

Player's Guide

Introduction

Hi Kids,

Welcome to the world's favorite game! You might have been playing soccer for a while now or you may be new to the sport. People like you are playing soccer all across the USA and the world. US Youth Soccer provides for you here some guides and tips on how to play the game.

It has been said that soccer is a simple game, but those of us who play the game know that it can be quite challenging. What you do on and off the field will affect how well you play. Both being a good player on your own and being a good teammate are important. Respecting your opponents, teammates, referees, coaches, club and the game is crucial to your enjoyment. Demonstrating fair play will earn you respect from your teammates and opponents.

In this player's guide, Coach John Thomas and Coach Sam Snow give you the "how to" on these points and more. The player's guide is a quick, fun overview of the game, covering everything on an off the field, including training, adult expectations and good game day routines. Use it as a resource to help you become a better player and teammate.

It's time for the kickoff...good luck!

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1.

It's a Player's Game

Soccer, unlike some other team sports, is centered on the player. In some sports, the game stops often and the coach tells the players what to do next. In soccer, the game stops rarely and the players must decide what to do next themselves. You need to be aware in a soccer game and think for yourself. The player who can make a difference in a match is a soccer savvy player. This means you need to not only learn the skills of the game, but also the rules and strategies. To learn the rules you can go to the US Youth Soccer website for the rules for your age group and you can ask your coach. From time to time ask the referee about the rules before your match or between your matches at a tournament.

During a match it's the players' responsibility to talk to each other and make the decisions. The players make the game happen! You must take responsibility for what you do on the field. Players should do most of the talking during a match and coaches should say little. The players play the game, so you need to take charge after the kickoff whistle blows.

To learn more about strategies of soccer, you need to become a student of the game. First of all listen to your coach and be willing to ask questions about the game. Go watch matches too! Check out local professional and college teams. Watch soccer on TV, including The US Youth Soccer Show on Fox Soccer Channel. Read soccer books and magazines too. Look at videos and DVDs. Even video games like FIFA 2007 can help you get a picture of the game in your head. Learn all you can about your game.

2. *Teamwork*

Soccer is a game with room for individual expression and creativity within the team. You see those moments in a match now and then, a bit of individual brilliance. A big save, a dribble that beats opponents and goes to goal, a crucial tackle, a clearance off the line or a breathtaking goal; those moments of great individual play stand out in soccer. They are all wrapped up within team play!

Teamwork is part of what makes a team sport fun to play. There is great satisfaction when you and a teammate pull off a play together. Do the things in a match for your teammates that you'd like for them to do for you. Encourage your teammates, especially when they make a mistake. You can lift their confidence and help get them back in the game. Run hard for your teammates. Some of it is just hard work and sweat, but it helps your team do its best.

Being a team player is important and you can be an impact player too!

3. *The Grown-ups*

Most of the parents and coaches at your games know that the match is for you and they support you well. Some adults though forget that it's just a game. While you don't want to be disrespectful, you should in general tune out what people off the field are saying. Your attention must be on what's happening on the field and what your teammates are saying.

You know from playing the game that win, lose or draw, it's the game and the competition you like. Yes, it is exciting to win a match and a bit of a bummer to lose one; yet no matter how the game goes you'd rather be playing soccer than not. Sometimes adults forget this and they focus on getting trophies. Remind them from time to time that playing the game is what counts. Always give your best whenever you play. Remember that soccer is a player's game and play the game for you!

4.

The Lineup

Soccer teams have a basic formation to play the game. That formation is divided into four lines, which are the goalkeeper, the fullbacks, the midfielders and the forwards. There is always only one goalkeeper, but the number of fullbacks, midfielders and forwards can change. The difference may be due to the age group and the number of players on the field for each team or it may vary because of different formations.

Soccer savvy players can play a number of positions in different formations. That versatility will make you quite a valuable player to many teams. In fact, US Youth Soccer recommends that players get exposed to playing all of the positions on a team up to age 14. Whatever lineup your team uses the basic idea is for you to be able to help your teammates near you on offense and defense and for them to help you too!

If you are in the starting lineup for today's match then you have the responsibility to be ready physically and mentally. Arrive at the field to get warmed up physically and to get focused mentally. As you warm-up, in your mind see yourself doing good things in the match. See yourself being skillful, confident and helping your teammates on offense and defense.

