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# Practice Session Guidelines

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Boys & Girls teams  
aged U9 – U14.  
Fall Season 2010

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Prepared for

# White Bear Soccer Club

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## Introduction

I, like many others who grew up in a “soccer playing” nation, learned to love the game by playing with friends; most of our play was self-directed, without coaches, fancy equipment, referees or for that matter *any* adults at all, present. Rules were made up by the players and often adapted according to the environment that we played in. 11 v 11 was somewhat a rarity in my day to day soccer life with most games being played by a ‘handful of lads’ consisting of various forms of “everyone against everyone” or small sided games. It is my belief that these types of activities will assist greatly in the development of our young players and not only from a technical, tactical, physical and psycho/sociological perspectives but also by helping players foster an intrinsic love of the game.

This document is intended to give you some pointers and guidelines for preparing sessions during the fall season. This body of work will provide you with enough ideas to keep practices engaging for the players and for provide *you* with some developmentally appropriate questions to address with your group. The competitive games that your team plays will also provide you with information for planning training sessions however, long term player development will be better served if you focus more on teaching the principles of play, developing tactically savvy and technically proficient athletes as opposed to teaching the newest, greatest system (probably Spain’s) which is viewed as being *the* winning formula. Learning to win is an important part of development however it is not *the* most important part of development at this age.

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As a coach with White Bear Soccer Club, It is expected that you provide an engaging, challenging, nurturing, disciplined and enjoyable environment for your team to operate in; PLAYER’S welfare and education should be your primary goal and at the center of ALL of planning.

The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) recommends coaches take an economical approach to preparing activities and training sessions, in short this means constructing sessions that address the four components of a soccer game; Technical, Tactical, Physical and Psychological. My approach in writing these guidelines has been to embrace the USSF recommendations and to also support a common worldwide view for developing young soccer players; through the use of small sided games and activities.

- Technical – Building a greater repertoire of soccer related movements and developing the tool box of techniques to be used to aid the solving of tactical issues. Technique should be developed predominantly within the context of basic soccer games. Technical elements can be viewed as being actions with the ball such as passing, shooting, controlling or movements without the ball, such as running, skipping, jumping.
- Tactical – Developing environment/situational awareness and encouraging decision making in order to pose opponents with problems and come up with solutions to deal with those problems posed by the opponent.

- Physical – The age groups that we’re dealing with are for the most part in optimal windows for trainability of speed, flexibility and technical ball skills.
- Psychological – Once again, the age groups that we’re addressing are very much in the their ‘Golden ages of learning’ with intrinsic motivation being developed in fun and enjoyable situations which lead to: the desire to play, increased soccer imagination, creativity and also a readiness to face increased physical demands and higher standards of discipline.

### Winning isn’t everything (not yet, anyway!)

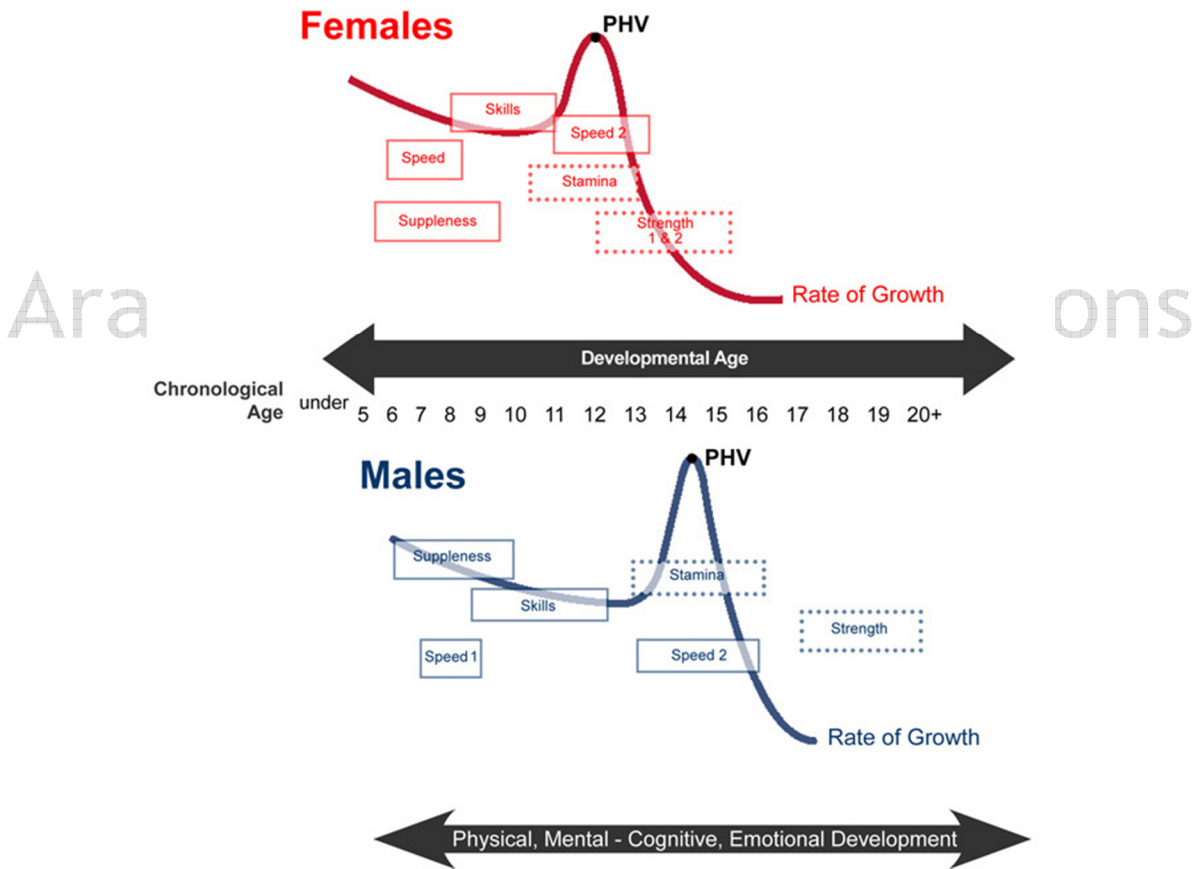
Below, I have provided you with a table which highlights what I see as being the most important aspects regarding team performance during a league competition for players operating in a developmental environment

