

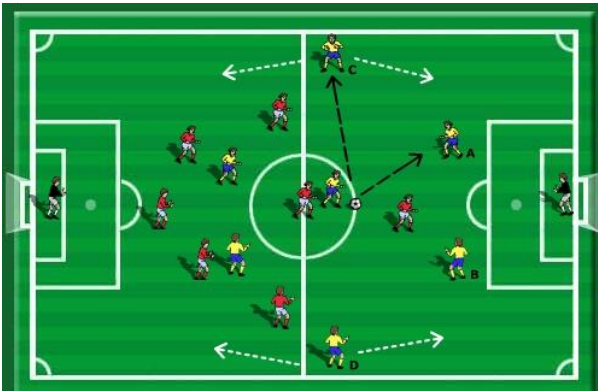
Questions & Answers About Strikers

MISSOULA STRIKERS SC

It Is All About Development

If you read this front to back, you will have a clear understanding of Strikers, our developmental goals and our methods.

Technical Handbook (2010)



This handbook contains information that will help parents understand the decisions made by Missoula Strikers Soccer Club technical personnel from club uniforms to team selection.

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Glossary of Divisions of Play in MONTANA

AA	=	Premier	=	National Championship Series (NCS)
A	=	Select	=	Competitive Developmental
		Classic	=	Recreational

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank all of the coaches and administrators from Missoula Strikers who have helped with this handbook by providing us with valuable feedback. There are people who work tirelessly for the Club, the teams and the players who go unrecognized, and I would just like to say we do appreciate all that you do to make soccer happen for so many young people.

Introduction

Of course there have been many questions asked of Missoula Strikers over the past few months. In this book we hope to answer many of your questions, but first I want to address a topic close to my heart which is important to the success of the Club's players.

Missoula Strikers is committed to implementing a Long Term Development Plan

As Technical Director, I wish to use my experience with Long Term Development (LTD) to better the players within Missoula Strikers. This experience goes back to when I was still playing professionally and in Canada's national program (which certainly seems a long time ago now ☺). The study of development via training has consumed my focus and has always intrigued me as a developing coach. At all age groups, youth to adult, the benefits of a LTD plan are essential to developing a complete soccer player and citizen.

LTD and winning championships are often seen as polar opposites. In fact they are not opposites, they are truly connected when LTD is the focus of your programming, but disconnected when championships are the focus. LTD promotes championships, but championships alone do not necessarily bring forth long term development.

First, we know that LTD requires thoughtful and timely changes, and making changes for the betterment of the Club's programming and its most important members ... the players ... is our primary concern.

Our LTD plan will not work without the support of every player/parent/coach within the club. You must understand the influence that your support has on the development of every player within the Club. Consequently, do not underestimate your contribution to the fulfillment or destruction of this plan.

There may be changes. This happens when putting in place a long term vision. As we progress we may see things that occur that necessitate changes to our LTD programming. I know change brings forth apprehension, doubt, and fear. In this document it is our attempt to explain the Club as well as the reasons for change.

'The only consistent part of development is change.'

You can leaf through the handbook, read it cover to cover or go to a specific area with the help of the Table of Contents on the previous page. Anyway you look at it, we hope you find your answer, and if you don't please let us know so we can improve this handbook for next year.

Thanks for being part of the Missoula soccer community.

Yours in Soccer,

Neil Sedgwick
Technical Director

Club Culture

“What is Missoula Strikers?”

Strikers is really an umbrella organization that consists of players, parents, coaches, and administrators. Strikers tries to encourage young players to grow mentally, physically, technically, and tactically in a fun, fair and challenging environment.

“What kind of soccer does Missoula Strikers Soccer Club Offer?”

The goal of Missoula Strikers is to create soccer teams based on but not limited to: sportsmanship, coachability, skill, commitment and age division.

On the competitive side, Strikers offers Premier (AA) and Select (A) soccer.

Missoula Strikers also offers less competitive soccer. The youngest ages play MicroStrikers with a season in the fall and in the spring. We also offer recreational (Classic) level soccer in age groups where teams are available.

“Why does everyone in the Club wear the same color and style of uniform/warm up suit?”

There are two reasons for this. First, from a parental perspective, it insures that your child will not need to buy new uniforms every year rather only when your child grows out of their existing uniform. More importantly, younger age groups can see a physical similarity between themselves and the older age groups. There can be no denying that youngsters look up to, and try to emulate the older players. The singleness of the uniforms creates a pride in the name Strikers that cannot be taken lightly.

Finally, we want the members of Missoula Strikers to develop a sense of community and belonging to the Club. We can no longer operate as separate teams, but we must become a club which means there is a connection from bottom to top.

“Why would we try to coordinate attending a tournament with other Missoula Strikers Teams?”

Like the uniforms, younger kids should be given the opportunity to watch older, more skillful Missoula Strikers players compete. One example: by exposing the U13s to a U19 game they will be able to assess their play based on what they are seeing. It creates a club culture within Missoula Strikers, one with camaraderie amongst the varying age levels, and certainly a key to success at all levels of soccer.

“Why will players sometimes train with players of other ages and from other teams within the Club?”

First, let's address the age question. The most widely held belief is that playing with older players is the only way to improve. And there is a tremendous amount of truth to this belief, but we need to look at the situation from both perspectives. As children age, the speed of the game increases (the skills do not necessarily increase however) which may hamper individual creativity. By exposing older players to a younger player, they can work on more difficult skills against slower competition. Likewise the exposure to these advanced skills might be processed and emulated by the younger players with whom they are competing. We do not expressly encourage older players to play against younger competition, but in the correct

dosages, it can be an excellent means of improving the older player's skill level and confidence. Both groups can benefit from these sessions.

On training together. We ask our Club coaches to take advantage of this developmental opportunity by combining practices occasionally. We also feel that this helps the development of the Club Culture. Players get to know each other and the other coaches, and this is important in supporting one another in games and through the developmental process.

There are also times when a team's coach may not be able to make a training session or a game, and in this case, coaches who have trained with the team are able to step in and take over.

This is what a club is all about – a connection from bottom to top with players and coaches.

“We sometimes have a coach from another team in our club coming and working with our team in practice or actually taking the team to games or tournaments. Does this help the development?”

By being part of a club we are able to share resources. As our coaches all work under the same programming and all teach by very similar principles, there can be this interchanging of coaches with teams. Because all coaches are working within the same Long Term Development Model, there is consistent instruction between the age groups.

Also during the games a coach is really just the person making substitutes guaranteeing that everyone is playing. They cannot often affect the outcome of a game because they are not involved directly in the game. This is much different than most American sports, which is why it seems so counter-intuitive at first look. We assure you that we have only your child's best interest in mind when another coach takes the team they are still operating under the same principles and already know your child.

U13 and Above - Miscellaneous Questions About Age Groups, The Club and Try-outs

“How are teams selected and who will be selecting the Teams?”

Missoula Strikers are aware of the subjectivity of team selection. To alleviate the affects of “favorites,” each tryout is observed by a number of club coaches and players are evaluated separately. The discussions shared between the selecting group is critical to the evaluation process. They will base their evaluations on the player's technical, physical, tactical, and mental factors associated with their age group.

Each selection committee will include the specific age group coaches (i.e. if at the U14 age group, the head and assistant coaches of the AA and A teams will be involved) and a group of coaches from the age groups above and below. These selections will be overseen by the Technical Director and Boys/Girls Directors.

“When will try-outs occur?”**NOVEMBER 21 & 22, 2009 & December 1st (where needed)**

Try-outs for the 2011 and beyond spring seasons will occur two weeks following the Montana Cup which is the end of June. Consequently, tryouts will occur the first or second weekend of July.

