach, and focus on promoting enjoyment of competing¹⁹ rather than the outcome (i.e. winning).¹

The key point, for Grassroots coaches, is that 'deliberate play' promotes enjoyment, inclusion and development.

When players are more engaged, feel included and enjoy themselves it will likely increase motivation to continue playing. This is particularly important during the adolescent years where dropout is higher.¹³

When coaches design practices that promote opportunities to engage in 'deliberate play', it should be viewed as intentionally creating a fun and player-centered environment that contextualizes the development of skill and tactical awareness. When engaged in 'deliberate play' the game/environment is the primary teacher and the coach serves as a facilitator who, when necessary, guides players to find solutions as opposed to providing the answers. In this stage of the practice, the coach's goal is to help create the environment that orientates the players to the practice objective via 'deliberate play'. While there are clear benefits to having a coach instruct and provide feedback on performance, we must also appreciate that in the teaching-learning process we don't always have to instruct in order for learning and development to occur.

Benefits of 'Deliberate Play'

A growing body of athlete development literature suggests that engagement in 'deliberate play' is important and has a number of positive implications for the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development of children.^{1,2,16-18,20} More specifically, research investigating the practice pathway of elite soccer players indicates that high levels of engagement in less structured soccer specific 'deliberate play' and practice activities are an important component for attaining high-level performance.^{3,4,8,13,14} The benefits of 'deliberate play' include:

- Increases enjoyment and intrinsic motivation
- Promotes motor and cognitive development
- Promotes game awareness
- Promotes inclusion
- Provides players with frequent ball contact
- Promotes social interaction and problem solving skills
- Promotes game-like decision making (i.e., tactical cues)
- Contextualizes technical development (i.e., skill = tactical application of technique)



STAGE 2: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES



During the second stage, known as 'practice', the goal is to create an environment that develops the player in relation to the practice objective and any related player actions and key qualities of the player. While 'deliberate play' is a positive introduction to the practice and has an important role in practice design, it can only facilitate the learning process to a point.⁵ In order to facilitate learning further players must be engaged in different forms of learning activities such as 'play-practice' activities²¹⁻²², 'Teaching Games for Understanding' (TGFU)²³ or elements of 'deliberate practice'.¹²

Research shows that the practice pathway to maximizing development is dynamic, the acquisition of skill is non-linear⁷ and that there is flexibility in the types of training activities an athlete engages in to achieve optimal performance.⁵ The key is to create a practice environment that integrates a balance of developmentally appropriate activities that find the right challenge point for the learner.²⁴ 'Play-practice' activities refer to activities that are designed, and guided, by coaches to improve aspects of performance (i.e., player actions or key qualities) while emphasizing fun and enjoyment at the same time.²¹⁻²² The TFGU model, a games-centered teaching pedagogy, places emphasis on developing tactical awareness and decision making within the framework of modified games^{23,25} and facilitates the learners understanding of when, where, and how to apply their technique in a game context.²⁵ Deliberate practice is more highly structured and primarily focused on the goal of improving performance as opposed to just the inherent enjoyment of participating.¹²

One of the key qualities of a coach is the ability to design practices that incorporate developmentally appropriate learning activities that are enjoyable, educational, game-like, and challenging.

The characteristics of developmentally appropriate practice activities include:

- Frequent skill repetitions - improves ball mastery
- Activities are player-centered
- Activities are game-like in nature (i.e. problem-solving, decision making)
- Provide opportunities for instructional feedback to facilitate learning and development

It is important to reiterate that while some activities can be more structured, and coach-led, they don't have to be any less enjoyable. The goal of grassroots coaches is to find a way to create an engaging environment that incorporates activities that are educational, enjoyable and game-like.



STAGE 3: THE GAME - LET THEM PLAY!



During the final stage of every practice the players should be provided with the opportunity and freedom to play, without interruption, in a format (i.e., 4v4, 6v6, 8v8, 9v9) that replicates the game. The format is based off of the maximum roster size per the U.S. Soccer Player Development Initiatives for the age group being coached (i.e. U6-U8 is 8 so 4v4, U9-U10 is 12 so 6v6, U11-U12 is 16 so 8v8, and U13+ is 18 so 9v9). This is the time for players to express themselves, without being micro-managed, and work through the process of applying their technical and tactical skills within a game context. At this stage of the practice the coach is checking to see if the player is able to transfer the skills learned in practice into the game environment. The point at which the player is unable to find a solution, or make the necessary corrections, is an opportunity for the coach to engage, at appropriate teachable moments, in the learning process.

SUMMARY

In closing, the key ingredients of an effective grassroots practice environment is one that has a careful balance between 'deliberate play', a variety of learning activities, and regular game opportunities. These three components, when combined, create an effective practice environment that maximizes player enjoyment and development.

