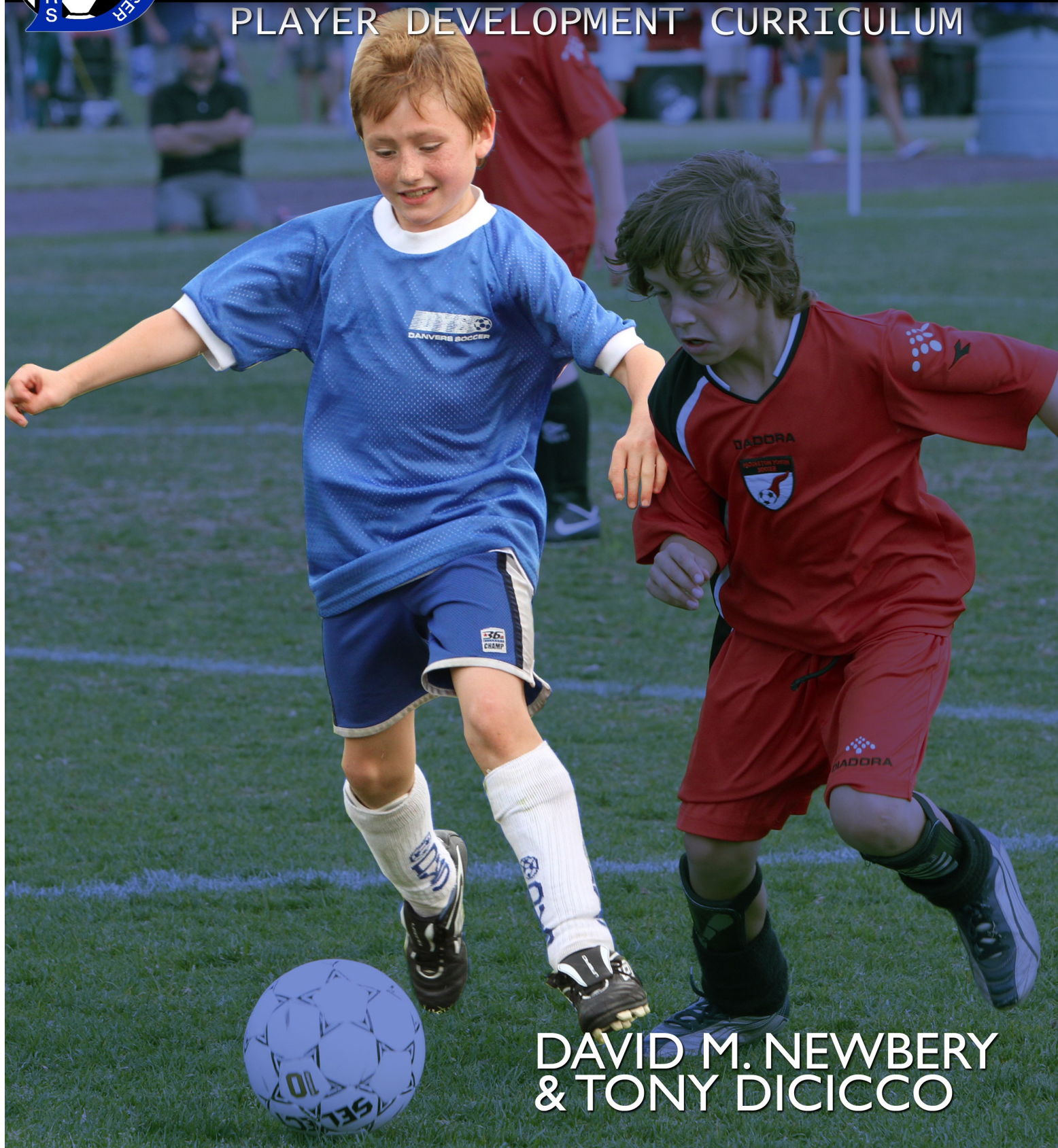




# DANVERS YOUTH SOCCER

## PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM



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### **CURRICULUM INTRODUCTION**

