

BC Soccer Long Term Player Development

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LTPD benefits players, parents, coaches and clubs:

1 Adapted from Canadian Sport for Life: Long-Term Athlete Development Resource Paper, Ottawa: Canadian Sport Centres, 2005. The complete document is available at www.ltad.ca.

Benefits for players & parents:

- Better understanding of what makes a good soccer program.
- More players learning at their level and having fun.
- Appropriate game and league structures (e.g. size of balls, goals, field etc.).
- More opportunity for players to realize their athletic potential.
- More coaches who are knowledgeable in leading safe, effective practices.

Benefits for coaches & clubs:

- Information and education on effective coaching and practice methods.
- Guidelines for appropriate game structures.
- Guidelines on appropriate competition levels.
- Established pathways for player development for all levels of ability and ambition.
- Affirmation of best practices for coaches and club administrators.

Benefits for all:

- Competitive behaviour is fostered in players, while over-competitive behaviour is discouraged in adults(e.g. coaches and parents).
- Players, parents, coaches, and administrators understand that players are unique and therefore different in interest and aptitude.
- Players stay involved in the sport throughout their lives (as players, coaches, referees or club administrators).
- Soccer grows, and lifelong wellness is promoted for players of all ages, genders, and levels of ability and disability.

Competition in the early stages of LTPD

One element of Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) that frequently stirs controversy is the recommendation to eliminate league standings below U12. The controversy arises from the popular claim that standings, as well as league championships and trophies at these early ages, are essential to motivating young players to “compete”.

The elimination of standings in children’s leagues is not intended to reduce the intensity of competition among players in a game situation. LTPD recognizes that playing with competitive commitment and intensity is necessary to advance player development in ball technique, decision-making, mental concentration, and other skills and capacities.

However, experience shows us that young children will compete even in the absence of league standings. All young players understand that soccer is a game for scoring goals and “winning.” Simple observation of children’s soccer around the world shows that the absence of a trophy or league title does nothing to diminish each player’s desire to compete each time they step onto the soccer pitch for a match.

The important difference is that the elimination of standings below U12 diminishes the incentive for coaches at these levels to play to “win the league” because they are chasing a trophy and a league title at the end of the season. It also reduces pressure from parents to win, to perform, and to avoid mistakes.

Why is this distinction important?

When coaches in children’s leagues chase trophies and titles, and when parents criticize and pressure their children, poor player development is the most frequent result. Coaches tend to play only their strongest players, leave their “weak” players on the bench, specialize players in positions prematurely, use game tactics aimed solely at guaranteeing a win (e.g. kicking the ball down the field, not trying to create controlled buildup), and promoting a general attitude of “don’t take chances – don’t experiment with your skills or decisions – just play safe by kicking the ball far and away.”

These problems are more easily addressed in the absence of league standings. Coaches of children’s teams are easily able to justify equal playing time for all players, experiment with positions and field alignments, and promote a general willingness among players to try their skills in a game setting without being preoccupied with failing their teammates and the overall effort to “win the league.”

When standings are eliminated in children’s soccer below U12, games are still won and lost, and competition still takes place among the players. However, it is now far easier for coaches to pursue a broad-based approach to player

development rather than a narrow view of “we must win three points today or we cannot challenge for the league title.”

In this light, it should be clear that competition remains at the centre of the LTPD approach. Less skilled players are assured more playing time in the competitive environment so they can develop their competition skills, and all players gain experience in

a variety of positions. Most importantly, and far more subtly, all players are encouraged to practice and experiment with their skills in a competition environment without fear of making a mistake that could cost a league result.

Measured in the context of the physiological, emotional and mental developments that take place during childhood, it is essential that players be permitted and even encouraged to make mistakes. This is the only way they can achieve the practice required to refine their ball control and decision-making skills in a competitive setting.

