

Create a Soccer Coaching Curriculum for Every Age Group



Soccer isn't all about winning, particularly at youth level. However, this doesn't mean that the beautiful game has nothing more to offer children than the opportunity to have fun and be active.

Youth soccer can deliver a wide range of additional outcomes, from building confidence and self-esteem to developing physical fitness and learning the value of teamwork. But if you're going to achieve any of these goals at your club or academy, you'll need to develop and implement a carefully planned soccer coaching curriculum.

This guide will answer a host of questions about planning, building and implementing a coaching curriculum, including:

What is the purpose of a coaching curriculum?

What should you be looking to achieve with your curriculum?

How should a coaching curriculum be structured?

How can a coaching curriculum be tailored to different player groups?

How can The Coaching Manual help you create a coaching curriculum?

How can you ensure your curriculum remains relevant over time?



What is the purpose of a curriculum?

In school, the curriculum represents the various lessons and content taught in class as part of a specific course or academic programme. And it's no different in soccer. Your coaching curriculum should detail what you expect your players to learn during a given period - generally a full season.

Developed before the start of a season, the curriculum should be built around clear player development goals. However, it's important to note that the curriculum can be amended as new challenges and goals become apparent (we'll discuss this in more depth later in this guide).

There are three main benefits to introducing a coaching curriculum:

- The DOC can be confident that coaches are focusing on the right areas.
- Coaches no longer have to worry what session they'll be running tomorrow, next week, or in a month.
- Players benefit from a well-thought-out training plan, with a clear progression from week to week, rather than a scattergun approach with no link from one session to the next.



While they may share a purpose, no two curriculums will look the same. Each should be developed based upon the requirements of the specific club, academy or soccer programme, taking into account factors such as:

- Player age range
- Size of player pool
- Ability level of players
- Experience and knowledge of coaching staff
- Type of facilities available
- Frequency and length of training sessions

Ultimately, you should be building a season-long syllabus of training sessions that give your players a well-rounded soccer education and prepare them for the next step in their sporting career, whether that be progressing to a new age level or advancing to a high school or college team.

As well as detailing the specific sessions your coaches will run throughout the season, your curriculum should incorporate clear aims and outcomes – in other words, the reason why you’re doing it, and what you hope to get from it.

What are you aiming to achieve?

To develop a soccer coaching curriculum, you first need a clear concept of the objectives you’re aiming to deliver.

To give a simple example, if you want your players to be skilled in an attractive possession-based game, your curriculum will inevitably focus heavily on keeping the ball. In younger age groups, this might translate to running simple 3 v 3 matches. Meanwhile, older players will develop the skills to play through the thirds, with Rondo drills teaching them to maintain positions and control of the ball.

Aligning your curriculum with your club's vision and philosophy

As you may already have noticed, there's a clear connection between the coaching curriculum and the club's wider sporting philosophy.

Just as it's important to ensure that your coaches are teaching the right playing philosophy, you'll need to align your soccer curriculum with the overarching vision for how you want the game to be played.

To expand the above example, a Director of Coaching who believes in a possession-based game plan probably wouldn't want to implement a training curriculum with heavy emphasis on rapidly transitioning from defence to attack. However, they might want to incorporate defensive drills based on a high press, with the goal of winning the ball back as quickly as possible to give their teams the best chance of dominating possession.

Example: The NSCAA Player Development Curriculum

The National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) has detailed the aims of its own player development curriculum. While this won't necessarily apply directly to your club or academy, it provides a useful example of how these aims could look:

Objectives

- Provide attainment standards for measuring coach and player performance
- Reflect coaching best practice
- Promote intellectual, social, personal and physical development
- Establish high expectations for all constituents
- Identify outcomes relating to skills, knowledge and other performance criteria
- Reflect the NSCAA's vision and mission
- Provide equal opportunity for all players to learn and achieve



How should the curriculum be structured?

Just as the content of one curriculum will inevitably differ from that of another, there's no such thing as a “perfect” structure for your season-long coaching plan. A curriculum that works for FC Barcelona's youth development programme is unlikely to yield the same success at a much smaller club, with more limited resources, less experienced coaches, and less naturally gifted players.

That being said, there are some common structural elements that should underpin your soccer coaching curriculum. With that in mind, we've put together an outline for a simple curriculum:

Example: A template soccer coaching curriculum

- **Aims:** From a top-level perspective, what are the driving forces behind your curriculum? What are the two to three things that underpin your approach to working with the age group in question?
- **Outcomes:** Why are those your aims? What do you hope to achieve by focusing on them? For instance, if one of your aims is to ensure that players enjoy being a part of the club, the outcome could be to improve player retention.
- **Methodology:** This is where you slot together the individual training sessions designed to meet the aims and deliver the desired outcomes.

The final section – methodology – is where the real detail lies. Within this area of your coaching curriculum, you'll want to incorporate the following information:

Content

In the context of a soccer curriculum, “content” refers to the type of training session held on any given day. You should define the purpose of each session - is it intended to improve tactical awareness? Fundamental skills? Physical and mental development?