We have the possibility of calling a third day on December 1st, in order to accommodate individuals who are out of town due to previously scheduled commitments.

“What happens in the case of bad weather in November of 2009?”

In case of inclement weather and the try-out day has to be shortened, the Club may reschedule an alternate date. However, if the evaluators feel as though they have seen enough to form a fair roster, then another day may not be rescheduled.

“Does a player have to attend the Try-outs?”

First, in to obtain a fair evaluation, attendance at all sessions is recommended. If a player is unable to attend a try-out, they must contact the coach and make alternate arrangements prior to the try-out. But you must remember, that not attending tryouts and requesting a later tryout holds up the process and the remainder of the players who tried out on the appropriate days are waiting to know how they will be placed. Ask yourself if it would be fair to you if you had to wait. After answering this question, we are certain that you will attend the scheduled days. We have scheduled two dates with a third possibility if the coaches and evaluators feel that it is needed.

“What can the player expect at evaluations or try-outs?”

Preregistration on-line ahead of time. Arrive at least thirty (30) minutes before the beginning of try-outs in order to check in and have your photo taken. Be dressed ready to play. Bring cleats, shin guards, soccer socks, a ball and a water bottle. Check in at your age level table and get your number. The Club uses numbers, instead of full names, to give the players anonymity, in order to make try-outs as fair and impartial as possible. After receiving a number, find your age level and get ready (jog or play with ball to become warm).

Evaluators will begin the try-out as close to the scheduled time as possible. Roll will not be taken at the try-out area. This is why it is important to check in first and to get your number. It is the player's responsibility to try-out in the correct age group; please speak with your evaluator if you are not sure if you are in the correct age group. Family members are asked to leave the fields after check-in or stand behind a designated area. We want to avoid having family surrounding the field as this puts unnecessary pressure on the player. A family member coaching during try-outs will not be tolerated. The try-outs will last one and a half to two hours. Parents are asked to return after 90 minutes, in case the try-out ends early. Players should meet their parents near the registration table beside the parking lot. Players will keep their same numbers from one try-out session to the next. Do not lose it !!

“What if the player is sick or injured?”

If a player is sick or injured, contact must be made with the Head Coach or Technical Director as soon as possible. An attempt will be made to arrange an evaluation for the 'AA' consideration.

“What are the evaluators looking for?”

In general coaches/evaluators will be looking for the following over the two or three days of tryouts. This list is not complete; however it gives you an idea of several of the areas that they will be observing.

1. Technical – Dribbling, Control on the ground, control from the air, passing (short and long), heading, ball striking, individual defending.
2. Tactical – Understands application of techniques (skill), possession, penetrative play and defending.
3. Athletic/Physical – Agility, balance, coordination, speed, strength.
4. Mental Capabilities – Competitiveness, helpfulness, courage, aggressiveness, attentiveness, thankfulness, coachability, general attitude.

“Who determines whether a player is able to ‘play-up’ an age group?”

The Selection Committee for that age group, the Technical Director and the Boys or Girls Director will determine whether a player is at the appropriate level to compete at the next level. Regardless of the player’s School Grade, they are bound by their USYSA birthdates.

“When are the teams announced?”

Two Saturdays following the try-out, the rosters for each team will be posted on the Missoula Strikers website. The Club will send out a message via email informing you of the evening it will be posted. This is a tough time for players when the decision doesn’t go in their favor. Please keep in mind; this is also hard for the Coaches making the selections.

The Club will name a minimum of 15 players on the AA (Premier Team) – where multiple teams exist in an age group, the Coach may take time inviting other players to practice and evaluating them throughout the winter before naming their final roster prior to the season. This provides players the best opportunity to be selected if they are “bubble” players (the group of 7-8 players who have the potential to go be on the AA team but coaches want to evaluate their development and their commitment over the next few months). We feel that this is the fairest way to ensure the top players are playing AA.

This entire process will be coordinated with coordination between coaches and the Boys or Girls Director.

“Why are some Premier (AA) teams showing only 15 or 16 players on the roster?”

As we described in the previous question, because tryouts are months prior to the season beginning, we understand that development will occur and if there are 7-8 ‘bubble’ players (players who are very close to making the next team up) we do not want to pick only two and find that it is another two who develop when given the appropriate training environment.

Consequently, we may have 15 or 16 on one roster (unless the selection committee are sure that there are 18 clear Premier (AA) players and there is a drop off at the 19th player) and pull players up for training or games.

This is the essence of a club program as you are able to develop appropriately within an environment that allows for movement.

“What if a player decides not to play after the try-outs or after rostering?”

If a player drops after the team selection and rostering, they family will not receive a refund for the fees paid to date. Significant work and time is spent in forming these teams. It is a major problem to reorganize the affected teams.

“If my child is cut from the strongest team, is it permanent?”

The state of MT has a guideline which makes it very difficult to move players between teams, even within the same club in a single season. Subsequently, the placement will remain consistent for the season, but as we have explained, each year has a new tryout.

The reasons for this are twofold. This may be a temporary or permanent arrangement. First, children develop at different rates so it is unwise to establish teams beyond the immediate year. Second, a child may not tryout well, but establish themselves as a great player throughout the season because of their love of the game and the effort that they put into their development. Those children deserve opportunity to play on the more competitive team the next year.

Nevertheless if there are injuries or holidays within the top (AA) team, a player is able to be brought up to this team on a CLUB PASS.

“Will the coach of my child’s team be trained/educated themselves?”

There are two separate matters here. Internally, the Technical Director (Neil Sedgwick) will conduct training sessions for the coaches and coaches will meet regularly for discussion on various developmental topics. These will include specific technical aspects of the game and tactical training sessions which will be age specific. The State Soccer Association requires all coaches acquire a National Coaches License based on their coaching experience. This insures that your child will be coached by an individual who has received training in both soccer and age appropriate relations.

“What will the schedule look like?”

Each team will have gymnasium space in late winter for individual skill development. Outdoor practice will begin as soon the weather permits, usually March. The Montana Youth Soccer Association season ends with a season tournament: Memorial Day (Regional Qualifying Tournament for Premier/National Championship Series Except for U13), third weekend of June (Montana Championship for Select or Montana Showcase for U11-U13).

The practice schedule will be established by each team, but our minimum number of practices per week is typically three.

“Will we be going to tournaments?”

Each team will be traveling to several tournaments which are currently determined on a per team basis. Tournaments allow players to often see new opposition, and in many cases a higher level play than what they would normally see in Montana.

At the older age groups, the tournaments/showcases allow players to play in front of college coaches, providing a potential opportunity to play beyond High School or Club.

The Club attempts to schedule the tournaments prior to the try-outs and it is then the responsibility of the families to understand the commitment they are about to make when

trying out. The coach and the Club will determine the quality of tournaments that are needed and when they are needed.

Strikers teams are encouraged to look at tournaments where multiple Strikers teams will be involved. By attending other Strikers games at these tournaments we believe a connection within age groups and genders occurs, eventually creating a solid 'Club Culture'.

In 2010, the AA (Premier) teams will all attend the US Club Regionals (through US Club Soccer) in late June ... unless the team is representing the state at the USYSA Far West Regionals).

If my child is not a starter, and he is not guaranteed playing time, why should we pay the money?

