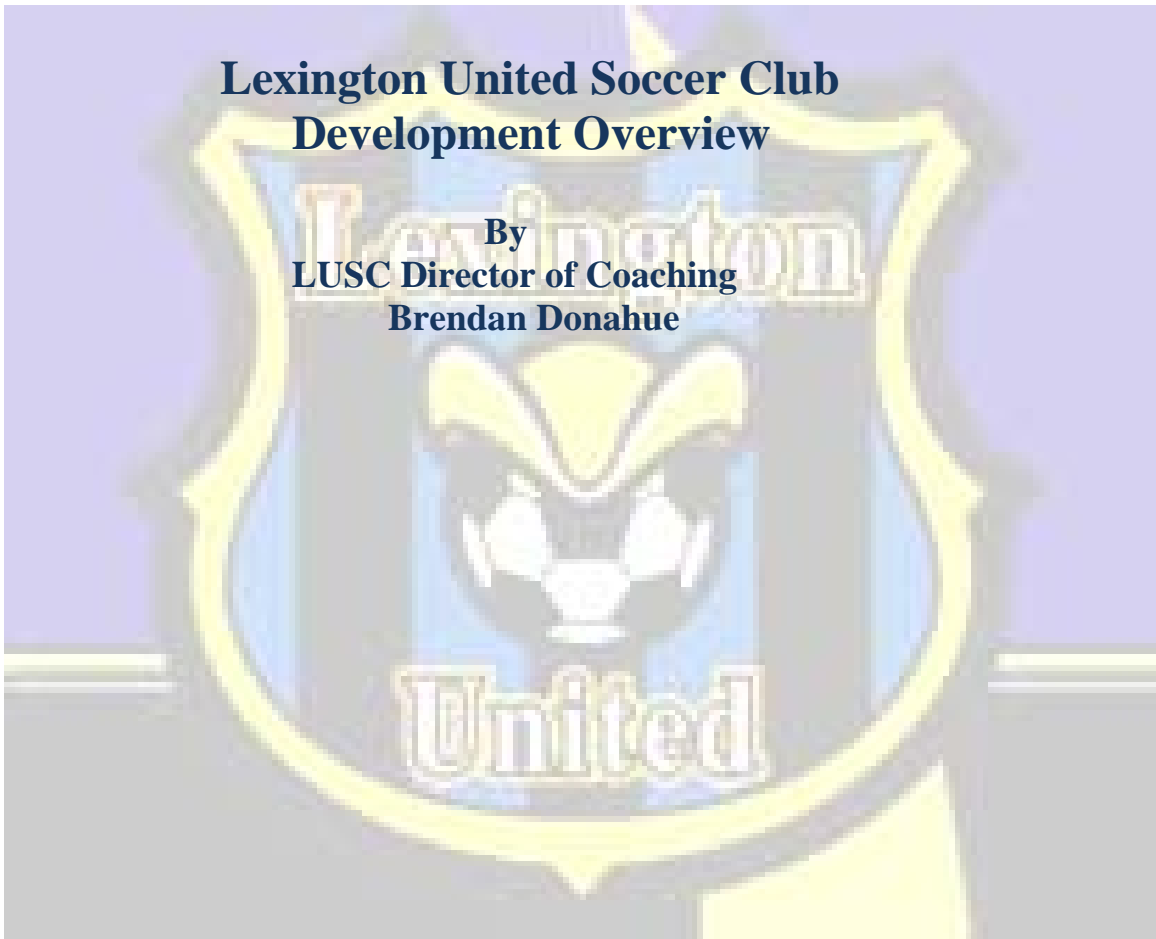


**Lexington United Soccer Club
Development Overview**

**By
LUSC Director of Coaching
Brendan Donahue**



The purpose of this overview is to provide coaches within Lexington United a general idea of how each step in a player's development path ties into the other age groups of the club. It is the desire of LUSC to create a proper learning environment for the game of soccer which is both fun and develops a proficient skill set. The values of fair play and sportsmanship are ones we hope to instill in all of our participants.

