



BLUEPRINT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Revised October 2023



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INTRODUCTION

Since TSS Academy opened in 1997, we have been helping young players develop in the game around the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Much has changed over that time. TSS has evolved from solely a supplementary training provider to a primary soccer provider for a number of young female and male players. This evolution began with the inception of TSS FC in 2011. At the time of updating this document, approximately 350 youth players look to TSS for their primary soccer instruction, ranging from 3 training sessions a week, plus a game outlet. That responsibility compelled TSS back in 2016 to fully examine the quality of instruction and development approach that underlies the organization. The Blueprint for Development is essentially a culmination of that self examination over a number of years. As this review process is ongoing at TSS, the Blueprint for Development continues to be an organic document that evolves as the organization evolves.

The principles and views covered in this Blueprint have certainly not developed in a vacuum. Many insights have been gleaned from other organizations and federations who have vast experience and knowledge in player development. The Long Term Player Development (LTPD) plan published by the Canada Soccer is also a document that has helped TSS gain more clarity in the approach taken. The TSS Blueprint for Development is supportive and complementary to the Canada Long Term Player Development Plan.

Since TSS continues to provide supplementary training to over 600 players a year in BC through Total Soccer, this Blueprint for Development will also be infused into those training sessions. In other words, this document is not solely for TSS FC, though we are more able to impact those players given the volume and frequency of training provided.

TSS also recognizes that any development plan or approach will have little effect without the ability or the will to monitor and educate those assigned to teach our players. As a smaller soccer organization, this responsibility is more manageable but accountability and vigilance is required nonetheless.

Lastly, it must be made clear that this Blueprint for Development is a document intended solely to help TSS in becoming a better, more accountable soccer organization. It's also to help the families who attend TSS to better understand the development approach taken. It is not the intention of this document to instruct others how to develop youth soccer players. We appreciate and respect that there will be different views on this subject. If the document spurs healthy conversations in the soccer community, we welcome those conversations. After all, some of the views presented here were also a result of the countless conversations that have taken place with the many passionate youth soccer contributors who reside in the soccer clubs and academies across BC and the country.



Before mapping out a development plan, it's important to have a proper context of the game in which we are trying to play. Soccer is a foot-eye coordination sport. That is very unique to us Canadians, given that the vast majority of sports we play involve hand-eye coordination. Everything from hockey, basketball, baseball, American football, field hockey, lacrosse, etc. are all hand-eye coordination sports. These activities tend to come to us humans more easily by virtue of what we do with our hands every day. We eat with utensils, tie our shoes, type on a keyboard, text on our phones, change a lightbulb, brush our teeth, fold our clothes. This list goes on and on. But what do we do with our feet everyday? We put one foot in front of the other. Not very dynamic. Not very challenging. So when asked to manipulate a ball with our feet with the same proficiency as our hands, the demands placed on us are far greater and likewise the amount of practice and commitment required is far higher. Soccer requires a great deal of commitment in terms of detailed practice just to reach a level of proficiency. Excellence is a whole other matter. In other

words, you can't part-time the game of soccer and expect to become a player of any consequence. Other countries are steeped in the game of soccer. Children have a ball at their feet for hours and hours every day. That is not the soccer world in which we currently inhabit. We need to appreciate that distinction and recognize the challenge that lies before us as players, parents, and coaches.

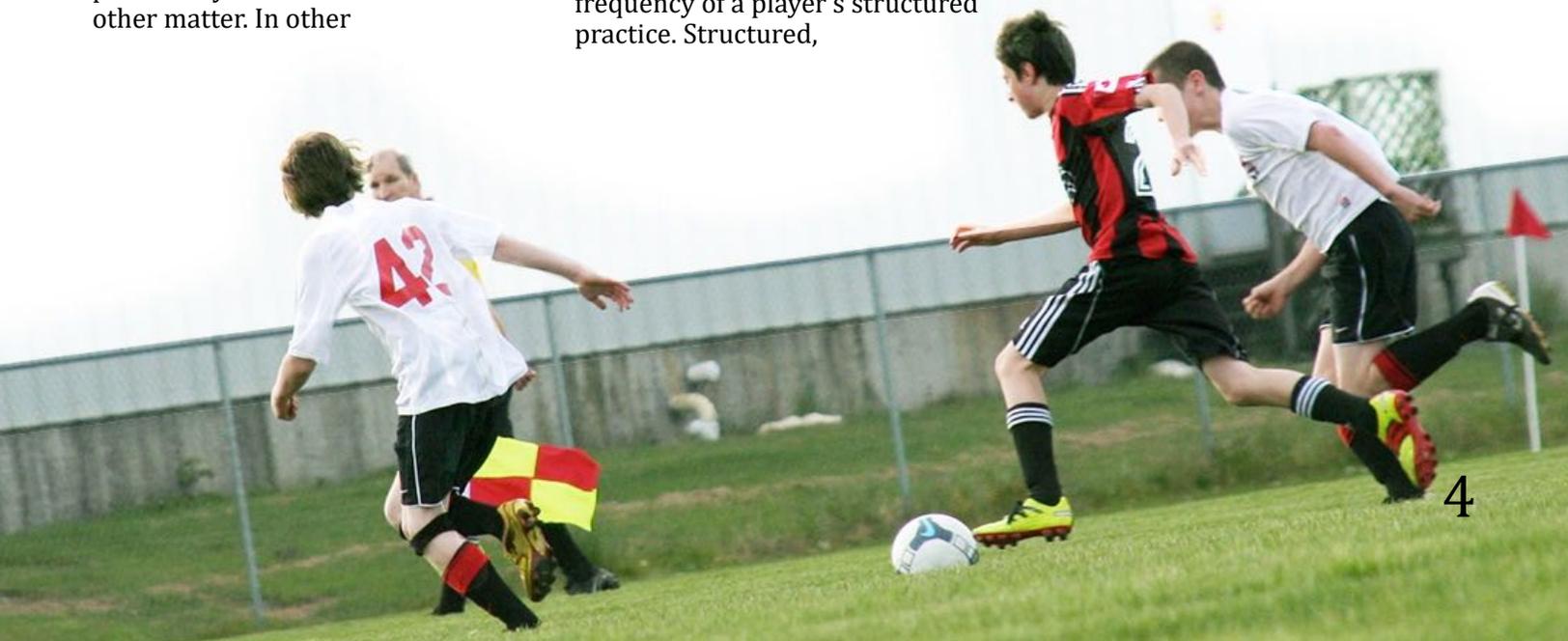
Quite simply, too much structured practice can lead to burn out and a diminishment of joy in playing the game

