

# SSA Academy Handbook 2016/2017



FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

## **Index**

<b>Who Does What</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Academy Calendar</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Parental Involvement</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Keys to Peak Parental Performance</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>USSF Perspective on Parental Involvement</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Other Resources for Parents</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Characteristics of U-10 Players</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Characteristics of U-12 Players</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Implications for Coaching Academy Age Players</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>USSF/GYSA Coaching Manual Summary</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>The SSA Academy Curriculum</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Game Rules and Regulations/Scheduling/'Playing up'</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Food and Drink: How to Prepare Your Child for Soccer Activity</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Burnout Issues</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Your Child's Health and Safety</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Georgia Youth Soccer Association Supplemental Insurance Plan</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Club Fees Information</b>	<b>24</b>

## Who Does What

**Club Director of Coaching:** The club director of coaching is responsible for the overall management of the soccer side of the entire club.

**Academy Director of Coaching:** The location's academy director of coaching is the individual primarily responsible for the day-to-day running of a particular location's academy program.

**Staff Coaches:** The staff coaches work with the academy directors of coaching in implementing practice activities and managing practice sessions. They will also assist with rostering decisions and coach the games for the age groups to which they are assigned to coach for practices. In some instances, they may also be assigned to coach an academy team outside of their age group when schedules dictate (e.g. tournament or regular-season games where multiple teams are playing at the same time or at different locations).

**Operations Manager & League Administrator:** These people are responsible for most of the club's off-the-field issues related to registration, GSSA affiliation, and program management. With regard to the Academy program, this includes fees payment and registration issues.

**Team Managers:** Team managers are parents who volunteer to fulfill a vital role in each age group. They are typically responsible for managing the team's financial accounts, completing paperwork related to tournament applications, coordinating players' registration needs, liaising with the coach about paperwork issues, and whatever else is deemed necessary to ensure the smooth running of an age group. They will often be your first contact for off-the-field issues related to your child's participation in the academy program, as well as the liaison for uniform-ordering issues. In order to make their lives easier, we ask that:

- You respond in a timely manner to any requests they make for information, payments etc, since they often have to deal with a lot of parents at once and even one late response can seriously hinder their ability to manage the program effectively.
- You keep them updated on any changes to information pertaining to your child's participation in the Academy program (cell numbers, E-Mail address, changes in medical insurance coverage, etc.)

## **Academy Calendar**

The program year begins with our annual weeklong team camp in late July/early August. Pre-season practices normally begin a week or two after the team camp. Extra practice opportunities (foot skills sessions, goalkeeper sessions, and speed & agility sessions) typically begin the first week of the regular season.

The fall regular season generally begins with a tournament in early August. Regular games begin around the first or second weekend of September and are typically scheduled for Saturdays with some Sunday afternoon games.

The fall season ends around the first weekend in December, usually with another metro Atlanta tournament. We then break for winter until early February when we begin our spring season, generally with another tournament. The regular season begins with games in early March and typically ends with a tournament the weekend before or of Memorial Day.

### **Game Schedules**

Season-long academy game schedules are posted to the website ([www.ssaelite.com](http://www.ssaelite.com)). A confirmation of the schedule for each weekend is usually sent out and/or posted to the age group's Shutterfly page the weekend before.

### **Team Lists**

Lists containing information about the opponent, meet time, shirt color, and field location are typically posted to the age group Shutterfly page and/or emailed the Wednesday before a Saturday or Sunday game.

### **Tournaments**

Academy teams typically play in metro Atlanta tournaments, but on occasion the coach may recommend an out-of-state tournament. Tournaments cost approximately \$60 per player for game fees, and in the case of an out-of-state tournament, associated coaching costs, such as the coach's hotel costs, gas, food bills etc will be assessed and divided equally among all the attending players. This can add \$40-\$80 to the cost for each player. With regard to tournament schedules, two games are typically played on the Saturday and one (or two depending on the tournament format) on the Sunday.

## **Parental Involvement**

From experience, we have found that players respond best to an academy environment where coaches and parents share the same goals and expectations. As such, your role in supporting and encouraging your child, both on and off the field, will play a big part in ensuring that your child reaches his/her full potential. If your child is to get the most out of his/her academy experience it is vital that he/she attends all team functions (practices, meetings, games, etc.). We understand that there will be times however when conflicts cannot be avoided and other more important events occur. We respectfully request that in these situations you communicate your child's absence to his/her coach in a timely manner (E-mail, phone call) so that the coach or club can make the necessary adjustments.

With regard to a child's development, it is often said that sport is a great way to teach young people about the importance of teamwork, perseverance, assertiveness, 'sportsmanship', respect for others, and other desirable qualities. Most academic research has found that this isn't achieved unless clubs, coaches, and parents specifically set these as goals. SSA's Academy program places great importance on developing these "life skills" in our players and we hope that you do too!

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this for an average parent is behavior during games. Soccer games are typically fast, exciting spectacles and spectators can easily get emotionally involved in the action. Unfortunately, this emotional involvement can sometimes take a form that is counterproductive to a child's development. Young players place great importance on the behavior of their parents and other adults, and they often assume that parents/adults always 'do the right thing'. As such, our players will likely interpret any anti-social behavior that our parents engage in, such as arguing with officials or yelling abuse, as perfectly acceptable behavior. While we do not intend to tell you how to raise your children, we would ask that you realize that by engaging in such activities you may well be influencing your child's teammates in a manner that his/her parents may not appreciate.