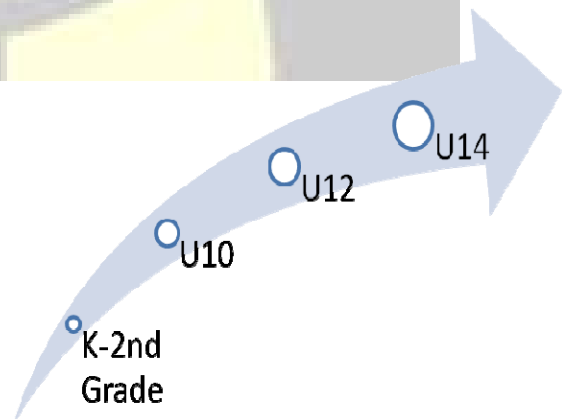
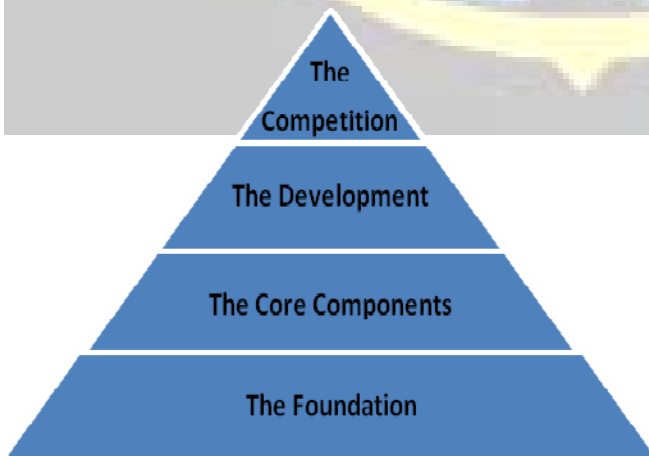
Lexington United is a club for everyone no matter what their ability or interest level in the game of soccer. We are a program dedicated to enjoyment and development. However, if we do our job of developing players properly at the youngest ages, winning games, and possibly championships, will take care of itself. Players develop at different rates and mature at different times. We would be doing the club, and its' individuals, a disservice if we sacrificed the development of any child in an effort to win championships.



One guiding principle at each stage is that the players develop proficient skills through fun and structured activities. The game should remain enjoyable no matter what the level of the player, or what the stage in the development process. The game is about the players, not the coaches. It is our job as coaches to ensure that we help facilitate the players' learning and enjoyment of the game of soccer.

Facilitating

“The game is the teacher” is a phrase which we constantly hear. In practical terms, this maxim means that the soccer coach organizes conditioned games to improve players. The kind of conditions the coach puts on the games will help teach the players. This process is called facilitating learning.



The Foundation Stage: K through 2nd Grade

First thing first: Learning advanced soccer techniques and tactics is completely unimportant at this age level. We want the players' first experience to the game to involve lots of touches on the ball, limited instruction, and plenty of fun! Kicking the ball in a given direction, running and moving the ball with their feet, stopping the ball without using their hands, shooting at the goal, and blocking shots. These are the basic elements of soccer that we aim to teach children as we introduce them to the game of soccer. The major focus of the activities will be for all players to develop a comfort level and coordination with the ball. As a player "graduates" from the K through 2nd grade program, they should have the ability to dribble the ball with different speeds and in different directions and also have a basic understanding of small group teamwork. It is our hope that all players have the ability and desire to "take a player on".

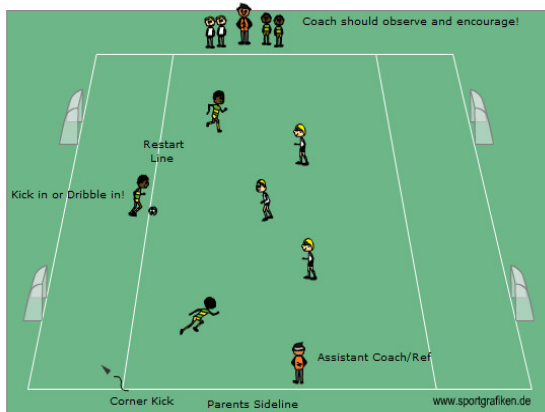
Although the soccer ball will be the main focus of our training, we aim to enhance the child's overall learning experience by:

- interacting comfortably with one's peers
- dealing with both victory and defeat
- respecting teammates and opponents
- introducing, accepting and obeying the rules of the game

In addition, your child can:

- develop his/her own style of handling the ball
- learn how to move in a variety of situations
- improve his/her coordination
- have fun playing the game of soccer and being part of a team

LUSC follows US Soccer's Recommendation of a dual field game format in the K-2nd grade program. This format helps maximize touches and allows for greater decision making opportunities for all players involved in the program. In 1st and 2nd grade, the game format is 3v3 attack two goals, defend two goals in an effort to naturally create more spacing and lateral play through the game itself. The K-2nd grade curriculum is created by LUSC Director of Coaching, Brendan Donahue, with strong influence from Horst Wein and various European Coaching Schools.



