

# Sun Prairie Soccer Club (SPSC)

## 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Grade In-House League Coaches' Manual

Spring 2009

## Section I

### FAQ

**Finally, my players are old enough now that we can start focusing on winning, right?**

Sorry. The focus at the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Grade level is still on individual development – namely individual possession (dribbling, shielding, attacking the net, shooting) and personal defense (tackling and containment.) While developing individual skills is paramount, we begin the transition from complete focus on individual possession skills to individual defensive, team possession and team defensive skills. We also introduce that “odd-ball” position in soccer called the keeper.

**Why can't I coach all that AND win every game?**

You can, if you're lucky. If you happen to land an extremely athletic squad, it is quite possible. The truth about youth soccer is that the easiest way to score a goal (“kick and run”) at the younger level is not the best way to teach each child and the team as a whole to possess the ball, which is essential for our children to be competitive (and thus, enjoy the game) past U12.

The good analogy is bowling. When you first go bowling, you roll the ball straight and accurate. You do well, but never outstanding. You can beat your friends who do the same, but when you try to out-bowl somebody who can curve the ball, you get creamed. “Kick and run” soccer is like bowling straight; it's easy and can be rewarding at this level. When you teach your children to settle the ball, make a good pass or attack the net, look for support or run wide, you are teaching them the essentials that will help them succeed at the next level. You are teaching them to bowl with a curve. And when you first teach them to bowl with a curve, they will have many, many more gutter balls than they would if they just bowled straight, but when they start to get the hang of it, they will cream the “straight bowling” competition.

**What is “Kick and Run” soccer?**

When a player gets the ball, she kicks it forward, regardless of who is open. Eventually, the ball will squeeze through the mob and somebody on her team will run on to the ball and score (especially at the U9 level as there is no off-sides.) The kicker will thus be rewarded for her mindless activity and continue her habit of kicking the ball whenever it gets near her. The more she instinctively kicks the ball, the less chance she has to develop her possession, passing and awareness skills.

**But I want to win!**

You'll win big that day – and it will come – when your least talented player attempts to settle the ball, but instead allows an easy breakaway goal AND you say, “Great Idea! I'm proud that you did not just kick the ball away! Next time you'll settle that pass!” When her disappointed frown turns to a smile, you will win big, real big.

Section II  
**The 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Player**

From the USSF Manual: From SPSC

At this age, there are some children that becoming more physically mature including some relatively bigger and faster players whose eye-hand and eye-foot coordination is a little ahead of the rest. Coaches may see players suddenly “sprout” between seasons or become clumsier. That quick, dodgy forward who played for you in the autumn may be stumbling on his oversized feet in the spring. Don’t type-cast players of this age; let them discover every position, learn every skill.

Some, not all, players have a greater ability to stay focused for longer periods of time. Explanations should be concise, brief and to the point. What seemed to make sense to them last practice may need to be relearned the next practice. During practice, you must strike a balance between making the session “fun” and allowing enough “repetition” of a skill or skill set so that the players begin to gain some functionality.

Children still need to focus on ball possession, especially in tight spaces; continue to increase their comfort level with the ball. As much as we want every player with the ball to see every option on the field and instantly make the correct pass or shot, these children FIRST NEED TO BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE BALL. Teach them to keep the ball at their feet, teach them to shield the ball with their body, teach them to have the confidence to look around them before and while they possess the ball.

The faster, stronger players should not be encouraged to use their athleticism to solve all their problems. A talented scorer should be encouraged to “go to goal” whenever the opportunity arises, but that does not mean she should dribble through the entire opposition when a simple pass would be a better alternative. A player with a great “foot” should not be encouraged sit back at the top of the goal box and blast away. Challenge every player to increase her abilities.

Begin to introduce the players to the idea of thinking about their decisions and movements as being related to themselves and others on the field, both offensively and defensively. Get your players to think about what they should do in a certain situation. Should they pass, should they shoot, should they dribble? If they do not have the ball, should they make a run, support back or stay still? Use small games (3v1, 4v2 and such) during practice so the children get an idea of using space, thinking abstractly and making decisions. These kids are not chess pieces that you can move around on the field during the game. They need to make their own moves.

