The Novice Coach’s Guide to a Successful Soccer Season

Practical Advice on Coaching a Competitive Youth Soccer Team
The Novice Coach’s Guide to a Successful Soccer Season

The vast majority of soccer coaches in the United States are still Moms and Dads who volunteer to coach their sons or daughters.
The Novice Coach’s Guide to a Successful Soccer Season

While a growing proportion of these parents have some soccer-playing background, most youth coaches are new to the sport.

The term “novice” includes those who are new to soccer and also those with a soccer background who are inexperienced in their role as “coach.”
The Novice Coach’s Guide to a Successful Soccer Season

This self-paced course provides theoretical and practical information for novice coaches working with the U-10, U-12 and U-14 age groups.

For the purposes of this presentation...

“U-10” includes U-9 and U-10
“U-12” includes U-11 and U-12
“U-14” includes U-13 and U-14
The Novice Coach’s Guide to a Successful Soccer Season

The information is organized into six sections.

What is Soccer?
Understanding Your Players.
Understanding Tactics and Skills.
Team Management.
Practice Management.
Parent Management.
Section 4
Team Management
The Team Management information is divided into the following five sections...

a) Pre-Game Warm-up
b) Game Management
c) Substitution Management
d) Player Management
e) Situation Management
The Pre-Game Warm-up
Pre-Game Warm-Up

The objective of the pre-game warm-up is to prepare the players for the game.

The game includes technical, tactical, physical and psychological elements.

At the youth levels, the pre-game warm-up should take about 30 minutes.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

The elements of a good warm-up are outlined in the following slides.

From a technical, tactical, physiological or psychological perspective, waiting in line to take a shot at goal is not the best use of warm-up time.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

To prepare technically, the warm-up should always include some individual ball activities, such as dribbling and juggling.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

Stretching activities (muscle warming) should be dynamic - include the ball - and be part of the technical warm-up.

Static stretching activities should be part of the cool down, not the warm-up.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

The warm-up might also include some partner or small-group activities to incorporate passing and receiving; and perhaps even some heading for the U-10’s and older.
Tactically, the warm-up should include 10-15 minutes of small-sided play, such as 3v3 or 4v4 or 5v5 to lines, or small goals or target players.

To maximize participation, two games of 3v3, for example, would be more effective than one game of 6v6. An odd number of players can become 3v3+1.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

Physically, the game requires the players to move forwards, backwards and sideways; jump, slide, fall down, and challenge for the ball.

The game requires the players to move at speeds ranging from walking to jogging to cruising to sprinting.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

The game often forces the body to raise heart rates close to maximum levels and then to quickly recover before the next bout of activity.

A proper warm-up should therefore raise heart rates close to game levels.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

The physical demands of playing soccer are only predictable in that they are unpredictable. The players must respond to the tactical demands of the game.

And under normal weather conditions, elevated heart rates, sweating and deep breathing are good indicators of physiological readiness.
Psychologically, the best ways to focus attention on the task at hand are to warm-up with the ball and to spend time competing in some form of small-sided soccer.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

The last part of the warm-up should include some short sprints (5-10 yards) with and without the soccer ball.
Pre-Game Warm-Up

The warm-up for the goalkeepers should include a variety of catching, footwork, and shot stopping activities.

Only a limited number of field players should be recruited to take shots and flight balls at the goalkeeper.
Game Management
There are three elements to coaching from the touchlines during live matches.

The first is Substitution Management, the second is Player Management, and the third is Situation Management.
Substitution Management

A style of coaching which is less adult-dominated has been found to increase player enjoyment and retention rates because the decision-making is left to the participants.
Game Management

Novice coaches tend to substitute too frequently and provide too much tactical information – often with the goal of limiting tactical complexity and lessening the risk of losing; while the more experienced coach will minimize both the number of substitution interruptions and the volume of technical and tactical directions offered to the players.
Psychologically, all adults should appreciate that players would rather play for a losing team than sit on the bench for a winner.

