



Gulf Coast Soccer Academy Guidelines U7-U10

Gulf Coast Soccer would like to thank the Kentucky Youth Soccer Association for permission to use their Academy Guideline as a template to create our own document including the sample lesson plans.



THE FUTURE OF US SOCCER

The only country in the world that has more children playing soccer other than the United States of America is Brazil. This South American nation has a rich history of producing world class players, yet their system has less structure than the current system used here in the U.S.

In 2007, the United States Soccer Federation introduced the U.S. Soccer Development Academy to encourage clubs to develop U16 & U18 Male soccer players. The developmental approach was introduced for clubs to start creating elite soccer players and reduce the focus on winning games. Although this approach taken by US Soccer is good for the game, many US Youth Soccer State Associations realize that player development needs to become a priority and take place with the younger age groups.



Gulf Coast Soccer realizes the Academy approach is vital if our players and club want to produce top players capable of competing at the highest levels or to maximize their potential.

Throughout this manual, this approach will help GCS administrators realize the importance as well as guide them on how to operate the academy while educating coaches, players, referees and parents involved with the process.

WHAT ARE ACADEMIES?



An Academy is when a club/association keeps a collection of players within an age group as opposed to placing them on individual teams. Academies do not “cut” or “tryout” younger players and all children that want to play can participate. Gulf Coast Soccer will allow all U7-U10 players who sign-up to stay within the program.

The Academy is a concept that is based on the professional soccer club systems from around the world. There are no “A, B, and C” teams with these Academies as players stay in pools and can be moved back and forth according to their progress and development throughout the seasonal year. The emphasis is on developing players and FUN!

Currently travel/select clubs throughout the majority of the United States have players attend a “tryout.” Players are then placed on teams according to their abilities, or cut from having the opportunity to be coached and play/ train within a competitive environment. This is short sighted.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

The Academy approach accommodates and accepts that younger players still have a lot of learning and growing to do within the game and recognize that putting them in an environment where they would receive more training than matches is more developmentally appropriate. This approach would allow clubs to keep players in larger pools, foster development over winning, and let these young players play freely. Each club's Developmental Academy would then play non-result oriented competition against other clubs that would be organized in "Developmental Academy Play Dates."

Success is a byproduct of player development.

There is a saying that without technique there's no tactics. With the Academy approach, the focus on improving the individual player's technique will be emphasized because players will be in an environment where they will not have to worry about making poor decisions or fear of failure during the match.

Young players need to get a "feel" for the game; to learn to play instinctively.

Young players will be allowed to show their abilities in an environment in which they will still be playing against competition without the "fear" of losing a match. At the same time young players will learn to make decisions in a match-like setting while getting more touches on the ball, thereby improving their technical development. If clubs are going to produce better teams in the future, then clubs must first produce players that are better technically.

Many Select clubs presently have players as young as 7 and 8 "tryout" to make a club team. Clubs put these young players through the psychological rigors of making a club select team when they are so young.

There is absolutely no way that anyone can predict how good a nine/ten year old player is going to be. So many players get missed when we have them "tryout", which can cause these young players to get discouraged if they don't make the level. This can cause a snowball effect, as parents become disgruntled and look to move to another



organization so that their child can play on the so called "A" team.

Coaches have roles and responsibilities as well as taking care of our actions without letting egos undermine our real purpose. With young players it is the coaches' job to develop every player without discretion of ability. How many times have we seen late bloomers? *The Academy will provide an environment that will allow these young players to experiment and play without the fear of losing a match.* The Developmental Academy will foster an environment where players will look to be more creative, take risks, become better with the ball and have more fun.

Young players are dropping out of the sport of soccer by the time they are 13 or 14 years of age. Research has shown that 70% of all kids drop out of sports. The main reason soccer is no longer fun (according to players who drop out) is due to pressure to win or failure due to an emphasis on results over development and FUN. The excitement of playing matches also wears off when they become a teenager due to the pure fact of having so many games so early in their young soccer careers.