Why 3v3 to 4 Goals? The 3v3 to 4 goals format is one of the best exercises for players to learn to "read the game" and make decisions without coaches instructing them on what to do. This is consistent with the LUSC approach that the game is the greatest teacher.

In 3v3 the defense cannot defend both goals equally. This should, in time, teach

the players to recognize the 2v1 situation and which goal is the best one to attack.

Basic Rules:

- All restarts are done with a dribble in or a kick in.
- After a goal is scored, ask the scoring team to return to their half of the field.
- When the ball goes out over the end-line, the ball is re-entered from the restart line (pictured above).
- Coaches should police (ref) the game to ensure that it is safe, but it is best if they remain 2 to 3 yards from the sideline. No need to run up and down the field with the players.

The Core Components Stage: U10

This is a critical time in the player development process. It is important to not over coach the player, but at the same time instill proper technique during practice sessions. A typical training session should provide an opportunity for technical work, small sided games that promote game intelligence, and free play.



Technique: Technical repetition is the absolute top priority at the U10 level! It is much easier for children to learn proper technique at a young age than it is to break bad habits when they are older.

Areas that need to be addressed repeatedly over the course of the season:

Proper Inside of the foot passing must be developed.

1. Toe Up
2. Ankle Locked
3. Placement foot facing your partner
4. Hips squared to the target you are playing into
5. Strike the center of the ball and follow through

Receiving the Ball properly is vital for a player to become successful in other aspects of the game. Can we develop a clean **“first touch”**?

1. Get in the path of the ball
2. Remain soft on your feet, not flat footed
3. Don't “trap” or “stop” the ball, instead “prepare it” away from your body so you can play the ball on your next touch
4. Can we take the ball in a different direction than it came from?
5. Can we receive the ball “side on” to open up the field?
6. Can we get our head up after the first touch and locate a teammate?
7. Can we “take a look” prior to the ball’s arrival to scan our surroundings?

Note: Focus should begin with the ball on the ground and receiving with the inside of the foot. The inside of the foot provides the largest surface and players will have the greatest success controlling the ball in this fashion (technique is the same as when passing, but instead of striking the ball you try to cushion it as it arrives). Once they've become comfortable with this manner of reception you can begin to ask players to use the **outside of the foot**.

1. Stay faced up to the direction the ball is arriving from, don't turn you body sideways
2. Point toe down
3. Turn foot slightly inward
4. Meet the ball between its central point and one of its sides (slightly off-center). This will allow you to direct it in the direction you want to go.

Tactics: Very basic concepts should be introduced, but never at the expense of neglecting technique. Tactics involve the decisions players are faced with throughout the game. At the U10 level we should not address team tactics, but focus on:

1. Individual Tactics
 - 1 v 1 Offensively (run at the defender, attack the front foot, can you turn the defender)
 - 1 v 1 Defensively (proper body positioning, don't cross feet, angle of approach, speed of approach)
2. Small Group Tactics

Attacking:

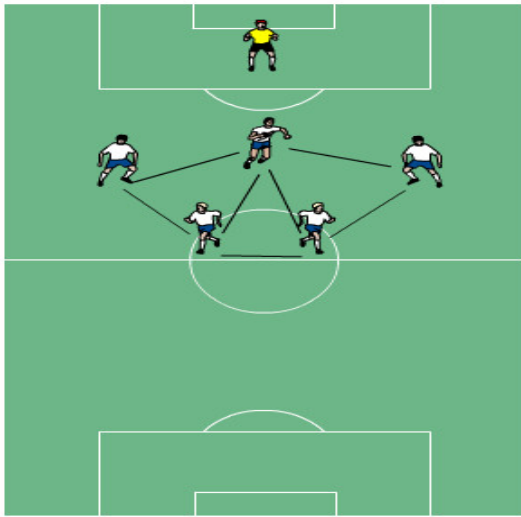
- Angles of Support (always try to provide the player on the ball with at least two options)
- Proper spacing (don't crowd the player on ball)
- Who's stretching the field? Depth
- Who's creating the width? Lateral support

