

## **DOVER SOCCER CLUB HOUSE LEAGUE COACHING MANUAL**

Welcome to the Dover Soccer Association's House League. The House League is our recreational league open to children from K through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. As such, the objective of the league is to provide kids with an opportunity to enjoy the game of soccer while learning basic skills and tactics.

To make the League work, we depend on parents volunteering as coaches. These volunteers have a wide range of experience as coaches and/or soccer players, with some having virtually no previous experience on either count. Novice volunteers should not be deterred, as we have had many inexperienced coaches make significant contributions, starting by simply showing up with a positive attitude and willingness to learn.

We have prepared this manual to assist coaches of all experience levels. Basic equipment needs, practice/game formats, and rules are listed. We have also included a brief overview of skills we feel should be covered and some suggested drills.

Coaches should, and inevitably will need to develop their own approaches based on their experience and their individual players. However, we want all our coaches to understand the general objectives of the League. We want to create chances for the kids to score. There are no goalkeepers before the U12 level, and we do not officially keep score.

Once again, always remember this is a Recreation League. We are here to enjoy the game and some friendly competition, and increase each child's self esteem. Practices should be run with having fun and challenging the players in mind. Coaches should praise kids for any and all good play and create opportunities for them to succeed.

## **EQUIPMENT**

### **Players**

- Shin guards – mandatory, to be worn under socks
- Footwear – soccer cleats are recommended, but not required
- Water bottles – each player should bring a bottle with their name on it.
- Each child will be given their own Team Shirt
- Each child will be given their own soccer ball. They will need to bring this ball each week. Players are encouraged to practice skills and drills at home with their ball.

### **Coaches**

- Extra soccer balls
- Cones for marking field boundaries and organizing drills
- Adult Team Shirts for Coaches (Large, X Large & 2X Large)  
\*Teams with only one or two Coaches are encouraged to ask parents to get involved as Assistant Coaches

### **Other**

- Pop-up goals will be set up on the U6, U8 and U10 fields before each session
- Larger goals will be set up on the U12 fields
- A Medical Kit will be available at the field each Saturday

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Indirect Free Kick** - Offensive team has free kick, defensive players must be at least 10 yards away from the ball, and ball must be touched by at least two players before it can become a goal

**Fouls** - Kicking, Pushing, Tripping, Hitting, Holding Dangerous play (any action that puts a player at risk of injury even if injury does not occur)

**Throw-Ins** - The thrower must stand with both feet on the ground behind the sideline, holds ball with both hands, and throw starts from behind the head

**Corner Kick** - A free kick taken from the corner of the field where ball went out of bounds (defensive players must be at least 10 yards from ball)

**Goal Kick** - Free kick taken 6 yards in front of goal (defensive players must be at least 10 yards from the ball)

## **GAME FORMAT/RULES**

### **U6 – Kindergarten**

- 60 minute sessions. 40 minutes of drills followed by a 20 minute game. 10 minute halves w/ water break @ half.
- Two separate 4 v 4 games run simultaneously on half fields. Substitutions allowed at any time.
- No goalkeepers. Players must keep 10 feet from their goal.
- Be lenient with out of bounds, we want continuous action. Coaches/Parents can kick the ball back in play if it goes out of the playing area.
- No offsides.

### **U8 – Grades 1 & 2**

- 90 minute sessions. 60 minutes of drills followed by a 30 minute game. 15 minute halves w/ water break @ half.
- 5 v 5 games. Substitutions allowed at any time.
- No goalkeepers. Players must keep 10 feet from their goal.
- Player kicks ball back into play when ball goes out of playing area. Be lenient with out of bounds, we want continuous action.
- All Fouls and Handballs awarded an Indirect Free Kick where foul occurs on field.
- No offsides.

### **U10 – Grades 3 & 4**

- 90 minute sessions. 60 minutes of drills followed by a 30 minute game. 15 minute halves w/ water break @ half.
- 6 v 6 games. Substitutions allowed at any time.
- No goalkeepers. Players must keep 10 feet from their goal.
- If ball goes over sideline – Throw-in awarded to opposing team.
- If ball goes over end-line (behind goal):
  - Corner Kick if ball awarded to team in offensive end.
  - Goal Kick if ball awarded to team in defensive end.
- All Fouls and Handballs awarded an Indirect Free Kick where foul occurs on field.
- No offsides.