ADULT: COACH & PARENT DEVELOPMENT

Are adults involved with the youth soccer game more concerned about the outcome of the single match or season and failing to see the bigger picture? Or is the message received by soccer authorities confusing because nobody really knows how to measure success?

In many soccer programs, the model used for U10 soccer is measured on a result based format. With each passing season the amount of problems reported are increasing within these age groups. It is usually due to sideline behavior by the coach or parents and pressure to win. When observing teams that play under the pressure to win games, the quality of soccer and the player's confidence in taking risks does not prevail.

The majority of adults today played sports growing up in a non-structured environment. They could play without any pressure, without adults dictating their every move and would solve problems for themselves. Society has changed in many different ways resulting in fewer opportunities for children to engage in "free play." *In order for us to keep developing technically efficient soccer players and creating teams that play without fear of taking risks, we have to create a happy medium where everyone can experiment with the game.*

Youth Soccer Clubs are now businesses with the common theme among clubs being "if we don't create winning teams at U7-U10, parents become disgruntled and take their child to another organization." Realistically does it matter who wins at these young age groups? Do 16 year olds remember season record at U8? The measuring tool that should be used for youth team/club success at the youngest age groups is overall player development rather than wins and losses. Coaches go through a season in fear of not just losing games but whether they are going to please the parents. Instead the focus should be about developing player's enthusiasm and love for the game.

In a study conducted by Dr. Brent Walker, (Sports Psychologist for the United States Soccer Federation and Founder of "Play in the Zone") players and parents were asked simple questions on what aspects of the game they value higher than others. As you will see from the results below, even though the parents were 100% behind a developmental approach, the underlying message is that they still value winning higher than what players do.

Players Values		Parents Values	
Successful team	Playing Time	Successful team	Playing Time
47%	53%	23%	77%
100% Effort	Winning	100% Effort	Winning
80 %	20%	100%	0%
My Success	Team Success	Childs Success	Team Success
27 %	73 %	53 %	47 %
Good At	Challenging	Good At	Challenging
54 %	46 %	57 %	43 %
Competition	Fun	Competition	Fun
39 %	61 %	47 %	53 %
Winning	Fun	Winning	Fun
29%	71 %	4 %	96 %
Improvement	Winning Team	Improvement	Winning Team
67 %	33%	100 %	0%

At first glance you may believe that majority of the coaches and parents have a player development mentality, but with player's success and competition and playing time rated as high as it is, the underlying focus switches to winning without the parent or coach realizing.

"Academy Soccer" may cause adults to perceive that this is just simply going to recreational soccer, which is not the case. *Actually, the Academy Format is a bridge between Recreational and Select geared for players that aspire someday to play at a higher level.*

The academy approach would allow for a "true" club environment to be created. Players are not necessarily placed onto a team but play with various different players and allow them to experience different competition during training sessions and Play Days.

This also leads to coaching development as now club directors of coaching can "mentor" a coaches in this environment. Take away the emphasis of "results" and now these young coaches will be able to teach these young players. We are now getting more young people that are familiar with the game but they don't want to coach in clubs or a travel environment due to time and commitment. If each club has an Academy then we can get young coaches that have played the game at a higher level to teach without the fear of some parent looking at their watch and/or the result at the end of the match.

This Developmental Academy approach is “Player-Centered” and not “Coach Controlled.” Soccer is a player-centered game isn’t it? With the Developmental Academy approach young players will be in an environment where they are challenged at their own pace. More players need to be included as opposed to excluded in these younger age groups and this format will do just that. Below is an excerpt from the US Soccer Federation’s “Best Practices for Coaching Soccer in the United States”:



“When we place children in travel soccer too soon the emphasis is subtly being placed on the team result and winning the game, rather than on the individual player’s performance. If the team doesn’t win, then it doesn’t get to play in this league or that division or in this particular tournament. Thus, coaches feel the pressure and start recruiting bigger, stronger kids that can help secure the victory-now. They start playing more of a long ball game and placing the emphasis on direct play. They want the ball out of their end as quickly as possible. What the coaches should be doing is, building out of the back, keeping possession of the ball, encouraging risk takers and flair and placing the emphasis on the individual’s technical abilities. Are the coaches allowing an environment to flourish that allows the players to make mistakes because they know long term development is what they are really after? The answer is no, because there is too much pressure to succeed at every step along the way. If this coach loses too many games then he risks losing his players to a more “successful” team. The parents will want to move their child to a “winner,” or get rid of him and bring in (in some cases hire) another coach. Thus, the environment becomes individually stifling and the player’s creativity takes a back seat to the winning mentality”.