And that active and meaningful playing time is the most important factor in player motivation, enjoyment, and retention.
Prior to puberty, every player should play in every position over the course of a season – including goalkeeper, and the novice coach should appreciate that players enjoy competing for blocks of time, rather than rotating in and out of the game.
# Substitution Management

The more players on a roster, the less time each player has on the field. However, at every non-elite level of soccer, all players should be afforded equal playing time.

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Simple Ideas For Managing Player Rotations

The recommended approach to managing player changes is to substitute in the middle of each half.

Inform the players before the game who is starting, who the substitutes will be replacing, and (injuries aside) what position they will be playing.
Simple Ideas For Managing Player Rotations

Prior to puberty and particularly at U-10 and U-12, players should be rotated between the four lines (GK, Defense, Midfield, Forward) from game to game.

The following slides offer examples of substitution management schematics for 6v6.
# Substitution Management

## 1st Half

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mia</th>
<th>Claudio</th>
<th>Landon</th>
<th>Heather</th>
<th>Coby</th>
<th>Brad</th>
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</table>
Substitution Management

1st Half Substitution Pattern

U-10 Game Time = 2x25 minutes / Changes @ ~12.5 minutes
Substitution Management

2nd Half Substitution Pattern

U-10 Game Time = 2x25 minutes / Changes @ ~12.5 minutes
Simple Ideas For Managing Player Rotations

By U-14, most players will have gravitated to a favorite position and, particularly post-puberty, the main role of the coach is to assign players to roles where their playing personality (emotional and technical strengths) can be maximized.
Player Management

The traditional role of the “coach” is to influence the outcome of matches by taking some, or all, the decision-making away from the players on the field.

In soccer, in particular, this often results in the coach over-managing the game and over-criticizing the players for their mistakes. As a consequence, many kids quit because they don’t have fun.
Player Management

While everyone on a team should “strive” to win, too many adults mistakenly equate the “outcome” (did we win or lose?) as in an indication of “performance” (how did we play?) and “value” (was the experience challenging and fun for the players?).
Player Management

The following information presents general ideas on how to coach from the touchlines.

As a general operating practice, the quantity of information offered from the touchlines should be kept to a minimum.
Player Management

Coaches and parents must appreciate that participation, performance and value are more important to the players than winning.

When measures of coaching success do not include progress on player development and emotional satisfaction, the players are more likely to become frustrated and quit the sport.
Player Management

What to look for?

All adults should remember two things about youngsters participating in youth sport:

They never deliberately try to lose and they never deliberately try to make mistakes.

Both eventualities are guaranteed.
Player Management

What to look for?

Inexperienced coaches watch soccer and typically see only the small technical and tactical mistakes made around the ball.

Their “coaching” then explains what the player(s) should do next time to be more successful.
Player Management

What to look for?

More experienced coaches also see the small technical and tactical mistakes, but appreciate that these breakdowns are simply indications of current ability level (skill) and a natural part of the game for amateurs and professionals alike!

These mistakes can’t be “fixed” during games.
Player Management

What to look for?

From a broad perspective, “good” team play is demonstrated when the players are “connected” while attacking and defending.
Player Management

What to look for?

When attacking, the players at the back of the team have important roles in helping to keep possession and creating scoring chances.

When in possession, everyone is an “attacker” and anyone can score a goal.
Player Management

What to look for?

When defending, every player should be involved in trying to recover the ball and limiting the space available to the opponents.

When out of possession, everyone is a “defender” with responsibilities for helping to win the ball back.
Player Management

What to look for?

Experienced coaches assess each individual player for their strengths and weaknesses; and assess team play through the lens of the Principles of Play.
Player Management

What to look for?

The technical qualities of each individual will determine the tactical potential of the team.

The best indication of individual quality is assessing whether the player is comfortable and confident when in possession of the ball.
Player Management

What to look for?

If the overall technical level of the individuals is poor, the coach’s ability to impact game tactics to any significant degree will be severely limited.
Player Management

What to look for?

However, assuming there is some general comfort level with the ball, game coaching will typically respond to the following six tactical questions.
Player Management

What to look for?

#1 - Is the rhythm of play controlled?