Performance (Subjective/Objective)	Outcome	Outcome (From Development Perspective)
-	-	Undesirable
-	+	Acceptable (short term)
+	-	It’s a funny old game!
+	+	<b>Win-Win</b>

## What to focus on and when.....

Taken from Canadian Sport 4 life's Long Term Athlete Development Program, I have included a graph which illustrates and highlights the "Windows of Optimal Trainability" for boys and girls. I think this information is very relevant to all of us who operate with young athletes and strongly recommend you pay close attention to it and utilize the information to suit your teams' needs. During research, I also came upon a very similar table which was presented by Glasgow Rangers Football Club of Scotland who were addressing a party from the technical developmental department of the Scottish Football Association. Data for girls was not included in the GRFC presentation, which is the primary reason for not publishing their graph

(Canadian Sport for Life) Pacific Sport - Optimal Windows of Trainability (Balyi and Way, 2005)



**All Systems Are Always Trainable!**

Two windows — stamina and strength — are based on the moving scales of the onset of the growth spurt. The other 3 windows — speed, skill, and suppleness — are based on chronological age. The trainability of the different systems for children and youth with a disability is not well understood. Applying this information to specific athletes with a disability is a good example of coaching being an art as well as a science.

### **What is PHV?**

Peak Height Velocity (PHV) is directly linked to the Development Age of athletes. PHV is a measure of the maximum rate of growth in stature during a growth spurt. The age of maximum velocity of growth is called the age at PHV.

PHV is a key component of the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) principles.

### **Why is it important to know when PHV occurs?**

Each athlete grows at a different rate; therefore a coach can have, on the same team or training group, early, average and/or late maturers.

## **There are 5 basic S's of Training and Performance; Stamina (Endurance), Strength, Speed, Skill, and Suppleness (Flexibility)**

(Dick, 1985)

1. **Stamina (Endurance)** - The optimal window of trainability occurs at the onset of PHV. Aerobic capacity training is recommended before athletes reach PHV. Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after growth rate decelerates.
2. **Strength** - The optimal window of trainability for girls is immediately after PHV or at the onset of the menarche, while for boys it is 12 to 18 months after PHV.
3. **Speed** - For boys, the first speed training window occurs between the ages of 7 and 9 years and the second window occurs between the ages of 13 and 16. For girls, the first speed training window occurs between the ages of 6 and 8 years and the second window occurs between the ages of 11 and 13 years.
4. **Skill** - The window for optimal skill training for boys takes place between the ages of 9 and 12 and between the ages of 8 and 11 for girls.
5. **Suppleness (Flexibility)** - The optimal window of trainability for suppleness for both genders occurs between the ages of 6 and 10. Special attention should be paid to flexibility during PHV.

### **The ABC's of athleticism:**

Agility, Balance, Coordination and Speed.