REFEREE DEVELOPMENT

During the first 2 years of a young referee’s career 7 out of 10 quit officiating games. One of the big reasons they drop out is due to verbal abuse or grief dealt by adults. Referees feel it is not worth the money, time or hassle to help in developing the game.

In the Developmental Academy approach, young referees will gain invaluable experience in calling a match and not worry about the outcome.



Younger referees who are often called upon to call U9 matches can now be “mentored” in an environment that is developmentally appropriate for them as well.

Clubs can use players from some of the older age group teams as referees. This in return will allow these older players to give back to the game and gain a better understanding of what it takes to officiate a game. Clubs can then use referee assignors or even club/academy directors to guide these young referees throughout the games.

We need to provide an environment for our young referees to learn while managing a quality match. The need to retain future referees is vital. No Referees = No games!!

RECOMMENDED ACADEMY TRAINING CURRICULUM

"GOOD PLAYERS EXECUTE GOOD DECISIONS. POOR PLAYERS EITHER CAN'T MAKE THE DECISION, OR CAN'T PULL IT OFF."

Below is just a recommendation or a guideline for Academies to use for their training. The training environment should place emphasis on technique over tactics and is positive and FUN.

TECHNICAL EMPHASIS

- Dribbling
 - Finding space (head up)
 - Beating an opponent (taking players on)
 - To keep possession (shielding)
- Passing
 - Short passing
 - Disguise in passing
 - Introduction to striking longer balls
- Receiving
 - Mechanics of receiving balls on ground
 - Importance of first touch (sets up second touch)
 - "Take it somewhere new"
- Shooting/Finishing
 - Mechanics of shooting
 - Mentality to finish
 - Finishing off the dribble
- Juggling
 - Individual
 - With a partner
- Goalkeeping
 - Footwork (Getting behind the ball)
 - Collecting balls off ground
 - Catching techniques
 - Stance

TACTICAL EMPHASIS

- Penetration via dribble or pass
- Role of support
- Introduction of simple 2 player combinations
- Mentality of winning the ball back (getting pressure)
- Understanding of transition from attack to defense
- Understanding of transition from defense to attack
- Understanding of how 2 playing lines interact

PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPHASIS

- Positive
- Encouraging players to "take risks" (encourage dribbling and creative play over passing)
- Fun!

FITNESS

- Should not be done as a means of getting them "FIT". No sprint tests, long distance runs, etc.
- Should be done as a means of getting better with the ball and should include the ball. Should be FUN!
- Teach controlled falling
- Running mechanics
- Range of Motion activities
- Proper training activities should provide enough fitness

SAMPLE LESSON PLANS

Dribbling

- Fun Dribbling Activities
- Positive and Creative Dribbling
- Beating an opponent on the dribble
- Creating 1 v1 opportunities in a game
- Dribbling for possession

Passing & Receiving

- Fun Passing Activities
- Dynamic First Touch
- Receiving and Turning with the Ball
- Passing/possession
- Passing, Receiving and movement
- Dealing With Bouncing Balls

Shooting & Finishing

- Shooting
- Attitude to shot & Finish

Goalkeeping

- Footwork
- Dealing with 1 v1 situations
- Basic Handling
- Dealing with crosses

Tactical Emphasis

- When to dribble and when to pass
- Developing support play to improve possession
- Switching the play
- Defending in small groups
- Pressure, Cover, Balance
- Winning and keeping possession