Is the play too fast (too many turn-overs) or too slow (no chances created)? Or, does the rhythm of play speed up when space is available to attack; and slow down when there is no space available to attack?
Player Management

What to look for?

#2 - Counter Attacking vs Building-up?

When coming into possession, do the players appreciate when to counter-attack (realistic goal scoring opportunities) and when to slow down, keep the ball, and build the game?
Player Management

What to look for?

#3 - What is the shape of the team during the build-up when scoring a goal is not possible?

Is the back line connected to the midfield?
Is the team spread out from front to back?
Is the team spread out from side to side?
Are there spaces between all the players?
Player Management

What to look for?

#4 - When building-up, does the ball circulate around the field to create space to attack forward?

Is the game being played in the same area or on the same side of the field?

Is the ball passed backwards or across the field when the forward options are closed?
Player Management

What to look for?

#5 - What is the shape of the team when the opponent has the ball?

Are the three lines connected from front to back?
How far from the front players to the back players?
Is the team connected side-to-side?
Player Management

What to look for?

#6 - Does the team recognize when to start defending?

Do the players recognize...
When to immediately press the opponent?
When to start defending deeper in the opponent’s half?
When to start defending at the half-way line?
Player Management

Coaching Volume

The better coaches speak only when necessary.

The more coaches shout, the faster the players become frustrated and tune out.
Player Management

Coach or Cheerleader?

While all players appreciate receiving praise or hearing encouragement, the coach’s role is to help the players adjust to game situations, not to act as the head cheerleader.

Praise and encouragement should be earned; not become routine game noise.
Player Management

How to say it?

The good coach provides information that will help the player improve their performance without threats or sarcasm.
Player Management

How to say it?

“Statements that imply a lack of skill or belittle performance should be avoided.

“Don’t pass the ball there!”
“How could you miss that?”
“Why couldn’t you see that Mia was open?”
Player Management

How to say it?

The more constructive and simple the information, the easier it is for players to understand the message.
Player Management

How to say it?

Information that helps players understand how to change the game improves confidence.

“Let’s keep the back line connected”.
“Let’s look to play more side-to-side”.
“Let’s take a touch and find a teammate”.

Ohio Youth Soccer Association North
Player Management

How to say it?

Coaches who praise well-intended failures as often as obvious successes will develop confidence and trust in their players.

Positive words can never overcome negative tones or disapproving body language.
Situation Management

Once a game kicks off, the player’s responsibility is to solve the immediate tactical problems and the coach’s responsibility is to help the players manage the overall strategy.

Most coaches spend too much time managing from moment-to-moment and not enough time managing the bigger picture.
Situation Management

There are many factors which influence game strategy and some of the more common variables impacting youth soccer are included in the following table.
# Situation Management

## Situational Variables

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Pre-Season?</th>
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<td># Games per Weekend?</td>
<td># Games per Week?</td>
<td># Games per Month?</td>
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<td>Tied Score?</td>
<td>Narrow Lead?</td>
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<td>Second 25%?</td>
<td>Third 25%?</td>
<td>Last 25%?</td>
<td>Extra Time?</td>
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</table>
Situation Management

At the youth levels, the score of the game and the time remaining are the most important variables impacting coaching decisions.

The following slides present examples of how coaching decisions can impact game strategy.
Situation Management

Player Positioning

In general, the better players will form the spine of the team and play in the more central positions.
Situation Management

Player Positioning

In evenly matched games, the stronger players will typically spend more time on the field, while the weaker players will rotate into the more peripheral positions.
Situation Management

Player Positioning

In unevenly matched games where the score is favorable, the weaker players should play more minutes and be given opportunities to take on the key positional roles in the team.
Situation Management

Player Positioning

In unevenly matched games where the score is unfavorable, everyone should play equal minutes.
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

How a team attacks and defends during a game is related to the score and the time remaining.

However, the challenge for many youth coaches is having players capable of possessing the ball.
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

Without players with the ability to control, dribble and pass the ball, there is no realistic expectation that the coach can bring significant strategic change to the flow of the game.

With that said...
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

The fun of coaching is often found in the outcome of the Risk-Reward decisions that accompany strategic choices.