Your behavior may also be counter-productive to developing your child's technical and tactical skills. No matter how good your intentions are, we insist there be no shouting instructions to your child or to his/her teammates. Your vocal support and positive encouragement are welcome a good play, but "go" or "shoot" are interpreted as instructions and as such are not desirable, since it is critical that players are given one set of instructions by one voice before, during, and after practices and games. For this reason, the club insists the coaching staff be the only instructional voice at games and practices. No one other than a member of the coaching staff may sit on or near the team bench before and during games unless specifically invited by the coach. Please respect the space and privacy necessary for the team and coach to carry out their game responsibilities.

## **Keys to Peak Parental Performance**

- Let the coach coach. This includes goal setting and psyching up your child for practice and post game critiques. Having more than one "coach" confuses children.
- Do not bribe or offer incentives. Leave motivation to the coach. Offering money for scoring goals, for example, distracts your child from concentrating properly in practices and games.
- Support your child unconditionally. Do not withdraw love when your child performs poorly.
- Support all players on the team. Your child's teammates are not the enemy. When they are playing better than your child, he/she has a wonderful opportunity to learn.
- Support the SSA program. Get involved by volunteering, helping with fundraisers, car-pooling, or however else you can.
- Encourage your child to talk with the coaches. "Taking responsibility" - whether about playing difficulties or missing an upcoming match - is a big part of soccer.
- Understand and display appropriate game behavior. When you cheer appropriately, you help your child focus on the parts of the game he can control (positioning, decision-making, skills, etc.). If she begins focusing on elements she can't control (field conditions, the referee, the weather, etc.), she will not play up to her ability.
- Monitor your child at home. Be sure she is eating and sleeping properly.
- Help your child keep priorities straight. A youngster needs help balancing school work, friendships, and other commitments besides soccer. But having made a commitment to soccer, she also needs help fulfilling her obligation to her team.
- Pass the reality test. If your child's team loses but he played his best, help him see this as a "win."
- Remind him to focus on the process, not the end result. Fun and satisfaction should come from "striving to win." Conversely, do not let him be satisfied with "winning" if it comes from inadequate preparation and performance.
- Keep soccer in its proper perspective. The game should not be larger than your life. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Keep your own goals and needs separate from your child's. Remember that your relationship with your child will continue long after your child's soccer days end.

# United States Soccer Federation's Perspective

## Issue

As the sport of soccer continues to gain in popularity throughout the United States it is important to monitor the effects of this growth. As we have already witnessed, growth in any sport in this country can bring about both positive and negative ripples, especially given the emphasis our society places on sports. College basketball for example has increased its fan base dramatically in the past two decades, but this exposure has also taken gambling to a new and dangerous level. For every new and exciting development in a sport there also can be a new and often disturbing challenge that must be overcome if the sport is to continue to move forward. Soccer has its share of challenges for the future. In fact, one could argue that soccer might have more challenges than any other sport at this time, since it is one of the fastest growing sports in the country. One challenge that is becoming increasingly alarming is the role of the parent toward their soccer-playing child. These are the new millennium soccer Moms and Dads. While most parents have generously given their time to become coaches, administrators, referees and supportive fans for the benefit of their children, many others have become overly involved in their children's soccer life to the detriment of his or her development and the game. These parents put too much pressure on their children in the hope that they will make a national team or earn a college scholarship. Instead of parents taking a supportive role they become agent and negotiator sheltering their children from the true lessons that the game can instill - lessons like overcoming adversity, taking responsibility, setting goals, working together for a common cause, and respecting authority to name just a few. The results are young players who cannot think or act independently, lack creativity and ultimately lose their love and desire to play the game.

## Recommendations

### Adversity = Growth

In the children's movie, "The Emperor's New Groove" there is a scene in which the prince and his sidekick Pacho are trying to escape their captors. At one point they find themselves bound together back to back on a log heading down a river. The prince, who is facing the opposite direction, hears the rush of a waterfall approaching and exclaims, "Let me guess, we're heading for a huge waterfall," Pacho replies matter of fact, "yep." The prince says, "sharp rocks at the bottom," Pacho replies again, "yep." The prince says calmly, "Bring it on!"

“

Like the prince, young players need to be able to embrace adversity whether this is a difficult loss, being cut from a team, accepting a referee's decision or even working out difficulties among themselves. At the very least they need to be able to handle it in a positive, independent way. Parents can and should be the guiding influence in teaching their children how to handle adversity, but they should not take this responsibility away from the child.

Nowadays, we more often see the opposite. When a team loses a game by what is perceived as a bad call by the referee, the parent goes and screams at the referee. Instead of young players taking responsibility from the loss, they end up blaming the referee. When players are cut from a team, the parents blame the coach. Instead of the players learning what parts of their game need improving for them to reach the next level, they end up blaming the coach, or the parents switch the player to another team.

### Children follow the lead of their parents!

For many of us we see adversity as something that must be avoided at all costs. It can be painful in the short term, but tremendously beneficial in the long term. It is the special person who can react to adversity and truly learn from it. Parents must help guide their children through adverse times being careful not to stifle their ability to turn a negative situation into a positive one. The individuals who have learned this are much

more likely to reach farther than anyone thought possible. Every player that has made a career of professional sport or who has made a national team has suffered through their own share of adversity. Parents must think of adversity as an opportunity for their children to grow.