Supporting knowledge

Beyond the primary goal of the session, what supplementary benefits will it offer to players? For instance, a guided coaching session with regular individual feedback may have the additional benefit of instilling discipline, whereas a self-regulated session with little coaching involvement may help to build confidence and self-esteem.

Learning environment

Literally, where will the session take place? Theoretical training might occur in a classroom around a tactics board; practical sessions on the training field; and fitness sessions in the gym. At different times of year, you may also wish to move sessions indoors to avoid adverse weather.





How to tailor your curriculum for youth, college & professional soccer coaching

As we've already noted, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to soccer coaching. The needs of a youth player are very different to those of a college player, and these differences must be reflected within your curriculum.

To reflect the importance of a carefully tailored approach, we've taken the above outline for a simple curriculum and added in aims, outcomes and methodologies relevant to three different player groups – youth level, college level, and professionals:

Youth level

- **Aims:** Provide equal playing time; instil a love of the game; prepare youth players for the next age level.
- **Outcomes:** Gain buy-in from players and parents; retain players; build long-term team success.
- **Methodology:** For instance, instilling a love of the game could be achieved through focusing on fun drills in which players get to spend plenty of time with the ball, and promoting competition within the squad.

College level

- **Aims:** Ensure players are bought into club culture and sporting philosophy; encourage familiarity with multiple playing positions; improve fitness levels.
- **Outcomes:** Improve player retention; build a flexible, adaptable playing squad able to cope with different systems and formations; allow coaches to implement a high-intensity game plan.
- **Methodology:** For instance, encouraging familiarity with multiple playing positions could be achieved through training sessions that force players to take up different positions and/or use their weaker foot.

Professional level

- **Aims:** Ensure players are bought into club culture and sporting philosophy; improve on-field decision-making; move the ball faster.
- **Outcomes:** Improve player retention; enable players to overcome challenges during matches, when coaches are unable to intervene; allow coaches to implement a fast, counter-attacking game plan.
- **Methodology:** For instance, improving on-field decision-making could be achieved through scenario-based training sessions (e.g. playing 4 vs. 5 to replicate having a player injured or sent off).





How to tailor your curriculum for youth, college & professional soccer coaching

While the benefits should be apparent, the idea of building a training plan spanning an entire season can seem intimidating.

How can you be sure you're focusing on the right areas?

What proportion of time should be spent on each type of training session?

How will you find the time to bring it all together in the first place?

Fortunately, building a soccer curriculum couldn't be easier with The Coaching Manual. Rather than devoting hours – or even days – to developing your curriculum, our intelligent software can create a whole season's worth of drills and exercises in a matter of minutes. Here's how it works in seven simple steps:

Choose your team

Because we understand that backroom staff are often involved in multiple teams, the first step in our season planning process is to name the team whose curriculum you're planning.

Choose your player age group

Player needs vary significantly from one age group to another. Telling us the age range of the players you're working with helps us to create a bespoke plan that's relevant to your team.

Select the start and finish dates for your curriculum

Simple – just tell us when you want the season plan to start and end, and we'll create a curriculum that meets your needs.

Tell us the days and times of your training sessions

Give us the days and times on which you train – up to three sessions per week – so that we can fit the sessions you need into a timetable that fits your routine.

Give us your regular matchday

Again, matchdays can vary from one team to the next. Tell us the days on which your fixtures take place and we'll ensure your players get the right balance of skills-based training and game preparation.

Wait for up to four minutes

Bear with us! It'll take up to four minutes – that's just 240 seconds – for our algorithm to build you a season-long training plan. Make yourself a coffee, grab a snack, and wait to view your curriculum.

View your season plan with our interactive calendar

Congratulations – by answering a few simple questions, you've built a training curriculum that covers a full season! Use our interactive calendar to browse the sessions scheduled for each date.



How to keep your curriculum aligned with new goals and challenges

Of course, even the best-laid plans will become outdated at some point. Any number of factors may necessitate changes to your season curriculum. Perhaps you've lost a key member of the coaching team. Perhaps several new players have joined your squad. Perhaps, having carried out performance reviews, you've discovered that players are well behind or (hopefully) ahead of schedule, requiring objectives to be updated.

Whatever the case, your soccer curriculum should be treated as an agile, flexible plan that can be amended in line with the changing needs of your players.

However, you shouldn't change for change's sake. Our software understands how to build a curriculum that's appropriate for each age group and will help you achieve your goals.

Don't be tempted to make wholesale amendments off the back of two or three shock defeats or victories. When it comes to helping your players develop, consistency of approach is vital. When you do iterate, concentrate on highly specific changes targeting one or two key areas of your curriculum, rather than tearing up the rulebook and starting from scratch.

Conclusion: Let The Coaching Manual do the heavy lifting

While it's up to you to define aims, outcomes and your wider coaching philosophy, The Coaching Manual is here to help with the hard yards of piecing together a season plan.

All you need to do is follow the seven steps detailed above and our software will produce a detailed, season-long training syllabus tailored to your specific needs. Rather than hours of hard work, it'll do the job in just a couple of minutes. Give it a try!

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