And, with every strategic choice comes the possibility of glorious reward or utter failure!
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

When a team is losing, removing a player from the back line increases the number of players in attacking positions and can help generate more scoring opportunities.

Of course, this strategy also can also leave a team more exposed to counter-attacks.
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

The timing of this decision is often related to the game clock.

Early in a match, there is still plenty of time to recover. Left too late, however, and there may not be enough time to create the scoring chances necessary to recover the deficit.
Typically, teams that are behind in a match will attempt to change the rhythm of play.
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

This can be accomplished by...

- Playing the ball forward more quickly when there is no urgency in the speed of play.
- Playing the ball forward more slowly when there are too many needless turn-overs.
- Encouraging quicker passing when the ball is circulating too slowly.
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

- Encouraging more dribbling when there is space to run with the ball.
- Individually, defending with more urgency to unsettle the opposition.
- Defending as a team closer to the opponent’s goal to try to win the ball in the attacking half.
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

- Defending as a team further from the opponent’s goal to try to open space for counter-attacks.
- Some combination of these strategies.
SITUATION MANAGEMENT

TIME AND SCORE SCENARIOS

Conversely, when a team is winning, moving an extra player to the back line can reduce the chances of conceding a goal.

However, this strategy can provide the opponents with more opportunities for possession in the attacking half.
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

From a winning position, teams may want to...

- Slow the rhythm of the game by possessing more and penetrating less.
- Defend further back to draw the other team out of their end and create more possibilities for counter-attack chances.
Situation Management

Time and Score Scenarios

- Or, simply continue to play with the same style and intensity that generated the lead!
The Laws of the Game

The rules of play are legislated through the world’s governing body (FIFA) and passed around the globe through each country’s National Governing Body.

In the United States, the US Soccer Federation (US Soccer) is the National Governing Body.
The Laws of the Game

The official laws of the game for U-6, U-8, U-10 and U-12 can be found at the US Youth Soccer website:

http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/RulesSmallGames.asp

The official FIFA laws of the game can be found at the FIFA website:

http://www.fifa.com/worldfootball/lawsofthegame.html
There are 17 “Laws of the Game”, of which the following five can be adjusted for players under the age of 16.

- The dimensions of the field.
- The size of the ball.
- The size of the goals.
- The duration of play.
- The number of substitutions.
# Modifications By Age

The following table presents “ideal” logistics for youth soccer. Local accommodations are anticipated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
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The Field of Play

Standard Field Markings

- Goal Line
- Goal Area
- Penalty Area
- Penalty Spot
- Penalty Kick Arc
- Corner Kick Arc
- Half-Way Line
- Center Circle
- Center Spot
- Touch Line
Referee Protection

Soccer is a fast-paced, free-flowing, contact sport and the playing rules are written to provide referees with “guidance” on how they interpret game situations.

The Laws of the Game contain very few absolutes for decisions encountered during live play.
Referee Protection

For coaches, players, and other spectators, it is necessary to appreciate that the most important language from the Laws of the Game is..

“In the opinion of the referee!”
Referee Protection

The majority of referees, like young players and novice coaches, are quite inexperienced and still learning their craft.

Each year, the referee association typically loses around 40% of its new recruits – but up to 70% of its new referees under the age of 18. Most cite touchline abuse as the main reason for giving up.
Referee Protection

It is everyone’s responsibility to educate players and those on the touchlines about the Laws of the Game.

It is everyone’s responsibility to protect inexperienced referees from touchline abuse. In particular, it is the coaches’ responsibility to control the behavior of parents on their team’s touchline.
The “Problem” Laws

Most referee abuse begins as a lack of understanding.

First, in understanding the letter and spirit of the Laws of the Game; and second, in understanding the importance of, “In the opinion of the referee”.

The following slides discuss the “problem” laws that typically serve as flashpoints for referee abuse.
The “Problem” Laws

“In” or “Out” of Play

The ball must completely cross a line for a goal to be scored (goal line); or to be considered out of play (corner kick, goal kick, throw-in).