Defensive:

- Pressure and Cover
<http://lexingtonunited.org/exercises/2v2%20Defending%20Pressure%20Cover.pdf>
- When to challenge, when to be patient

Most tactical concepts should be introduced using the **“Discovery Method”**. This method calls for the coach to select age appropriate exercises for his/her players, manipulating the activities in a way that the players find solutions to the problems they are confronted with without the coach directly giving them the answers. The coach should observe each activity closely and formulate questions. These questions should steer the player to the proper solutions on their own. Questions should demand that the players think and should not be of the yes or no variety.

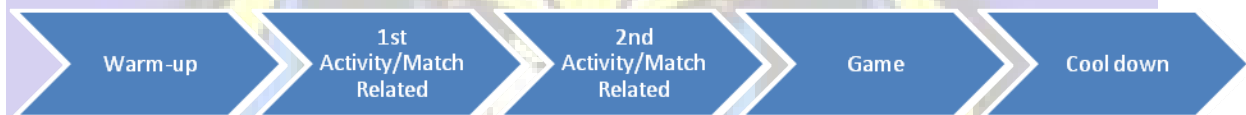
Recommended System of Play: K-3-2



Reasons one might choose to play this system:

- You have excellent coverage at the back while also having good numbers to control the middle of the field.
 - If you choose to align your team in this fashion, you should encourage the flank players at the back to “attack the space” in front of them. When this happens, you should ask the other two players to adjust their positioning to cover the space that was vacated.
- Having the additional player begin at the back is generally more comfortable for young players since they can see more of the field, and the play develops in front of them. If you start players higher (K-2-3) up the field, the front players will spend a lot of the game facing their own goal

The Development Stage U12: (a typical practice structure)



Warm-Up Activities should involve one of the following:

1. One Ball per player (focus: dribbling)
2. One Ball per two players (focus: basic technique of passing & receiving)
3. One Ball per 3 or 4 players (focus: passing & receiving, movement off the ball)
4. Introduction to Team Warm-ups (2 or 3 balls for the entire group).

Match Related (two exercises): The Coach should choose a couple of activities that will allow players to develop their technical skills while under an appropriate degree of pressure (4v1, 3v1, 2v1, 2v2, 1v1). There may be some tactical elements in these activities, but the coach should allow the player to learn these concepts through the game and not through long instructions and lectures. Players will begin to show a much greater sense of spacing and the advantages of moving off of the ball.

The concept of **transition** should be introduced and coached. How do we react when we lose possession of the ball? Do we drop our head or do we try to get immediate pressure to win it back? What do we do when we gain possession? Do we look to go forward quickly if the opportunity presents itself? Most successful teams excel in transition.

The Game: Each practice should conclude with an extended period of free play. Coach may stop to make a few brief coaching points, but should spend the vast amount of time

observing to see whether the players are applying the chosen topic of that day's practice to the game. *Remember that the more numbers (players) you add to the final game, the more confusing it is on the players. They also will receive fewer touches on the ball.*

Ex. 4v4 is easier to choose the best passing option than an 8v8 game.

Goals to Accomplish for U12 coaches

Technique: Technical repetition is still a top priority at the U12 level! It is much easier for children to learn proper technique at a young age than it is to break bad habits when they are older.

Areas that need to be addressed repeatedly over the course of the season:

Proper Instep Drive must be developed.