### **Wear Their Boots**

Before saying anything to your child on the field think first about how it would affect you if you were playing in the game at that time. Put yourself in your child's mind, see what he/she sees, hear what he/she hears and then ask yourself how you would respond.

### **Feel the Love**

"To play the game is great! To win the game is greater! To love the game is the greatest of all!" This quote is on a plaque inside the lobby of the famed Philadelphia Palestra. It says what most elite athletes already know. In developing their children in the game of soccer the best parents can do is to help instill a love for the game. No athlete ever made it at the highest level without a real and undying love for the game. The love is what makes players train hard, the love is what makes players sacrifice for, the love helps players overcome adversity and the love makes them reach for their dreams. This love cannot be coerced or forced. It must be nurtured and developed through both positive and negative experiences.

### **Pop the Questions?**

Have your child ask him or herself these three questions after each and every game:

1. Did I work hard?
2. Did I take responsibility for my actions?
3. Did I interact in a positive manner with my teammates?

If the answers are "yes", then they were successful regardless of the score or amount of playing time.

### **Rationale**

In every sport athlete matriculation beyond the age of 16 greatly diminishes. For some, this will be their last organized health-full experience in life. Sports is and should be about participation, enjoyment, team cohesion, challenges, adversity and yes – competition! Sports mirrors life and life mirrors sport. However hard we try as coaches or parents we cannot control the outcome of a game or life's challenges. However, we have a large window of opportunity to influence how our children and athletes respond to life's ups and downs. Sport instills a sense of physical strength, self-esteem, empowerment and the mental ability to deal with disappointment. Players will make mistakes, they will experiment, they will fail and they will succeed. Between the white lines, let the game be the teacher.



## **Other Resources for Parents**

1. The SSA club website – [www.ssaelite.com](http://www.ssaelite.com)

This website is useful for general information including directions to our fields, field condition updates, club policies and guidelines, and day-to-day news about the club. It also includes 'The SSA Way' – a document that provides information on the club as a whole.

2. The Georgia State Soccer website - [www.gasoccer.org](http://www.gasoccer.org)

The website contains directions to all the soccer fields used by clubs in Georgia, updates on soccer-related issues, and general resources for players, coaches, and parents.

3. The United States Youth Soccer Association website – [www.usyouthsoccer.org](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org)

This website has a range of resources that parents can utilize to get the most of the youth soccer experience for themselves and their children. Go to the home page and click on the 'Parents' tab at the top of the screen and follow the link to the 'Parent Resource Library'.

Topics include:

- Approaching your child's coach
- The benefits of summer camps
- How to motivate young athletes
- Promoting moral and social development through sports
- Why sport exercise can improve your child's health
- Time management for young athletes

4. United States Soccer Federation – [www.ussoccer.com](http://www.ussoccer.com)

The USSF is the overall governing body for soccer in the US. On this website you will find information about a whole range of soccer-related issues. It also has a copy of the most recent FIFA 'Laws of the Game' document.

## **Characteristics of U-10 Players**

### **U-10 Motor Skill Development**

Stamina and the ability to stay physically active are increased as compared to U-8, but U-10 players still lack adult-level stamina and tire quickly. They are also affected by accelerated heat loss, increasing risk of hypothermia. Gross and small motor skills become more refined. There is a great diversity in playing ability and physically mature individuals demonstrate stronger motor skills. Children can make rapid gains in learning and function at increasingly sophisticated levels in the performance movement skills. Kids of this age are often described as 'sponges' for their ability to learn new skills.

### **U-10 Cognitive Development**

Play at this age becomes less egocentric. The "stage is disappearing and players begin to appreciate the benefits of cooperation with others. This is the dawn of 'team' play and the understanding of what 'being part of a team' means. Introduction of 'competitive' and 'cooperative' activities is appropriate and effective. Whereas some younger players (U-6/U-8) would not deal well with an activity where the ball is 'stolen' from them by teammates, U-10 players normally accept that competition in practice is necessary and is even fun. The 'cooperative' types of activities teach them the value of teamwork in that some tasks are easier accomplished when players work together.

Players begin to understand and appreciate the need for rules and limits and a code of conduct. When an individual breaks a practice rule set by the coach, teammates get upset and will not be slow in reminding him. Abstract thinking begins. The ability to sequence thoughts and action is evident, with some players beginning to think in advance of the ball. Hence, tactical concepts of time and space can be introduced. Starting to understand fundamental tactical concepts such as changing direction of the ball, passing back in order to go forward, etc. Players are also intrinsically motivated to play. They are more inclined towards wanting to play rather than being told to play. They also demonstrate increased responsibility about things like bringing a ball and water to practice etc.

### **U-10 Social Skills Development**

Adults outside the family (coach!) may take on added significance and the importance of the coach as a role model cannot be overstated. Continued positive reinforcement is still the most effective communication tool as players are psychologically fragile. Players may initiate play on their own at this stage. They become more serious about their play and start comparing themselves to teammates. Peer pressure is significant as well as team identification. Players enjoy the uniforms and find it 'cool' to be part of a team. Players begin to understand and see that repetitive practice of a technique results in improvement. This can be a great motivational tool, since they can now connect the two concepts of 'practice' and 'improve'. But explanations must still be brief, concise and purposeful.

