

**Coaching in AYSO Region 76
2008 Strategic Plan
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This document sets out a plan for the coaching function in AYSO Region 76 in the next three years beginning with the Fall 2008 season. The plan sets out our goal as well as specific objectives consistent with our goal and individual actions to be taken.

This is, intentionally, an ambitious plan and we know we cannot implement every idea it contains all at once. This draft of the plan does not set out a detailed timeframe for implementation, with a couple of exceptions. The timing will be discussed as part of the refinement of the plan by the Region and then incorporated into the plan.

1. Goal

Our goal should be to bring the standard and quality of coaching in AYSO Region 76 to the highest possible level, consistent with the region’s resources, both volunteer and financial.

The primary goal of our coaching program should be player development, defined as the improvement of all players’ individual and team skills to their maximum potential. This goal must be achieved within a program that meets the desire of players and their families for recreation that is safe, fun and educational.

The program must also be rewarding for coaches. We recognize that our coaches are volunteers, most with limited experience as educators and many with limited experience of the game of

soccer. We should also remember that we cannot expect that every coach will aspire to the same level of skill and commitment as we can demand of professional coaches. However, this reinforces the need for the Region to provide and, in some cases, mandate the use of a wide variety of additional training and resources directed at our volunteer coaches.

2. Objectives

In this Section 2, we describe the general objectives of this plan. These objectives will help us accomplish our overall goal. A more detailed discussion of how to accomplish these objectives will be set out in Section 3 (Actions).

2.1 Optimizing Player Development

(a) Players of all ages and abilities should be coached to achieve their potential. Coaches must not limit their attentions to their strongest or weakest players.

(b) We must give first priority to players on our regular season teams, 90% of whom will not play on a post-season team in any given year. While we understand that tournament teams will continue to receive a significant allocation of our resources, consistent with the commitment their players and families make, we must address the needs of every one of our players.

(c) We need to develop a set of expected outcomes for all players at every level, make coaches aware of these expected outcomes and do whatever we can to assure that these outcomes are being attained for the majority of players as they move from one year to the next.

(d) Additional optional practice opportunities should be given to players starting at the latest in U8A. These should continue to be available after the regular season and should be available to players whether or not they are likely to participate on post-season teams.

2.2 Recruitment. We must recruit volunteer coaches who understand our goals and are committed to achieve them.

2.3 Improved Training and Resources

(a) All coaches, including assistant coaches, must meet minimum requirements set out by AYSO National.

(b) All coaches will receive additional training related to the age group they are coaching and failure to take such training will disqualify coaches from coaching post-season teams.

(c) Coaches must be given additional resources and tools to enable them to meet our goal. These resources will include mandatory use in some divisions of the MLS Camps coaches, and making available online and video resources, both commercially available and home-grown.

(d) Observation, Mentoring and Assessment. We need to observe our coaches, mentor the less experienced ones and develop a system of assessment and review.

2.4 Improved Communication

(a) We need to communicate regularly with all coaches and parents and we need to have more frequent contact with less experienced coaches and problem coaches.

(b) We need to upgrade the coaching pages on our website.

(c) We should mandate rather than request parent feedback.

2.5 Improved Leadership.

(a) To help implement these changes, we should create a Coaching Commission, comprising the most experienced and well-qualified of our coaches.

(b) Region 76 needs more individuals qualified as instructors able to teach all of the classes through the U12 level and eventually able to instruct and lead the Intermediate and Advanced Classes.

2.6 Improved Safety

(a) Safety is an area primarily within the purview of the Safety Director and the Referee Administrators. Coach Administrators should work with them on programs to improve safety.

(b) At present, coaches are required to take a simple one hour class, Safe Haven, just once in their coaching career. We need to increase and reinforce coach awareness of safety issues, by setting some regional standards and through better communication of those standards.

3. Actions

3.1 Optimizing Player Development

(a) **Making player development more important than winning.** We must make clear to all division directors, coaches and parents that our primary goal for players is player development.

Making player development paramount has direct practical consequences. At all levels, it means de-emphasizing winning and emphasizing actions by coaches that will improve the technical and tactical skills and the teamwork of their players.