The term 'Curriculum' is most commonly associated with teaching and school education. In general terms, an educational curriculum consists of everything that promotes intellectual, personal, social, and physical development of the participants. When transferred to sport, the term curriculum is usually related to a book of activities and games organized in such a way to aid the coach plan for a practice session. Rarely do these curriculum books engage the reader in a rationale for selecting such activities, or describe how coaching methodology is as important as the activities themselves. Unfortunately this approach usually leads to very low adherence by the coaches – particularly if subsequent coaching sessions do not realize the outcomes suggested in the text.

In the context of youth soccer, learning is often left to chance. Clubs and coaches seem satisfied to accept the major benefits of participation as activity and having fun. Although these outcomes are very beneficial to the child, wider ranging results can also be realized through a structured and organized program – a 'true' curriculum. Soccer participation offers children experiences to develop confidence, self esteem, knowledge, physical development and in some cases the opportunity to participate in elite level competition at High School and College.

The Danvers Youth Soccer Association Player

Development Curriculum details the framework, aims, objectives, and content that creates tremendous value and helps to raise standards, performance, and expectations (Table 1). The curriculum includes approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, quality of relationships between coach and the player, and the values embodied by the club.

### **SOCCERPLUS APPROACH TO CURRICULUM DESIGN**

In partnership with practitioners and curriculum experts, SoccerPlus has developed an approach to curriculum design based upon three key elements:

1. Element 1: Curriculum Aims
2. Element 2: Curriculum Organization
3. Element 3: Curriculum Evaluation

### **ELEMENT 1: WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?**

The Danvers Youth Soccer Association Player Development Curriculum provides an opportunity to create a relevant, coherent and engaging environment for all players, parents and coaches. Having clear purposes representing the club's hopes and desires for the players is an important starting point. Purposes not only provide a reference point for decision making but also a direction on how learning experiences are to be organized.

### **CURRICULUM PURPOSES**

The purposes of the Danvers Youth Soccer Association Player Development Curriculum are:

Establish an entitlement – for every child entering the program irrespective of social background, wealth, gender or differences in ability.

Establishes standards – at each stage of development so progress of players and coaches can be monitored, goals and improvement targets can be established and players can be selected for the appropriate development groups.

Promotes continuity and coherence – facilitates the transition of players between teams and phases of skill development, and provides a framework for coaches to adhere to.

Promotes understanding for parents and players – increases understanding and confidence in the player development philosophy and coaching team.

### BIG PICTURE OF CURRICULUM

<b>1</b> <b>What is the purpose of the curriculum?</b>	Aims	Equality of opportunity	Establishing standards	Continuity and Coherence	Promotes understanding	Pathway (U5–U18+)
	Outcomes	Achieve soccer standards	Achieve academic, social & health aims	Commitment to learning	Confident learners	Individual & team Success
	Focus		Skill development Individual and team	Knowledge and understanding e.g. Identifying visual cues, tactical awareness	Attitudes and attributes e.g. sportsmanship, respect, confidence	
<b>2</b> <b>How is the curriculum structured?</b>	Content	Fundamental movement skills	Tactical awareness & understanding	Physical & mental preparation	Academic & social responsibility	Fundamental soccer skills
	Methodology	Practical and theory	Individual and Team Assessment	Guided practice	Self-discovery	Directed & modeling
	Supporting knowledge	Cognitive development, mental acumen	Biological development, growth and maturation	Emotional development, confidence, self-esteem	Nutrition, balanced diet and hydration	Physical fitness, speed, agility, balance & coordination
	Learning environment	Team practices, positional instruction and optional sessions	Street soccer and unstructured practice	Competition e.g. 11v11 and small-sided games	Tournaments and festivals	Indoor training and games
<b>3</b> <b>Are the aims being achieved?</b>	Evaluation	Skill acquisition Against performance standards	Team selections Tryout process combined with regular seasonal assessments	Talent identification Planning for exceptional talent	Knowledge and understanding Decision-making & tactical awareness	360° Review Parents, players, coaches and administrators