Some coaches will always want to win at all costs, regardless of whether or not there are league standings. This is an unfortunate reality of community children’s sport. However, the LTPD approach to competition below U12 provides the best overall incentive for coaches and players to focus on broad-based player development instead of a “win at all costs” approach.



Stages of Development Focus

STAGE 2: FUNdamentals “FUN WITH THE BALL”

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At this stage, individual player development is paramount. Coaches and teachers should create a stimulating learning environment where the atmosphere is “Freedom and Fun.”

Where:	Home, schools, clubs.
Why:	Provide opportunities for children to learn basic soccer elements.
Who:	Physical education teacher, parent coach, team coach, club head coach.
Coaching:	CSA Community Children Course.

- **Physical** – Develop the ABCs of movement: agility, balance, co-ordination and speed, as well as running jumping, twisting, kicking, throwing and catching.
- **Technical** – Movement exercises/games designed to promote a feel for the ball: gaining ball control in receiving passes, dribbling, passing less than 25m, kicking the ball forward, and shooting on goal.
- **Tactical** – Small children are egocentric – playing the ball is the most important objective. However, they now need to be introduced to co-operation between players. They gain understanding of the game through playing situations.
- **Mental** – Basic awareness of environment to build game intelligence and decision making.

Game Structure: Ranges from 3v3 to 5v5.

				FIELD SIZES		
Game Format	Squad Size	Game duration	Ball Size	Min/Max width	Min/Max length	GOAL SIZES no larger than
3 v 3 *	Max 6	2 x 15 min.	3/4	18 to 22m	25 to 30m	5f/1.52m X 8f/2.44m
4 v 4 *	Max 8	2 x 15 min.	3/4	20 to 25m	30 to 36m	5f/1.52m X 8f/2.44m
5 v 5 *	Max 10	2 x 15 min.	3/4	25 to 30m	30 to 36m	5f/1.52m X 8f/2.44m

**With or without goalkeeper - when no goalkeeper, reduce the goal size.*

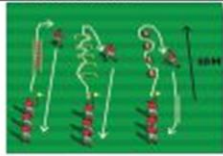



Recommended training times: 30 to 45 minutes.

Season Length: 12 to 20 weeks, indoor and/or outdoor.






Recommendations:

- No league standings – jamboree format – emphasis is on FUN.
- Players and game formats are organized to support the basic playing experiences.
- All players play equal time and try all team positions, including goal keeping.
- The game structure progresses between ages from simple to more complex.
- Equal time should be allotted to practice and games.

Example of a Fundamental Stage session

Phase	Time/Equipment	Activity Name	Emphasis
Warm up/Agility	8-10mins		Running Jumping Twisting Changing direction
Break	2 mins		Hydration/Rest
Ball Familiarity Games	8-10 mins		Dribbling inside and outside of the foot Preparing to shoot Shooting at a goal Goal Celebrations
Break	2 mins		Hydration/Rest
Ball Familiarity Games	8-10 mins		Attacking the goal Shooting/finishing Goal Celebrations!
Break	3 mins		Hydration/Rest
Small sided Games	10-15 mins		Direction Let the players play Basic Shape/Support Shooting/finishing
	5 mins	Team Cheer and Snack Time	

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FUNDAMENTALS Course (Stage 2 'Fun with the Ball' U6-U8 Female/U6-U9 Male)

At this stage, players should participate in stimulating practices and games that develop basic technical skills in a FUN atmosphere. The emphasis should be movement exercises and games that promote a feel for the ball while teaching basic principles of play within a fun but structured setting. Mini game formats are used, ranging from 3v3 to 5v5 and a basic league schedule can be created but no standings should be kept. All players should play equal time and try all team positions, including goalkeeper, and equal time should be allotted to practices and games.

Pre-requisite: N/A

Course Length: 7.5 hours

Course Fee: \$80

Next Issue:

- 10 Key factors Behind LTDP
- Stage Focus 'Stage 3 Learning to Train'
- Grassroots Development Service Plan

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