### **U12 – Grades 5 & 6**

- 90 minute sessions. 45 minutes of drills followed by a 45 minute game. 22 minute halves w/ water break @ half.
- 8 v 8 games. Substitutions allowed at any time.
- Goalkeeper. Can use hands within 10 yards of goal.
- If ball goes over sideline – Throw-in awarded to opposing team.
- If ball goes over end-line (behind goal):
  - Corner Kick if ball awarded to team in offensive end.
  - Goal Kick if ball awarded to team in defensive end.
- All Fouls and Handballs awarded an Indirect Free Kick where foul occurs on field.
- No offsides.

## **COACHING THE HOUSE LEAGUE SOCCER PLAYER**

As coaches, you'll want to keep in mind for yourselves and stress to the players that there are TWO parts of the game:

1. Technical skills: dribbling, passing, shooting
2. Tactical skills: positioning, decision-making

As you work on these sets of skills, try to keep an emphasis on "progression". Drills/games should get progressively more difficult and lead into game situations. Players should develop over the course of a Saturday and the season. And, do remember that players will progress over the course of a season. Just because something seems really difficult for them on the first Saturday, don't give up. They'll get better as they go.

Also, coaches should try to plan their practices and drills to keep players in motion as much of the time as possible. Obviously, there are times when players need to listen to instructions (maybe the hardest skill you'll teach) or wait their turn in line, but we want to minimize these down times.

Following are some thoughts and examples of ways to introduce and coach the basic skills:

### **TECHNICAL**

#### **DRIBBLING:**

Go over games where players (each with a ball) dribble in a confined area, such as a circle or square. The emphasis should be on getting touches and getting comfortable with the ball.

Examples of games:

- a. Start with all players just dribbling around trying to avoid teammates. Add a "monster" or two in the middle (and have players with balls "free" those who have been caught - keeps everyone involved). Add skills (stopping the ball, using the bottom of the foot, turning, speeding up, etc.).
- b. Play a "numbers" game where players, for example, have to stop the ball with the bottom of the foot when you call out "1," tap the ball between the insides of their feet when you call out "2," etc.
- c. Younger players can play "snake": two players start without balls, the rest of the players have balls in a confined area; one of the two players puts his/her hands on the shoulders of the other player without a ball; those two players then chase players who have soccer balls; if a player is caught (the snake kicks their ball), that player joins the end of the snake.

- d. Another good game has you putting cones or discs inside a circle. Players then have to dribble around the confined space and, whenever they come upon a cone, they have to dribble all the way around it. You can have them practice with right foot/left foot and inside of foot/outside of foot.
- e. Introduce older players to the concept of “shielding” the ball by controlling the ball with one foot, while keeping their other leg (and rear) between the ball and the opponent.

Things to keep in mind when working on dribbling: practice getting head up (players tend to look down at the ball); try to keep ball close (players tend to “kick and run” instead of really controlling the ball).

#### JUGGLING:

Introduce juggling at a young age. It will be difficult and frustrating for players at first, but that’s okay. They’ll get better. Our feeling (not shared by all coaches) is that it is okay to start with ball in hands. Have players drop the ball and gently kick it back up to their hands with their right foot, left foot, right thigh, left thigh. Progress to multiple touches.

#### PASSING:

Remind players that there are always two people involved in a pass and both need to have good technique. The passer needs to make a good pass and the receiver needs to receive and control the ball appropriately. For the passer, teach the use of the inside of foot, top, outside, but NOT the toe. Emphasize the appropriate touch - i.e., don't blast it if you teammate is 5 feet away, but no "wimpy" passes either. For the receiver, emphasize turning the body to make reception easier. So often young players are off balance and the ball just “clanks” off them. For older players, have the receiver think about where they are going to go with the ball after they have it. Have them work on positioning their bodies appropriately to protect against a defender and go right into their next move.