#### EXTRACT FROM TONY DiCICCO'S POST WORLD CUP REPORT, 2008

"I look at our success in Chile, coupled with our Gold Medal at the China Olympics and our Silver Medal at the U17 World Cup in New Zealand, as important results to re-establish US Soccer as the number one women's program in the world. However, we cannot confuse our success in 2008 with "everything is right with USA girls' and women's soccer". The fact is we are losing ground in the women's game worldwide. Our player development model is flawed in a number of areas:

We over-value winning: At the young development ages we need to be spending more time on developing technique and teaching the basic tactics of the game. Youth soccer in America is big business. Winning brings top players to one's club and allows for more winning and more money.

Winning is part of player development certainly, but at the younger age groups, winning is out of control. One can develop a winning team by giving players specific roles and playing "no play...no mistakes" soccer, but this is at the expense of the individual player's development.

We are locked in the "under syndrome": All our players play U15, U16, and U20. Even our colleges are U22. The rest of the world has their younger talented players playing in sophisticated environments, learning from the experienced veterans on their teams or on the teams of their opponents."



### A WORD ABOUT 'WINNING'

Winning is not regarded by SoccerPlus as a necessary evil of competition. SoccerPlus believes there are significant values for the player, coach and club when striving to win games, leagues and tournaments. However, 'winning' is not so absolute - it has a broader definition than triumphing over another team. Winning is an appropriate description for players and teams achieving realistic goals, in practice and in games. In this context, winning can be symbolized by learning how to overcome adversity as an individual or team, by employing a new team tactic to great effect or by developing camaraderie as player's working together. Player Development places winning in the context of the 'bigger picture' – if players learn and master fundamental skills and movement patterns the likelihood of winning is greatly increased. In essence, winning becomes a by-product of good practice.

### A WORD ABOUT 'TALENT' AND TRYOUTS

Selecting players to teams becomes a major task for youth soccer programs and very few people (players, coaches or club officials) enjoy the experience. Typically, one-time-per-year tryout events are hosted prior to the fall season and all players wishing to be considered for the travel program must participate. Players, given a number to encourage objectivity, are required to perform a series of skill activities and play in small sided games in front of the assessors. The assessors, usually coaches in the club, but sometimes independent professionals, are equipped with a clip board, grading sheet and set of instructions and are assigned the unenviable task of selecting the players into the first sixteen, second sixteen and so on. There are several flaws to this approach:

1. Assessing talent requires time – usually two tryout sessions are not sufficient.
2. Objectivity is generally compromised by the team coaches having discretionary powers to select the teams.
3. The people assessing the talent are generally not qualified or experienced to do so.
4. The assessors rarely receive any assessment


training.

5. Negative outcomes from the process are often damaging to the reputation of the club and with the engagement and goodwill of the parents.

Talent takes time, a significant amount of effort and regularly emerges later than we hope or expect. Players grow at different rates, hit puberty at different times, possess different work ethics, have varying motivations and receive different instruction. However, many coaching practices perpetuate the belief that talent manifests itself early and does not need nurturing or developing. To this end, if we want the best for our players and we want to allow talent to materialize, the methods used to select players to teams and the treatment of players after selection or rejection needs to change.

Cutting young athletes from a team without the infrastructure that encourages them to adhere to the program and offers them new opportunities to be successful, will result in 'late developers' lost to the game and the competitive stream. Additionally, this approach provides children without the athletic potential to continue playing in a positive educational environment. Children who may not continue to play soccer in high school or beyond are more likely to continue adopting healthy behaviors if their experiences are positive. The SoccerPlus Long Term Player Development Model applies to all players – regardless of potential. Recreational players will learn more skills and have more fun, while elite performers develop the skills required to perform at High School and beyond.