UNSTRUCTURED PRACTICE

The truth of the matter is that TSS alone cannot give a young player all the tools required to become a player of substance. Most players are training up to 3 times a week plus a game. That's roughly 6 hours of organized soccer a week. It sounds like a lot but it isn't - not if the objective is to achieve true excellence in all the skills required. The solution is not necessarily to increase the volume and frequency of a player's structured practice. Structured,

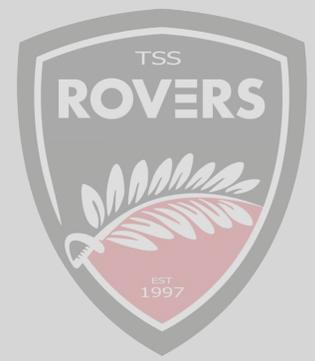
adult-organized practice is taxing. Having a young player continually run through a set of soccer tasks and activities requires a high degree of concentration. These demands are often heightened by a lengthy drive in the car to and from training. The player can then spend a few hours completing homework when returning home. Quite simply, too much structured practice can lead to burn out and a diminishment of joy in playing the game.

Unstructured play, on the other hand, is different entirely. This involves a young player simply playing on their own, whether juggling in the back yard, striking a ball against a wall, or playing pick-up soccer during the lunch hour. True excellence takes place on the many patches of grass in the neighbourhood and schools. It takes place during those sunset hours when a young player fights the darkness in order to beat a personal juggling record, or score one more goal against local rivals. Unstructured play is the time for skill refinement, a time for exploration, and dedicated repetition. A player seeking excellence in the game can never get enough of that kind of practice.



“You build a player like you build a house. In the house, there is a basement, a foundation, which for a player is - technique. It is developed between the age of 7 and 14. If you have no quality technical skill by age 14, you can forget it, you will never be a soccer player.”

– Arsène Wenger, Chief of Global Football Development, FIFA



SOCCKER AGE VS BIRTH AGE

Many soccer federations around the world have identified various stages of learning for young players. In so doing, they have identified the technical, tactical, physical, and mental areas that need to be developed as a player goes through those stages. Many of these development plans ascribe age groups to each of these stages. This is a necessity in order to develop talent by a certain age for both national programs and professional clubs. It's also a necessity given that there are key ages in which learning is not only optimal but, in many cases, critical for certain skills to take root. TSS fully supports this progressive approach to development.

However, in truth many players when joining TSS have not passed through these stages having received appropriate instruction. In other words, players have essentially bypassed those stages and, in many cases, were encouraged to focus on inappropriate aspects of the game. For example, many players as young as 8 and 9 were encouraged and taught to win games at all cost, largely ignoring their technical development. As a result, their current birth age does not match what we would refer to as their “soccer” age. Given those realities, it makes little sense for TSS to institute a curriculum based on a player’s chronological age without considering their “soccer age.”

TARGETING ESSENTIALS

We don't live in a “footballing” culture. Young players in this country do not have a ball at their feet for the better part of the day. Kids are not glued to their television sets watching the game. They tend to be programmed with a multitude of activities and often unstructured play is not overly encouraged. Add the obsession with video games, social media, and other screen time activities, and the cards continue to stack against those who would like to see this country regularly compete on the world stage. We can bemoan that fact but the truth is that we cannot run effective programming without considering the environment of these players. We need to consider that environment when devising a development plan and continue to chip away in the hope of changing the culture over time. In the meantime, TSS feels that it's important to target the essential skills, giving young players the best chance of being effective in the game. If young players can be more skillful, they will enjoy the game far more, and thus grow the culture. Covering every aspect of the game under the assumption that players are spending hours on their own refining these skills is naive at best. So too is spending countless sessions on tactical formations and patterns of play when players are not watching the game on their own or, more importantly, still trying to master fundamental techniques.

If young players can be more skillful, they will enjoy the game far more

TSS believes in loading young players with the essentials during structured practice and assigning personal responsibilities to the player for honing other skills or gaining a wider range of tactical intelligence. Young players need to understand that excellence cannot be realized just by attending adult-organized training sessions and working hard. As educators, we can help by providing personal assignments and inspiring a hunger for more development. But we cannot magically create excellence solely within the confines of TSS training hours, not without the player also taking ownership of their own development. We place those demands on the player because ultimately the mission of TSS is the individual player. At the younger ages, the team is simply a vehicle for individual player development.





Style of play is not simply about aesthetics. TSS does not subscribe to a certain style of play in order to look attractive. TSS institutes a style of play for development purposes. It's our belief that young players should be instructed to play the game thoughtfully. Essentially that means trying to secure the ball and not aimlessly kick the ball forward in the hope of generating errors on the part of the opposition. We believe in playing out of the back and through the thirds of the field with a series of quick decisions - whether that's 1 or 2-touch passes or dribbling to change angles. Does this always win soccer games? No. Invariably it can cause costly mistakes because young players are still developing their technique and decision-making ability. TSS believes that playing this way develops players because they are continually being asked to exercise their skill and decision-making. Kicking the ball aimlessly

is the absence of both those things. Being thoughtful with the ball must take precedence over chasing results by methods that are counter productive to development. It's easy to say those words but harder to live them.

In the end, this approach does generate results on the scoreboard but it takes persistence and it takes patience. The focus at TSS is to coach players to their potential for tomorrow - not on coaching players to their limitations for today.