1. Toe Down
2. Ankle Locked
3. Placement foot facing your partner
4. Hips squared to the target you are playing into
5. Strike the center of the ball and follow through. Can we land on our shooting foot?
6. Head should remain steady

Tactics: Small group concepts should be introduced and coached. Coach should now place players in situations where they are forced to make decisions during practice that they will be confronted with during their games. This should happen during the Match Related portion of training. At the U12 level we should not overemphasize team tactics, but focus on:

1. Individual Tactics
 - 1 v 1 Offensively
 - 1 v 1 Defensively
2. Small Group Tactics (very important)

Attacking:

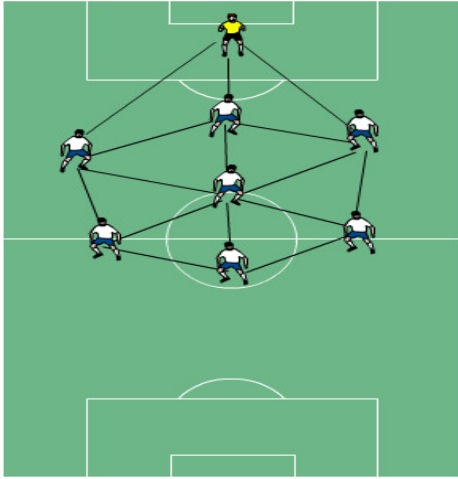
- Angles of Support (2nd attacker)
- Proper spacing
- Who's stretching the field? Depth (3rd attacker)
- Who's creating the width? Lateral support (2nd and 3rd attackers)
- Can we begin to combine between the lines (Forward/Midfield/Defense)

Defensive:

- Pressure, Cover and Balance
- When to challenge, when to be patient
- Can we pinch and remain compact as a group?

Coach should continue to introduce tactics using the **“Discovery Method”**.

U12 Recommended System of Play: K-3-1-3



Reasons one might choose to play this system:

- There is a strong balance between attacking and defending with an emphasis on transition and flank play.
- The team is balanced in a manner that you are rewarded for “switching the field” or “changing the point of attack” since there is excellent coverage along the flanks.
- Players at the back should have 2 to 3 forward options to play into at all times. This helps instill the habit of looking early for the “deep option”. Looking forward should be the first look for all players since a single pass can eliminate more defenders.
- Attacking patterns such as the overlap and up-back-through are easily recognizable in this system.
- Coach can easily alter the system to a K-3-3-1 while defending to provide for more compactness and numbers behind the ball.

The Competition Stage: U14

This is the final stage in the development plan. The game is now at the 11v11 level and possesses many challenges to both player and coach. Coaches should continue to run training in a structured way (simple to complex) as well as consider grouping players together during training that will be playing near one another on game day.

Helping players understand their roles in the various moments of the game becomes important to the team’s success.

Moments of the Game



Warm-up: I prefer to run at least one group warm-up out of every two practices. When choosing to run a full-team warm-up, a coach will be sacrificing the number of touches a player receives, but will be enhancing the players’ ability to see a larger scope of the field and understand the value of combining with teammates.

Match Related: The Coach should continue to choose a couple of activities that will allow players to develop their technical skills while under an appropriate degree of pressure (6v4, 4v2, 3v1, 2v1, 2v2, 1v1). There should be some tactical elements in these

activities, but the coach should allow for the player to learn these concepts through the game and not through long instructions and lectures (Discovery Method). Obviously, there will be moments where the coach needs to step in to make corrections, but it's important to keep the commentary clear and concise.

U14 Players will begin to show a much greater sense of spacing and understand the advantages of moving off of the ball. It will be important that players can solve problems and see options over a greater distance. Can we train our players to look for the deepest option early, and if it's not "on" play underneath to a safer option.

Transition should be an integral part of your practice. How do we react when we lose possession of the ball? Do we drop our head or do we try to get immediate pressure to win it back? What do we do when we gain possession? Do we look to go forward quickly if the opportunity presents itself? Most successful teams excel in transition.

The Game: Each practice should conclude with an extended period of free play. The Coach may stop to make a few brief coaching points, but should spend the vast amount of time observing to see whether the players are applying the chosen topic of that day's practice to the game.

Remember that the more numbers (players) you add to the final game, the more confusing it is on the players. They also will receive fewer touches on the ball.

Ex. 7v7 is easier to choose the best passing option than an 11v11 game.