Our coaches understand that every child, regardless of skills, has put in the time to be the best player possible and will provide your child with meaningful playing time throughout the season. Unlike other sports where size matter (football and basketball) anyone can become a great soccer player, Pele was 5'7" and Maradona was a towering 5'5". If your child loves to play soccer no setback should dissuade them from following their passion of becoming the best soccer player they can become. No one ever improved by not playing. As many stories illustrate, anyone can become a successful soccer player if they so desire.

Having said this, your child's team will set guidelines for playing time which may center on effort in practice or attendance at practice. These are important factors for individual and team development, and the coach will assist the team in setting these guidelines. Typically, a coach will give every player at least half of a game in league play if the player attends every practice and they work hard on a regular basis. When it comes to tournaments, we encourage coaches to attempt a balance in playing time, however, there is the understanding that when the team attends the Regional Qualifying Tournament then the coach will play the players that they feel will get the positive result.

U16 (Where did the U15's Go?)

"Why are we combining the U15 and U16 age groups?"

This may seem like a radical change here in Missoula, but it has been done in many smaller soccer communities over the years in order to create a competitive appropriate and challenging environment. We must, as players move up to the next age level, create an environment that allows the top players to excel, while nurturing those players who are not yet at the top of the age group but certainly have the ability to be in a year or so.

This change still has Long Term Development as our focus. Although Strikers took the initiative to implement this change in 2008, the State Association approved in August 2009 for the entire state.

If we are awarded two spots at U16 either with the boys or the girls, we will have a U16AA Premier Team and a U16AA Select Developmental Team who will both play a U16AA schedule, and where numbers permit, a Classic U16A Team who will play a U16A schedule.

This is an increased level of play and practice for all players who would have been U15 (who we will now refer to as first year U16's), however very manageable as they could be playing with or against many of these same players in High School nearly six months before their Club schedule begins. Freshmen and Sophomores together in an age group..

We have to provide a developmentally appropriate environment for all players at U16, and we want to challenge the most prepared players in their first or second year of U16. By doubling up the age group we will see more development by all players as they become challenged appropriately. This appropriate level of challenge includes the Premier, Select Developmental and the Classic A Team.

It is important to us that no player is without a place to play. We know very well that this year's Classic player could be next year's Premier player if they spend the time to develop. It has happened on too many occasions for us to neglect any player. Players who want to achieve will achieve. They may be slightly behind now, but could mature physically or develop an understanding of the game's principles which may make them a top player in the next few years.

Players do not have to play together every year to be a team and they do adapt to the changes of new people on their team. The player will form new relationships and will compete with one another on the field for the team's success. These are all High School students now and with that, it is the first time that these players play on multiple competitive teams within the year. As they begin to play on multiple teams with different players, they learn to create a team environment and generate team success with new teammates. This is important in a player's individual development. They will in High School, college, and then into the working world be asked to construct teams/committees/work groups that must form and function quickly together. Likewise in HS soccer or college soccer, they must deal with ever changing team personnel. This is simply a stage in their development that prepares them for later experience in life.

"Won't the players need to play together year after year to be competitive? By changing the structure of the teams by combining U15 and U16, don't they lose that familiarity with one another?"

Continuity certainly has a part to play in the development of a 'team', however, the most important part is the bringing together of individuals who have a strong understanding of the principles of play in soccer (both in attack and defense), and are technically sound enough to use this understanding. A strong player who understands the game can enter any team and have success almost immediately.



Montana Youth Soccer Assoc. League & Tournaments

National Championship Series 2010 (NCS) Regional Qualifying Tournament

U14-U19: Premier Teams

May 29-30, 2010

Host hotel: Billings Holiday Inn Grand

Far West Regional Tournament (NCS)

NCS winners only

June 14-19, 2010

Albuquerque, NM

US Club Regionals

U13-U18 B & G Premier Teams

June 26-29, 2010

Seattle, WA

Montana State Championship Cup

U14-U19: Classic & Select Teams

June 18-20, 2010

Host hotel: Great Falls Holiday Inn

Montana Showcase Cup

U11-U13: Classic, Select & Academy Teams

June 26-27, 2010

Host hotel: Butte War Bonnet Hotel

Teams must book rooms for Montana competitions through state association office. Fines are being assessed any team that does not and must be paid prior to any games.

2011 Missoula Strikers Team Selection

July 9-11, 2010

MicroStrikers

“What is MicroStrikers?”

MicroStrikers is an introduction to the Strikers Soccer Club and for many young players, soccer in general. MicroStriker programs are organized twice per year (spring & fall) into five or six week programs. The teams at this level are generally organized by neighborhood, however, this is not always the case where the number of participants do not work.

The coaches of MircorStrikers are often parent coaches who work with the Director of Strikers and receive a coaching clinic before each MicroStriker Season. The Sunday games are small sided to allow maximum participation and ball interaction. Coaches are responsible for one practice per week and it is up to the coach and the parents to determine whether a second practice will be held.

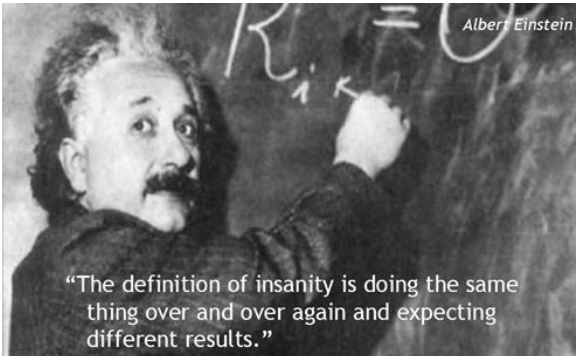
Strikers Academy U9 thru U11 Strikers – A New Design - IMPROVED

“What was this New Design?”

In 2008 Missoula Strikers joined several other clubs in Montana and did not enter their teams into the MYSA U11 League. With this, the Club held weekly training sessions, then on four weekends played within themselves in small sided games, and on two weekends traveled to tournaments.

The goal was to limit travel and decrease the poor decision making that often comes with the pressure of games (league standings, family cheering on the sideline, peer pressure if a player makes an error).

After a year of working with coaches, observing players, and discussions with parents, it has become apparent that we must do things differently within Missoula Strikers in order to create a better developmental environment. I am fortunate to have met a great number of people interested in development as well as shared many experiences with our committed coaches.



In these discussions and with the large number of younger players in Winter Academies, and by observing under-aged players who played U11, Missoula Strikers wish to bring U9's and U10's into the fold. This will change our youngest Strikers programs from U11-U12 to a four year span of U9-U12. With this change in format we feel that we will see positive effects on development.

In mid July, several of us from the Club attended the Montana Youth Soccer Association semi-annual meeting in Helena and they proposed an Academy Program, which was very similar to what we had planned. The State Association plans to have U12 and below in this Academy program in 2010 (U11 and U10 in the spring of 2009). All of the large clubs want to make this move as quickly as possible, so I feel that as a state are heading in the right direction. We have chosen to call our U9-U12 Program, "The Strikers Academy", to be in-line with the state association's future plans (Academy name) and to highlight that players within this Academy are the prospective Striker players at U13 and above. They receive their training in the Academy program and then take that training forward through the Strikers Club.

So what should be expected this upcoming season and for The 2010 Spring Strikers Academy?

First, the U12 Program will continue to play 8 versus 8 and compete in a state organized league traveling every other week to a city in Montana and playing several games, while on alternating weekends should be playing at home. The U12's will have Trainers (we will discuss Trainers later in this handbook) assigned to their teams who will work with the coaches or as coaches, in order to help with the development of your children. Everything is much the same as it was a year ago, with the exception of these Trainers working under a set curriculum established by the Technical Staff of the Strikers.