SOCCER AGE EMPHASIS

Teams with a young "soccer age" should be encouraged to play the game in a way that's appropriate to their development stage. We don't believe that players with a young soccer age should be trying to play the adult version of soccer. TSS believes they should be playing the game in such a way that elicits the skills

required to eventually play the adult version. The younger teams at TSS are encouraged to take risks through dribbling and passing the ball. That can be difficult for adults to watch at times because these players will make far more costly mistakes when approaching the game this way. However, it's important to allow that process to take place.

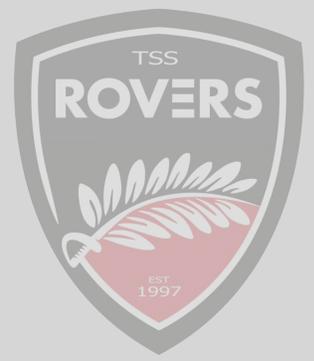
SCORING GOALS

TSS encourages its young players to score goals using their skill and their brains. We don't encourage players to simply create chaos by launching the ball aimlessly into the penalty area in the hopes of generating fortuitous bounces. Continuously kicking the ball forward can be an effective way to score goals given the technical deficiencies of the opposition, but it does not help players see the game or solve problems in a thoughtful and skillful manner. Forcing young players to get to goal with skill and intelligence can be a frustrating process because it's much harder for them to score that way but, in the end, it will benefit their development.

"Possession is related to success, not because of specific strategies related to what the score in the game was, but because of teams' relative skill levels. Possession is about ability...and that means, over the course of the season, those teams that cherish the ball - and know how to treat it - will win out."

- The Numbers Game, Authors Chris Anderson and David Sally





“The technical piece is massive. If you can’t hang in a session technically, it doesn’t matter how strong you are, how fast you are, even how intelligent you are, really.”

– Danny Karbassiyoon, Arsenal FC



Securing the Ball

The purpose of securing the ball is to dribble and pass in order to shift the opposition in such a way that meaningful opportunities to attack forward present themselves. Those opportunities come in the following forms:

- 1) *Gaps through which to dribble or pass*
- 2) *Isolated defenders to attack 1v1 or 2v1*
- 3) *Numerical superiority of teammates in forward positions*
- 4) *Openings to shoot on goal*

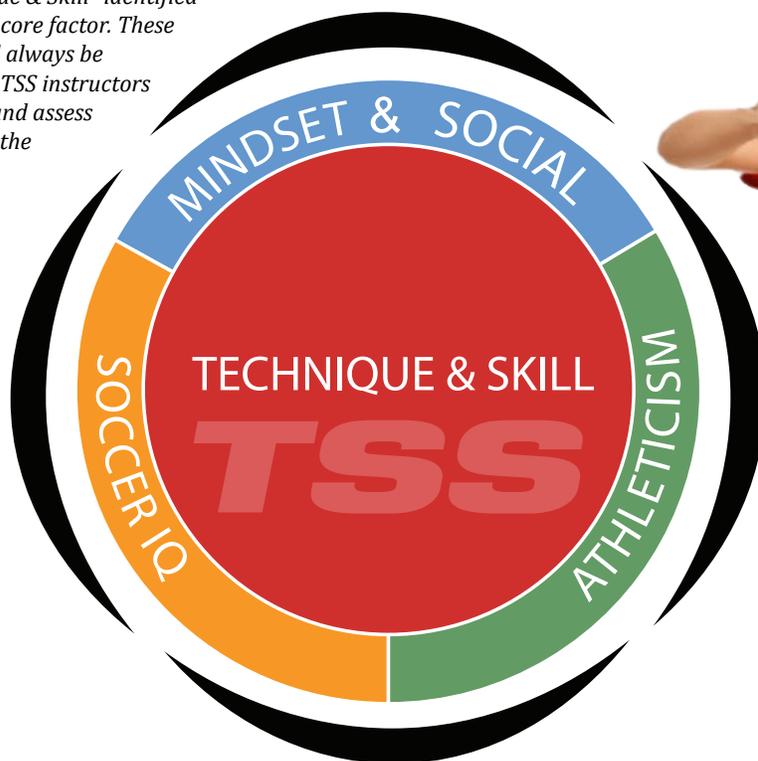
Ultimately the purpose of securing the ball is to deny the opposition the ball in order to create meaningful opportunities to attack forward and score goals.



4 FACTORS MODEL



TSS focusses on 4 key factors in developing young soccer players with "Technique & Skill" identified as the central core factor. These factors should always be considered as TSS instructors help develop and assess the players in the program.



TECHNIQUE & SKILL

This factor forms the core of the 4 factors. Technique & skill is simply the ability to master and apply the skills required in the game such as dribbling, passing and receiving, defending, finishing, etc. These skills must ultimately be demonstrated in the game environment under pressure. Without a high degree of technical proficiency, the other factors are of little use and the effectiveness of the player becomes marginal. Developing solid technique & skill is a constant pursuit.

SOCCER IQ

Ultimately the skills required in the game need to be infused with appropriate decision-making. *When do I dribble, when do I pass, where do I pass, where do I move?* These are just a few of the decisions continually presented to players. TSS refers to this factor as Soccer IQ. It's a key ingredient in becoming a complete player. This factor can be developed through instruction and simply from playing the game itself. It can also develop from regularly watching the game live or on TV as a student.

ATHLETICISM

Athleticism is a catch-all term used for a wide range of physical characteristics such as speed, agility, balance, flexibility, endurance, and strength. How a player moves is inextricably linked to many skill applications since the player's feet are used to manipulate the ball and not used only for getting around the playing surface. While some aspect of athleticism can be developed with proper movement instruction and strength training, other aspects are largely determined by genetics.

MINDSET & SOCIAL

Mindset & social is one of the most influential of the factors. This is the set of established attitudes or way of thinking that a player possesses. A player with a strong mindset develops faster, deals with pressure more easily, and ultimately ends up performing at a higher level. The social component represents the emotional skills and maturity required for a player to positively contribute to the team dynamic and develop the individual discipline and autonomy to succeed.