## Practice Session Format

Using the guidelines highlighted in the LTPD graph of “Windows of optimal trainability” and following the USSF’s economical training theory, I would encourage you to create sessions which follow a format similar to the following model. This model for practice could be viewed as a “whole-part-whole” approach.

1. Mini Soccer Games (SSGs) based on the current session’s theme or revision of previous session’s theme
2. Dynamic Movements (with and/or without the ball) and the 5 S’s
3. Technical/Tactical activities – simple to more complex
4. Mini soccer games

- All activities should have an objective or goals for each player and team
- Should be player centered
- Simple rules for players to follow
- Include players in the decision making
- Games should be refereed by the players

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### Recommended duration for practice

U9 & U10 - 60 minutes

U11, 12 & 13’s – 75 minutes

U14 – 90 minutes

### Coaching Styles

I would prefer that you operate more as a facilitator to learning rather than ultimate authority and the one with *all* of the answers however, I respect that there are many ways to skin a cat and trust that you be flexible enough to choose the style most appropriate to the situation you are presented with.

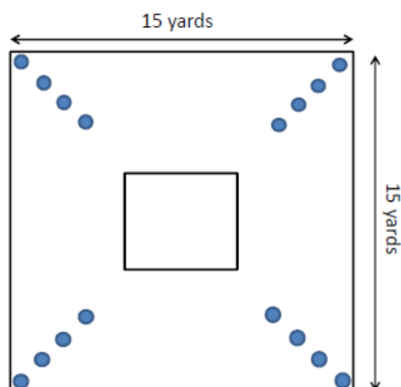
## Dynamic Movement Exercises

Ankle Rolls	High Knee Skip. Take knee beyond 90 degree's	Pre turn (Half Carioca)
Ankle flicks	High Knee Skip. backwards	Pre turn leading with opposite leg
Ankle flicks, backwards	Knee across skip	Carioca
Tight knees	Knee across skip, backwards	High Step March
Tight knees backwards	Lateral Running	Walking Lunge
Wide skip	Lateral Running leading with the opposite leg	Walking Hamstring Stretch alternating legs
Wide skip Backwards	Hurdle skip	Hamstring Flicks
Single dead leg lift 1:3 ratio - Lift, 2, 3,	Abductor skip	In Pairs - Wall Drill - Leg across body
Single dead leg lift, backwards	Abductor skip Backwards	In Pairs - Wall Drill forward leg swing
		In Pairs - Wall Drill Knee across body

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Consider how, if and when a ball may be used as this will facilitate motivation when working on areas such as speed, mobility, agility etc. Distances covered and the movements you require should mirror the game and the duration of movements and actions should be appropriate to those areas you are looking to develop. Speed/agility ladders maybe used or improvise with the use of cones for agility activities with special attention paid to work: rest ratios. Relay races are a good motivational medium for this type of training.

### Basic Set up for dynamic movement and agility exercises.



The set up shown, uses cones to replace speed/agility ladders. Divide the group into four and line them up on the four corners. Players move across the grid diagonally to the other side and then down one side of the square in a clockwise direction. Players will experience a somewhat chaotic environment in the center of the

square, this will further challenge players to and require quick reactions to avoid collisions.

## Tactical elements and technical suggestions for practice

### 1. Have players identify when they should shoot, pass or dribble the ball. Some technical considerations are:

- i. Passing: Ball on the ground. Laces, inside of foot, outside of the foot, toes and heel. Passes over opponents. Chipped, Driven and Faded into space and to team mate. Passes when moving and passing combinations (Wall passing, 3<sup>rd</sup> man running combinations)
- ii. Shooting: Driven shots, volleys and half volleys. Practice with the ball moving toward, away from and across the body of the shooter.
- iii. Dribbling: Moves-Scissors, Mathews, Lunge. Turns-Cruyff, Step-over, Inside Cut, Outside Cut, Drag Back and Stop turn. Running with the ball using the correct technique to cover ground quickly and efficiently. Combining moves to possess or penetrate into advanced positions.
- iv. Receiving the ball. On ground with feet (laces, inside and outside) and in the air with thigh and chest to create a new passing angle. Receiving the ball on the half volley.