## Section III

# Basic Philosophy

### Encourage...Mistakes?

Yeah. When you encourage children to try new things in a competitive environment, you are expecting to see mistakes. So let's just call a spade, a spade. When you are coaching these children, encourage them to take chances, encourage them to try things in which they have little confidence, encourage them to make mistakes.

When they fail, you smile and say good try, keep going.

If you grumble when a child fails and only applaud when a child succeeds, kids who have little chance of succeeding won't be willing to take the chances they need in order to improve. Sometimes the hardest thing a coach can do is swallow a groan and manufacture a smile.

Build confidence in these kids, and you will build soccer players.

### The 50% Plus Solution

There are twelve players on a roster, and all twelve players get to play. Unless there is a disciplinary issue, every child should play 50% of the game or more. No exceptions. You might bring your team to a tournament: Everyone plays 50% plus. You may be in a tight game to win the World Cup: Everyone plays 50% plus.

### Positioning Chaos!

Some kids will gravitate toward playing defense in the mistaken belief that it is "easier" somehow. Some kids are prone toward the rough and tumble world of playing keepers. Others insist that they are goal scorers and nothing else. You, as coach, may have your own biases regarding matching players up to positions.

Resist the urge!

Players should play every single position (with the exception of keeper and only if she really, really has a distaste for balls being fired at her.) Let them taste every dish in the first year. If a player tells you that they do not like a particular position, challenge them to reach a particular goal before you will consider switching them to another position (e.g. "Coach, I hate playing forward!" "Okay, Sophie, if you score a goal or help someone score a goal I will move you back to defense next shift.")

Children still need diversity, but a rare few players have found the dish that they like best. Let your keeper out of the net for a half or an entire game! Put your big scorer back on defense, challenge her to hold the shutout.

### Keeper? What's that?

The goal is bigger, much bigger, than the pop-up nets the kids use at U8. Luckily, one player on the team, the keeper is allowed to use her hands to defend the net. That's the good news. The bad news is that most players have never had the chance to learn how to play keeper.

We expect keepers to “kick” the ball away when it is in a crowd (real aggressive keepers will pounce on the ball), pick it up when it is not. Keepers should begin to get a feel for angles and how far to stand out of net during play (e.g. If you can convince your keeper to stand at the top of the goal box when the ball is on the other half of the field, you are doing very well.) Let your keepers punt once in a while if they so desire, or roll it/throw it if punting is not their thing. As coach, don’t sweat the details; some players will take to the position, some will cringe at the prospect of ever going back.

A few ideas points, things to consider:

On goal kicks, it is probably wise to allow a defender to take the kick in order to allow the keeper time to get ready for the inevitable counter attack. Some coaches do this all the way through college, but if you have a keeper with a strong and accurate leg there may not be a need for such coverage.

Choose two keepers for the game, one keeper per half. Have your assistant coach or a willing parent “warm” them up before the game by playing soft toss, letting them throw, roll and punt the ball. Getting the keepers to move laterally is helpful during warm-ups.

Often, you will have a player who professes to LOVE to play keeper yet somehow she is atrocious, I mean terrible – runs from the ball, retreats into the net during shots and takes the worse angles possible. Often, these faux keepers are just trying to “take a break” from running by parking themselves in net. Confidence building will do you no good in this situation; get them back on the field the next half.

All keepers should know that they cannot touch the ball if one of their own players intentionally passes the ball back to them. Teach them to KICK IT AWAY, even if it goes out of bounds.

If a player really, really wants to be a keeper for a practice, you may consider allowing her to use her hands during practice activities (e.g. rolling instead of foot passing).

#### Section IV

### Practice? What does that look like?

We suggest you hold one practice a week, forty-five minutes to one hour long. If there is a hint of lightning, practice is off. Visit [www.sunprairiesoccer.com/coaches-inhouse.html](http://www.sunprairiesoccer.com/coaches-inhouse.html) for sample practice plans.

Practices should be a little easier (than younger groups) because the kids should have a little longer attention span and a little more coordination; trickier because your activities should begin to focus more on promoting soccer skills, but you still want the kids to have a good time.

**Remember that there should be no intentional HEADING activities at this level. UW Pediatricians recommend that children do not start such activities until after 4<sup>th</sup> Grade.**

There are too many practice ideas, philosophies and tenets on the web and in print to categorize for this modest introduction. Added to this maelstrom of offerings are the personal preferences of the individual coach.