When breaking down the game of soccer to its most elemental objective, you ultimately arrive at a single and obvious purpose: to score more goals than the opposition. It sounds simple enough. But what is required to achieve that purpose with a high degree of efficiency? The one fundamental requirement of scoring goals is to have the ball. Simply put, a goal cannot be scored without having the ball (unless the opposition does you the favour of scoring on their own goal). If the opponent has the ball, there is no chance of scoring. Worse yet, if the opponent has the ball, they may score against your team. So having possession of the ball is a critical requirement of scoring goals - or put a different way, keeping the ball away from the opposition is a key skill. At TSS, we refer to that skill as *securing the ball*.

Of course, the other way to score goals at the younger ages is to simply prey on the technical deficiencies of the opposition by continually playing the ball forward and essentially giving the ball away close to the opponent's goal. The hope and belief is that the opponent will make a mistake in a dangerous area of the field resulting in a goal for your team. This approach definitely works when skill is in its infancy but it's a short term strategy to win at the youth level

with the long term cost of skill development. TSS does not subscribe to this approach. We accept that employing the approach of *securing the ball* is fraught with consequential mistakes and losses in the short term but we believe it's the approach that ultimately develops successful players. Development is a process, a long suffering one at times, but if we stay the course, it can deliver rich rewards. Those rewards come by way of players achieving a level of ability that would not otherwise be achieved.

A heavy concentration of dribbling and ball mastery needs to take place during the early years of development or these critical skills will never take root

SECURING THE BALL

There are two ways in which to *secure the ball*. The ball can be secured as a *group*, which is achieved primarily through passing and receiving, or the

ball can be secured as an *individual*, which is achieved primarily through dribbling. A fully developed team will secure the ball through a combination of both passing and dribbling.

At TSS, we believe that learning to secure the ball as an individual is the fundamental building block for player development. There are so many moments in the game when a pass cannot be made. It may only last a second, or two. During those moments, the player in possession must have the skill to retain the ball as an individual in order to evade the opponent, find a passing angle, or create a shot on goal.

Having the individual ability to evade or get beyond an opponent in a variety of different ways also allows players to achieve a high level of composure on the ball and ultimately better decision-making. A player can only make decisions within the boundaries of their technical ability. So it stands to reason that if a player has a bigger technical toolkit at their disposal, the breadth of decisions at their disposal will also expand.

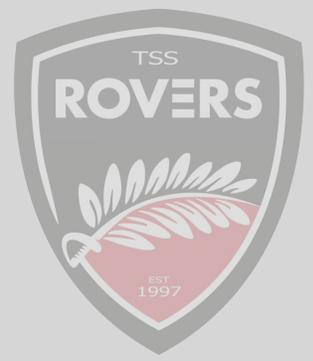
"I see mediocrity everywhere and a lack of inventiveness, and it all stems from an absence of individual skill. We've got kids playing football (soccer) not for performance reasons but to win matches in any way possible."

– John Cartwright (Ex-technical director of the FA school)



“The great fallacy is that the game is first and last about winning. It is nothing of the kind. The game is about glory, it is about doing things in style and with a flourish, about going out and beating the lot, not waiting for them to die of boredom.”

— Danny Blanchflower, former Tottenham Hotspur Captain



Too often, coaches fail to teach young players how to secure the ball as individuals and concentrate all efforts on securing the ball as a group. TSS believes this approach leads to incomplete players, ones who continually lose possession of the ball as the level of defensive pressure increases. Ultimately, the complete player is able to secure the ball both individually and as a group. However, the window of opportunity to master the skills required to secure the ball as an individual is small. A heavy concentration of dribbling and ball mastery needs to take place during the early years of development or these critical skills will never take root.

DRIBBLING & BALL MASTERY

It's important to make the distinction between evasive dribbling and invasive dribbling. Evasive dribbling is continually taking place during the

game. It's the subtle and not-so-subtle angle changes with the ball that allows players to escape pressure and secure the ball. Invasive dribbling, on the other hand, is the ability to beat players and get past them. In simple terms, evasive dribbling is the ability to “get away” from an opponent whereas invasive dribbling is the ability to “get beyond” an opponent. Invasive dribbling is an invaluable skill to possess since it can unbalance the opposition, but it does not have the same level of importance for every position.

PASSING & RECEIVING

Passing & receiving are critical skills in the game. They allow players to secure the ball as a group, which is ultimately the method of team success. But again, the effectiveness of passing & receiving is heavily reliant on the individual player's ability to master the ball and evade pressure in order to create passing angles.

DEFENDING

As we've identified, having the ball is a necessity in order to score goals. Defending is essentially the ability to prevent the opponent from advancing the ball and ultimately, from scoring goals. In doing so, the defending team is looking to re-secure the ball. While the skills required to defend are less technical than those required to secure the ball, they are nonetheless important skills to possess. Players must learn how to defend as individuals and as a group.

FINISHING PHASE

The ability to score goals as an individual through striking and finishing is an indispensable skill. So too is the ability to attack as a group through penetrating runs, crosses into the box, etc. Getting the ball in the opponent's goal is the ultimate objective of the game. It's the end product. Time needs to be spent on these vital skills but, as tempting as it may be, TSS believes that we cannot get there by excluding the foundation of learning to secure the ball.