At U11 this year, you will notice that you will be hitting the road and driving less frequently. This change comes at a good time due to the increasing fuel costs, however, the impetus for this change is purely developmental. Young players do not need to travel 5-7 hours every other weekend (some more frequently) in order to play a couple of hours of soccer. We need players playing more, not sitting in the backseat sleeping more.

Costs are an issue though, and without trips to Great Falls, Bozeman, Livingston, Butte, etc. on a sometimes weekly basis we will not eliminate but at least limit the price of fuel from the equation. But we know it isn't just fuel, it is also the food purchased for the family on the road and sometimes overnight stays on a consistent basis. By focusing on development and playing the majority of weekends in Missoula, the Academy design will considerably decrease the expenses for being part of club soccer, while increasing the quality of that experience for your child.

Consequently, the players in our U9-U11 Program will stay close to home. We will play in Missoula competing 'In House' as we attempt to bring raise the level of technical ability within our program. We will play from 10:00 until 12:00 each Saturday morning during April and May, with the exception of weekends where our U10 and U11 teams may travel to one or two tournaments and several 'State Scheduled' games with other clubs (this is a change from last year where the Academy Clubs didn't have games scheduled by the State Association. We are also attempting to line up one tournament in state and one out of state (within 4-6 hours of Missoula).

Although we will not be travelling weekly to play in a proper league championship-type format, we will play a variety of games throughout this period. Some weekends may be 4v4, where others may be 6v6 or 7v7. We will set the number of players depending on the theme of practice during the previous week. Every weekend however, the Trainers and coaches will be focused on giving instruction that touches on the work done in practice during the week.

These games sound like MicroStrikers, but I can't emphasize enough that this season will be in no way similar to MicroStrikers. The U9-U11 programs this year under Strikers will have coaches as they typically do, however, two times per week the practice groups will have Trainers who will follow a specific curriculum when running practice sessions. **These Trainers will be selected because of their expertise with the curriculum, their teaching ability, and their coaching certification.** In essence we will double the coach to player ratio this year. All of our coaches and Trainers will continue their coach education under a program designed to maximize the opportunities for player development.

The quality of player involved in the Strikers Academy will definitely not be that of MicroStrikers. The November tryouts will allow Strikers to select the top players in each of the age groups, both boys and girls. Our goal is to find the very best boys and girls at U9, U10, and U11. This quality group of players will play and practice together so they can help one another develop within a very competitive environment.

We are also attempting to set up a single Saturday (Play Date) gathering with one or more larger clubs in a designated spot. As an example, we may meet up with the Academy's from Bozeman and Great Falls, in Great Falls (last year this Play Date was cancelled due to weather in Great Falls). Here we will give instruction and play games in a festival format.

In addition to this format, our U9, U10 and U11 players will also see added value as they will be registered and placed on a team for MicroStrikers of course at no additional cost. They will meet their team and play the six Sunday games, demonstrating their Strikers Academy trained abilities.

Next, you will notice that the season will be shortened. We will organize the practice groups through the tryout days in October. However, we will not come back together until March of 2009. In the past we have attempted to start training immediately after the New Year, but we found inconsistent attendance during the winter and the season to be too long for players and parents. Now the program will run March through the end of June or early July (four months versus six).

For those players truly interested in playing indoor, there will be gymnasium time. This time will be an open gym where players will come together in each age group and play following a quick 10-15 minute technical warm up. This open gym format will begin in mid January.

The U11 and U12 teams will also compete in two tournaments outside of Missoula and consider attending the Montana Showcase if the state continues with this event (there was discussion that it may not be continued when all clubs go to the Academy format). Some of the most memorable experiences for young players are traveling with family/friends, staying in hotels or camping, and playing with their friends in an out of town tournament. We want these tournaments to fit into the developmental plan, but also provide unique experiences and competition. We will also attempt to find appropriate tournaments for the U9 and U10 age groups.

This is really a return to STREET SOCCER, which is missed with many young players in the modern day. The difference, this is GUIDED Street Soccer. Trainers and coaches will guide the experience, attempting to find the blend of instruction and free play.



Answers to Common Questions About U12 and The Strikers Academy

“So U12 is not changing to the Strikers Academy this year (2010)?”

There was the movement in the State last year for clubs to run with the Academy format at U11. Only a few of the clubs went for the Academy. We will continue with the Academy format at U11 and below (more on that later).

“If we attend the tryouts will my son or daughter get cut?”

We have created U9 and U10 age groups so we can better match the quality of the various age groups. In the past we have had 9 and 10 year olds playing with the U11's. This at times, has stunted the development of the U11 player. Every player needs to be challenged to grow as a player. By separating these age groups, we are putting every player in a more challenging and appropriate environment.

We are separating the age groups and we will only select players who show the energy, skill and desire to grow as players. This should help maintain the quality needed for optimal development. Consequently, your son or daughter may receive the recommendation to play within MicroStrikers until they develop appropriately before joining the more advanced play in Strikers. Between Strikers and MicroStrikers we want to provide a place to play and train for every young player, but we still must challenge those more skilled (physical and technical) players in Strikers so they will continue their development. The more that a player plays the game at a young age, the better they will become. Your child will have a place to play and enjoy the game if they do not make the Strikers Academy in their age group. If they love the game and play on their own, I am certain they will be better equipped for tryouts next year.

“What is the focus of the U9-U11 Programs?”

It has been said, “You can't play in the orchestra if you cannot play your own instrument.” This holds true for soccer as well. At this young age, Strikers will focus on an individual's technical ability with the future in mind for your young soccer player. In fact, the majority of all practice time will be invested in your child's individual skill development with the hope that this will lead to a lifelong love of the game.

“How does my child's team at U9-U11 learn to play together and develop team chemistry in this new format?”

This is where we have to adjust our thinking so that development can occur. In fact, our 'team' focus versus an 'individual' focus has held back development. We have to understand that good players can go play on any team at any time, so we must focus on the individual and create good players, not necessarily good team chemistry.

When we watch children play on their own with friends (and I think we can all agree that this does not happen as much as it used to, or as much as we used to), they play in games and they do not care about team chemistry, nor do they say, “I play better with so-and-so,” or “we have a connection,” or “we play hard for one another”. These are adult phrases that come from the adult game (and adult sports or sporting movies). Children just play and whoever is on their team, is on their team. Left alone, the young players' 'free game' (free of coaching and spectators) is a true pick-up game and this is where the greatest development occurs.

When the Prospect Academy group from Strikers heads to a tournament or a in-state “Play Date”, the coaches and Trainers will separate the teams accordingly. It is their play in practice and in weekend Missoula games, that show the coaches where they should play. These teams will change as the number of players in the games changes, and as players develop within the Academy. Players must continue to grow and perform.

“Why can’t I just place my 9 or 10 year old in U11? I know they have done this in the past.”

As the interest in the Club continues to grow, there are now increased numbers at the youngest ages. At one point the Club needed the 8-10 year olds to form teams at U11. We hope that this is no longer the case since we are a larger club. We believe there is a better way for these under aged players to develop – to play within a structure that does not put additional stress on our players and parents at an early age.

Having said this, if there is a player who is so strong technically, physically and competitively for their age group, the technical staff of Missoula Strikers may make a recommendation that this player be moved up an age group.

“What is the Curriculum?”

In school, every teacher follows a specific curriculum in order to address the developmental concerns of each grade. Within Strikers, our curriculum involves age specific developmental concerns. We have created guidelines for curriculum that take your child systematically through what they need as young developing athletes/soccer players.