If any part of the ball has not crossed the outside Plane of the line, the ball is still live and in play.
The “Problem” Laws

Hand Ball

In soccer, the “hand” is considered any part of the arm from the outside of the shoulder to the finger tips.

The flat part of the shoulder (clavicle) is not considered part of the “hand”.

Ohio Youth Soccer Association North
The “Problem” Laws

Hand Ball

Determining what is a “hand ball” may be the most confusing rule for the soccer novice.

Some officials will simply whistle for a free kick any time the ball strikes the “hand”. While technically incorrect, there is consistency to this approach.
The “Problem” Laws

Hand Ball

The simplest criteria for determining “hand ball” is to ask if the ball played the hand (legal) or did the hand play the ball (not legal)?
The “Problem” Laws

Hand Ball

Generally, when the hand or arm is deliberately used to gain an advantage, it is an offense punished with a direct free kick or penalty kick.

Depending on the situation, the penalized player may also be cautioned (yellow card), or ejected from the game (red card).
The “Problem” Laws

Hand Ball

It is also considered illegal for the ball to contact the hand or arm when either is extended from the body or moving toward the ball. The controversy arises when there is no deliberate intent to gain an advantage.
The “Problem” Laws

Dangerous Play

An action is considered dangerous when an opponent is impeded from competing for possession.

Players may also be penalized for putting themselves at risk in attempting to compete for possession.
The “Problem” Laws

Dangerous Play

It is not illegal for a player to stop or kick the ball while they are on the ground.

It is not illegal for a player to raise their foot to play the ball, providing an opponent is not endangered in the process.
The “Problem” Laws

Tackles and Challenges

It is not illegal to tackle from behind.

Playing the ball first in the act of tackling does not make the challenge fair or the associated contact irrelevant.
The “Problem” Laws

Tackles and Challenges

If, in the opinion of the referee, a challenge is careless, or reckless, or made with excessive force, it is illegal.

The penalties for an illegal challenge can range from a simple free kick to a caution (yellow card) to an ejection (red card).
The “Problem” Laws

Advantage Rule

The advantage rule allows the referee to keep the game flowing if there has been a rule infraction that can be waived off.

The advantage rule only applies to the team in possession and generally only when they have an opportunity to create a scoring chance.
The “Problem” Laws

Advantage Rule

Once the referee applies the advantage rule, the free kick can still be awarded if the attacking team has not benefitted from the “play on”.

Once an advantage has been applied, the referee has the right to caution any player guilty of foul play during the next natural stoppage in play.
The “Problem” Laws

Offside

The offside law becomes part of youth soccer beginning at U-11 and presents difficult challenges for players, coaches, and officials.

The key to understanding whether a player is offside – or not - is their position when the ball was kicked.
The “Problem” Laws

Offside

A player is offside when the ball is passed to them and they are closer to the opponent’s goal line than at least two defenders and the ball.

The opponent’s goalkeeper is typically, but not always, one of the last two defenders.
The “Problem” Laws

Offside

In addition, a player cannot be offside...

1. If they are in their own half of the field when the ball is kicked.
2. Any time they are even with, or behind the ball.
3. If the ball is received directly from an opponent.
The “Problem” Laws

Offside

A player cannot be offside...

4. If the ball is received directly from a throw-in, goal kick, or corner kick.

5. If they are not seeking to gain an advantage by being behind the opponent.
The “Problem” Laws

Offside

A player can be offside...

1. If they are initially in an offside position and not involved in the action, but then seek to gain an advantage.
2. If they interfere with an opponent.
3. If they interfere with play.
The “Problem” Laws

Throw-In

When the ball crosses a touchline, a throw-in is used to restart play.
The “Problem” Laws

Throw-In

The general rules governing throw-ins are as follows:

1. The ball must be thrown with two hands from behind the head and from the point where it left the field.
2. The ball must be released forward.
The “Problem” Laws

Throw-In

3. Both feet must be touching the ground when the ball is released.
4. Both feet must be on, or behind the touchline when the ball is released.
5. It is not illegal for most of the foot to have crossed the inside edge of the touchline at the point of release.
End of Section 4

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