**SOCCERPLUS 5 STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

 <b>SOCCERPLUS FIVE-STAGE DEVELOPMENT MODEL</b>																	
Age (in years)	0-2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Baby LTAD Model	Active Start				Fundamentals				Learning to Train				Training to Train				Training to Compete
SoccerPlus stages	PLUS 1				PLUS 2				PLUS 3				PLUS 4				PLUS 5
Age Group	U5-U6				U7-U9				U10-U12				U13-U15				U16-U18
Soccer Age (Developmental)	2 years +/-				2 years +/-				2 years +/-				2 years +/-				2 years +/-
Coaching Time (year)	40-90 hours				100-200 hours				150-320 hours				150-360 hours				150-540 hours
Developmental Focus	1. Social 2. Physical 3. Technical 4. Psychological 5. Tactical				1. Technical 2. Social 3. Physical 4. Tactical 5. Psychological				1. Technical 2. Physical 3. Tactical 4. Psychological 5. Social				1. Technical 2. Tactical 3. Physical 4. Psychological 5. Social				1. Tactical 2. Psychological 3. Technical 4. Physical 5. Social
Specialist Training	General				All Position Training				Specific Position Training				Groups & Units				Whole Team
Players Per Session	12				12 to 15				15 to 18				18				22
Length of Session	45-60 min				60-75 min				60-90 min				75-90 min				75-90 min
Ratio Training:Games	Training				4:1				3:1				3:1				2:1
Training Format	1v1 to 3v3				1v1 to 5v5				4v4 to 8v8				4v4 to 11v11				4v4 to 11v11
Game Format	N/A				4v4 or 5v5				6v6 to 8v8				7v7 to 11v11				11v11
Goalkeepers in games	No				5v5 only				Yes				Yes				Yes
Player Assessment	2 per year				3 per year				4 per year				6 per year				8 per year
Coach Assessment	2 per year				2 per year				2 per year				2 per year				2 per year
Coach Certification	Youth Module				Youth Module				E License				D License				C License

### SOCCERPLUS STAGES OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

The following section provides details of the SoccerPlus Long Term Player Development Model. Each stage is organized to reflect distinct differences existing in the development of children and the content and teaching methods implemented to address such differences. The SoccerPlus model has five stages of development:



#### PLUS 1 (STAGE 1) AGE 4 & 5, EARLY CHILDHOOD

The introduction to soccer stage coincides with the onset of independence from parents and increased self confidence in most children. Children also start to begin to play cooperatively with others. This does not mean however parents should fully pass the responsibility for learning to the club coach. The parent has a very important role in encouraging the child to play at home. Practice sessions should occur once or twice per week and players should be encouraged to play multiple sports and activities.

##### Development Focus:

- Players should learn the fundamental movement skills of running (forwards, backwards and sideways), jumping, turning, twisting and bending (lowering center of gravity to form a solid base).
- The ball should be involved all the time.





### **PARTICIPATION IN OTHER SPORTS**

In many American communities, soccer provides a means to an end – keep the children active and entertained until they are old enough to play sports such as baseball, football and hockey. As a result, many youth soccer clubs see a drop off in participation as the children reach 9, 10 and 11 or have constant conflicts with players and parents prioritizing another sport over soccer. The reality of this situation draws the question, ‘how does the club/coach prevent players leaving soccer?’ There are several possible answers:

- Offer a soccer program with structure, purpose and detailed planning.
- Communicate to parents and players effectively, sharing the progress of the player and benefits received from participation in soccer.
- Don’t attempt to stop players - encourage children to participate in other sports – particularly at Plus1 to Plus 4 (4-14 years old)
- Soccer performance can benefit significantly from learning transfers from other sports (and vice versa) – for example, tactical similarities such as attack and defense in basketball or field hockey.
- Soccer performance can benefit significantly from physical transfers from other sports (and vice versa) – for example, rebounding, quick feet and lateral movements in basketball can greatly enhance explosive movements required in soccer.
- Early burnout often occurs for children committed to one sport.
- Late developers leaving soccer too early affects