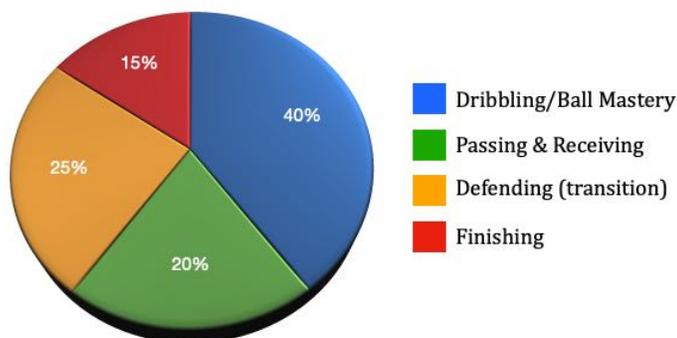
SOCCER AGE *Levels*



TSS has identified 4 different levels through which players will develop. In general, it takes a number of years to graduate from a level, assuming proper instruction is taking place. These levels are not necessarily correlated with specific chronological ages. The levels are in relation to a player's current technical and tactical abilities. We refer to this as "soccer age." That being said, it's without question that there's an ideal time through which to progress through these levels, not just from an optimal learning perspective but also if a player has aspirations to play at a high level. It's important for TSS to always be mindful of a player's soccer age in order to provide the most appropriate and effective development environment. We must also recognize that some players within the same group/team may take longer to progress in their soccer age due to mental and/or physiological maturation reasons. Conversely, some players may temporarily jump ahead for those same reasons.

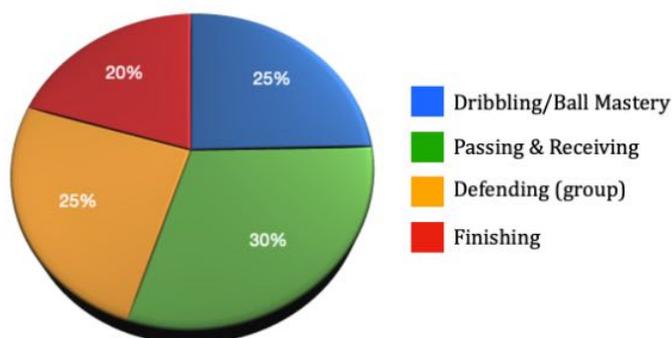
Level 1 - Foundation

At this level, players are in the early years of soccer, or they've been playing in environments without developing the required fundamental skills. During Level 1, the primary emphasis is on dribbling skills and ball mastery in order to develop a proficiency in securing the ball as an individual. The development environment should be one of creativity and enjoyment. Players must feel that it's safe to make mistakes while trying to develop these skills. It should be noted that once players get beyond age 13, it becomes increasingly difficult to acquire these fundamental skills. The earlier that players develop these skills, the better chance they have of playing high level soccer by age 18.



Level 2 - Discovery

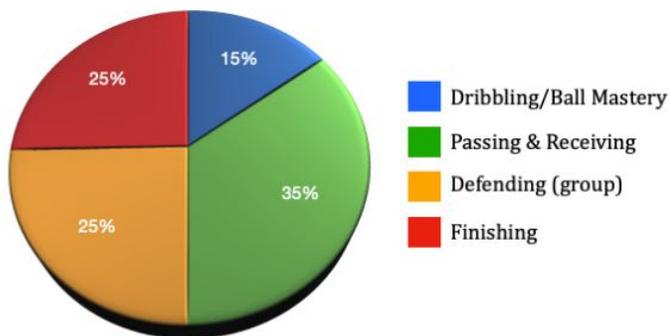
As players enter Level 2, they've now gained a much greater comfort on the ball. There's still a heavy concentration on dribbling and ball mastery but now more emphasis is placed on the ability to secure the ball as a group. This comes in the form of passing and receiving, understanding angles of support, movement off the ball, refining first touch, etc. Players are also asked to have a greater understanding of individual and group defending, as well as the finishing phase of scoring goals. The development environment continues to be one in which creativity and exploration is encouraged.





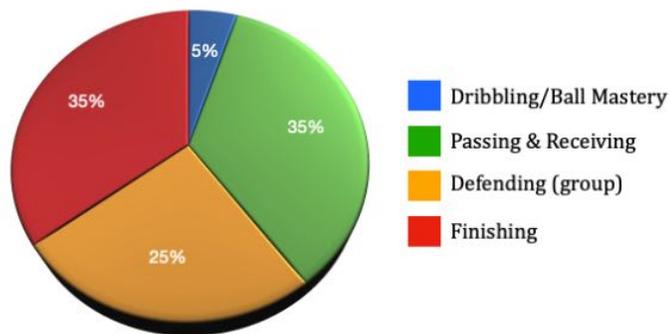
Level 3 - Competitive

By Level 3, players now have a stronger foundation of ability and, as such, can be exposed to a wider range of technical and tactical game components. The training approach is more balanced with greater emphasis on passing and receiving and less concentration on dribbling. Players are also given more responsibilities around defensive organization, and greater demands are placed on them with respect to work ethic and competitive performance.



Level 4 - Select

Level 4 is when players are pushed to perform at a high competitive level. The technical tools are in place to allow for a greater emphasis on different tactical strategies both in possession and out of possession. Passing and receiving, along with the Finishing Phase take up the majority of focus. Position-specific instruction is also taking place at this level, particularly for attacking players. The instructor places high demands on players in terms of fitness, competitive levels, and consistency of performance.



Below is a list of skills required for all TSS FC players as they progress through the program. It is by no means an exhaustive list but it forms the foundation of what's required. Each skill is measured in the context of the level at which the player currently sits. These skills are ultimately measured in the game environment - not simply in training. They are also listed as learning outcomes to which TSS instructors are held accountable.

