

Silver Lake Soccer Club Tips for Recreational Team Volunteer Coaches

Goal: Youth soccer is for kids. Volunteer coaches will provide a safe, fun and low-pressure environment to facilitate and help kids enjoy and learn the game, build friendships, learn life lessons, and develop skills to become better people.

Intro: This is a brief how-to tips sheet for volunteer coaches. We thank the coaches for their dedication, and hold coaches accountable to create a fun and safe environment for all our players. Our belief is that when we set high standards, all coaches, players, and families will benefit. There will be coach training opportunities throughout the season, which can expand the points here and go over practice session designs in more details. These will be run by experienced coaches from Steel Soccer (formerly UK Elite). Coaching education can also be obtained through U.S. Soccer's license courses and fees will be reimbursed.

General tips:

- Soccer coaching is more than just X's and O's. It's also about getting to know the kids (background, strengths, challenges) and build connections. Each child is unique. They will listen when they feel that coaches understand and hear them. Be a good teacher, not a commander.
- Adapt philosophies, instructions, and practice session designs which can be gained from books, websites, videos, or from prior experiences to the kids on the team, based on their age, ability, and interest. Tweak and adjust.
- Remember coaches do not have all the answers. When things don't work, reach out to fellow coaches and the club. Do what's best for the players and keep learning through available resources. It takes times and patience.
- Give players chances to solve problems on their own, especially during practices and games. Ask open-ended questions. Don't think for the players, but help players learn to think. Allow players more control and creativity.
- Trust that players want to do their best during practice. It's up to the coaches to make practice fun and effective. When practice sessions don't turn out as expected, revise to make them better. Do not criticize those who seem distracted or inattentive; some may just have had a bad day at school (or online learning). Ask for input from the kids and adjust practices to engage them.
- Youth players want to do their best during games. No one wants to look bad on the field. Players will make mistakes. Let the kids play and learn from mistakes. Criticism in front of everyone will not be productive. Offer constructive and simple instructions.
- Develop players into well-rounded athletes who can play multiple positions. Players grow and develop at their own pace; someone who's slow today may be fast later, someone who's small may develop into superb athletes (like Messi).
- Parents play critical roles. Talk and get to know them; they are our allies. They can provide information about the players – their interest, prior experience, etc. Let parents know what's happening in practices, what you try to teach, and how the kids are doing. Ask for feedback periodically.

Season logistics: complete coach credentials/waivers etc. online; attend general coaches meeting (July in normal years) and coach training sessions (July-Sept in normal years); obtain training equipment; stay informed through SLSC website, email, Twitter, and Facebook; organize pre-season meeting with parents; communicate with parents about team roster, practice schedule, jersey orders, game schedule, player development opportunities, and get parents to help.

Preseason coaches/parents meeting:

This is an important meeting. It sets expectations for the season. Do online if needed.

- Introductions. Talk about your plans – what you believe in as a coach and why, what your objectives are, and how you plan to achieve them. Answer any questions.

- Expectations of the parents. Coaches would prefer that parents don't give instructions on the sideline during practices and games. It can be confusing for the kids if those conflict with what coaches try to teach and can also be embarrassing for the kids if parents yell at their kids. Discuss how you want the parents to support the kids.
- Let parents know that as volunteer coaches, you are always learning. If some parents are more experienced as coaches or former players, offer opportunities for follow-up discussions.
- Get parents to help as assistant coach and team parent. They are usually willing. For example snack schedule / end of season party (in normal years).
- Go over logistics during COVID19.

Practices:

- Plan practice sessions; do the sessions and adjust as necessary; reflect afterwards to think how they can be improved, and whether every player is learning and having fun.
- Avoid lecturing. Kids have been in classroom all day. They come to play. Provide brief instructions, explain, and check understanding.
- Avoid long lines, players will get bored and it is a waste of time. Many skill activities can take place in parallel – for example everyone can dribble. Large teams can be put into smaller groups and play small sided games (2v2, 3v3 etc.) so that players get more touches on the ball. Get parents to help watch the kids in multiple groups.
- Practice progression: warm up, stretch (for kids older than 10), individual or small group work, small sided games, team scrimmage; feel free to mix things up. Research shows players learn better over the long term using interleaved practice than blocked practice.
- Soccer is a game played with opponents, therefore having opponents during practice simulate game-like situations, allowing better transfer of skills. With that said, un-opposed exercises can help players get comfortable with new concepts / movements, especially new and/or younger players; gradually adding defensive pressure will help build skills. For example, go from 4v1 to 4v2 for passing skill progression. Meanwhile, the opposing players learn defensive skills.
- Adjust the field size with cones based on the number of players, their skill level, and the objectives of the practice sessions. Use multiple goals, endzones, etc. to add variety and target different learning objectives.
- Practice session plan examples from U.S. Soccer: 1) <https://www.usyouthsoccer.org/lesson-plans/>; 2) <https://www.mayouthsoccer.org/coaches/session-plans/>

Games:

We play to win, have fun and learn. Every player should get to participate and experience different aspects of the game. Respect the referees and the other team. Be a role model for players and walk the walk.

- Before game: confirm with opposing coach game time, location, jersey color. Remind parents. Prepare line up and substitutions.
- During game: observe, let kids make decisions and allow mistakes. Provide brief points as needed, while recognize that in-game adjustment can be challenging for young players.
- After game: Thank the opposing team, referees, and parents. Do not dwell on mistakes / negatives. Acknowledge positive points briefly. Don't criticize your own child's play when driving home.

References:

- There are many good resources available. Book example: "Developing Youth Football Players" by Horse Wein ("football" refers to soccer). With more than 150 games and exercises, it describes age-appropriate teaching methods and allows kids to enjoy and play more active roles in the learning process.
- We recommend Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA)'s philosophy and player development model that is suitable for all youth and professional sports. PCA's national advisory board includes many renowned coaches and athletes. PCA's website provides extensive resources for coaching. <https://devzone.positivecoach.org/>.