



The MSI Way

Recreational Program Curriculum Guide

This document serves as a companion to the Recreational Program Curriculum, accessible for coaches via the PlayMetrics app.

Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to coach an MSI Recreational Program team! We have compiled training session plans for you to use. It is important to remember that, just as “The map is not the territory,” the session plan is **not** the training session. Your role as the coach is to infuse the activities within the curriculum with enthusiasm and care. Adapt where needed! If an activity is going great and the players are loving it, feel free to continue the activity longer than prescribed. If an activity in the session plan seems like it will be too challenging for your players or won’t work in the space you have, bring back a favorite activity from a previous week!

Phases of Development

Our age groups at MSI are broken into the following developmental phases with a curriculum for each phase:

- 1st/2nd Grade – Our youngest recreational program players develop a love of the game and a relationship with the ball while learning to demonstrate good sportsmanship and be good teammates.
- 3rd/4th Grade – During these years we lay the foundations for the technical abilities, decision-making, and positive team-first behaviors that will be the basis of our players' abilities as they continue to grow.
- 5th/6th Grade – As players move out of elementary and into middle school, they begin to form their own identities as both people and soccer players in terms of style of play, on-field strengths, and position.
- 7th–12th Grades – Once our players get to the 11v11 game, we are preparing them for life as both people and soccer players, whether they are trying to play a higher level of soccer or become productive members of the soccer community in other ways.

Play-Practice-Play Methodology

Play-Practice-Play sessions are accessible via the PlayMetrics app or from [our website](#). Here is a breakdown of a Play-Practice-Play session:

- **Play 1 – Arrival Games**

As players arrive at practice, welcome them each individually and put them straight into small-sided games (1v1, 2v1, 2v2, etc.). Set up two fields so everyone gets to play. Introduce the topic of the session using Key Words delivered in the flow of the play and Guided Questions in team huddles to provoke curiosity and build understanding. By using minimal directive coaching during this stage, we keep the soccer fun and player-centered while still introducing our topic.

- **Practice**

Players participate in 1-2 activities tailored to the topic of the session. While these activities are more “drill”-like than a game, we still want to

maximize the amount of soccer taking place “in context,” meaning with defenders and opportunities to score. Coaches continue using Key Words and Guided Questions to build on the topic of the session.

- **Play 2 – The Game**

Divide the players into two teams and play a game, using as many of the Laws of the Game as you can to give the players a “dress rehearsal” for the coming weekend’s game. The focus is still on our topic via the continued use of Key Words and Guided Questions.

The PDFs available on our website use sessions from the Maryland State Youth Soccer Association following this format:

Play 1 – 20 minutes	Practice – 20 minutes	Play 2 – 20 minutes
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If you access the curriculum via PlayMetrics, some sessions include Arrival Games, **two-three** options for Practice, and a closing Game. You can choose one of the Practice activities and use the timing above, or you can use two and run your session like this:

Play 1 – 15 minutes	Practice 1 – 15 min.	Practice 2 – 15 min.	Play 2 – 15 minutes
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You may also choose to add an additional Practice phase activity from the extensive PlayMetrics library and adjust your session to the 15-minute, four-phase structure.

Many coaches ask where skill development occurs in a Play-Practice-Play session. Contemporary research has taught us that far [more skill development occurs in context](#) than in **isolation**. An unopposed drill where players execute a technique without interference is of minimal use. We can

teach proper technique in the flow and during breaks in a Play-Practice-Play session.

“The Main Thing”

The game of soccer can be broken down into four moments:



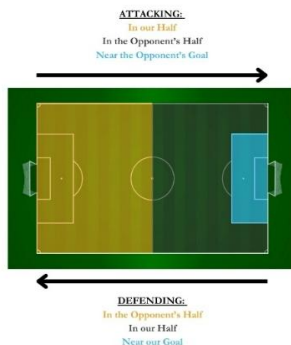
Attacking – when our team is in possession of the ball.

Losing the Ball – the transition from attacking to defending.

Defending – when the opponent is in possession of the ball.

Winning the Ball – the transition from defending to attacking.

We also break the game down into areas of the field:



One of the strengths of the Play-Practice-Play methodology is that it is a comprehensive training model. Since so much of the session time is spent on playing the game, players are practicing aspects of all four moments (attacking, transition to defense, defending, transition to attack) at every single session.

However, as coaches we focus on **one main topic** at each session. A single topic combines either the **Attacking** or **Defending** moment with a **specific**

area of the field, such as “Attacking in the Opponent’s Half.” Players still experience all four moments throughout the session, but by centering our coaching points around a primary topic, we help the players learn more.

It is often tempting to coach in response to any mistake that we see, regardless of the intended topic. Doing so will confuse the players and inhibit deeper learning on the main topic. We are also able to use more specific positive reinforcement when we focus on one topic and “catch them being good” rather than correcting every mistake.

Four Elements of a Training Activity

There are four essential elements in any training activity:

- **Organization**

Is the activity clear to the players? Are boundaries and rules understood? Is the activity safe and efficiently run?

- **Repetition**

Is there repetition of the relevant Player Actions for the session topic?

- **Challenging**

Are all players being challenged (experiencing success and failure) at an appropriate level?

- **Coaching**

Are the players receiving age-appropriate, effective coaching?

It is important to Check and Adapt the first three elements in order before applying coaching.

- Adjust the use of cones, pinnies, and extra soccer balls to ensure Organization.

- Adjust the nature of restarts, types of goals (endlines, target players, mini-goals etc.), and field size to increase Repetition.
- Move players between teams or fields to ensure the appropriate Challenge level.

Applying Coaching before making sure the first three elements are sound will result in an unclear picture for the players.

When thinking about modifying the sessions in the curriculum for your team, use the four elements as your guide. If the players are experiencing success too easily, can you make an attacking session more challenging by making the field smaller? If the players are getting scored on too frequently, can you make a defending session easier by adding an extra player to the defending team?

Common Adjustments

Here are some common adjustments you will have to make to the sessions provided via PlayMetrics or our website.

1. **Space** – While it would be wonderful to give each team a full field for every training session, unfortunately that is not the case. Adjust your sessions as needed based on the space available to you.
2. **Goals** – You do not need goals to run any of the provided training sessions. If a diagram includes a real goal, you can always substitute a pair of cones and stipulate that goals only count below the goalkeeper's head.
3. **Numbers** – If an activity calls for groups of four and you have 13 players in attendance, you can modify the activity to two groups of four and one group of five. If the Play 1 activity is a 4v4 game and you only have

12 players, that becomes two 3v3 games. If you have more than 18 players, you can play one game of 4v4 and one game of 5v5.

4. **Game Rules** – Make sure your Play 2 Game is as similar as possible to your game on the weekend, including goalkeepers and the laws of the game.
5. **Multiple Groups** – If an activity calls for seven players participating and you have 14 or more players in attendance, try to run two copies of the activity at the same time to maximize player participation.

Conclusion

However you choose to train your players, we hope that you remember the guidelines from this document. Even if you are not using the Play-Practice-Play methodology, please take advantage of the resources we have shared with you to create the best possible environment for your players!