DRIBBLING & BALL MASTERY

- ✓ **Evasive dribbling:** Demonstrates consistent ability to dribble dynamically and deceptively using skills such as *outside cuts, inside cuts, u-turns, hook turns, stop turns, and twist offs* in order to evade an opponent (both feet)
- ✓ **Invasive dribbling:** Demonstrates consistent ability to dribble dynamically and deceptively using fakes and changes of speed to beat an opponent
- ✓ **Changing Speed:** Demonstrate the ability to accelerate and decelerate as an act of deception
- ✓ **Body positioning:** Demonstrates consistent ability to get in between the ball and opponent to secure the ball
- ✓ **Running with the ball:** Demonstrates consistent ability to run with the ball at pace while keeping the ball secure
- ✓ **Dribbling on first touch:** Demonstrates consistent ability to dribble on first touch, away from pressure

PASSING & RECEIVING

- ✓ **Touch:** Demonstrates consistent ability to take a purposeful and secure first touch when receiving the ball on the ground or in the air (both feet)
- ✓ **Turning:** Demonstrates consistent ability to open up on back foot to face forward whenever possible or take a touch sideways with back to pressure (both feet)
- ✓ **Passing:** Demonstrates consistent ability to make timely, and precise passes into feet or into space with different parts of the foot (both feet)
- ✓ **Support:** Continually provides supporting angles to the ball whenever possible through speed of movement and verbally demanding the ball
- ✓ **Movement:** Continually moves off the ball quickly and dynamically to support the ball
- ✓ **Awareness:** Continually scans the field in order to take up appropriate positions to receive the ball

DEFENDING

- ✓ **Physicality:** Demonstrates consistent ability and willingness to physically re-secure the ball when required through tackling or proper body positioning around the ball

- ✓ **Slide tackling:** Demonstrates consistent ability and willingness to slide tackle when necessary
- ✓ **Heading:** Demonstrates consistent ability and willingness to head the ball when necessary in order to defend against the opposition's aerial attack (age appropriate)
- ✓ **Closing down:** Demonstrates consistent ability and willingness to quickly close down space as the 1st defender in order to stop the opposition from advancing the ball
- ✓ **Defensive cover:** Demonstrates consistent understanding and willingness to provide defensive cover whenever necessary
- ✓ **Awareness:** Continually scans the field in order to take up appropriate defensive positions and mark opponents when necessary
- ✓ **Anticipation:** Demonstrates consistent ability to read the play and anticipate/react to the next action (live in transition)
- ✓ **Work ethic:** Demonstrates a tireless work ethic by getting up and down the field at speed when defending and competing physically when required

FINISHING PHASE

- ✓ **Striking:** Demonstrates consistent ability to strike a ball on goal with power and/or precision with different parts of the foot (both feet)
- ✓ **Movement:** Demonstrates consistent ability and willingness to get forward beyond the ball to create attacking opportunities
- ✓ **Penetration:** Demonstrates consistent ability and willingness to play penetrating passes or make penetrating runs in behind the opposition's back line
- ✓ **Heading:** Demonstrates consistent ability and willingness to head the ball towards goal off corners and crosses (age appropriate)
- ✓ **Disguised Finishing (zero "cues"):** Demonstrates the ability to finish with different part of the body quickly and deceptively
- ✓ **Deceptive Movement:** Demonstrates ability to live in shadow spaces, and find blind spots (double movements, overlaps, underlaps)

At TSS we define athleticism simply as a player's physical capabilities. Similar to skill, the ability to use physical skills and capabilities can be improved through training. However, unlike skill, there is a more rigid ceiling when it comes to developing athleticism. Some individuals are gifted with certain physical attributes that propel their athletic superiority. These attributes include such elements as fast twitch muscle fibers, a lean physique, physical strength, or a natural efficiency with respect to cardiovascular endurance. Other individuals without some or all of these attributes must work hard to overcome genetic limitations. It's also vital for these individuals to excel in the other factors such as technique & skill, soccer IQ, and mindset in order to counteract their athletic limitations.

PHYSICAL LITERACY

Another contributor to overall athleticism is *physical literacy*. This refers to a player's ability to move efficiently and effectively. Physical literacy is heavily reliant on coordination and muscle memory. Young players must learn how to move and control their body. This is an even greater necessity in soccer than other hand-eye coordination sports. For example, in a sport like basketball, a player needs to move efficiently around the playing surface in order to be an effective player. However, that movement efficiency does not directly affect a player's ability to catch and throw the ball. Soccer, on the other hand, is a sport that essentially involves catching and

...soccer players cannot control the ball if they cannot control their bodies

throwing the ball with one's feet. Therefore, limitations in physical literacy doesn't simply impede a player's ability to move around the playing surface, it impedes a player's ability to play the game. More plainly put, soccer players cannot control the ball if they cannot control their bodies.

It takes time and repetition to develop physical literacy. The earlier a child begins to engage in dynamic physical activities the better. Playing other sports can also help in gaining a wider range of physical literacy.

6 COMPONENTS OF ATHLETICISM

TSS identifies 6 main components of athleticism required for soccer: balance, strength, agility, speed, endurance, and flexibility. All 6 of these components carry equal importance and should be demonstrated in harmony.

Balance - the ability to remain stable during movement. This is magnified in soccer as many of the skills require players to balance on one foot while under pressure.

Strength - the ability to produce force. Similar to balance, strength is required when holding defenders off while shielding the ball, or pushing defenders away as a player escapes pressure. Strength is also required for striking a ball as a player is required to generate foot/leg force on the ball.

Speed - the ability to move rapidly. Speed is advantageous any time there is an opportunity or need for a player to run in a straight line. However, instructors need to ensure that fast players don't neglect their skill development since speed can often mask technical deficiencies.

Agility - the ability to move sharply and accurately in different directions. Agility is particularly important when trying to execute dribbling skills or defending against dynamic players.

Endurance - the ability to resist fatigue. This is a critical athletic component in the game. At the professional level, players will run anywhere from 9-14km over the course of 90 minutes.

Flexibility - the ability to achieve large ranges of motion at the joints. This is important for a variety of soccer skills such as passing and receiving where a player must open up at the hip and the ankle so the foot is perpendicular to the ball. Flexible ankle joints are also vital for executing fundamental evasive dribbling skills such as the inside and outside cut.



Soccer intelligence is primarily made up of "anticipation" and "decision making" skills. *Anticipation* necessitates that players read the game and perceive ahead of the action what opponents and teammates are likely to do in any particular situation. *Decision making* necessitates that players select and execute an action based on the current circumstances on the field of play. Even a very young player with a ball at their feet begins this process, trying to keep the ball while one of their parents attempts to dispossess them of the "toy." This is essentially how we define soccer intelligence.