## **U-10 Technical Considerations**

The ability to strike a ball properly and the feel for the proper weight of passes is a clear deficiency. First touch is also a problem, with players not able to prepare the control surface effectively, and not having mastered yet the art of cushioning the ball. Bending balls around opponents or into players' runs is beyond them at this stage as all passes are straight-line passes. Crossing is also beyond their ability, but then it depends on how one defines a cross. Some players might be able to generate enough power to get the ball into the penalty area, especially if ball and crosser converge at speed and at a favorable angle, but dribbling up the flank and wrapping their feet around the ball to 'guide' it into near post or far post runs is too difficult for them. Crossing from a stationary position is downright impossible. Of all the techniques, dribbling at this age group is usually the most advanced, but mostly straight line dribbling. U-10 players tend to dribble a lot, partly because they like to dribble and be in control and partly because they are so focused on looking at the ball that they lose vision and are oblivious to their passing options. However, shielding is rarely used with players not knowing yet how to use their bodies and shield the ball or turn away from pressure.

The range of passing and accuracy varies, but for the most part, is very limited. For a typical U-10 player to get any distance on a pass, ball and player must be moving towards each other on contact. Players have to have a running start in order to get power behind their pass. When required to pass from a stationary position, they can only muster enough power to hit a 10-15 yards pass. Since they have to mobilize so much of their body energy just to get the power, accuracy often suffers.

## **U-10 Tactical Considerations**

Understanding of team shape is lacking. Players at this level do not know how to stretch the field and provide depth and width. Lack of support is a big problem. Players struggle with providing proper support for the ball carrier. Players often get caught in an opponent's 'shadow' and do not adjust their positions leading to poor supporting angles. Front players' instinct is to run away from the ball, straight to goal, denying good support ahead of the ball. Players also do not know how to transition from supporting the passer to supporting the receiver when the ball is played forward. Players have difficulties with the concept of support behind the ball.

Players do not open their bodies to the field and have a limited vision of the field and their options. Lack of vision causes players to make poor decisions pertaining to choice of passes and wall passes. It also leads to poor first touch decisions, with no thoughts given to the best option. Players cannot 'read the pressure' on teammates. This means they pass the ball to teammates who are closely marked. It means they do not have a handle on the relation between distance of pass and distance of marking.

There is practically no deception in the play of U-10's. Most attacks are played along vertical lines with players' instincts to play 'Kick and Chase' soccer. The bigger the field and the bigger the numbers on the field, the more frantic play becomes, with the element of randomness associated with the 'Kick and Chase' style of soccer.

## **Characteristics of U-12 Players**

### **U-12 Motor Skills Development**

Many players are beginning their pubescence at this stage. The average age for the beginning of pubescence is 10 years for girls and 12 years for boys. But until they go through most of the growth process, fitness exercises and weight training exercises do not necessarily improve their fitness levels, since the body's neuromuscular system has not been fully developed yet. Players should be at least 16 before weight training produces significant strength benefits. Overuse injuries, burnout, and high attrition rates are associated with high-intensity children's programs that fail to stress skill development and learning enjoyment. Since their bodies are undergoing quick changes and soft tissue (muscle) expansion doesn't always keep up with bone growth, flexibility training is the key to preventing injury. Coordination level of many U-12 players is beginning to reach maturity and many are capable of performing complex skills.

### **A Note on Fitness**

Soccer fitness has many components, such as speed, stamina, agility, power, and flexibility. Experts agree that until players complete their growth spurt and their cardiovascular and neuromuscular systems reach maturity, emphasis on fitness training has limited benefits. Hence, fitness training of young players should not assume a high priority and should be done mainly with the ball.

Another fact about fitness is that it is reversible, meaning that when a player stops playing or training he will lose some of the fitness level gained. For example, loss of stamina, which is the foundation fitness for soccer, can occur within just two weeks of inactivity. The good news is that the human body adapts quickly and fitness levels can be regained easily when players resume training.

Given these generally-accepted limitations to fitness training for players at this age, we try to incorporate primarily aerobic (endurance) exercises into the technical warm-up session as a means to ensure that our players are 'match fit' without losing any of their much-needed time working with a ball. In order for this to be effective, these activities need to go for 20-30 minutes or so and need to engage our players at a level of intensity approximate to around 60 - 80% of maximal heart rate (as a rough guide, something around a level of intensity where an individual can just about carry a conversation!).

Also, we do only a limited regimen of sprinting/push-up/strength exercises for the following reasons:

1. As mentioned above, most of the conventional wisdom in the coaching community recommends against focusing on fitness work for players of this age when it is done at the expense of ball work.
2. The club offers additional speed & agility sessions that provide for a player's needs in this regard should the parent feel that it is appropriate.

3. If a player is continually fatigued during skills training at this early stage in their learning (i.e. U10 to U12), it can have a slowing effect on the rate of skill development. In other words, the more tired a player is, the more likely it is that she will make a greater-than-average number of mistakes, leading to an increase in the time taken to acquire a particular skill.

### **U-12 Cognitive Development**

Players at this stage begin to acquire 'adult' logic. They begin to think in abstract terms and can address hypothetical situations and apply a systematic approach to problem solving (if I do this.... and then I do that... this might happen...). This means they can solve more complex problems. Although players look up to the coach and want to please him/her, they also start to question in their minds the validity of instructions and activities. It has to make sense to them for optimum motivation and participation.