Especially in U10 through U14, we give coaches many weeks and games in which the outcome of the game has no bearing on the playoffs. Coaches rarely take advantage of this. Instead, their line-ups, substitution patterns, tactics and behavior all tend to be directed at winning rather than player improvement. For example, teaching tactics that are standard in higher level play, such as the offside trap or back passes or short free kicks, are judged too risky to try out in games. Moreover, strong players are discouraged from passing the ball to weaker players and weaker players are urged to give the ball up as soon as possible to the stronger players. We cannot optimize the development of weaker players on teams coached in this way.

A clear statement of the primacy of player development should be completed by the end of June 2008, approved by the Regional Board at its July 2008 meeting and then circulated to all parents and coach volunteers. The statement should be routinely provided by division directors to all coach volunteers as part of the recruitment process. Coach volunteers need to certify that they have read and understood the statement.

(b) Developing expected outcomes. We need to create a matrix of expected outcomes for players at every level. In the lower divisions, the outcomes should be the same for all players in any given division. From U10 onward, the outcomes can and indeed should be different for new or very inexperienced players and players with two or more seasons of experience. We may need to consider an upper and lower range of expectations, so that we can challenge the best of our players while setting minimum standards for all players.

For example, every six-year old should be taught and have mastered how to hit an instep kick and should be able to hit a ball accurately for a specified distance. Every six-year old should also have mastered the fundamentals of trapping a ball by getting their whole body behind the ball. Every ten-year old should have mastered the chest trap. And so on.

We need help to develop our matrix. We will consult with professional coaches, including the AYSO National Coach as well as the MLS Camps coaches. In addition, within the region we should draw on the expertise of the members of the Coaching Commission. There are some excellent online resources available, mentioned in Section 3.3(c)(3) below (Online Resources), on which we can draw. We already have a curriculum available for GU10, although this could use some freshening in light of experience.

Once we have developed our matrix, we need to communicate to both coaches and parents what they can expect of young players and teach coaches how to coach the skills that their players are capable of learning.

(c) Additional practice opportunities. At present, players on regular season teams attend one practice a week with their team. Post-season tournament team players practice once or twice a week with their team.

(1) Open practices. We need to find a way to give players more opportunities to practice, not necessarily with their regular season team coach. As a practical matter, we cannot provide more practice fields to enable teams to practice more than once a week. What we can do is to run practices in the evenings or on Sundays that will be open to any player who wishes to attend. In the past when we have done this, the open practices were somewhat unstructured. We need these sessions to be more organized. We could have a session on dribbling, another on kicking and shooting, another on trapping, another on goalkeeping and so on.

This season, we have developed a template for a practice field schedule that will mean that no U10 and U12 teams will practice on Monday nights and no U8 or U14 teams will practice on Tuesday nights. On those evenings, at 6 and 7:15 pm, open practices will be held, led by the MLS Camps coaches and experienced regional coaches. We should try to continue these sessions, perhaps a couple of times a month, after the end of the regular season.

(2) “Boot Camp” for new players. We plan on having a free one-day camp on August 30 for players in U10 and U12 who are new or in their second year in our program. The idea would be to teach fundamentals to these new players in one or two three hour sessions. Plans for this are under way.

3.2 Recruitment

(a) **In general.** Historically, the region, like many AYSO regions, has struggled to recruit enough coaches to fill all of its needs. This struggle has been exacerbated by rapid growth in the number of players, the downsizing of U10 roster sizes with the implementation of 7 v 7 short-sided games, and a lack of lit fields, which requires us to schedule too many practices at 4 pm and limits the availability of potentially qualified volunteers.

One effect of shortages in volunteers has been willingness on the part of division directors and the Coach Administrator to compromise on the requirements they have made of recruits. From time to time, clearly unsuitable coaches have been recruited or retained.

We must expect this struggle to continue. While our numbers are expected to stabilize at around 2,300 this year, that is, about 100 more than in 2007, no improvements in availability of lit fields can be expected. Nevertheless, we must be more willing to confront the problem of too many coaches who are not able or willing to meet our standards, especially as upgraded in accordance with this plan.

(b) **Communicating our expectations.** At a minimum, we need to communicate our expectations more clearly to recruits. These expectations include the following:

(1) Meeting all training requirements, including minimum training and certification required by AYSO National, use of a mandatory curriculum for their division, midseason training, attendance by an MLS coach at a minimum of one practice and acceptance of a mentor.

