HOBBIT WEEKLY

FOR YOUTH COACHES

The week in youth football, pick…

ISSUE 06

26 Oct to 1 Nov 2026

8 fundamentals

Pick one or two to work on

6 to 12 tennis

Participation up 72% since 2019

NSW fees frozen

Juniors stay at $54.42 in 2027



Cover story · Coaching · Josselin Lebreton

Swap one phrase, keep them going

Coaches rehearse a kinder touchline reflex before Saturday

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Keep Them Playing, Keep Them Moving

A U10 coach looks down a twelve player roster and wonders who sits. A parent asks whether tournament minutes should follow the scoreboard. On another touchline, a coach shouts the same instruction on every touch.

Across this issue, the same idea keeps surfacing: the child and the ball come first. England's grassroots fundamentals put keeping players active and making it a game at the center, with no principle ranked above another. The 8-a-side coach says build triangles whatever the format. And the touchline guide asks you to replace phrases that shut children down.

> **We can see the pattern. More touches, more play, fewer interruptions.**

> **One line to carry with you: fewer instructions, more ball.**

So before your next session, ask yourself: what will my players spend the most minutes doing tonight, and is that the thing I actually want them to learn?

The Hobbit editors

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3 coaching discussions

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FOR COACHES

Before Saturday, pick one of these phrases you know you use and rehearse its replacement out loud, so the reflex you reach for after a mistake encourages a child instead of closing them down.

COVER STORY · Coaching · Josselin Lebreton

01 7 youth soccer coach phrases to ban from the sidelines (and what to say instead)

Some youth soccer coach phrases, blurted out without thinking from the touchline, are enough to kill a child's desire to play. The good news: each one has a simple replacement that corrects just as much, without hurting.

Why youth soccer coach phrases weigh heavier than you think

A child of 9 or 12 does not judge soccer by the quality of the play. They judge it by how they feel: do I belong here, does the coach believe in me, am I allowed to make mistakes?

Every phrase from the touchline answers one of those questions. And it is often the phrase blurted out in frustration, a second after a mistake, that stays longest in the child's head.

For a coach, an automatic phrase is a reflex: you want to correct quickly, protect the result, keep control of the group. For the child, it is a verdict. They do not hear the instruction, they hear what they are worth.

The consequences are known to every amateur club:

- The player withdraws: they stop taking risks, they play small, they hide.
- They lose the pleasure: they come to training out of obligation, then they quit.
- The parents feel it: the conversation at home becomes "why don't you like soccer anymore?"

Retaining young players therefore depends less on the content of the session than on the climate you create with your words. Good news: it is the easiest lever to change, it costs nothing and it requires no equipment.

Here are the 7 phrases to watch first, with an alternative for each.

The 7 coach phrases to ban (and what to say instead)

For each phrase, you find what the child really hears, why it holds them back, and an alternative you can use as soon as Saturday.

1. "What on earth are you doing?!"

What the child hears: "You got everything wrong." It is not a real question: it expects no answer, it expresses your irritation.

Why it holds them back: they understand that mistakes are dangerous. Next time, they will choose the safest solution rather than the best one.

To say instead:

- "What did you see at that moment?"
- "What else could you have tried?"

On the pitch, this can look like this: a U11 loses the ball while playing out from the back. You call them over during the stoppage, you ask the question, you listen to their answer, then you add a single idea. Thirty seconds, and they go back on knowing what to try.

2. "Pass!" or "Keep it simple!" on every touch of the ball

What the child hears: "I don't trust you to decide."

Why it holds them back: from being guided by voice, the player waits for the instruction before acting. They stop lifting their head, they listen to the touchline. It is the opposite of what you want: a player who reads the game alone.

- "Go for it, I'm here if you lose the ball."
- Before the match: "Today, I want to see you attempt at least two dribbles."

A common mistake is to confuse directing and coaching. You set a framework before the match, then you let them play. Advice is given at stoppages, at half-time or at the water break.

3. "It's your fault" or "You're making us lose"

What the child hears: "You are the team's problem."

Why it holds them back: a child singled out as responsible for a goal or a defeat carries that label for a long time, in front of their teammates. Some no longer want to play in that position. Others ask not to come anymore.

- "We lost that ball together. What do we change?"
- "It happens, we get back in position and we fix it together."

Concretely, at your next session, anchor a simple rule in the group: a mistake belongs to the team, not to a player. The children pick it up quickly among themselves, and the atmosphere changes.

What the child hears: "I prefer another player to you."

Why it holds them back: comparison with a teammate damages the confidence of the one being compared, and creates distance in the group. Two children of the same age do not have the same pace, the same build or the same experience of the game.

- "Last week, you did this. Today, I want to see that."
- "You have improved on this point, here is the next step."

The only useful comparison is the player with themselves. Keep a record of two or three points per player: that is what makes your feedback precise and credible.