### 2. When not in possession of the ball, where should players move to, to assist the player that is in possession? How can the team help the player with the ball? Some technical considerations are:

- i. Creating space as an individual. Getting free from an opponent and clearing space for team mates. (Diagonal runs, over-lapping runs, cross-over plays, checking runs)
- ii. Create space as a team and transition from defense to attack.
- iii. Receiving the ball. (As previously mentioned) including disguising intentions.
- iv. Passing and disguising passes

### 3. Teach players how to block shots and prevent forward passes from their opponents. Help players understand which areas should be protected from the opponents and the key spaces to deny opponents entering. Some technical considerations are:

- i. Closing down opponents
- ii. Covering the pressurizing defender
- iii. Blocking shots and forward passes
- iv. 1 v 1 confrontations
- v. Delaying the attack (U12's and older)
- vi. Recovering into goal side positions (defensive transition)

**4. Encourage players to look for and find available space which is available to exploit for attack.**

- i. Receiving and controlling the ball away from defenders
- ii. Changing direction, switching play
- iii. Movement off the ball
- iv. Passing into space

**Small-sided games (SSG's) should be an integral part of every training session.**

**Small Sided Games keep sessions FUN and ENJOYABLE and help players foster a desire to play.**

**They also encourage decision-making, Imagination and Creativity**

Play with teams of 4 v 4, 5 v 5 including GK's or 6 v 6 including Goalkeepers. The fields should be 20-30 yards wide x 40-50 yards long.

**One-nil: (Possession, controlling game)**

Teams start by attempting to score against each other. The first team to score may not score again until the opponent scores. If they do score it's disallowed and a goal kick is awarded to the defending team.

**Chaos: (Psychology)**

Two 4 v 4 games on the same field, one game is north to south, the other east to west.

**Winner stays on: (Managing chaos, transition)**

Pick three teams; First goal wins the game; the winning team stays on and switches to defend the end they just scored in. The new team brings their own ball with them and starts the game with a throw in. The new team may enter the field from any part of the side line.

**Moving Targets: (Passing and vision)**

Teams have 3 goals each plus a blocker. The blocker moves behind the goals and which-ever goal s/he is behind is locked and the opponents may to score in that goal. Switch the blocker at regular intervals.

### Gates: (Dribbling, passing, defending)

Two teams, gates or goals are created randomly around the field with one or more gates than there are players on a single team. A goal is scored by passing through a gate to a team mate or by dribbling through a gate.

### Sniffer: (Shooting & Finishing)

Two teams play in the mid third of a field. Each team has a goal keeper and a sniffer in the opponent's defensive third. The sniffer may be used to set up attacker who must shoot from inside the middle third; the sniffer may also score from rebounds off the goalkeeper.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Ball: (Heading and finishing)

Ball may not touch the ground, score in opponent's goals. If ball hits the ground another is served straight away.

### Rugger +1

Teams may only move forward by dribbling the ball, they may however pass the ball backwards. A joker plays for the team in possession. The first pass may be played forward from any restart.

### 2 – Touch Free: (Possession and building as a team, combination play and attacking)

Teams must play two-touch football in their own half but unlimited touches may be taken in attacking half of the field.

### 4 v 4 + 4 (Plus Goalkeepers):

Two teams play with assistance of bumpers around the outside of the field. Bumpers have only one touch.

### No tackle football: (Possession and defending)

Teams may not tackle to win the ball they may only intercept passes. If a player is running with the ball and is tagged with an opponent's hand, s/he must turn the ball over to the other team.

### X Factor: (Possession and movement off the ball)

Field marked with an 'x' from one corner to the other, through the middle. Each team defends three goals. Players may only play once in a section pass each in each section before they have to move to another.

### Les Bleu: (Possession, creating space as an individual, combination play)

The field is divided into thirds; 1v1 in each end zone and 2v2/3v3 in the central zone. All players must touch the ball in the central zone before they can play into the striker. The player passing the ball into the striker may assist to create 2 v 1. One touch finish=2 points, two touch finish = 1 point

[Back to Back: \(Creating space/width and movement off the ball\)](#)

Two teams play with the goals placed in the center of the field back to back. Each team must keep one player in their own half at all times and may not play over the goal, but around.

## **Team Formations for League play/Competition**

Teams playing in 11 v 11 competition, will rarely have the numbers to play a 'full game' in practice and as advocated in these pages, I think using small sided games is a more appropriate method for development yet, I respect that you will on occasion need to operate in 11 v 11 mode. One way to address the lack of numbers to play an 11 v 11 game is to scale down the teams and systems; Play 9 v 9 on a smaller field, possibly box to box, deploying a 1-2-4-2 system which lends its self to a 1-4-4-2 system. This system will present players with tactical problems that are probably more demanding than a regular 11 v 11 game and therefore much more suited to the promotion of player development yet the structure of the team is essentially the same. The required system for boys at the U14 National Team developmental camp, held annually in MA, is 1-3-4-3. Once again, for those with fewer players than 22, I recommend a 1-2-3-2 system for training as the tactical issues of such a formation will be similar to the 1- 3-4-3 system.

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