### PLAYER ASSESSMENT

#### PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment forms an integral component of the SoccerPlus Player Development Curriculum and is discussed in more detail in the 'Player and Coach Assessment Program Manual'. Although assessment processes can have negative connotations and outcomes (such as cutting players, overly focusing on weaknesses or the basis for firing coaches), the correct use of assessment methodologies offer significant benefits to players, teams, coaches and parents. Some of the purposes and benefits of assessment include:

1. Correlate player performance with end of stage expectations – determine if the player is at, below or above expectations
2. Align program practices with program standards
3. Determine progress in skill acquisition and performance
4. Enable individual plans and goals to be created for each player, team and coach
5. Evaluate the success of a particular approach to coaching and learning
6. Create and implement education programs to enhance strengths and address weaknesses
7. Validate the curriculum
8. Identify issues in assessment and develop corrective actions
9. Communicate progress to players and parents
10. Provide evidence and to promote and support program improvement
11. Document and celebrate program effectiveness.
12. Provide information allowing duplication of effective programs. Effective programs that meet the intended outcomes or program standards are worthy of replication.

#### PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT MATRIX

SoccerPlus Performance Standards and Assessment Matrix have been created with the aforementioned benefits of evaluation in mind. Benchmarks for performance are provided at the end of each stage of

development. The assessment program measures the players 'competence' – the relationship between skill; the selection and application of skills, tactics; strategies and ideas; and the readiness of the body and mind to cope with the activity.

The following three measurement levels are used for player assessment and are mapped against standards expected at the end of each stage of development:

- Exceeds expectation: correlates to a score 70-100% - suggests the player has reached a high performance standard in a particular skill. This score is often an indication that the player can progress to the next level of complexity.
- Meets expectation: correlates to a score of 50-69% - suggests a player has achieved a level of competency consistent with the expectation for this stage in their development. The player is ready to move on to the next level but further reinforcement of the original skill will be required.
- Below expectation: correlates to a score of 0-49% - suggests additional focus on the skill and effort required to raise performance. Unlikely the player can move forward to a more complex skill with success. Ongoing reinforcement of original skill required.



# EXAMPLE PAGES FROM A PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM

COMPETENCY MATRIX FOR STAGES PLUS 1 TO PLUS 5																			
STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT	PLUS 1			PLUS 2			PLUS 3			PLUS 4			PLUS 5						
AGE IN YEARS	3/4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11		12	13	14		15	16	17	18
RECEIVING																			
Control – foot		☺							☑										
Control – thigh					☺					☑									
Control – chest						☺						☑							
Control – head						☺						☑							
PASSING																			
Ground – inside of foot – 5 yards				☺				☑											
Ground – inside of foot – 10 yards				☺					☑										
Ground – inside of foot – 20 yards					☺				☑										
Ground – instep					☺					☑									
Long pass						☺								☑					
Chip/lofted pass						☺								☑					
Swerve pass – inside of foot						☺								☑					
Swerve pass – outside of foot						☺								☑					
Crossing								☺								☑			
SHOOTING																			
Instep					☺							☑							
Half volley						☺								☑					
Volley						☺								☑					
One on one with goalkeeper						☺								☑					
HEADING																			
Basic technique				☺				☑											
Defensive header								☺				☑							
Attacking header								☺				☑							
PHYSICAL CONDITIONING																			
Own body weight strength exercises						☺						☑							
Core body strength						☺										☑			
Dynamic warm-up		☺							☑										
☺ The recommended time for introducing a competency    ☑ The time when an average player should become competent																			

# CHAPTER 6:

## PLUS 1: 3-5 YEAR OLD PLAYERS



### PLUS 1: PLAYERS AGE 4 & 5

#### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

The first five years (4-9 years of age) of soccer participation provide the foundations for future performance. Failure to establish fundamental movement and ball skill competencies can dramatically limit the player's performance and subsequent participation in soccer. Plus 1 and Plus 2 focus on learning essential physical, psychosocial and cognitive skills that form the building blocks for future participation in whichever sport they may choose. To this end, we must not underestimate the value of quality child-centered coaching with the youngest age groups.

