



Player Development Curriculum

U10 – U14 Players

Purpose

The purpose of this player development curriculum is to establish a consistent progression of player development across the age groups and teams of Garrison City F.C. It is not meant to tell coaches “how to coach.” Garrison City F.C. recognizes that coaches will have varying styles. Further, Garrison City F.C. recognizes that player development will vary within age groups, especially the younger age groups. Coaches are expected to tailor their efforts to the players and teams with which they are working. However, the hope is that as players reach the U13 and U14 levels they will have developed certain basic technical and tactical skills that will allow them, if they so choose, to continue on playing at more competitive youth league levels and/or the high school level.

This player development curriculum is meant to be taken and used in the context of the Garrison City F.C.’s general philosophy that playing soccer is fun and that developing as a soccer player should be fun. So, while we certainly hope that Garrison City F.C. players master the technical and tactical skills set forth in this curriculum, we remind coaches (and ask coaches to remind parents and others) that the broader Garrison City F.C. goal at all age levels is that the players have fun while playing soccer and developing as soccer players.

Age Group: U10

Technical skills priorities:

- Dribble with all sides of both feet
- Dribble out of trouble
- Dribble past someone
- Shielding
- Soft first touch
- Proper shooting technique - - using laces of both feet
- Proper passing techniques - - inside and outside of both feet
- Receiving the ball with all parts of body
- Proper heading technique
- Start juggling – institute reward system for 20 consecutive touches, 50, 100

Tactical skills priorities:

- Basic attacking
- Basic defending
- Comprehend 1 v 1 and 2 v 2
- Introduction to first and second defender roles
- Introduction to first and second attacker roles
- Introduce the concept of a team having “shape” - - why width and depth are important
- Introduce re-starts such as free kicks, corner kicks, goal kicks and throw-ins

One characteristic of this age group is that there is a broad continuum of development of the players: socially, physically, and as soccer players. However, there are certain characteristics which most 8 and 9-year-olds have in common: their attention span now measures in minutes rather than seconds (although not a lot of minutes!); they start to think ahead and can reason “if this, then that;” they want to be playing soccer; they affiliate strongly with their team and/or coaches; they begin to become aware of peer

pressure and are competitive with their peers; they understand and respond to “rules;” and they can understand and recognize fundamental tactical concepts.

One trap to be wary of, given the players’ developing intellects, is to focus too much on tactical development. While tactics are certainly important and should be developed, players at this age need to continue developing their technical skills - - some players much more than others depending upon what their previous exposure to soccer has been. Players within this age group need to be able to dribble, pass, receive and shoot the ball at a basic level, and need to start developing their “touch” with the ball. Touch is, of course, necessary for all of those skills, but in a broader sense, players need to become comfortable with the ball. This can only happen with opportunities for numerous repetitions of the basic technical skills.

Players within this age group also begin to understand and identify with “roles.” This is both good and not so good. On the one hand, it’s great to see that players will actually begin to stay (for the most part) in the positions assigned to them. However, be wary of players over-identifying with a “position” rather than his or her job as an attacker or defender in different situations. Remember, the goal is to develop the players as soccer players, which means that they’ll be defenders when the other team has the ball and attackers when their team has the ball. Remind players that when their team has the ball, they all have “attacking” roles, which of course vary depending upon where they may be on the field, but roles nonetheless. Same idea for when the other team has the ball: all players then have a “defending” role. During practice, use small-sided games and activities to allow players to experience attacking and defending without worrying about playing a “position.” In scrimmages and games, move players around on the field so they experience attacking and defending from different perspectives.

Finally, players in this age group need to start learning about “possession” of the ball, both obtaining possession and maintaining possession. At the most basic level, players in this age group understand that playing soccer is like playing “keep away.” They know they “win” (good things happen) when their team has the ball and they “lose” (not so

good things happen) when the opposing team has the ball. And, again, mastering this concept reinforces the concept discussed above of players having multiple roles wherever they may be on the field: an “attacking” role in the situation where their team has the ball and a “defending” role in the situation where the other team has the ball. However, please keep in mind that “keep away” is not the ultimate objective of a team - - the objective is to score goals. So, while obtaining and keeping possession of the ball is an important part of development, teach players to have possession with a purpose, and don’t forget to encourage players to shoot and shoot some more when appropriate.