(2) A commitment to all players on their team, not just the strongest ones.

(3) An unequivocal promise to adhere to our Code of Conduct, especially in relation to behavior toward referees.

We will communicate these requirements in writing to coach volunteers, who must accept them before being appointed as coaches.

(c) **Diversity.** We should encourage diversity in our coaching corps and, in particular, increase the number of coaches who are women.

(d) **Youth coaching program.** We already have an informal program in place to pair up kids, at least 12 years old, who are usually players or former players, with teams as assistant coaches. These youth coaches are subject to some specific rules (not written down anywhere as of now), including a requirement that they not be head coaches and that a team can never be left with just youth coaches to coach a particular practice or game unless the practice or game is supervised by a parent or other responsible adult connected with the team or appointed by the region. At present, our plan does not provide for any changes to the current way we operate the

youth coaching plan. We simply state for the record that a youth coaching program should never be used to fill a gap in our coaching ranks – like the youth referee program, it needs to be a program for the development of these young coaches and a meaningful community service opportunity, not a band-aid for volunteer shortages.

(e) Recruiting and supervising non-parent adults. While most of our coaches are parents of current or former players, and many of the remainder are relatives of players, we do have a number of adult coaches who do not have (and never have had) children in the program. Some of these individuals volunteer because they want to be involved in youth soccer; others are recruited from local universities or are otherwise encouraged to contribute their experience as soccer players to our players. These non-parent adults pose a number of issues regarding recruitment, supervision and retention. At this point, our plan does not set out any new ideas to deal with these issues but simply flags this area of our program for further attention in the future.

3.3 Improved Training and Resources

(a) Compliance with existing AYSO National standards. The region already requires all regular season team coaches, including all assistant coaches, to meet the minimum requirements of AYSO National, namely successful completion of Safe Haven and of an age-appropriate training. Currently, regular season coaches must complete the following training:

U6	U6 Coaching Course
U8B and U8A	U8 Coaching Course
U10	U10 Coaching Course
U12	U12 Coaching Course
U14	U12 Coaching Course (Intermediate Coaching Course preferred)
U16/U19	Intermediate Coaching Course (Advanced Coaching Course preferred)

In addition, the requirements for post-season coaches are somewhat higher in U14: Coaches must have completed the Intermediate Coaching Course.

At a minimum, all of these requirements will be maintained.

Action Item → Many more coaches need to be encouraged to take the Intermediate and Advanced Coaching Courses.

Action Item → We will work with Area 1-P to hold the Intermediate Coaching Course more frequently than once a year.

Action Item → We will also publicize all Intermediate and Advanced Coaching Courses offered in Southern California.

(b) Additional training. All coaches will be required to take additional training related to the age group they are coaching and failure to take such training will disqualify coaches from coaching post-season teams. In particular, we need to provide training in mid-season, after coaches have had some time on the field with their players. Here are some ideas for additional training opportunities:

(1) Observation of professional coach working with team in the coach's division. We would put on a 2-hour clinic, most likely on one or more Sundays in October, in which professional coaches, from MLS Camps and elsewhere, would do a demonstration practice with a regular season team. The demonstration would last one hour; the other hour would be used to talk about the organization and other techniques used by the professional coach – how to keep things moving, how to involve players of different skill levels, how to be organized in a small space with limited resources, and so on.

(2) Regional goalkeeper clinic. We have done goalkeeper clinics before but this clinic should focus on how to coach goalkeeping.

(3) Mandatory use of MLS Camps Coaches. See below.

(4) Introduction to mandatory curriculum. All coaches should be required to attend at least one session introducing the mandatory curriculum described below.

(5) Mentoring. We will develop a mentoring program. In all probability, a formal program will not be in place in 2008 but we will provide mentoring on an *ad hoc* basis where needed.

(c) Additional resources. Coaches must be given additional resources and tools to enable them to meet our goal. The following is a list of additional resources that we should consider:

(1) MLS Camps Coaches. We will increase the number of such coaches from two to four. In addition, every team in U6 and U8 should be required to have an MLS Camps coach attend at least one practice; if feasible, we may extend this requirement up to U10 and U12.