5. "Stop crying, it doesn't hurt"

What the child hears: "What you feel doesn't matter."

Why it holds them back: at 8, 10 or 12, crying after a knock, a defeat or a frustration is normal. A child who is forbidden to feel learns to hide their emotions, or to leave the pitch. And you can be wrong about the pain: when in doubt after a collision, you check, you do not minimize.

- "Take your time, I'm here."
- "Do you need a minute on the side? Come back when you're ready."

On the pitch, this can translate into a simple ritual: a pause zone where the child can breathe without being watched or judged. They come back faster and more confident.

6. "I've told you ten times already!"

What the child hears: "You're slow, you don't listen."

Why it holds them back: if an instruction isn't followed after several reminders, there's a good chance it was misunderstood, not poorly listened to. An instruction given to 18 children at the same time doesn't speak to each of them in the same way.

- "I explained it badly, I'll start again differently."
- "Show me what you understood."

This second phrase changes everything: the child rephrases, you see where the message got lost, and you adjust. You move from repetition to understanding.

7. "We're here to win"

What the child hears: "My enjoyment and my progress come after the score."

Why it holds them back: in development, winning is a consequence, not a goal in itself. If the result comes first, children play not to make mistakes. The most fragile disappear, the strongest play alone, and the group freezes.

- "Today, our playing objective is to play out cleanly from the goalkeeper."
- "I want to see desire, courage and teamwork. The score will come with it."

You can still want to win: ambition is healthy. But by linking it to a precise playing objective, you teach children to win because they play well, not to play so as not to lose.

Knowing that a phrase hurts isn't enough: it's a reflex, and it comes back as soon as tension rises. Here is a simple method to replace it.

1. Identify your reflex phrases. Over two matches, note in a notebook (or ask an assistant to do it) the three phrases you repeat most. You'll be surprised: we don't hear ourselves speak.
2. Choose your replacement from one of these 3 families. Describe: say what you see, without judgment ("You received with your back to play"). Question: let the player find it ("What did you see?"). Suggest: give a single action cue ("Try to look at the space before receiving").
3. Apply the 3-step rule. Breathe, state the fact, give a single idea. Not two, not three: a child remembers one instruction at a time, especially in the middle of the action.

A common mistake is wanting to change everything at once. Choose a single phrase per week. After three weeks, you'll have replaced three automatic habits, and the group will have noticed.

Pitch examples: three situations, two ways to react

Let's take three moments every coach has already lived through, at three different ages.

Situation | The reflex phrase | The phrase that helps

U9: a child miscontrols in front of goal and drops his head | "What are you doing?!" | "Well tried, you dared. What did you feel under your foot?"

U13: the centre-back loses a ball that leads to a goal | "It's your fault, concentrate!" | "We fix it together. On the next ball, first look at where your free teammate is."

U15: a player has stayed on the fringes since the start of the match | "Pass it and stop hiding!" | "I trust you. Show me a risk taken in the next 5 minutes."

The coach can then observe three effects fairly quickly. The player lifts his head. He dares more. And above all, he listens to you again, because he's no longer trying to protect himself.

This isn't laxity: you correct just as much, but you correct the play, not the person. The standards stay the same, only the tone changes.

Practical advice for talking to children in football

A few simple habits to put all this in place without turning into the perfect coach overnight.

- Before the match, set a framework. One playing objective, one value (courage, helping each other), and you stick to it. What you announce beforehand means you correct less during the match.
- During the match, talk little. A child in action can't listen and decide at the same time. Save your interventions for stoppages and substitutions.
- At half-time, a single idea per group. Not a speech: one point to improve, one point to keep.
- After a defeat, wait before analysing. A child who has just lost isn't available to learn. Highlight what worked, and save the review for the next session.
- Praise the behaviour, not just the result. "I liked the way you got back up" counts as much as a goal.
- Give the same attention to everyone. You speak to the substitutes in the same tone as to the starters. The parents see it, and so do the children.
- Get help. Ask an assistant or a trusted parent to point out when a phrase slips. An outside view is worth all the advice.

From what age do these tips apply?

From the earliest age groups, from the football school through to the senior teams. Only the vocabulary changes: with U7s, you describe and you show; with U15s, you ask more questions and you allow more autonomy.

Breathe before speaking and wait for the next stoppage in play. Use the rule of three steps: the fact, a single idea, then you let them play. The irritation subsides within a few seconds, the sentence stays.

Does a player only respond to a firm tone? What should you do?

Firm is not harsh. You can be very clear and very demanding with a calm voice. If a player only responds to volume, first check whether your instructions are simple enough and whether you have given them the right to make mistakes.

Set the framework at the start of the season, during a meeting or with a parents' charter. A parent who knows your objective (to progress, to enjoy the game) understands better why you do not shout.

Should you praise even when it does not work?