If you will start off today's match as a substitute, then do your best to help the starters get ready. You too need to play the game in your mind so you can be ready when your time comes. Once the match begins watch closely to see how the other team plays, then you can be ready to go in and help your teammates anywhere on the field. To do all of these things takes a positive attitude and self-confidence.

5.

Training Session and Practice

Practice is what you should do on your own or with friends to improve your skills; see the section in this Player's Guide called On Your Own. The training session is with your teammates where you can improve your teamwork and understanding of the game. The training session is when you learn new things from your coach and practice is when you try those things on your own.

If you want it to all come together in a match, then what you do before the match is crucial. This means good training sessions and practice. You get out of practice and training what you put into them! If you give your best at those times then the payoff for that hard work will be your performance in matches.

You should come to training sessions with an alert mind to learn new things. The attitude to try new skills and tactics is very important to become your best. You can be challenged at training to push yourself by your coaches and your teammates. Take on that challenge and you'll find your game getting better and better.

Be a team leader! Before a team training session, challenge your teammates to a game like Warp Speed.

- Warp Speed is a group juggling activity to focus on problem-solving and teamwork.
- It extends the common name game to a team building exercise by asking players how fast they can pass the ball to everyone, including saying their teammate's names. Groups can predict a time and try to deliver.
- Check yourselves; was your prediction too fast or too slow? Try to figure out what you can improve upon and then make a more accurate prediction.
- Push yourselves to go even faster. The more accurate your passes are, the closer you get to Warp Speed.

Practice on your own or with a friend or two and try out new skills. This is the time to experiment and become comfortable with the ball. Practice can also be a good time to improve your personal fitness.

6. *Game Day*

To play your best on game day, what you do the day before counts. Getting ready for a match begins the day before by eating right, especially dinner, and getting a good night's sleep. The food that will be your fuel on game day is mostly what you ate in the two meals before the match. So what you eat and drink really counts for your energy when you play. If your match is in the morning eat a light breakfast, but if it's in the afternoon then you can have a regular breakfast.

Get to the field at the time your coach tells you. During the warm-up with your team, you should play the game in your mind. Sports psychologists call this visualization. That is when you play the game in your head. You see yourself on the field playing skillfully, getting into the right places to help your teammates and giving them encouragement. You visualize yourself doing good things in the match.

Whether you are in the starting lineup or not, it's important to warm-up well both mentally and physically. If you'll be going into the match from the bench keep playing the game in your head. Take a look now at the other team and see if you can figure out their strengths and weaknesses. Then when you go in you'll have your head in the game right away. Be sure to stretch and run a bit to get your heart rate up and be ready to run hard as soon as you step onto the pitch. You'll be the one on your team with fresh legs, so work hard to support your teammates.

During the match keep visualizing yourself playing skillfully. The more you play that movie in your head the more likely it is that it'll happen. Listen to your teammates on the field and tune out the distractions from around the field. Remember to respect the referees, but for you as a player they are just a part of the game environment. Like the field conditions and the weather don't complain, just get on with playing your best. Focus on the parts of the match that you have control over.

Finally don't be so concerned about the match outcome that you don't try the things you've been practicing. The match is when you need to try what you've learned in your training sessions and when you practice on your own.

7.

What to Eat and Drink

Soccer is a high intensity, intermittent activity, which requires both strength and endurance for the length of the match. A proper diet is crucial to your health and to your performance as a soccer player. Proper foods and fluids are necessary to have the energy to play your best.

As soon as you start to become dehydrated you'll feel tired. Water, in and of itself, is a nutrient; however, it provides no calories or energy, but it will adequately hydrate you both before and during play. But most soccer players do not drink enough water, so drinking a sports drink helps with staying well-hydrated.

Preventing dehydration can be simple as long as you drink as frequently as possible during a match and go into the match well-hydrated. You might be thinking, "What's the big deal? Won't drinking when I'm thirsty guarantee that I'm hydrated?" Surprisingly, no. During exercise, for reasons not totally understood, humans don't drink enough to prevent dehydration. You need to drink before you're thirsty and keep drinking after you no longer feel thirsty.