**Children should learn as they play.**

The United States Soccer Federation is less succinct, but perhaps less convoluted:

As much as possible let players experience soccer through 3v3 to 5v5 games that last for no more than 10 or 15 minutes at a time. The small numbers allow the players to gain critical practice at 1v1 and 2v1 situations, while still allowing for the fun and feel of a soccer game. The time limit gives the players a predetermined amount of uninterrupted play, while also allowing an opportunity after 10 minutes for the players to refocus. Players are ready for activities or games that allow them to play the ball sideways and backwards. They also begin to enjoy playing the game skillfully.

If this is starting to sound a lot like just a bigger version of U8, you are right. Kids this age are NOT YET ABLE to play an adult version of soccer. We are still easing them into the game; as we do so, we should have one eye on the prize and the other on making sure they are having a blast.

Practices should be at most an hour of structured, adult-directed soccer. If you have time to supervise, you can let the kids play for another 15 minutes before or after practice on their own. You might let them play a small sided game or practice juggling for example.

**Keep them moving with the ball!** Say you are an ex-marine, desperate to shower your team with the same hurt the Corp jack hammered into your leathery hide. You want your team to run sprints up and down the field? Fine. But make them sprint with a ball at their feet. You like to end practice with a jog around the field? Fine. But make them jog with a soccer ball.

**Minimize or prohibit lines!** You have a great 1v1 activity that involves two teams facing each other in two lines. You call out two names; two players emerge from the lines and battle for the ball. The rest of the players...sit...and...watch. What's wrong with this picture? How about you set up six 1v1 boxes before practice and when it is time to play 1v1, everyone plays at the same time.

## Section V THE GAME

**The game is all theirs, not yours.** You can scream and hallow and cajole and beg and plead, but in the end they will play as well as they can and no better. The best that you can do is to make this a fun learning experience for them.

**BE POSITIVE.** There will be times when you want to pull out your hair. Somebody will do something so unbelievably unexplainable that you will bite a hole in your lip. In those situations you must find the humor in it all.

**COACH during games, DON'T MICROMANAGE.** There are rules that your kids may need to know, reminders of their positioning and minor situations that you may call out to them to be

helpful. You SHOULD NOT feel the need to tell every kid where they need to be and what they should do at every single moment of the game. If you do, before long the kids will be looking at you for guidance instead of thinking creatively for themselves. This is their game!

**SOME OF THE OTHER TEAMS DO NOT PLAY BY OUR CLUB or MAYSA RULES.** Some communities load up their traveling teams as if they are playing for Olympic gold. We even out our teams per MAYSA rules. Some teams play strict “kick and run,” require their defenders to never leave the defensive third. We don’t. Some teams will not stop scoring goals even if they are ahead 10-0. Our coaches switch players around to make things competitive. Deal with it, knowing that we do it right.

**Regarding Set Plays, Corner Kicks and Goal Kicks.** We are so busy teaching the fundamentals that we rarely have time to dream up fancy set plays to run against opposing teams. We suggest you hold a practice session at the beginning of the season to go over the basics, but save any super fanciness for later years. A more mature team might consider a couple plays for corner kicks if they have a player who can boot the ball, but that’s not necessary either.

**Parents are your Responsibility!** If you have parents that get too aggressive, give them a chill pill. The ref will come to you and only you. Send your manager over to straighten them out.

**Work on Throw-Ins:** We have U11 players who...CANNOT...KEEP...THEIR ...TWO...FEET...ON...THE...GROUND! Practice the two feet beneath method before you practice the drag.

Also see the attached “US Youth Soccer Official Under 10 Playing Recommendations” and “Modified Recommendations of the Game for U10”.

## Section VI

### Game & Practice Times

The majority of games are Tuesdays and Saturdays (see game schedule). Location of the games will vary from week to week (see game schedule). Games will consist of two 25 minute halves and a 5 minute half-time. All players must receive equal playing time. Referees are already assigned to each game and must be paid (\$15) by the Home team coach. You will be provided with a check to cover the referee costs for your home games. See the game schedule for the games you must pay the referee.

