

Balmain Junior Football Development Model

Towards a Different Junior Coaching Style

Balmain FC is excited about delivering a Junior Football Philosophy, a Development Model and Training Program to their members and community. Balmain FC wants coaches and players to focus on enjoyment, enthusiasm, confidence, positive self-esteem, good teamwork and spirit, and to develop a love of football.

Let's move away from an over-reliance on specific tactical instructions or commands and into an environment where the players are encouraged to come up with their own solutions. We want skilful, confident and creative players capable of playing with great composure under pressure, not players who are frightened of making mistakes, who won't try unconventional things or who lack the confidence to test themselves and take on an opponent.

Junior football should not be solely about winning but about development. However, by emphasising development rather than the importance of winning we may well find we have the players and teams more likely to do just that. We should be interested in players "expanding their game" not "narrowing" it through restrictive over-instruction by coaches.

The Balmain Junior Development Model follows on from the Balmain Junior Football Philosophy (see link below) and is designed to guide junior players through the differing physical and mental demands of the various age groups.

http://www.balmaindsc.com/team_management/other/balmainjuniorfootballphilosophy.pdf

Age-Related Training Levels

- Junior Training Squad (4 – 5 years)
- Level 1 – Training basics and mini-football (6 – 7 years)
- Level 2 – Training for mini-football (8 – 9 years)
- Level 3 – Training for Junior football (10 – 11 years)
- Level 4 – Training for Junior football (12 – 14 years)
- Level 5 – Training for Youth football (15 – 18 years)

These levels represent a progressive range of ball exercises and simple games that provide common game-like situations. Training will be a developmental process through the age groups designed to build a solid football foundation. For example, players from 5 – 7 years (the ball discovery years) will participate in basic football-related activities to develop their technique (mastery of the ball) and their interest in the game. Players' level 2 – 3 (or 8 – 12 years), sometimes known as the Golden Age of learning, will be geared towards refining their football technique and developing tactical abilities.

Development of Football essentials

The age-related training levels have been designed to take into account the different mental, spatial and physical abilities of children from the various age groups, and are simple models which all coaches will be able to follow. Each level will emphasise the following football essentials with different weightings on different aspects for each age group. These essentials are:

- **T**echnical: manipulation of the ball, dribbling, passing, receiving, finishing.
- **T**actical: decision making, defending, attacking, positioning, and supporting play
- **I**ntelligence: creativity, problem-solving, composure, communication
- **A**thleticism: strength, agility, speed, balance, coordination

Each of these elements relies on the other in order to develop and progress further as a player. For example, a coach should not teach an advanced tactical game (particularly to our mini players) until the players are proficient in their technical abilities, have the required spatial understanding, and have come to understand the basics of the game in their own terms.

"Technique is most important for the 8 to 12 age group. They have to learn to control the ball with every part of both feet and body (except arms) from all directions". (Coaching Soccer – Bert Van Lingen)

It is easier to play with composure and creativity when technical skills have been raised to a sufficient level. Why? One is more likely to play with composure and creativity if they have saved a whole lot of time in controlling the ball and have the skill to guide the ball to do exactly what they want!

As Technical elements are being improved, the players in the 8 – 12 age groups will grow in both their Intelligence and their Tactical understanding of the game. Specific tactics from the coach should be kept to a minimum. Too heavy a reliance on a coach's tactics and directions at a young age is inappropriate as it removes a player's own decision-making and the opportunity for them to "read" the game on their own. Lots of match-related games will enhance this skill i.e. they will begin to recognise game patterns and perform the tasks that require them as individuals and as a team to attack, defend, etc. Yes, it is important to guide them and to point out options but always encourage them to think and don't take the thinking away from them by giving rigid instructions.

In the junior age groups there should be no need for specific exercises for Athleticism as this will be covered during regular football development i.e. fitness and strength should come about through lots of playing football and football-related, and other sporting activities. Increased speed should be encouraged once any basic techniques and exercises are mastered but not at the expense of the technique.

These essentials cover all the attributes needed to play and to influence the game. As game situations continuously change the players must adapt, reorient themselves and make new decisions. The better they are in these four areas the greater their ability to play the game. By the age of 12 years these young players will likely have developed a solid foundation that can be applied to their competitive years as a footballer (in line with FFA guides of 11-a-Side Competition from under 13 and above – though currently younger).

Training session structure

Each training session, the players should work through a variety of activities and games starting with the development of individual ball mastery (skills training), moving through games that incorporate the use of these skills in a more pressured environment, encourage spatial awareness or that have a greater emphasis on the tactical, before finishing the session with a group game where players are encouraged to put into practice all they've learnt earlier in the session.

The following would be the framework for a typical 1-hour training session:

- Stage 1, Ball Mastery - Building individual Ball Skill,
- Stage 2, Technique - Developing passing and dribbling technique
- Stage 3, Technical & Tactical - A variety of SSGs - 1v1 or 2v2 using your skills developed from stages 1 and 2 and building the players tactical game.
- Stage 4, The Game – a Match with age related or standard association rules applying the skills developed from above stages.

Note: if a child is playing in a small-sided game they will be far more involved than if they playing in a game with a large number of participants. This means they will get more touches of the ball, be involved in more problem-solving situations, and have more opportunities to put their skills into practice. This all means a better use of training time. Consider running two parallel games with half the number of participants rather than one large game. It should also be noted that children do not have the same spatial awareness that adults do, nor generally do they have the intellectual capacity to process as many options as adults do. There is no benefit in presenting them with too many options (team mates) in a game, as (particularly in the younger ages) they probably won't even see them. Finally, playing in a relatively small area will encourage better close control of the ball – too large a playing area will enable players to get away with poor technique. A balance between something that would be too cramped to get a flowing game going and something too large that it allows kids to get away with poor close control is the ideal.

Some Principles, Responsibilities and Expectations of Junior Coaching

- Be organised and always arrive a bit earlier for training sessions and games. Plan your training session so that minimal time is wasted in setting up. On game day ensure you have pre-planned your substitutions so everyone gets equal game time.
- Always check that the playing/training area is safe. Have an Emergency Kit available and be aware of safety procedures
- Ensure there is a sufficient numbers of balls (one ball each) and all equipment is safe
- Language - You are an important role model; never use inappropriate language around children.
- Only say things that make young players feel motivated, accepted and valued
- Avoid over-coaching and lectures. A young player's attention span is short and you may lose them
- Avoid drills that have players standing in long queues waiting around and getting distracted
- All training activities should involve the ball. No laps or sit ups as these will not help them be better footballers
- Organise activities that are developmentally appropriate and progress from a simple to more complex exercise
- Create an environment that encourages technical, creative and decision-making abilities
- Make observations, give clear advice and apply appropriate corrective exercises
- Always stay calm as this is how you want your players to be even when put under pressure by the opposition.
- Encourage possession of the ball – discourage needlessly giving the ball to the other team. This is where creativity begins
- Never encourage a player to “get rid of it” or to “kick it out”. Panic begins here.
- Do not give too many instructions or you'll develop players who don't know how to think for themselves.
- Allow players to discover their own solutions to the many problems that arise during a game. Prompt them but encourage them to come up with their own answers.
- Don't specialise – give players the opportunity to play in a variety of positions. It is in their long-term interest to be become well versed in all facets of the game.
- Be knowledgeable in the rules of the game, whether these are Small Sided Games or Official 11v11 games.
- Always be respectful and polite to the officials. Yes, you will sometimes disagree and people do make mistakes. Set a positive example and expect your players and their parents to do the same.

Happy Footballing

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