### **U-12 Social Skills Development**

Players at this age begin to spend more time with friends and less time with parents. Peer pressure plays a factor in type of activities they choose. Popularity and being with the 'in' crowd at school affects self-esteem. Early or late onset of puberty also affects self-esteem and could have psychological implications. They begin to compare themselves to peers in terms of soccer ability and, unfortunately, some drop out of the game when realizing they are not as good as they thought they were. Most kids migrate towards friends that are alike in terms of age, race, sex, socioeconomic status, and sports interests. They're on their way to developing a conscience, and a scale of values.

### **U-12 Technical and Tactical Development**

As players grow, their technical range increases and players who spend many hours honing their skill outside of team practices are beginning to reap the benefits by now. Their superior skill enables them to spend more time thinking about their next move and their speed of play and problem solving is enhanced. Technically, the power and accuracy of U-12's passing and crossing increases compared to U-10's. However, their receiving skills lag behind their passing, and their ability to control air balls, bouncing balls, and long passes/clearances is still poor. Tactically, there is still very little deception to their play. They understand the concept of switching play and try to do it, but their lack of power/accuracy does not allow them to do it well, resulting in turnovers. Hence, play is still dominated by the kick and run mode, since that is the safest way to get the ball from point 'A' to point 'B'.

## **Implications for Coaching Academy Age Players**

Using the above information, coaches tailor the training sessions to address their players' specific needs. It is worth noting here that a healthy dose of patience is required. When players are introduced to new concepts or skills, they go through two stages of skill acquisition:

1. **Learning the skill.**
2. **Embedding it into their set of instinctive responses.**

In the first stage, players learn how to execute the new concept or new skill. The second stage, namely ingraining it into their instincts, usually takes much more time than the first stage, but is fundamental for long-term success. The objective here is for the skill to be executed at the right time in the game and to be used instinctively.

The optimum mode of play is through instinctive responses. Players should trust their own instincts and play without 'looking over their shoulders'. Otherwise, they become tentative and get bogged down by thinking too much, or by being conditioned to wait for their coaches' instructions. The problem with most young players new to a sport is they don't yet have good instincts, or habits. When put under the stresses of competition, players will automatically revert to their natural instincts. But if the right habits have not been ingrained yet, undesirable responses will be elicited. For example, the 'kick and chase' mode of play is essentially the players' natural response to competitive stress in games they are not equipped to handle.

The perennial challenge for youth coaches is to get rid of their players' bad instincts and replace them with good habits; habits that in time become ingrained into their players' instinctive responses. But this process takes time and requires patience by the coaches and parents.

The 'fast tracking' of players through the developmental stages in the haste to get to the 'big game' 11v11 tactics is not always advisable, even for the better players. The longer we keep players in the second stage of the skill acquisition process (ingraining stage), the better the long-term results. This is true for all young players, even the best ones. The patient approach of skill acquisition is especially crucial for the U-5 through U-12 age groups, the formative years. In practical terms, as an example, it means that the 2v2-training environment recommended for tactical development of U-10's needs to be repeated until the desirable habits are ingrained.

# **USSF/GYSA Coaching Manual Summary**

## **Technical Emphasis**

U-10, U-11 and U-12 players love to dribble and are sufficiently coordinated to work on feints and fast footwork and try it out against live defenders. A lot of 1v1 activities should be used with U-10/U-12s and it should be planned such that there is minimal idle time between turns, to maximize repetition and learning.

Another aspect of the game that can never be overplayed is finishing. The more creative ways we can find to incorporate finishing into our activities, the better. Even when we work on dribbling or passing, it's possible and advisable to add finishing as the end product of every passing drill or make scoring on goal the objective of every dribbling move.

The main priority at U-10, U-11 and U-12 should be the teaching of 'support play near the ball', deception with the ball, and combination play in small groups.

Technical training is the number one priority for U-10s, U-11s and U-12s and technical work should involve 70% of the practice time. However, working on technique in isolation without opponents, such as repetitions of unopposed dribbling or passing moves, should not constitute the only part of the technical content. Players at the U-10 through U-12 stage need to practice technique against opponents. This will improve the transfer of skill to the game and will be more realistic, not to mention more fun for the players. To that end, a mixture of individual, cooperative and competitive activities should be used to hone technique. The low ratio of players to ball inherent in small groups will still produce the requisite volume of technical repetitions.

As a rough guideline, a typical practice session should be split into 3 parts: A third of the practice devoted to unopposed technique; a third of the time for practicing the technique against pressure; and the last third in small-sided games devoted to tactical teaching. This approach has the recommended allocation of 'two thirds technique/one third tactics', not to mention the fact that even the tactical third provides for plenty of technical repetitions due to the small player-to-ball ratio.

\

4v4: This format adds more options and complexity to the 3v3 and is a great segue to team tactics and formation. Some coaches see 4v4 as the starting point for teaching tactics and laud the diamond shape as the basic tactical unit.

Fitness on its own has no place in the training program of U-10/U-12s. Players at this age have not completed their growth spurt and many have not even started their puberty. This means that fitness work with players who have not yet matured physically has limited value since the neuromuscular system cannot yet handle full adaptation to fitness training. The fun games and activities will take care of the fitness needs of these players. Every moment in practice needs to be devoted to ball work.