A problem with many coaches is they see the game as adults, so they see all of the pieces it takes to have their 10 year olds play like 25 year olds on television. But how did these 25 year olds get to that level. Not by learning everything all at once and not by having a large number of techniques and tactics thrown at them prematurely. We teach addition before multiplication. We teach the scales before we start playing difficult pieces on the piano. We have college students take prerequisites for other classes. But for some reason when it comes to sport (especially team sport), we often skip steps in order to get to the game that looks like what an adult plays. We are determined in the Club to put into place our Long Term Development Model (or Plan). We have done this with committed trainers and coaches, a continued focus on our curriculum that is based on age appropriate development, and of course the energy of young players and the support of their parents.

“Why a Consistent Curriculum?”

Like every Academy or place of education, we need a curriculum. As a Club Academy we want technique and tactics introduced at appropriate times in a child’s development. Our Trainers will make this occur by following our defined lessons.

“What is the difference between Trainers and Coaches in the Academy?”

The Trainers may be your coach, but typically the Trainer will be an individual who is trained in the curriculum, is an appropriate teacher of the curriculum, and has experiences or a coach certification that qualifies them as a Strikers Academy Trainer.

Coaches are there to assist the Trainer and add value to the practice sessions and games. As Trainers may work with multiple groups, they cannot be at all tournaments or games. Consequently, the coaches are vital to this program’s success and a player’s development.

The Trainer and Coach relationship is very much a 'mentorship' relationship, where the Coach observes and assists a Trainer so they can become versed in the curriculum that the Strikers Club would like taught at different age groups.

There will be coaches assigned to the age group at a ratio of 1:12. These coaches will be responsible for:

1. Assisting in all training sessions,
2. Running additional practices if desired,
3. Assisting in the selection of teams for tournaments,
4. Coaching at tournaments,
5. Communicating with the parents and players directly with regard to organization and administration.
6. Part of Strikers belief in Coaching Mentorship

“Will the Trainers and Coaches of my child’s team be trained/educated themselves?”

There are two separate matters here.

Internally, the Technical Director (Neil Sedgwick) will conduct training sessions for the coaches and coaches will meet regularly for discussion on various developmental topics. These will include specific technical aspects of the game, and tactical training sessions which will be age specific.

The State Soccer Association requires that all coaches acquire a National Coaches License based on their coaching experience and the level that they will be coaching. In 2010, every coach coaching AA teams will be required to have a D License. This insures that your child will be coached by an individual who has received training in both soccer and age appropriate relations.

“What is the practice schedule like?”

The new format will be designed around two sessions/practices per week headed by a Club Trainer and supported by team or training group coaches. If the coach wishes to run an additional practice this may certainly be organized.

“What about the travel requirements?”

We have attempted to minimize the travel at the U9-U11 age groups with the Academy format. We want our young players playing more and traveling less. This is the reason we are moving to go to the Academy structure and away from the league format.

In general, we would like our U11 teams to travel to two tournaments throughout the season. This is something that will be discussed at your team meeting with the coach and the other parents.

We would however, like to kick off the Academy year by travelling to Seattle with any Academy player who desires in order to play against Seattle club teams and then attend a Seattle Sounders (Seattle plays in Major League Soccer ... MLS). The Sounders Experience is one that every soccer enthusiast should feel.

As the clubs within Montana Youth Soccer Association look to adopt the Academy structure in 2009 at U11 and U10, there will also be a single weekend where our group will travel to another Montana City to play in a different format than our usual Saturday sessions. This means only three travel weekends.

“How much will my child play?”

Our goal is to always have players playing at least a ½ of every game. Substitutions will be made so the coaches can rotate players through the line up and play considerable time.

Because of the Academy format at U9-U11, the players will be playing games of different sizes, we will adjust the games to ensure that players play nearly every minute of every game. There will be substitutions in order to give players a quick break or if the numbers do not work out to be even at game time (i.e. playing 6v6 needs 12 players, but an uneven number of 13 need to play).

“What happened to Winter Team Training @ U11?”

In January, February and early March, there has been consistently poor turnout for teams training at U11. We will now move to an open gym format where we will designate days for your open play. The players arrive at the gym at their designated time, receive a short technical warm up and then they will be divided into teams for open / free play.

“If at U9-U11 the teams are not chosen by ability and we are not consistently playing in a league, why would I pay more for Strikers when my child could continue in Micro?”

Although a league is not in place, the training and game format leads to greater development and enjoyment. These Club Trainers are guided by a Long Term Development Plan and receive feedback from our Technical Director with regard to curriculum and the progress that the players are making.

The Long Term Development focus will guide the player through appropriate stages of technical, tactical and movement education. The training, based on this will challenge the player to grow. Don't miss this development. Players in this program will not look the same at the end of the season. Their technical growth will be accelerated and players outside of the program will be falling behind.

“I heard that there are select teams at U11 and U12 that may travel to tournaments. How does my child get selected?”

In 2010, our goal is to separate each of the age groups from U9 through U11 (U9, U10, U11) and allow the players to play at an appropriate level. We believe that this will concentrate the abilities based on age.

It is felt that a select opportunity will enhance the experience for the group of players and it is something that the Club has the ability to administer.

In 2010, as a Club we would take the opportunity to create Select Teams at each age group, BUT only after the Montana Cup Showcase and before the tryouts in June. Selection will be based on physical ability, technical ability, understanding of the games concepts, desire to learn, attention to the instruction at practices, and a young players ability to play with the team. All of these when are observed throughout the season by the coaches and trainers.

“I understand the Academy groups may get an opportunity to go watch a professional team like the Seattle Sounders. Is this true?”

In 2009, the boys U11 group traveled to Seattle and played in ‘friendly’ (or exhibition) games against a Seattle club. Following these games, they attended the Seattle Sounders game with 30,000+ other soccer fans. It was a great experience and something we want to offer to our Academy players this year. More details to follow, but please consider this as it is a fantastic experience.

“What would a typical Saturday look like for U9, U10 and U11 Home Plays?”

As a general schedule, when the U9-U11’s are playing at home in our Striker Academy format, the morning may look like:

- 9:40 – 10:00 a.m. Arrive at Fields
- 10:00 a.m. Separate into teams/Introduction/Large Group Warm Up
- 10:20-11:00 a.m. Small Sided Games (3v3 or 4v4)
- 11:00-11:50 a.m. Larger Sided Games (7v7 or 8v8)
- 11:50 a.m. Academy players help clean up
- 12:00 p.m. Wrap up of morning by Coaches/Trainers

This format could be similar for MT Play Date, where we play against other Montana clubs in a festival type format.



Technical Development within Missoula Strikers

**Tryouts - Team Formation (November 21 & 22, 2009)
Academy: U9/U10/U11
U12/U13/U14U16/U18/U19**

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR	Neil Sedgwick
BOYS (U12 through U19)	Paolo Rizzon
GIRLS DIRECTOR (U12 through U19)	Neil Sedgwick
DIRECTOR OF EARLY DEVELOPMENT	Peter Underwood

The Director of Early Development works with the above coaches who will also work as TRAINERS for the Academy for U9, U10, U11. Each of these age groups will also have appointed an appropriate number of coaches who are responsible for the teams during tournaments, for general communication with the families/managers as well as assist with the training sessions.