Age Group: U12 (sometimes called “The Romance Phase”)

Technical skills priorities:

- CONTINUE PRACTICING U10 TECHNICAL SKILLS
- Introduce juggling
- Speed dribbling in traffic; spinning, change of direction, shielding
- Encourage risk taking with dribbling – take on other players
- Ability to chip the ball
- Accurately playing longer passes
- Offensive and defensive heading
- Adding power and accuracy to shooting
- Proper tackling techniques

Tactical skills priorities:

- Build communication and field awareness
- Learn basic support positions – who is the first defender, second defender, third defender? Who is the first attacker, second attacker, third attacker?
- Continue teaching concept of team shape in response to ball location – ideas like width and depth
- Combination play – give and go, making two passes to get the ball where they want it to go, why a triangle is a coach’s favorite shape
- How and when to switch “fields” or the point of attack
- How and when to apply “pressure” as opposed to how and when to “contain”
- How to “channel” an opposing player – learn to use teammates and the touch line to help defend
- How to “chase” after losing the ball (the closest “defender” on the team is usually the player who just lost the ball)
- Experiment with small group situations: 2 v 1, 2 v 2, 3 v 1, 3 v 2, 3 v 3; encourage players to take risks and be creative

Players in this age group are entering a period that most coaching guidelines refer to as the “dawn of tactics.” Typically, players of this age begin to understand the basic tactical situations of the game and are more aware of movement of the ball and the reasons for tactical choices. Their problem-solving skills become more systematic and they tend to learn very quickly. Players of this age also are typically beginning to develop abstract awareness, so they can understand when coaches talk about “playing the ball into space” and “making runs off the ball.” However, just because they understand these basic tactical concepts does not mean that coaches should focus entirely on tactics. To the contrary, players within this age group are still developing technically, and some may have to re-develop technically as they begin to confront the onset of puberty, growth spurts, changing bodies, and awkward phases.

Remember, it is not uncommon to look out a U12 field and see a very wide variety of sizes and physical development of players, especially with girls. Some players look as though they could be almost adults and others look like they may be in the third grade. None of this is shocking news to any adult, but coaches (who the players really identify with at this age) need to be especially sensitive to physical and social changes their players are beginning to go through in this age group. Be patient as players develop and keep things fun. We all know stories of the awkward 10-year-old who didn’t quite fit his or her body who, by the time they were 12, had developed into a great athlete and player.

Warm-ups, flexibility and stretching all become more important at this age level, as the players’ bodies begin to develop. Coordination and agility are important, but, again, be patient as players get used to their bodies.

Another characteristic of this age group is that peer evaluation is constant. This is both good and not so good. Players in this age group will have fragile egos, so watch out for situations where players turn on teammates. Coaches can experiment with handing over certain responsibilities to the team, such as setting up the next game or drill, keeping their own scores in an activity, choosing among activities, etc., but player evaluation, feedback, and encouragement should still come primarily from the coach.

Finally, because players at this age love to emulate older players (almost hero worship) and learn so quickly, they should be encouraged to watch as much higher level soccer as possible. This will not only help them learn, but keep them excited about progressing as players.

Age Group: U14

(sometimes called “The Commitment Phase”)

Technical skills priorities:

- CONTINUE PRACTICING U10 AND U12 SKILLS
- Develop techniques under the pressure of time, space and an opponent
- Increase speed and then increase speed again
- Dribbling: encourage players to take on other players, 1 v 1; have them use feints, step-overs, spins and turns; continue practice shielding under increased pressure
- Receiving: develop quality first touch; practice on balls coming on the ground and in the air, while player is standing, moving and/or turning
- Shooting: players need to be able to shoot on the run, from a turn, from an angle; have players practice volleys
- Passing: players should be able to pass short or long, on the ground or in the air, and do so while running
- Players should be able to “bend” a ball from a corner or set piece
- Heading: players need to distinguish between a shot, straight-on header, glancing header, passing header, and clearing header
- Tackling: continue practicing proper technique; introduce slide tackle