Your body needs water. But remember water comes in all sizes, shapes and colors. Milk is 90 percent water. Juice and most soft drinks are 89 percent water, sport drinks are 94 percent water and even pizza is 50 percent water. And it all counts. Nearly everything that passes your lips provides water for your body, and in fact, research shows that most hydration happens at meals from the combination of food and beverages.

Water Content of Common Foods and Drinks

Item:	Water content, approximate
Diet soft drinks, tea, and coffee	99%
Sport drinks	94%
Milk	90%
Soup	90%
Soft drinks, soda pop, juice	89%
Yogurt	80%
Corn	76%
Baked potato	74%
Cooked rice	73%
Cooked pasta	66%
Taco	59%
Chicken	54%
Ground beef	53%
Pizza	50%

Prepared by the U.S. Olympic Sports Medicine Division and the International Center for Sports Nutrition. 1999 U.S. Olympic Committee

The training diet is the foundation for feeling on top of your game during a training session, practice or during a match. Eating great before a match does not provide as many performance benefits as eating right Monday through Thursday. How much energy you have at training or practice determines how much work can be done on the field.

In addition to water, your body needs carbohydrate, fat, protein and micronutrients. With micronutrients it is more important to make positive changes to the diet rather than to take supplements. Carbohydrates are likely to provide the majority of energy during a soccer match. Soccer players therefore need to make the effort to ensure they have enough carbohydrate in their diet.

- Good sources of carbohydrate are fruit, rice, bread, pasta, potatoes and breakfast cereals.
- Good sources of fat are lean meat, fish, milk and nuts.
- Good sources of protein are meat, milk, poultry, fish, dairy foods, nuts, eggs, legumes and pulses (peas, beans, etc).
- Good sources of vitamins and minerals are fruit, vegetables, nuts, lean meat, eggs, dairy products and of course, combinations of these ingredients.

A general rule of thumb is to try to eat three hours before you go to the soccer field so that the food has a chance to digest and be useful in your system as energy. For more information on nutrition for soccer players check out this FIFA document: <http://www.fifa.com/en/development/medical/index/0,1233,118496,00.html?a>

8.

Getting Match Fit

As the title implies the question for most players is, "Are you match fit?" The definition being that you are fit enough to play at a high pace for a full match. Now the problem is not that coaches and players do not try to get soccer fit, it's that the approach is a bit haphazard and inconsistent.

One of the parts of soccer that you personally control is your own physical fitness. This is something you can improve on your own time as well as when you are at training with your team. Here's a list of physical fitness components you should work at to improve as a soccer player. These components are in a priority order:

1. Balance
2. Agility
3. Coordination
4. Core strength and stability
5. Acceleration
6. Vertical jump
7. Endurance
8. Flexibility

In your training sessions, work on rhythm exercises and proper running motion. You should also learn how to land correctly when jumping, as this will reduce the likelihood of knee injuries.

If the coach and players put sufficient demands into a training session much can be accomplished. Then both fitness and technique, and possibly tactics too, can be trained. The problem is that most players' train in second or third gear and the coach allows them to get away with it. Then come match time and they must play in fourth gear, and occasionally in overdrive, and they are not up to it. The lack of fitness is even more noticeable in extreme weather conditions, especially high heat and humidity.

So the key is that when the training session has reached match situations the players must push themselves, and be pushed by the coach, to perform at match speed. This one factor alone is missing in most training sessions. With it the competitiveness, speed of thinking (tactical decision-making), technical speed and fitness improve. Players have a responsibility here to push themselves. Don't wait for the coach to have to yell at you to play at a pace that you wish to perform at come game day. You get out of training what you put into it! Train in second gear and you'll play in second gear and when you try to play faster you'll fail. Players need to push themselves first and foremost. Only then do you have a right to expect that your teammates should do the same. Then the coach is there to push you along when you need the help. The coach has the responsibility to relay these expectations to the players and to set the tone at the appropriate training sessions and at the proper time of a session.

By training often during a season at match pace, the team will be prepared for the specific demands of the match. If the team trains this way then the need for calisthenics and running laps is eliminated. Match pace training brings out the best

in everyone. In general the fitter you are the longer you can have a positive impact on the game. Just by giving your all at each training session your fitness will improve.