THE HOW COMES FIRST

It's important for instructors to first help players develop the ability to execute skills before worrying excessively about the *where* and *when*. For example, focussing entirely on *where* and *when* to chip a ball, matters little if the player does not know *how* to chip a ball. In the early stages of development, there needs to be latitude given to players regarding *when* and *where* skills are executed and more encouragement given for actually executing those skills.

VISION AND AWARENESS

An important emphasis at TSS is the need for players to scan their surroundings repeatedly - "head on a swivel" - looking around the pitch at the ball, the movements of opponents and teammates, and hunting for areas of space that can be exploited or exposed. Just like manipulating the ball to practice technique & skill, we must

If the ball is constantly turning over, players are more apt to see chaos rather than patterns in the game

continually demand that players pay attention to their surroundings. Devising exercises that require a player's eyes to constantly scan the environment will help increase awareness and ultimately soccer intelligence.

FAMILIARITY AND PATTERNS

Players have information entering their visual system continuously throughout a match or training session. This information varies in its importance. We need to help players to better recognize important information, particularly as it relates to cues from the movements of other players, their body positions during specific actions, and patterns that occur during play. Soccer intelligent players are able to identify familiarity through patterns in play as sequences unfold such as 2v1 situations, triangles of support, gaps between defenders, etc. The ability to identify those familiarities enables players to anticipate the likely outcome of events ahead of time.

SECURE THE BALL - SEE THE GAME

Seeing familiarities through patterns in the game is more easily achieved by securing the ball. If the ball is constantly turning over, players are more apt to see chaos rather than patterns in the game. Similarly, if players

are continually fighting with the ball to control it, chances are their eyes will be down staring at the ball, unable to see the game unfolding before them.

WATCH THE GAME

Soccer IQ also develops from being an 'active observer' of the game. Attending live matches and watching the game on TV helps present visual cues of creative and thoughtful performance that players then look to emulate.

THE INTELLIGENT PLAYER

We believe that a player with a greater understanding and appreciation of the game will ultimately enjoy the game more and put more practice time into improving themselves. These players will dedicate time to actively observing the game, which will only accelerate their learning. We want a TSS player to see football as the beautiful game, enjoying the artistry and the elegance that aesthetically pleasing soccer performance brings.





Attitude is everything. Mindset | Social, next to technical skill acquisition, is the most important factor in becoming a complete player. Mindset can best be described as the set of established attitudes or way of thinking that a player possesses. A player with a strong mindset develops faster, deals with pressure more easily, and ultimately ends up performing at a higher level. Essentially, mindset is the fuel that allows the other factors of skill, athleticism, and soccer IQ to be utilized to maximum effect.

ABILITY = CONFIDENCE

Technique & skill also feeds mindset. As players increase their ability on the ball, their confidence grows. While praise and encouragement can help a young player gain some confidence, that type of boost in confidence is fleeting at best. True lasting confidence comes from increasing one's ability.

Technique & skill sits at the very core of TSS teaching because, not only is it vital for player effectiveness, it provides a platform for young players to easily identify with improvement. As we enhance our players' skill levels, we are directly reinforcing their psychological metal. We are also helping them become better students. As skill noticeably improves, the amount of

TSS players must be comfortable being uncomfortable for that is the path to development

resistance to learning new skills in the future diminishes.

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL

Mindset also weaves into the social/emotional component. Players must learn how to integrate comfortably into the group dynamic in order to thrive. Players must also develop the discipline and emotional maturity required to achieve success. With this in mind, TSS believes that in order to make a true impact on a player, we need to

understand and respect the person first. Know your audience,

get to know the player and their parent(s), their other interests, family make up, etc. Social influences are far too often an under-estimated factor in a young player's development. The influence of life at home, school, community and at the soccer club must be always considered.

Playing soccer can help children learn many life skills such as co-operation, teamwork, discipline, and communication. Friendships are also some of the lasting benefits of joining a team.

To allow these social skills to develop, players should be afforded a safe and supportive environment while learning the game

GRIT & TENACITY

What does it mean to be have grit and tenacity in the game? Tenacity is exhibited when players are willing to do whatever it takes to train and play to the best of their ability, no matter what the score, no matter what the weather, no matter what the fatigue. It's someone who does not easily succumb to the feelings of self-doubt, embarrassment, or indifference.

But these are not simply character traits on the field of play. They also manifest in the form of perseverance in the face of adversity. Players will undoubtedly confront obstacles such as injuries, loss of form, getting dropped from the line-up, difficult teammates, conflicts with coaches or parents. The list goes on. It's not the absence of obstacles that will determine success but rather how those inevitable obstacles are faced.

"Tenacity is the most underrated quality in life. Tenacity is the common thing for every successful person in life. Maintain my motivation to go from A to B, to keep your focus on that target without any weakening, that is called tenacity, stamina in your motivation"

– Arsène Wenger



In order to master any job, first and foremost, one must understand the role of the position. The role of the coach is to teach. This is why we refer to coaches at TSS as “instructors.” At the end of the season, if the players have better individual ability (as described in Learning Outcomes) and a better understanding of the game than the mandate of the instructor has been met. The role is not to devise ways to win soccer matches at the expense of the players’ development or their enjoyment. As difficult as that may be at times, this is perhaps the most important factor in the success of the instructor. Too often there is a disconnect between messages and methods applied in training and those applied in games. The instructor’s job is to build congruency between the two.

SHAPING THE PLAYER

It’s important to recognize the challenges of teaching players who may have spent a number of years with little instruction or, worse yet, misguided instruction that has led to poor habits and false understandings of the game. In this environment, coaching at the youth level is much more than just running players through a series of drills and activities. It’s unrealistic to expect young players

An instructor’s job is to try to shape a player’s behaviour on the field, and in turn, shape their skills and understanding of the game

to mimic what is done in training alone, particularly players who come from a background that did not always ingrain proper habits. The instructor’s job is to try to shape a player’s behaviour on the field and, in turn, shape their skills and understanding of the game. This takes persistence and, above all, vigilance. Think of it as the parent trying to instill manners in a young child. The parent is continually reminding the child to say “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me.” It takes persistence. This is much easier with younger players because they’re essentially a blank canvas. Older players, on the other hand, are more resistant to change. Their canvas has many layers on it already. The instructor’s job is to peel off those old layers and paint a new picture. Even at this point, the canvas may not take to the new paint. It may need a number of applications over and over again. Again, it takes perseverance and vigilance.