Understanding some basic physical, psychological, cognitive and behavioral characteristics of children aged four and five will assist the parents, coaches and club in firstly appreciating the reason selecting content and teaching methodologies and secondly, to anticipate the outcomes associated with these choices. For



example; knowing a 4 & 5 year old player is mostly self centered (individualistic), will help adults to understand why 'their' ball is difficult to share with others and why passing is unnatural and difficult to coach.



#### KEY DEVELOPMENTAL POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN THE PLUS 1 STAGE

Physically	Psychological/Social	Cognitive/Mental
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tires easily and recovers quickly.</li> <li>2. Learns best by being physically active.</li> <li>3. Needs to repeat activities that are well known and mastered.</li> <li>4. Mainly uses large muscle movement – fine motor skills developing, but more difficult to master.</li> <li>5. Basic motor skills developing, needs to combine skills in simple games.</li> <li>6. Boys and girls have equal ability.</li> <li>7. Center of gravity is higher, resulting in issues with balance.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Likes to play/work on their own - egocentric</li> <li>2. Easily motivated</li> <li>3. Enjoys initiating activities</li> <li>4. Enjoys being praised for endeavors. Sensitive to criticism and does not enjoy failure.</li> <li>5. Developmentally advanced players start to become more independent and attempt to exercise more control over own environment.</li> <li>6. Limited attention span (15–20 minutes)</li> <li>7. Frustration can come quickly.</li> <li>8. Has a strong desire for affection and attention from adults.</li> <li>9. Seeks social approval</li> <li>10. Experimental, exploratory behavior is part of development.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increasingly able to use visual instructions (play them out in their mind) – although observing demonstrations is much more concrete.</li> <li>2. Beginning to take into account ideas and emotions of others.</li> <li>3. Inconsistent attention span</li> <li>4. Moving from being adventurous to being cautious.</li> <li>5. Interests can be short and quick changing.</li> <li>6. Imaginative, spontaneous and creative.</li> </ol>

### TRANSLATION TO PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Child centered coaching assumes a commitment on behalf of the coach/adult to embrace a natural starting point in development for each player. The coach's role is not to create parity (all players the same), but to nurture them to a level consistent with their individual commitment, attitude, enthusiasm and talent. To ensure participation in soccer is enjoyable for players and adults, parents and coaches of 4 & 5 year olds need to embrace and work with the development characteristics, and not against them.

1. Translated to player development this means:
2. Significant emphasis on fundamental movement skills – running, jumping, skipping, throwing etc
3. Focusing on ball familiarization and dribbling skills – one ball per child.
4. Sessions that are simple, fun have variety and use large muscle.
5. Selecting activities that do not place undue stress on the muscles, bones and energy systems of the body.
6. Repeating activities regularly – constant change and insufficient reinforcement negatively affects learning.
7. Including activities that take a short time to complete (5-10 minutes), due to short attention span.
8. Camouflaging and concealing technical information by using names, characters and stories.
9. Encouraging trial and error, keeping instruction to a minimum.
10. Using equipment and props to increase complexity but continue to make the sessions fun – hurdles, hoops, ladders, bean bags etc.
11. Include competitive games, but emphasize successes other than just winning (i.e. effort).
12. Providing considerable encouragement.
13. Keep instruction to a minimum and activity regular.
14. Include 'games and matches' in every session – no need for a separate day for games.
15. Avoiding temptations to place players in specialist positions (i.e. full back, forward or goal keeper).
16. Continually reinforce effort – and constantly praise players.