	Girls	Boys
U18 Girls / U19 Boys / U18 Boys COACH and an Assistant Coach AA (Premier) Team #'s to be determined by the coach	Premier CJ Cooper	U19 Premier Geoff Birnbaum U18 Premier Charles Chandler
U16 Girls / Boys COACH and an Assistant Coach AA (Premier) Team has 16 Players A (Select) Team has up to 18 Players	Premier Neil Sedgwick Select Developmental Mackenzie Murphy	Select Pete Kesel Select Developmental TBD
U14 Girls / Boys COACH and an Assistant Coach AA (Premier) Team has 16 Players A (Select) Team has up to 18 Players	Premier Winter Sanor Select Developmental TBD	Premier Paolo Rizzon Select Developmental TBD
U13 Girls / Boys COACH and an Assistant Coach AA (Premier) Team has 16 Players A (Select) Team has up to 18 Players	Premier Meagan Misner Select Developmental Shawn Destafney	Premier Dave Oberbillig Select Developmental TBD
U12 Girls / Boys COACH and an Assistant Coach Attempt to have 12 Players maximum	Hannah Hilley Camillia Lanham	Charlie Vandam Ocean Skyrud
U11 and Below Strikers Academy Coaches and Trainers	Trainers Peter Underwood Shawn Destafney	Trainers Kevin Houck Ian Marshall

Long Term Athlete Development Guidelines

Below you will find Istvan Balyi’s seven stage progression to Long Term Athlete Development.

Seven Stages of Long-Term Athlete Development	Active Start	Early entrance (Early childhood play, MicroStrikers)
	FUNDamental	6-8 Years (MicroStrikers, Academy)
	Learning to Train	9-12 Years (Strikers Trainers, MicroStrikers, Strikers Academy)
	Training to Train	13-15 Years (Strikers, Strikers Academy)
	Training to Compete	16-18 Years (Strikers, High School, Griz Academy)
	Training to Win	18+ Years (University / College)
	Active for Life	Retention / Enter at any age (Parks & Rec, USL/W-League, WPSL)

What does this mean?

Istvan Balyi has worked with Canada’s national sports organizations for three decades and over the past 20 years has created a model of athlete development that has been implemented all over the world. He has guided the sport organizations in Australia and Great Britain toward the implementation of this model within their day to day operations. Istvan’s work has included being the head sport science consultant for Australia’s Olympic coaches leading up to the Sydney Olympics. His work in the Strikers States has included being the lead Periodization (planning of training) expert at the IMG/Bollettieri Academy in Florida.

This model crosses the boundaries of all sports. It can be modified to reflect the needs of early and late specialization sports as well as demonstrating the differences in development between male and female athletes within each sport. In general, it provides the skeleton for which a sport specific model can be built.

By utilizing the framework of Istvan Balyi’s Long Term Athlete Development Model, I have created a year by year guide for our coaches within our Academy, Trainer programs at U9-U12, and team development. A small portion of this model is shown on the next page.

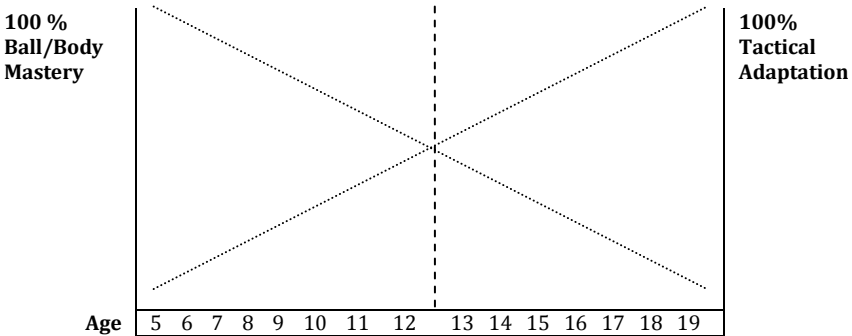
As you can see in the model, there has been an over-emphasize Training to Compete or Training to Win too early within the Club. Part of this has been a result of the MYSA structure. We must rethink competition and look at long term development. Unlike High School, we are focused on Long Term Development whereas High School Soccer is focused on competition

and results. We have time in the Club, to put the pieces in place for long term development. It is our choice as to how we program and what we teach.

LONG TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT - SOCCER																										
AGE (YEARS)	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25-28				
STAGE	Active		Initiation			Pre-Formation			Formation			Specialization			High Performance											
DIVISION (ISTVAN BALYI)	Start		Fundamentals			Learning to Train			Training to Train			to Compete			Training to Win											
TALENT IDENTIFICATION	Micro Soccer						Travel Club						High School / Club						College		Professional					
MICROSTRIKERS	MicroStrikers																									
MISSOULA STRIKERS													Missoula Strikers													
<i>PHYSICAL</i>																										
Flexibility	GENERAL												SPECIFIC						MAINTENANCE							
Balance	S	S	S	S	S	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D				
Aerobic	GENERAL												SPECIFIC TRAINING													
Anaerobic																										
	<i>Alaetic</i>																									
	<i>Laetic</i>																									
Strength													Ad						E						Maintenance	
Power													Ad						Ad						T	
Coordination	GENERAL												GENERAL						SPECIFIC						REFINEMENT	
Agility	GENERAL												GENERAL						SPECIFIC						REFINEMENT	
	S - Static Balance						D - Dynamic Balance						E- Endurance						M - Maximum							
	T - Train						Ad - Adaptation																			
<i>TECHNICAL (ATTACKING)</i>																										
<i>Dribbling</i>																										
Ball Familiarity	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	A	A	A	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P				
Rolling the Ball	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	A	A	A	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P				
Areas of Feet	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	A	A	A	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P				
Skipping	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	A	A	A	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P				

Technique to Tactics Training Ratios

A question which always arises when parents watch practice, especially at the younger ages, is, how much time will coaches work on technique (skill) and body awareness as compared to tactical work? We are asked why coaches at the younger ages are not working on goal kicks, throw ins, passing type plays, you name it, we are asked.



Here is an important connection to the academic world. In the third grade, teachers are not teaching algebra or calculus. There are many things to learn which help the student have success later in their academic careers, when algebra and calculus are taught. Likewise, we have a model of development and a general ratio of instruction that we want coaches to follow.

Coaches are generally directed by the graph below which has been adopted in some format by most soccer nations. This appropriate ratio at each age will greatly enhance a player's ability to enjoy the game and have success within the game as they age.

A Parents' Role in the Development Process Is Crucial

"How should I encourage my son/daughter and their team?"

Encouragement is what your child needs. There is a fine line however between coaching and encouragement.

Soccer is not an easy game. Your child is attempting to make decisions while manipulating a bouncing/rolling ball with their feet/thighs/chest/head while they are under pressure. This is tough. They will make mistakes, and this is when they need your support.

"What should I say after the game when we are driving home which will help them feel good about themselves and assist in the development process?"

We all know that parents are important parts of the developmental process. And we are aware that there are a few different types of parents. We see them depicted in humorous ways in cartoons and sitcoms, and we also see the dark side on national news from time to time. We also know the majority of parents are supportive of their children, the coach, the team, the sport and everyone's efforts. But sometimes the quiet-mannered mother or father can, during a game, begin to heckle/criticize the officials, scream out in debate of a call made or not made, storm/pace up and down the sideline, throw their arms in the air in disgust, ridicule an opponent, coach their daughter/son or another member of the team from the sideline, and worst of all, ridicule or make negative comments to their own children or those on the team. It happens, you have all seen it. Don't be that guy or gal!



Parent behavior

Respect for the game and the developmental process follow these simple points:

- ✓ Cheer for your team, but don't ridicule the opposing team.
- ✓ Learn the rules of the game. It will help you understand why certain situations take place.
- ✓ BUT, because you have read the rule book, this does not give you permission to voice your opinion to the referee. Be respectful of the referee's decisions.
- ✓ As a parent, try to be a "team fan", not a "my kid" fan.
- ✓ Be a good role model, both through your actions and by censoring those around you whose behavior is unbecoming.
- ✓ People may not remember the final score, but they will remember the person on the sideline who embarrassed themselves or the group of parents from Missoula Strikers who were disrespectful to the game.