Finally, while playing at match speed is indeed physically demanding, it's much more enjoyable because the ball is involved and you are actually playing the game. That's always more fun than wind sprints.

Enjoy the game!

9. *On Your Own*

Earlier we mentioned that there's a difference between practice and a training session.

Training you do with your team and coach and practice you do on your own or with one or two friends. If you want to become really good at soccer then you need to practice. Training with your team, even a few times a week, may not be enough. So practice at home or in your neighborhood with other kids or maybe even at school if there's a chance to do so.

The things you practice are what you can do on your own. That could be juggling, playing the ball against a wall (someplace without windows), dribbling (make your own slalom course) and maybe some physical fitness too.

Wall Ball: knocking the ball against a wall gives you the chance to practice several skills.

- Passing (Put an X on the wall and try to hit it with your pass. Vary your distance from the wall and your angle to the X.)
- Receiving (As the ball comes off the wall control it with different parts of your body: inside of the foot, thigh, top of the foot and so on.)
- Heading (See how many times you can head the ball against the wall without it touching the ground. How about trying the same things as you did in passing, but now with headers?)
- Shooting (Hit the X. Try some shots off the ground and some when the ball is in the air.)
- Throw-in (Hit the X.)
- Goalkeeping (Try different types of throws and hit the X.)
- Goalkeeping (Try out different catches as the ball rebounds from the wall. Vary the height of the ball.)

Tips on Passing

- Point the toes of the foot you are standing on towards your target
- Keep the knees of both legs slightly bent
- Keep the ankle of your kicking leg locked so that your kicking foot is steady
- Lean slightly forward to keep the path of the ball level
- Keep your eyes on the ball

Tips on Receiving

- Get your body in line with the path of the ball
- Keep the knees of both legs slightly bent
- Relax the body part receiving the ball upon contact with the ball
- Exhale
- Keep your eyes on the ball

Tips on Heading

- Get yourself in line with the flight of the ball
- Keep the knees of both legs slightly bent
- Strike the ball with the forehead at the hairline

- Keep your mouth shut with your tongue and checks out from between your teeth
- Keep your eyes on the ball

Tips on Shooting

- Approach the ball at a slight diagonal angle
- Point the toes of the foot you are standing on towards your target
- Lean over the ball
- Point the toes of your kicking foot down and curl them back inside of your shoe to make a firmer striking surface of your foot (like making a fist)
- Keep your eyes on the ball

Tips on the Throw In

- Stand with your hips facing where you want the ball to go
- Firm grip on the ball with the tips of your thumbs just touching behind the ball
- Hold the ball with your fingertips
- Follow through on your throw for improved accuracy and distance

Tips on Keeper Throws

- Hold the ball comfortably in your hand and release it off the fingertips
- Stand with your hips facing where you want the ball to go
- Keep knees of both legs slightly bent
- Keep your head steady and facing your target
- Follow through on your throw for improved accuracy and distance

Tips on Keeper Catches

- Get your body in line with the path of the ball
- Watch the ball all the way to your hands
- Keep your knees and elbows slightly bent
- Spread your fingers as wide as you can as you catch the ball for a safer grip
- Relax and exhale as you catch the ball and absorb it

10. *Fair Play*

Without an opponent you do not have a match. The other team is crucial to having the chance to see how well you play and how you can improve. The opposing team is not the enemy. They are players like you who love the game. Show respect for your fellow players before, during and after the match; when the match is over shake hands in a sincere way. Win, lose or draw this gesture shows class on your part and respect for the game. Don't hesitate to shake hands with the opposing coaches and the game officials too. They all give to the game just like you. You are setting the right example for the fans too. Here are some guidelines for you to follow:

1. Strive to maintain integrity within soccer.
2. Know and follow the Laws of the Game.
3. Play and practice in the spirit of cooperation with opponents, officials, administrators, coaches and spectators.
4. Be a positive role model to younger players.
5. Just say no to drugs and alcohol.
6. Beat opponents by skill and not by unfair methods.
7. Keep your self-control at all times and do not retaliate; composure is a key component to becoming a top-level player.
8. Do not overact when your team scores a goal.
9. Learn to win and lose graciously.

Be sure to check out the FIFA Fair Play Code at
<http://www.fifa.com/en/fairplay/fairplay/0,1256,12,00.html>.