We suggest working in groups of 3 if possible. The triangle is our favorite shape because it allows the player with the ball to have 2 passing options. You can begin with stationary triangles. Maybe move into "interlocking" triangles (i.e. the point of one triangle is actually in the middle of another triangle). For more advanced players, try moving triangles within a confined area. This teaches moving before and after the pass and "thinking 1 pass ahead".

For advanced players, U8+, introduce passing into space. One game is to lay out a square with cones - have 3 players each on a corner and one corner empty – the player opposite the empty corner starts with the ball and has 2 options, one at each adjacent corner. They pass the ball and the players then must move to give the

new ball holder two options at each corner adjacent to him or her. For advanced players, try a defender in the square playing at 50% speed.

Another good passing game for U10+ is 5 v 2 or 6 v 2. The 5 or 6 players work the ball around the outside of a circle and try to "split" the 2 defenders with passes through the circle.

A good game that combines dribbling and passing is to play 2 v 2 with a small goal at either end of the field, BUT, there are also 2 "wingers" who can only run up and down the sides of the field. The wingers are in a "free zone" and can help whichever team has the ball. For instance, if the 2 players on the red team have the ball, they can also pass to the wingers, so it becomes 4 v 2. If the blue team steals the ball, the wingers are now playing for them. This little game allows players who have mastered basic dribbling and passing skills to test them in a game-like situation. It also introduces using the wings, movement without the ball, etc.

### **SHOOTING:**

Shooting is the hardest skill to teach because there aren't a lot of games where everyone can shoot at once. However, demonstrate technique and have players get a feel for the right area of the foot to use by having players sit down and bounce a ball off of their instep (the lace area of the cleat) - right foot and left foot. For advanced players, have them do it multiple times without catching the ball.

To really break down the act of shooting, have players think about:

- Approach ball from an angle in order to be able to hit the ball with the instep.
- Plant other foot appropriate, i.e., not too far behind the ball (player will be leaning back when kicking) and not too far ahead of the ball (player will likely kick the ground or kick the ball to high up on the ball).
- Keep head down and over the ball.
- Drive through the ball. A shot is not a pass.

### **TACTICS:**

Tactical skills at the most basic level really are comprised of two questions that players should continually be asking themselves as they play (and watch their teammates play):

1. Where should I be on the field at this moment?
2. What should I be doing?

With younger players, we really want to emphasize that they should "spread out." That doesn't necessarily mean they need to be locked into positions, but we need to constantly work to combat the tendency to play "mob" ball. If someone is chasing down the ball on the outside - someone else should be hustling to the middle - either on offense or defense.

When your team has the ball, you are playing "offense" and you have a responsibility. Likewise, when the other team has the ball, you are playing "defense" and you have a responsibility. Players' responsibilities may differ based on where they are on the field, but get them to realize they always have a responsibility to be doing something. No "zoning out" allowed!

Teach players to use the outside of the field to move the ball - away from their own goal and up the field.

Passes to the middle: in front of opponents' goal is GOOD; in front of your goal is BAD; in middle of field, it depends, but is fine if you are trying to pass to a teammate.

When other team has the ball, players defending need to be "goal side" of their opponents. This is especially hard for younger players who do learn to move up and down the field, but have a hard time grasping "angles" and the need to move sideways or to the middle of field to be between the offensive player and the goal.

Positioning. Whether you're playing 4 v 4 or 5 v 5 or 6 v 6, etc., point out the "natural" triangles that are formed by players who are on the wing, supporting and in the center.

## **CONCLUSION**

Again, you have all season to work on these basic technical skills and tactics. Also, obviously, technical skills and tactics overlap, but players really need the technical skills first before the tactics become meaningful.

And, last but not least, have FUN with the players! If you're having fun, they'll have fun.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Dover Soccer has pamphlets and manuals that you can borrow. Please contact Ben Larkin (DSA Player Development, [benevel@comcast.net](mailto:benevel@comcast.net)), Kent Cassidy (DSA President, [cass\\_soccer@comcast.net](mailto:cass_soccer@comcast.net)) or any Board Member.

The web is also a great resource. Typing "soccer drills" into just about any search engine site will present you with an incredible number of sites offering various drills and coaching tips.