**Repetitions in Practices:** Coaches must carefully design sessions to extract maximal touches and progress to live opponents as quickly as possible. For example, if the technical topic is dribbling, players should be learning to execute the dribbling moves at match speed, with the explosive change of pace and direction that would replicate the requirements of the game. Furthermore, players should move as quickly as possible into 1v1 activities. This approach is recommended for all levels of players. Of course, lower level players will need more time in unopposed play, but all players need to progress to competitive, game-like situations at some point in practice and get ample repetitions of 1v1 duels.

1. Unopposed individual or small group activities to promote high repetition level, making sure they are executed at game speed. Work on both feet.
2. Add opponents, but keep groups small to continue to affect high repetition levels and work on technique in game-related conditions. It's not enough to just keep the groups small if the activity has only one group active at a time. Sessions should be designed to engage all the groups at the same time, to maximize touches. Give careful thought to the match-ups in the small groups and keep players of similar ability together. Encourage creativity and demonstrate how to incorporate deception to their moves.
3. Progress to a scrimmage, starting with two small-sided games side by side to keep ratio of players to ball small.

## **Tactical Emphasis**

The need to focus on support play around the ball at the U-10, U-11 and U-12 stages is critical to the development of the youth soccer player. Coaches need to break the game down for the players and address each of the key coaching points in a clear and methodical fashion and allow learning by repetition. The coaching points listed below are presented in a logical sequence and can be used as a 'road map'. It means that the points are taught in progression and that learning coaching point 1 will better prepare the player to learn point 2, and so on. Conversely, if a player doesn't understand how to apply a coaching point, he would struggle with the ones that follow it and build on it.

The following key points form the foundation for support play and can be addressed in 2v2 to 4v4 games:

1. Open Body. Players must learn to position themselves so they can see the whole field and assess all their options.



2. Support Angle. Players need to make it easy for the player on the ball to find them with a pass. Players need to 'read the pressure' on the ball and adjust their position accordingly.
3. Find Space. Players also need to 'read the pressure' on themselves and make quick adjustments to get away from pressure so they have time and space when they receive the ball. It's about learning the relationship between distance from the ball and distance from immediate opponent.
4. Support behind the Ball. Players have to provide support behind the ball in case a forward pass is not possible or in case player with the ball is under pressure and forced to face own goal.
5. Team Shape. Players need to understand how to create width and depth and which of those they should provide in each scenario.
6. Hold it or Pass it. Players need to read pressure to decide when to control and hold on to the ball and when to pass it first time.
7. Combination Play. Players need to learn which combination play is best for each situation. Should it be a wall pass, a double pass, an overlap, or a split pass?
8. Deception. Players need to learn how to keep defenders guessing, using body movement, fakes and fast footwork.

These coaching points can be taught progressively in a curriculum approach, with seasonal objectives, and spread over the U-10/U-12 period at a rate of absorption commensurate with these young minds. The tactical portion of practice should target support play around the ball by using appropriate activities that bring out these key points. The program's goal should be for players to instinctively adopt good support positions and make good decisions by the time they graduate into the 11v11 world of U13 soccer.

## **The SSA Academy Curriculum**

The club's academy directors will create a training plan for their locations based on the technical and tactical needs of their programs. This plan is designed to provide a consistent and coherent pathway for player development at the club, starting with our U6/8 PDA program, and continuing through to U12 in preparation for U13 Select soccer and above.

Elements include:

### **Ball Mastery:**

Ball mastery is the basic building block for soccer development. Players go through a variety of 1 player/1 ball exercises to help develop their technical abilities and build confidence when in possession of the ball during a game.

### **Penetration of the Defense using Moves (1v1):**

After the ball mastery element of player development has been accomplished, the next step in a player's development is to utilize these learned techniques in a competitive situation. It is at this stage that we begin to introduce the tactical (decision-making) element of soccer. By introducing a defender into the environment, we are obliging the player to make decisions about which move to use to best create time/space away from the opponent.

### **Penetration and Support (2v2):**

Building on the skills learned in the 1v1 level, the 2v2 level develops the decision-making process a little further. The player in possession of the ball now faces the decision of whether to take the ball him/herself (and thus recreate the 1v1 situation above), or pass the ball to a teammate. In creating this challenge, the 2v2 environment recreates many of the decisions that a player will face in a game, since players must process information about the position of his/her opponents and his/her teammates and always make the best decision possible.

### **Penetration, Support and Width (3v3):**

The 3v3 curriculum level builds on the skills learned in 1v1, 2v2, and 3v2 by introducing a third defender so that players have to work harder to create space and find opportunities to break down the opposing team. Players are called upon to make decisions, communicate, and create and exploit time and space.

### **Principles of Play (4vs.4):**

The 4vs.4 structure provides our players with the most efficient and effective means to develop their skills in a team vs. team environment. All the elements of 6v6, 8v8 and 11v11 play are found in this. The principles are as follows:

#### **Principles of Attacking**

Penetration of defense  
Support of player in possession  
Using width to create time/space

#### **vs. Principles of Defending**

vs. Pressure on attacker in possession  
vs. Cover for defender applying pressure  
vs. Providing balance to reduce time/space

Even though reference hasn't been made above to defending principles, in using the 1v1, 2v2 and 3v3 formats, we are obliging players who are on the team not in possession of the ball to constantly work on the basics of defending. As you can see, these defending principles are the exact opposite of the related attacking principles (the opposite of penetration with the ball is applying 'pressure' to prevent this penetration for example). These principles are at the core of all soccer play and any mistake made during a game will likely come down to how the players apply these principles.