Tactics: Small group concepts should be reinforced and coached. The Coach should now place players in situations where they are forced to make decisions during practice that they will be confronted with during their games. At the U14 level we should not overemphasize team tactics, but we should introduce general concepts:

1. Individual Tactics
 - 1 v 1 Offensive
 - 1 v 1 Defensive
2. Small Group Tactics (very important)

Attacking:

- Angles of support (2nd attacker)
- Proper spacing
- Who's stretching the field? Depth (3rd attacker)
- Who's creating the width? Lateral support? (2nd and 3rd attackers)
- Can we begin to combine between the lines? (Forward/Midfield/Defense)

Defensively:

- Pressure, Cover and Balance
- When to challenge, when to be patient

Can we pinch and remain compact as a group?

3. Team Tactics

Attacking:

Can we create triangles throughout the field?

Do we play through the midfield or long into our forward and transition to support?

Do we try to establish the width or do we try to control the middle of the field?

Defending:

Where do we start to defend?

Do we press in certain areas of the field or do we fall back when we lose possession?

Movement & Spacing between lines (Forward/Midfield/Back)

U14 Recommended System of Play: K-4-3-3

The 4-3-3 system: Inverted Triangle in the Midfield



Reasons one might choose to play this system:

- Four players at the back will keep the team protected when the opposition is in possession.
- When in possession four at the back also allows any one of the four defenders to step up to support the attack while still having three players remain in defensive roles to protect against the counter attack on loss of possession.
- Having three central midfielders that move in a triangular

formation can often outnumber a four person midfield at the point of attack (wherever the ball is).

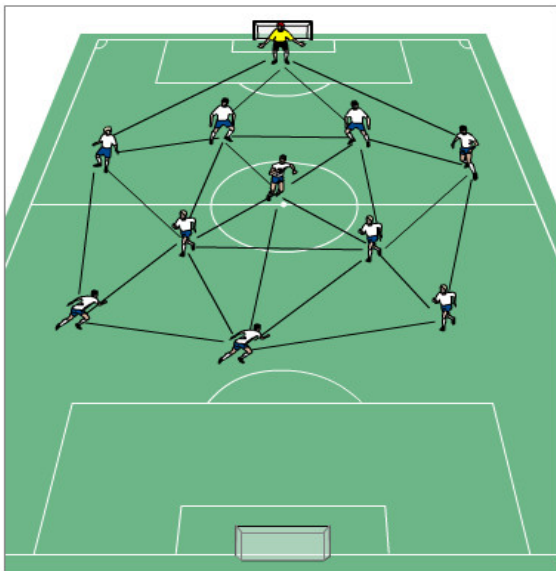
- Having three players in forward positions allows your team to disrupt the opposition's ability to build up from the back while at the same time giving your defenders and midfielders more forward options to play into when they are in possession.

Note: To play in the 4-3-3 the team must be disciplined and the midfield players must possess not only mobility, but a good tactical sense. It is important that all three midfield players have a solid understanding of one another's movements and possess not only the technical ability to play in tight spaces, but also have the technical ability to serve the ball over distance to change the point of attack.



If you break the 4-3-3, with the inverted triangle in the midfield, into two blocks of five, you'll notice that the system provides you with an equal balance of players in attacking and defending positions.

One of the key players, arguably THE key player, in this system of play is the defensive central midfielder or "holding midfielder". This player must remain central and deny penetrating passes into the opposition's central forwards. He is the person most responsible for protecting the team against a quick counter-attack.



The 4-3-3 provides numerous triangles for your players to play in. It is much simpler for players at all levels to see the game in small group situations instead of viewing the larger 11 vs. 11 game which can be overwhelming. By placing players in triangles they have opportunities to play both forward and backward. You also reduce the amount of lateral play that you often see in the 4-4-2 system. Although lateral play can often provide a greater amount of possession, it can lead to too many square balls. Square passes are often the most dangerous passes to make since upon interception both the

passer and intended receiver are easily eliminated as defending options. Two final benefits of the 4-3-3 system is that it generally provides more penetration of the opposition, since you are playing more players in forward positions, and in turn more opportunities to get into the box. After all that is where goals are scored!

Final Thoughts: *Remember there is no correct system of play! No system can make up for a lack of technical ability. We, coaches, must always reinforce proper technique and age appropriate tactics throughout our training. Players with a poor foundation, who lack the core components of the game will, be limited in their development and frustrated by competition no matter what system a coach chooses if they haven't been provided with the basic skill set to carry out the demands of the game.*

I hope you find the LUSC Development Overview a useful guideline for your coaching.