Tactical skills priorities:

- When attacking, reinforce maintaining possession; encourage risk taking, BUT on proper areas of the field
- Players should fully understand the idea of team “shape,” and why the concepts of “width,” “depth,” and “penetration” are important; encourage them to visualize the whole field or section of the field even if they can’t see it all from where they are
- Reinforce support for attacking teammates (second attacker, third attacker), combination plays, runs off the ball, runs in the box (near post, far post), through balls, overlaps, crosses, use of angles

- When defending, reinforce appropriate pressure vs. containing, how to channel a player with the ball, how to give chase, when certain types of tackles may be appropriate, support (second defender, third defender)
- Introduce multiple options for set plays

Players in this age group typically play games on full size fields with a full size ball, and they more or less play under “adult” rules and conditions. As skills develop and physical maturation occurs, the game becomes much, much quicker at this level. Fortunately, the players develop quickly as players, learning quickly and maturing mentally. Training demands and expectations should likewise increase. Players should begin to “master” the basic technical skills and shift their focus on to the tactical aspects of the game.

Players at this age group should know without thinking about it what they should be doing when: their team has the ball, the other team has the ball, their team has just lost the ball, and when their team has just re-gained the ball.

Remember, this age group, like the U12s, will contain players in various stages of physical and emotional maturation, and peer evaluation and peer pressure will be in full bloom. Players will be experimenting with their new found identities as teenagers. In addition, players often have a bit of a rebellious streak, however, this is often off-set by a fierce commitment to their team and teammates. Notice the focus of the players often shifts during this age range from the coach to their teammates and team. So, while it is certainly important to maintain discipline, coaches should experiment with turning more of the training and team organization responsibilities over to the players. And, when appropriate, encourage players to take leadership roles within the team.

Warm-ups, flexibility and stretching are again very important at this age level.

Endurance becomes a factor and can be addressed in training. These are things that can be taught to the players and turned over to the players.

And, finally, players within this age group, like younger players, learn by watching and emulating higher level players, so opportunities to do this should be made readily available.

A Word About Goalkeepers

One area of player development that is missing from the guidelines above is the development of goalkeepers. Obviously, keepers are needed at each of these levels. At the U10 level, this isn't such a problem because many players want to "try" the keeper position. This is actually a good thing because, even if a player tries the position once and never wants to play it again, he/she will have had the opportunity of experiencing a game from the keeper's perspective. At the U12 level and on up, the players who play keeper become more serious about the position and should be presented with opportunities for special training. However, keepers should continue to develop as complete "soccer players" as well, finding time to train and play on the field as well as in goal.

Rules and Behavior

Coaches need to be cognizant that many parents may not know the rules of soccer, and may not know that the rules vary a bit as players move up in age groups. Please try to keep parents, as well as players, aware of the rules of the game.

All coaches, players and parents should attempt to be "positive supporters" of the game and each other. Coaches are role models of behavior for players and parents. Instead of just letting players know they make mistakes, let them know when they make good plays and good choices. And, when correction is necessary, let players know the whole context, i.e., "That pass in that situation may not have been the best idea because. . ." or "That goal kick failed to reach your target because. . ." The players will adopt the coach's attitude, so think positive.

Final Thoughts

There are some themes running through the above guidelines that we'd like to highlight in closing. First, be sensitive to the physical and emotional maturation of your players. They are children and are growing in many ways other than as soccer players. Second, don't forget the technical skills! Tactics are an important part of the curriculum at each age level, but, if players wish to play at the more competitive youth league levels and/or at the high school level and beyond, they need to have mastered the basic technical skills by the U14 level. Tactical training and learning will continue, but time spent by coaches on basic technical skills will diminish significantly after a player moves on from the U14 level. Finally, and most importantly, remember to make soccer fun. By having fun, players will develop and maintain a passion for soccer that, in the end, will make them the players they become.