DEMONSTRATION

Given that technique & skill is the cornerstone of TSS player development, it’s vital for the instructor to continually demonstrate these skills. Young players need a visual of these activities, broken down step by step. The mechanics of these skills have to be perfected while progressively adding degrees of pressure. Above all, these skills have to be executed in the game environment. This is never easy for young players when learning new skills. Instructors need to find creative ways to encourage players to attempt these skills in game situations. The instructor should also expose the players to the professional game in order to paint pictures of various techniques and tactical sequences.

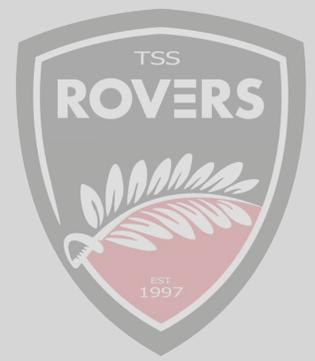
INSTRUCTOR’S ROLE

As instructors, we are in a significant position of influence with our players. It’s important to give consideration to the type of role model we are demonstrating. Instructors should always strive to create a positive, respectful environment. How we treat our players is crucial in ensuring how these children grow as soccer players and as people



“If the players don’t understand the message, it is the coach’s problem.”

– Pep Guardiola, manager of Manchester City FC



COMMUNICATION

Every teacher must be an effective communicator. A communicator must be clear and concise when delivering information, particularly when it’s feedback to a player/parent. Saying things such as *“I need more from you”* is non-specific and vague. Young players need specific feedback such as *“Jennifer, when you receive the ball, you have a tendency to stop the ball dead. I’d really like you to try and focus on taking your touch in a direction.”* Ensure that players have clear direction and clear measurables. Without concise and targeted communication, the players will have difficulty understanding what is being asked of them. This is particularly important when providing critical feedback.

EDUCATING THE PARENT

In order to optimize the learning environment for the player, the parent must be on side and, ultimately, must trust the process. The parent must be buying into the same methodology and ultimately be measuring the same things as the instructor. It’s the role of the instructor to help educate the parent. This can be done by emailing post-game reviews, having player/parent interviews, or sharing articles that reinforce the methodology at work.

Most parents are only exposed to the soccer that takes place in the local community. Often when the ball starts going backwards at TSS, the confusion begins. Many parents erroneously believe that the job of the “coach” is to win. Instructors must help them in

understanding otherwise. By getting the parent to re-focus on the technical and tactical evolution of their child, a key ally can be gained. The parent, in turn, can reinforce the instructor’s messages, which will only increase that player’s development.

LEADERSHIP

Ultimately an instructor must be a leader. It’s much more than just running players through a series of exercises. An instructor has to understand each player in relation to the 4 factors of technique & skill, soccer IQ, athleticism, and mindset/social. The instructor also has to understand the emotional needs of the player in relation to their age and gender. In the end, the player has to trust that the instructor continually has their best interests at heart.



Culture is a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization. Sport organizations and championship teams are often dissected by those seeking to discover the secret ingredients behind people and organizations that consistently deliver excellence. What is imminently clear is that a strong organizational culture is the foundation for success.

The truth is that culture is very easy to write down. The difficulty lies in executing consistently, in living and breathing it every day.

MAKE A DENT

At TSS, we aspire to make a dent in the Canadian soccer landscape, not simply by helping develop skillful and intelligent players but by offering a positive, enjoyable sport environment where young players can grow and learn without fear or retribution. We will do this through the way we exist, by the way we show up for our players and teams, by the way we educate our families and by the way we consistently deliver on our mission. This culture needs to be cultivated by the entire organization, including players, parents, and staff. This begins by instructors continually breeding habits, expectations, and mindsets into the players who put on a TSS jersey.

QUALITY INSTRUCTION

TSS commits to quality instruction at every session, every game, and every teaching moment.

Instructors must always put the development of the individual player at the forefront of every decision and every action. There is a simple question for every instructor to repeatedly ask: *how can TSS serve this player rather than how can this player serve TSS.*

BE BRAVE

TSS must push its players to be brave. This is what's required to develop news skills, to test them out in game situations, and to embrace the necessary failure that accompanies that development. Players must wear that bravery like a badge of honour. While a game may have been lost, the player should still be brimming with pride for the moments of technical brilliance they demonstrated.

EMBRACE RISK

TSS wants its players to relish every time the opposition yells "pressure" for that's an opportunity to test your metal. We want our parent group to applaud every time the players play out of the back under high pressure, and we want them to encourage the players to try again when it fails. We want players to go 1v1 when isolating defenders and to accept that the ball may be lost repeatedly when taking that risk. We want the players on the field to applaud one another for taking those risks. That's the culture that must be cultivated.

[TSS will offer] a positive, enjoyable sport environment where players can grow and learn without fear of failure or retribution

BE COMPETITIVE

Healthy competition must also be bred into the culture at TSS. That competition should be built into every training session so players continually push each other to be better. Instructors need to devise creative ways to breed that level of competition beyond simply the number of goals scored. This competition should also revolve around skill application and rewarding those who dare to fail.

OWN IT

Above all, players must learn to take ownership of their development. Players must regularly watch the professional game as part of developing their soccer IQ. They must come to training early to work alone on various aspects of their game. In the end, players have to understand that pursuing excellence requires dedication and sacrifice. But most importantly TSS must recognize and praise their progress when that sacrifice bears fruit. This is the culture that will ultimately propel players beyond their expectations.