(2) Development of Mandatory Curriculum. We instruct our coaches that they should have a lesson plan for every practice but very few coaches do this or even know how to do it. We should be providing lesson plans for each division and these lesson plans should generally be mandatory for coaches in the younger divisions. We recognize that we should not be completely rigid about the curriculum and we should be open to suggestions and constructive criticism. On the other hand, we simply have to have a better handle on what is being taught. And we believe that many coaches would actually welcome specific guidance on how to conduct a practice and what should be included.

(3) Online Resources. There are numerous online resources that have really excellent diagrams and animations. We tried providing access to one of the best, www.soccerclinics.com, in 2002. It was not widely used. But sites like this are better than ever and almost all coaches today are much more comfortable with using websites. MLS Camps provides free access to such a site, www.soccermadesimple.com. It has the advantage of having the same curricula as the MLS Camps coaches use when teaching in our program. However, it does not have any

animations or video, which we hope may be added in the future. We should take advantage of standardized curricula developed by the Massachusetts Youth Soccer at http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/download/273_statewide_curriculum_u6_u12_2_.pdf.

(4) **Video Resources.** There are innumerable soccer videos on the market. We even have one of that we made (Coaching Kicking). We should get more of these into the hands of coaches. We'd start by asking coaches what videos they like. We can review them and decide which ones we should recommend and how to make them available to coaches at reasonable cost (to them and to us).

(5) **Observation, Mentoring and Assessment.** We should develop a plan to have coaches observed and mentored and, in the longer term, assessed. We can consider some form of peer review assessment. Although peer review will not be as effective as review by senior regional coaches, we may find we simply do not have the resources to conduct senior-level review of all coaches.

4. Implementation Issues

4.1 Timing

We expect to implement many but by no means all of the items this year. Among the more prominent ones:

- Additional MLS Coaches
- Monday and Tuesday night open practices
- MLS Coaches to attend as many upper division practices as possible
- Boot camp for new U10/U12 players
- Formation of the Coaching Commission
- Development of mandatory standardized curriculum for U8A

This is not an exclusive list.

4.2 Bridging the Gap Between Plan and Reality

(a) **Board Support.** We recognize that this is an ambitious plan. It cannot succeed unless our Board of Directors and especially our Division Directors support it. Please talk up the plan and help when asked in the many actions we need to take to implement the plan.

(b) **Dealing with Coaches Who Do Not Meet Our Expectations.** While there will always be a gap between our aspirations concerning the training, commitment and conduct of our coaches and what actually happens on the field, we have to back our words with deeds, particular in relation to how we deal with personal conduct below our standards.

To begin with, we would point out that for the most egregious offenders, there are two significant remedies already in place in our region which have worked well over the years. First, we have a policy that no one has a right to be appointed as a coach and there is no appeal from a decision by a Division Director not to appoint an individual as a coach. Second, we have a Disputes Resolution Procedures (on the website, there is a link from the Program Page that goes to www.ayso76.org/program/disputeresolution.html). As a reminder, these procedures do not permit the Board as a whole to take action against a coach, player, parent or anyone else. Rather, they provide for discipline at various levels to be imposed by the Division Director or Regional Commissioner and for a Board of Review as the sole means of appeal.

This plan is not, however, focused on parents whose conduct requires actual imposition of discipline. We should aim to identify problem coaches early and find ways to address the problems through guidance, mentoring and supervision. Parental feedback and Division Director supervision are the keys here.

5. Financial Considerations

This plan does not at this stage consider the financial obligations that may be entailed by developing and implementing the plan. The MLS Camps coaches will cost approximately \$32,000 minus our share of camp proceeds plus the cost of housing the coaches. Our region has the resources to handle this expense and it has been approved by our Regional Commissioner, Jeff Pop.

6. Next Steps

A first draft of this plan was reviewed by our Regional Commissioner Jeff Pop, Coach Administrator (Younger Divisions) Robin Corbett and Area Coach Administrator Gerald Maestu. The plan was then circulated to board members. Substantive comments were received from Richard Winter and Rick Wolfen and these have been taken into account in producing the current draft. This version of the plan was then submitted to the Board for adoption at its meeting on July 1 and unanimously approved.

The Board was informed and understood that the plan is a living document to which modifications may be made as experience and circumstances suggest. We genuinely welcome input – there is no monopoly of wisdom here. Contact Robin or Michael at coac@ayso76.org.