DO

- ✓ Encourage your child to participate in physical activity.
- ✓ Put an emphasis on participation, learning and effort, not winning.
- ✓ Support your child while he/she is playing, simply by being there.
- ✓ Comment on how hard they tried, or something positive.
- ✓ Leave the coaching to the coach.
- ✓ Ask the child how he/she would like you to act or support them. Is there anything they would like you to do?
- ✓ Encourage your child to play on their own and with a friend.
- ✓ Model self control and enjoyment if playing with them in the yard or at the park.

DO NOT

- ✓ Do not yell at the child for errors or mistakes.
- ✓ Do not yell abuse at officials or opposition during a game.
- ✓ Do not criticize officials, opposition or put a coach down in discussion with your child about practice or a game.
- ✓ Do not put all the emphasis on winning.
- ✓ Do not make exaggerated facial expressions or hand signals to the child while they are playing or competing.
- ✓ If you are playing a sport or activity with the child at home, or at the park, do not try to turn it into a definitive coaching session. Rather, allow the child to have as much fun as possible, so that they are motivated to go and participate and play again. That way they will remain in the sport longer and develop the skills and abilities over time.

Missoula Strikers U14 – U19 Program Outline

2010 AA (Premier or NCS) Team Placement for U14-U18

- The state determined that our team placement this year. A club can no longer simply place teams into the six team Premier (AA) division but must qualify. Fortunately for Missoula Strikers, we are able to place a AA team in every age group.

Future AA (Premier) Years

- Top 4 teams from previous year's RQT (Regional Qualifying Tournament) compete the Premier Division the following year
- The next two teams will be selected by the state from Premier and Select teams based on strength of schedule and record.
- End of May compete in RQT (Memorial Day) to determine who will represent MT at the Far West Regionals
- End of June: Compete in US Club Regional Tournament (2009 in Burlington, Washington)
- Compete in Far West Regionals at the end of June if the team wins the MT State Cup/RQT
- Compete in several out of city / state tournaments

NOVEMBER Team Formation for 2010, however this changes for the 2011 season.

- Team selection occurs two weeks following the 2010 Montana Cup for 2011.

- The Club will have a Premier or National Championship Series (NCS) team for both boys and girls at U14, U16, U18 and then U19 Boys .
- There will also be U13 Boys and Girls teams at the Premier level however they will not compete in the RQT, instead they will compete in the State Championships on June 18-20 in Great Falls.
- The NCS Regional Qualifying Tournament (RQT) will be held on May 29-30, 2010 in Billings.
- NCS Teams have mandatory play weekends at present on April 24, May 8 and May 15th.
- **U16 Boys Premier participation still TBD. Working with MYSA.**
- The Club will also attempt to field teams at the Select (A) Developmental Level at all other ages where numbers permit.
- The Club may also field teams at the Classic / Recreational level in age groups where there are sufficient teams.
- The State Championships for Select and Classic will occur on June 18-20 in Great Falls.

Under 19 B

Under 18

Under 16

Under 14

Under 13

Missoula Strikers U9 – U13 Program Outline

Under 12

- Remains the same as previous years with teams competing in Montana Youth Soccer scheduled League and Team Selection occurring in early October.

November Team Selection

- Team selection occurs in early November as usual.

Under 11

Strikers Academy

- Involved in Academy Program.
- All participants in this age group will be broken into 'Practice/Training Groups'. The goal is to have a pool of players in each Training Group.
- Play on most Saturday mornings (4v4 up to 7v7 depending on the week's training emphasis) under the guidance of Club Technical Director, Age Group Trainers, and Club assigned coaches (10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.).
- Play in two travel tournaments.
- Play one weekend on the road in MT against another Club's Academy Program (Called MT Play Dates).
- Play Sunday afternoon in MicroStrikers of course at no additional cost.

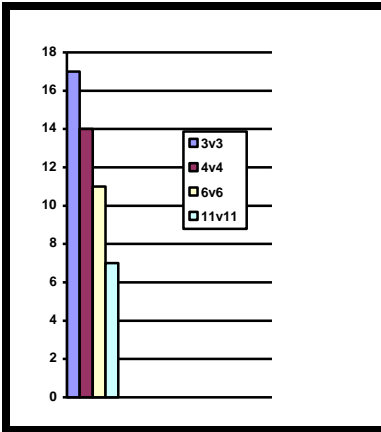
Trainer Program

- Age Group Trainers will work with the Training Groups two times per week. These Trainers are supported by the coaches assigned at that age. Each Trainer will follow a specific curriculum that fits into our Long Term Development Model and created with the Club Technical Director.
- The assigned coaches of that age group may also schedule an additional practice session which will be encouraged to include 2/3 play/scrimmage.

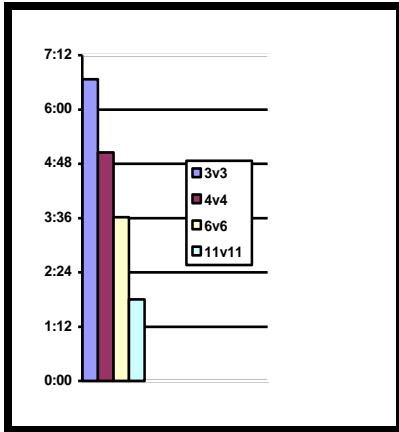
Under 10

Under 9

Why do we emphasize Small Sided Soccer in the Club?



Ball Contacts During a 10 Minute Period of a Game



Time Individual Has Ball in a 40 Min Game

Small sided games (SSG) are any games played with less than eleven players aside and the best way for players to combine nearly all elements of the game. The fewer the players the more game-conditioned touches on the soccer ball per player. As well as you get all these touches in a 'realistic' and 'live' environment with the addition of tactical applications. This is where the enjoyment happens and after 60 minutes of high activity combined with structured repetition the players learn and go home HAPPY!

11v11 soccer is an adult game devised by and for adults to play. The 11 a-side game routinely plays structured formations - defense, midfield and forward. Playing 8 a-side games have the same structure but players are more able to move from position to position, from defense to offence making the game exciting for them. **The smaller field and smaller number of players on the field will help the players to develop their technique because they will have more touches of the ball.** Because there are fewer players on the field there will be extra space, which will give the player more time to make decisions, this will help develop the tactical side of the game. In a small sided soccer game rules such as throw-ins, free kicks, and goal kicks can still apply.

From a player perspective all players can have more opportunities to attack (develop and identify goal scorers earlier) and all players will recognize that they will have to defend as well. From a coaching perspective organizing players during the match is far less stressful and practice time is not occupied with trying to demonstrate an 11a-side picture. Valuable training time can be spent on technique and small sided tactics.

Why small-sided games?

- ✓ We want our youth to have more touches on the ball and become more creative with it.
- ✓ We want our players to develop an understanding of tactical play and solving problems on the field.
- ✓ We want our youth to get quality instruction from the coach; less players on the squad = easier for novice coach.
- ✓ Allows more opportunities to observe and analyze the individual and collective responses of players under quick decision-making conditions in a simple environment.
- ✓ More space + fewer numbers = less bunching. Enhance positioning awareness
- ✓ Players under twelve are routinely structured into formal positions at ages when their spatial awareness do not lend themselves to a practical understanding of larger group tactics.
- ✓ More playing time, which encourages maximum individual participation → more individual involvement thereby improves fitness
- ✓ Want our youth to be more involved in the game including transition from defending to creating attacking opportunities
- ✓ More opportunities for youth to score goals! (Pure excitement!) → improves self-esteem and self-confidence
- ✓ The small sided environment is a developmentally appropriate environment for our youth players; it's a fun environment that focuses on player development.