### **Other Curriculum Goals:**

In working with our young players, we also focus on developing the following elements:

- A enjoyment of, and an appreciation for, the game of soccer
- Teamwork and effective communication
- Assertiveness
- Self-confidence

In summary, it is our aim to raise all the players who go through our Academy program to a level where they are competent and composed with the technical elements of the game, and understand the basic mechanics of how a soccer team operates.

### **Typical Academy Training Session**

#### Warm up – 30 minutes

- Technical practices to develop individual technical skills.
- Speed and Agility exercises
- "Scoring" games with the ball

#### Main Practice – 60 minutes

- Small-sided games – 2 vs 2, 3 vs 3
- Possession games and 'Going to Goal' games
- Scrimmages

### **Practice Schedule**

2 x team practices weekly

Additional, weekly, Speed and Agility, Goalkeeper, Foot-skills and Finishing sessions (optional, schedule varies from location-to-location)

## **Academy Rules and Regulations**

### **U-9 & 10:**

- 7v7
- Field: Length 45-60 yards, width 35-45 yards
- Game duration: 2 x 30 minutes
- Size 4 ball
- Typical roster size is 10 players for a 7-a-side game

### **U-11 & U-12:**

- 9v9,
- Field size: Length 70-80 yards, width 45-60 yards.
- Game duration: 2 x 30 minutes
- Size 4 ball
- Typical roster size is 12 players for a 9-a-side game

### **Field Rules:**

- Spectators are not allowed to stand behind the goals (or in the areas extending to the corner flags), or on the side of the field occupied by coaches and players.
- Smoking and the consumption of alcohol are forbidden.
- No artificial noise-makers

## **Scheduling Information**

We aim to schedule enough games across the regular season for our players to exceed the typical 11-game schedule of their U13 and older club counterparts. In doing so, we also want to ensure that our players have the opportunity to play at least 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of a game. Please note however that this 11-game schedule is the minimum number of fixtures that will be scheduled across a typical fall or spring season. The actual number of games played by a player may well exceed this number for a variety of reasons.

### **‘Playing Up’**

In certain circumstances, a player will be permitted to play up an age group with the permission of the academy director. Please note however that the player must demonstrate for permission to be granted.

## **Food and Drink: How to Prepare Your Child for Soccer Activity**

The best time to 'fill up the tank' is 2-3 hours prior to exercise for food and up to 15 minutes prior to the start of the exercise for water. This depends on the individual however since some individuals who experience 'nerves' before an event may suffer from mild nausea if they eat within 3 hours of exercise. A high energy meal, including bread, rice, pasta etc., eaten 2-3 hours before exercise should ensure that the child has sufficient stores of energy for the activity. Eating within an hour of exercise (especially if the child consumes something like a 'high-energy' bar) is **not** recommended since this may actually lead to a lowering of the blood sugar level as the body copes with the increased carbohydrate intake.

With regard to fluid intake, it is vitally important that the body is adequately hydrated prior to exercise. Drinking water during the hours prior to exercise and then taking 4-8 ounces of fluid 15 minutes before the start should ensure this.

### **During exercise:**

There is very little that can be done during a soccer game to refuel since the body will often 'shut down' the digestive process during vigorous exercise. Hydration however is a different story altogether! Drinking a pint of water every 30 minutes during exercise will have a significant benefit.

### **How and when to replenish after exercise:**

Following exercise the body must refuel and hydrate to prepare properly for future physical activity. However, the body cannot do both efficiently at the same time. As such, it is important to realize that you must first **hydrate then refuel**.

The prime time to hydrate is immediately after exercise. Since the body finds it difficult to refuel and hydrate at the same time it is important to stay away from drinks that are high in calories, such as regular soda drinks. These drinks are loaded with energy in the form of sugar and are not appropriate immediately after exercise. The best drinks are those with low (0 - 5%) sugar by volume. Gatorade and Powerade are excellent for this purpose though water and diet, , soda drinks such as Diet Sprite or Fresca are just as good (the bubbles in soda drinks make it difficult to drink the required amounts however). We'd suggest that your child drinks as much as he or she feels comfortable drinking!

For refueling the body, the muscles are most receptive to replenishing the energy stores up to 6 hours after exercise. There are no special requirements regarding the post-game meal.

## **Burnout Issues**

While the club would encourage you to take advantage of the extra practice sessions available to your child each week, it is certainly not our intention to overload you or your child with soccer! At this age, quality of practice is probably more important than quantity of practice, since players develop best when they are motivated to learn and not mentally or physically fatigued. Our duty at SSA is to offer you high quality, developmentally appropriate activities run by highly experienced and qualified coaches. We believe that there are few clubs in the metro Atlanta area that can offer the breadth and depth of practice opportunities that SSA offers and we are really excited to see how our players develop within this environment.