Teams are encouraged to hold one practice a week. Work with the Field Coordinator, Tom Gehrmann, [fieldcoordinator@sunprairiesoccer.com](mailto:fieldcoordinator@sunprairiesoccer.com), to find a field to practice on. Field space is limited as there are many teams at this age group practicing during the week. If you need assistance conducting a practice, contact Ryan Baker ([rbaker@sunprairiesoccer.com](mailto:rbaker@sunprairiesoccer.com)) to get in touch with some of our volunteer "counselor" coaches.

You may begin practicing as soon as you receive your equipment. First practices also serve as a team meeting for you to introduce players, work out a snack schedule, find parent volunteers to help out during practices and games, etc. ... plus have some fun for your players.

The SPSC does not reserve field space for practices. While you're likely able to practice at the game fields with no problem, it's possible you may not be the first one there. In that case, there is plenty of "green space" in the city to find an area in which to practice.

Weather Effects: The In-House Director will decide if games are canceled due to weather. If lightning occurs, all practices and games are cancelled. If your game is canceled, please coordinate with the other coach on a place and time to replay that game. You may decide to replay the game in place of a practice.

## Section VII Equipment & Uniforms

Each child will receive a t-shirt, shorts and socks for their uniform. Players should bring rubber soccer cleats, shin guards and a size 4 soccer ball.

Each head coach will be assigned the following equipment at the beginning of the season:

- A. One (1) Equipment Bag
- B. Twelve (12) Size 4 Soccer Balls
- C. Twelve (12) Pinnies
- D. Eight (8) Cones
- E. Forty (40) Disc Cones
- F. One (1) First Aid Kit

All this equipment must be returned at the end of the season.

There are a few other useful tools you might want to purchase on your own.

- A. Whistle - You should be able to command your team without a whistle, but if you'd like to light a fire under them once and a while, a whistle comes in handy.
- B. Air Pump - Keep one in your soccer ball for pumping up deflated game balls on game day (you'll be the hero) or at practices.
- C. Sun Block - Some parent will forget, you will remember, and some kid won't get melanoma.
- D. Cell Phone - To call 911 in case of serious injury.

## Section VIII Coaching Moments

Let's say you've prepared an entire practice devoted to teaching the kids how to pass the soccer ball using the inside of the foot ("Push pass"). You demonstrate what a "push pass" is and run a brief warm-up (such as "Simon Says" with partners) that allows each kid to practice the "push pass" with a partner. Everyone seems to understand the concept of a "push pass," so you go on to the next activity.

The next activity is a “gated” game where partners move from gate to gate, “push passing” the ball through each gate twice before they move on to the next one. There’s a time limit of sixty seconds, most gates win!

1. You blow the whistle to start the activity and suddenly every single kid is using his or her toe to pass the ball. What do you do?
2. You blow the whistle to start the activity and every kid on the field is doing it right except for little Philip Flighty. What do you do?
3. Forty-five seconds through the activity, most of the kids abandon the push pass and begin to use their toes. What do you do?
4. What do you do when little Suzy Socker does the best “push pass” you’ve ever seen?

### Short Answers

For question one, some coaches would apply the “Freeze” coaching concept whereas she would shout “Freeze,” all players would stop, and the coach would demonstrate the “push pass” again.

For question two, some coaches would apply the “Individual” concept whereas she would take that individual child aside and demonstrate the “push pass” to him alone while the others continued to play.

For question three, some coaches would apply the “Natural Stoppage” concept whereas she would wait until the activity was over to reinforce the notion of the “push pass” again.

For question four, some coaches would apply the “In the Flow” concept to praise the child while not interrupting the actions of that player or the team in general.

## Section IX The Parents

You should hold a team meeting at the beginning of the season to introduce yourself and your assistant coach to the parents. A few coaches like to have this meeting a few days before the first practice, but most coaches delay the first practice fifteen minutes to go over the essentials.

### What are the essentials?

**Team Manager:** Who will be in charge of snacks? Who will run the phone tree for cancellations? Who will organize the end of the season party? Kindly ask a parent to be your manager.

**Food Allergies or Medical Conditions:** Ask parents about the health of their children. Who is allergic to peanut butter? Good to know for after-game snacks. Who needs an asthma sprayer? Coaches will receive copies of their player’s registration forms where parents listed any medical or health conditions they wanted you to know about.

**Practices and Games:** Hand out a schedule for games. When and where do you plan to have your practice during the week? Children should arrive at the field at least fifteen minutes before practices and games.