One reason small-sided games are so good is because they force players to defend and attack. Very much of what my father did in practice replicated the street soccer he grew up with in the streets of Argentina. Street soccer usually meant small-sided games. In a small space, players have to make quick decisions on the ball and be able to handle it under pressure, because an opponent is usually close by. And you can't hide in small-sided soccer. If you're not marking opponents when they have the ball, they'll capitalize quickly. When your teammate has the ball, you need to make yourself available or he'll be cornered quickly.

-- Claudio Reyna, US World Cup Captain.

Synopsis (Studies) on the Topic of Small Sided Soccer

Study #1 – Manchester Strikers FC

The following data were collected in a 2002-2003 study conducted for Manchester Strikers Football Club by Dr. Rick Fenoglio, a lecturer in Exercise Science at Manchester Metropolitan University. Fifteen 4v4 and 8v8 games were videotaped and analyzed for the study.

Passes: +135% or 585 more passes in 4v4 games
Shots Taken: +260% or 481 more shots in 4v4 games
Goals Scored: +500% or 301 more goals in 4v4 games
1v1's: +225% or 525 more 1v1's in 4v4 games
Tricks, Turns, Moves: +280% or 436 more tricks, turns, and moves



Study #2 – California Youth Soccer

The following conclusions were reported in 2001 by John Weinerth as part of a 4v4 vs 8v8 pilot study for the California Youth Soccer Association - South (CYSA-S).

1. In the 4x4 game on a smaller field (35x25 yards), most of the players (88%) touched the ball 3-4 times more in several different categories such as: goals, shots on goal, completed and lost passes and total passes while still maintaining similar completion ratio of 31 vs 35%
2. When no positions were given to the players (the player's were free to move around the field), the results were that they were much more involved & subsequently touched the ball 3-4 times more.
3. In the 8x8 game (80x50yard field), two or three players dominated the game in passes and dribbles.
4. The observation of the game by several people was that the 4x4 game flowed with little breaks compared to the 8x8 game which had many breaks due to restarts from goals, shots on goals, throw-ins and dribbles by 2-3 dominating players.
5. Based on the oral survey, 88% of the players answered the oral survey questions #2 and #3 (Which game did you have more fun playing (on the small field or the bigger field)? & Which game allowed you to touch the ball more 8v8 or 4v4?) in favor of the 4v4 small-sided game. The individual Player Performance Analysis clearly illustrates a much more active involved player in the 4v4 game in comparison with that same player that seemed hidden and uninvolved in the 8v8 game.

Study #3 – German Football Association

This study was conducted by the German Football Association, in conjunction with The Sports University of Cologne.

Observations on the question, “What Game Format and Development Model is Best?” were as follows.



1. Children like to compete with each other
2. Skills need to be developed in playful environment
3. Players can't learn when game demands skills or tactics they haven't yet learned
4. If they encounter the same situation many times over, they learn to deal with it
5. Complicated rules, such as offside detract from the ability to learn fundamentals
6. Commonly accepted now that ages 8 to 12 are ideal for developing technique and coordination
7. In spite of this many coaches continue to implement adult rules and strategies, which hinder this development
8. It's not enough to merely substitute smaller games for 11v11
9. Basic concepts such as passing, control, dribbling and ball possession must be taught
10. Players should not be forced into rigid positional responsibilities until they have mastered the basics
11. Development is a long term process, and the player's enjoyment should take precedence over that of the parents - games that teach soccer fundamentals may not be the most exciting to watch
12. By changing conditions and variations of the training games, the coach can alter the playing style of the children

Study #4 – US Olympic Development Program (ODP)

Why is training more important for young players than game playing?

During a major international tournament (11-a-side) with FIFA-3 substitution rules (three changes with no re-entry), the individual time of possession for 90-minute games ranged between 20 seconds and three minutes, with an average of one and a half to two minutes possession time per player. (Bangsbo and Pietersen,2004)

In a study of 1500 ODP level female players, the average number of games reported played over the previous twelve months was 116. With an average game duration of 80-minutes and a maximum roster of 18, and with the ball out of play for an average of 33%, the typical player would experience 1.5 minutes of active play per game for a total of 174 minutes per year. Less than 3 hours of ball contacts! (Turner, 2003)

Under FIFA-3 substitution rules, a young soccer player competing in 100 games per year will only come into contact with the ball for a maximum of 300 minutes, or 5 hours. The recommended ratio of training sessions to games for 9-12 year-old players is 70% training and 30% games.

Study #5 – SSG Study of Players in Scotland

The University of Abertay Dundee conducted the following research by means of an observational analysis of small-sided games in Scotland. The purpose of the study using video analysis software (prozone) as our observational analytical tool was to collect data to compare the 4 vs. 4 game to the 7 vs. 7 and 11 vs. 11 game for U12 players.

More than fifteen years ago the move towards small-sided football was discussed at national level. In particular, the then, current Technical Director of the SFA, Andy Roxburgh (now Technical Director for UEFA) pioneered the small-sided game as the best means of developing the game for children. The small-sided games principle was based on sound educational and developmental evidence. Children learn in a progressive and sequential way using a building block approach. According to existing research the belief is very much that the 11-a-side game is a game designed by adults for adults and should be seen as the last part of the learning journey. Therefore, the 7-a-side game is the intermediate step and the 4 v 4 game is the first step in the ladder.

According to current research (Winter, 2005; Insight, 2004; Manchester Strikers, 2003), the ability of children to make decisions in a difficult, ever changing environment will be dictated by their developmental age, their preparation and the complexity of the situation. Professional educators and football coaches from around the world are agreed that the small-sided game is the best developmental tool for under 12's considering all the information. Also, the use of the 4 and 7 a side games are the best means of teaching the technical and tactical [decision making] parts of the game in preparation for the adult game.

Many believe that the large size of an eleven-a-side pitch, even at its smallest dimensions is too big for children due to the fact that they spend large amounts of time running around or standing still without even touching the ball with very limited passing interaction as well as skill and technical development. The limited time a child touches the ball will not allow appropriate time to develop the basic skills of which many of our international counterparts carry out so successfully. Ultimately, this will result in relatively low skill levels amongst young players in Scotland, which in turns leads to a number of children becoming disenchanted and leaving the sport.



The Future of Small Sided Soccer

All over the World soccer leagues have begun to realize...

- ✓ Soccer is viewed differently by younger players than older players
- ✓ Young players cannot fully grasp the complexity of 11v11 soccer and learn best through a progression of building blocks
- ✓ Without building blocks, many players are forced into more tactical situations bypassing technical and personal growth
- ✓ We set the youngsters up for failure if we continue at larger numbers for younger ages.

Keeping Development Soccer Simple

The Small Sided Game provides the best environment for youth players to develop soccer skills and techniques. When coaching, officiating or parenting remember to keep the game simple. Over complicating can lose the flow of the game, in turn inhibiting development. Encourage the players to discover the love of the game through the game.

In addition a small sided game is a great teacher.

The teaching of the game and the organization of the practices will require time for everyone to familiarize themselves with the game. After a week or two, however, there should be no difficulties.

Be Patient! The principles of the game are right. The game is right. The rewards will be in the children's enjoyment of playing and their positive development.

"We should respect the soccer of the past, analyze the soccer of the present, and anticipate the soccer of the future."



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