In order to ensure that our players' needs are attended to, we would like to give you another perspective on a fundamental issue in youth soccer - the issue of burnout. It is estimated by United States Youth Soccer Association that 70% of young soccer players will drop out of active participation by the time they reach 16. While there are numerous factors involved in this, 'burnout' is one of the biggest. Burnout is a psychological state where a player is no longer motivated to participate in an activity for intrinsic reasons and will instead participate primarily because she believes that his/her parents want him/her to. By the time this point has been reached, the player sees participation in the sport as something resembling an unfulfilling job. It should also be remembered that competence has very little to do with this. In other words, players don't necessarily suffer burnout because they are not good at soccer. In fact, there are hundreds of adult leagues filled with thousands of mediocre 40-year-old players!

This is important to us because we are as equally focused on creating a lifelong habit of physical activity in your child as much as we are seeing him/her succeed within the sport. While there is no guarantee that your child will end up playing on the national team, the odds are much better that your child's chances of contracting heart disease, or a host of other life-threatening diseases, will decrease with his/her participation in physical activity.

Our suggestion, therefore, is to monitor your child's motivation closely and ensure that he/she approaches every practice opportunity with enthusiasm and commitment.

## **Your Child's Health and Safety**

Please be reassured that we take the health and safety of your child while in our care very seriously. Apart from his or her on-the-field game activities, we also want to ensure that your child's welfare is looked after while he or she is attending practice sessions at our fields. In order to help us achieve this aim, we'd like to make some recommendations when your child is participating in SSA-related activities.

1. We would ask that you instruct your child not to leave the immediate area of the field once practice is completed unless a parent, or a designated guardian, is in attendance. This is especially important during the late fall and early spring seasons when our practices typically finish after dark. Should you, or your designated substitute, be running late, please call the appropriate academy director to inform him of your situation.
2. In the event that this request is impractical, we would ask that you inform the relevant academy director of any alternate plans such as "my child is meeting me on the other side by field #1".
3. Please ensure that you update your emergency contact information, just in case we need to reach you at the end of a practice session.
4. In the case of adverse weather, such as lightning or heavy rain, we will take appropriate shelter. This will typically be the nearest covered area that provides the most protection from the elements. Please remind your child of the importance of staying safe in such conditions.

## **Georgia Youth Soccer Association Supplemental Insurance Plan**

GYSA offers an insurance plan that provides supplemental coverage for all registered players, officials, referees and coaches. This plan is supplemental in that it pays any remaining balance of a claim made through the individual's primary insurance provider.

In the event of an injury occurring to a player, whether it is during practice, regular season play or while traveling to any soccer-related activity, parents may make a claim through the Georgia State Soccer website.

- A deductible of \$1,500 applies
- There is a limit of \$50,000 per claim

In the event that your child is injured, the coach will need to complete an injury report online through [www.georgiasoccer.org](http://www.georgiasoccer.org). You, as the parent, will then be contacted by the insurance company to follow up in order to begin the process for making a claim.

## CLUB FEES

The SSA Academy Program is a significant investment of both time and money, and it is important that a parent understands these commitments fully before accepting a place on the program. When a player attends summer tryouts and is accepted onto the program, **the financial and time commitment is for the full year (July through May).**

The registration fees cover all the following:

- Field rental for City and County-owned complexes
- State registration and insurance fees
- Referee fees
- Coach salaries and education
- Administration costs
- Team camp
- Extra training sessions

It does not cover:

- Tournament expenses
- Uniform costs
- Discretionary indoor field rental

### Payment Schedule

Southern Soccer Academy (SSA) fees can be paid in full or in a series of installments. Payment(s) can be made by cash, credit card or by post-dated checks. Payment plan options will include up to four post-dated checks or credit card transactions beginning with an amount payable at signing, followed by payments in August, October, and February.

SSA fees are similar to tuition in that they are not optional. If your child is unable to train for any reason including illness or injuries, except for injuries lasting more than three months, you will not receive a refund. Players who suffer serious injuries lasting more than three months though may submit a request to SSA administration for release of payment of fees for that period, though some fees such as the state registration fee are non-refundable.

### Payment Default

The SSA is a not-for-profit membership organization and unpaid dues represent funds not available to meet Club expenses. Any player account that is delinquent by 7 days or more will be notified by the Club, and suspended from participating in any Club/team activity. A late fee or a returned check fee of \$25 will also be added to the installments.



## **Release Policy**

If a player quits or wishes to be released from the Club, all fees to the SSA will need to be paid in full as per GYSA Rule 310.2d by credit card, money order or cash.

(310.2d Once a select program player is rostered to a team, that player's financial obligation as published by the club and accepted by the player must be satisfied before a transfer will be approved.)

## **Financial Aid**

SSA has developed a program that provides financial aid to qualifying youth athletes in order to play soccer. This program maintains confidentiality while assisting players with registration fees and some coaching fees. It does not cover the cost of uniforms, travel expenses and tournament fees. Request for financial aid will be based on a first-come, first-served basis and available funds are limited each year. Families receiving financial aid are required to volunteer additional hours to SSA. Financial Aid applications can be downloaded from our club web site or requested from the club office by emailing [Admin@ssaelite.com](mailto:Admin@ssaelite.com) . Forms should be submitted to [Admin@ssaelite.com](mailto:Admin@ssaelite.com) or mailed to the club office ASAP after tryouts are completed and roster spots are offered by coaches.

The amount of financial aid offered will not cover 100% of club fees, but is designed to make the program as affordable as possible given individual family circumstances. Factors such as family income (determined by documentation such as tax return information), family assets, and the number of years a family has been requesting financial aid will be factored into the process of calculating the amount of financial aid to be provided.