**Soccer Balls:** Make sure that the parents know that their children must bring their soccer balls to each practice. A shortage of soccer balls at a practice means that the kids will otherwise not get to “touch” the ball as much. Also make sure to tell the parents to **keep the soccer balls inflated**.

**You are NOT a babysitter:** Some parents will drop their kids off at the first practice and speed away to some other activity. If you don't nip this in the bud, before long, every parent will abandon you to the mercy of the children. Then some kid will get hurt or need to go the bathroom or wander into the street, and then you might as well flush your practice down the toilet. The parents should know from day one that you are a coach, not a baby sitter. At least two parents other than the coaches must be at every practice to take care of any emergency or secondary situation.

## Section X Coaches and Parents Rules of Conduct

Parents should know the following ABSOLUTE club rules, which are self-evident to most, but need to be made abundantly clear to some. Any violation of the following requires immediate action that may necessitate contact with the police.

1. **No physical mistreatment** of anybody, including their own child.
2. **No inappropriate touching** of anybody, including their own child.
3. **No verbal mistreatment** of anybody, including their own child.
4. **No smoking** anywhere near the children.
5. **No alcohol or illicit drug consumption** anywhere near the children.
6. **No inappropriate commentary, swearing or statements** near the children.

## Section XI Injury

Do not fool around with injuries. Call an ambulance if a situation appears serious. Use common sense, but err on the side of caution.

If a child loses consciousness at any time, he or she may not return to the game or practice and should see a physician immediately. If an injury appears minor, use your first aid kit and take your time to evaluate the scope of the injury. If you are unsure, then assume that the injury is serious and take appropriate actions.

If an injury appears to be related to the neck and/or spine, do not move the child. Call for help immediately.

## Section XII

### Player Evaluations

With so many kids playing soccer it can be difficult to maintain competitive balance across teams when team assignments are somewhat arbitrary. For this reason, we have instituted a “player rating” system to try to add a bit more science to building next season’s teams. Coaches will be ask to complete a “player rating” for each of their players at the end of the season. The system involves simply identifying the “level” of play each player possesses. Here is an example:

1. **Beginner:** Not very engaged in the game. If a ball is kicked to them, they will try to kick it, but they generally do not initiate involvement. Often require direction to participate in play.
2. **Developing:** Generally engaged with what is going on in the game, but does not yet possess the skills/confidence to be proactive on the field.
3. **Improving:** Always engaged with what is going on in the game and beginning to develop the skills/aggressiveness to dictate play.
4. **Competent:** Usually aggressive and often can dictate the flow of play but has not developed the ball skills and/or awareness of strategy to dominate play.
5. **Advanced:** Has developed the awareness and skills to dictate/dominate play.

## Section XIII

### Important Dates

**Saturday, April 25 - Team Picture Day, Sheehan Park:** Team photos are optional. The team must decide if they would like to schedule a team photo. Team and individual player photos may be taken. There is no paper work to fill out or payments to be made. Parents are given a web address and password to view and order the pictures online. There is no obligation to purchase pictures. Coaches must contact StephanieBerge at [waimages@verizon.net](mailto:waimages@verizon.net) to check available and schedule a time on April 25 to have team/player photos taken. All traveling and 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Grade In-House teams are having their pictures taken this day.

Note: We ask for coaches’ assistance in notifying parents that Team Picture Day is NOT the opportunity for parents to take pictures. The SPSC hires a professional photographer and it is distracting to her and the players when parents are snapping photos during the photo shoot.

**May 12, 6 pm - Youth Appreciation Night, Sun Prairie High School:** All teams are strongly encouraged to attend the high school girls’ varsity soccer game. Teams can “adopt” a high school player and root for her during the game. During halftime teams are announced on the field. A fun event for the kids. Players also receive a free treat from the concession stand. Last fall we had over 200 SPSC members in the stands, we hope to double that this spring! More information will be sent as the date nears.

**June 7, noon - End of Spring Season Festival, Stoneridge Estates Park:** To celebrate the end of the spring season, the SPSC is planning a HUGE festival full of food, games and prizes. All teams (players, parents, and families) are encouraged to attend. Visit [www.sunprairiesocce.com/festival.html](http://www.sunprairiesocce.com/festival.html) for more details.