Yes, but honestly. You praise what deserves it: the effort, the willingness to take risks, the attitude after a mistake. A sincere and specific compliment is worth more than ten automatic "well dones".

Conclusion: your words shape as much as your sessions

A child does not remember all your drills. They remember the way you spoke to them when they got it wrong. That is where confidence, the desire to come back and, in the end, the player are built.

Choose a single phrase from this list, the one you recognise most in your daily routine, and replace it starting this Saturday. The rest will follow.

Source: Josselin Lebreton · Translated from French josselinlebretoneducateur.com

THIS WEEK

02 Coaching

What are the grassroots coaching fundamentals?

> **For coaches** Use them as a reflection tool: pick one or two fundamentals to work on for a few weeks rather than trying to change everything in a single session.

The grassroots coaching fundamentals are a set of eight design and delivery principles to model what effective coaching looks like in the grassroots game.

They help coaches create a positive, engaging and effective learning experience and environment.

If you're new to coaching, they're a great framework to keep in mind to help you on your journey. And if you have years of experience, they can help you build on the things you do well already - plus identify areas you want to develop.

The eight grassroots coaching fundamentals

These fundamentals are in no particular order. Each is equally important.

They'll help you to develop as a coach while keeping the players at the heart of the experience.

Connect with players

Get to know your players and build meaningful relationships with them. It helps you build rapport and trust. Plus, it makes them feel valued, supported and motivated to learn.

Discover things like their names, interests, why they play and their motivations. And be genuine about this. Don't make it sound forced or that you're working your way through a checklist. Start with a simple hello and ask how they are when they arrive. Build up to finding out what they like and what they want to improve. Acknowledge their perspectives, thoughts and feelings. Then remember the details for the next time you see them.

All of this helps you create a personalised and positive environment. After all, the better you understand the person, the better you can support the player.

Build the plan

Create a clear connection between training and matchday. They don't need to be planned in isolation. You can link them together with clear objectives to make matchday a learning opportunity too.

This provides players with more repetition and allows them to learn over a longer period. Plus, they get the chance to apply their learning on matchday, which enhances their understanding and development. Your role is then to observe what went well and what needs more focus in training. Then the cycle begins again.

Include everyone

Ensure everyone is included and valued in your environment. It allows every player to thrive.

All players are unique. They have different needs, develop at different rates and require different levels of support. Understanding that and considering how you can support them is key. Allowing them to take part, offering choice and adjusting activities is so important here.

Keep players active

Make your sessions more effective. High ball-rolling time and less waiting around are key to this. This leads to more touches, more decisions and more learning opportunities for everyone.

There is a balance to find for the play-to-rest ratio, of course. But it's important that players aren't in long queues and waiting ages for another touch of the ball. Use small-sided games, parallel practices and purposeful interventions to help with this. Make any queues smaller so the turnaround from waiting to playing is quicker.

Make it a game

Plan training so it replicates what they're doing at the weekend. The more it looks like the game, the more opportunities players have to practise the skills they need on matchday.

So, when designing sessions, make sure they include direction, opposition and goals.

And don't forget that not every practice needs to be matched-up. Using overloads and underloads is useful too. They adjust the challenge your players face and prepare them for the problems they'll have on matchday.

Communicate clearly

Help players understand what they're working on and communicate it in a way that works for them.

Don't overcomplicate it. Use simple, clear coaching points and check for understanding.

Think about your language and the way you deliver the message, too. Use terminology your players know and understand so it sticks. Also consider whether visual aids are needed to support their learning. Putting on a demonstration or using a whiteboard can be a great way to get your messages across clearly.

Praise effort

Catch players in rather than catching them out. Observe and notice when players are doing something well - or trying hard to learn and improve. Effort deserves recognition.

Focusing on the intent rather than just the end result is powerful. It offers encouragement and allows making mistakes to be part of the learning journey. Plus, it helps players to feel confident and willing to challenge themselves further.

It doesn't always have to be verbal, either. A nod, a thumbs up or a high-five can be a nice way to acknowledge the effort your players have put in as well.

Seek feedback

Ask players for their opinions to help you reflect on your coaching.

Get their thoughts on what worked well and what could be improved. Use open questions to get meaningful answers.

Talk to other coaches, as well as parents and carers, to get their insights too. Then be willing to listen and adapt. This gives everyone a chance to shape the learning environment. It can also help you identify any areas for improvement.

How to use the grassroots coaching fundamentals

The grassroots coaching fundamentals are there to support your development. You may find that you're already displaying them naturally. But you can use them to aid your reflections. So, think about how you approach each fundamental. Find your strengths and any areas where you can improve.

But keep in mind that it's not about trying to work on everything at once in a single session. It's about shining a light on the areas you want to develop further and working on one or two of them for a while.

By bringing the fundamentals to life, you can make football engaging, inclusive and game-related. Doing this helps inspire every player to learn, enjoy and keep coming back.

Source: England Football Learning learn.englandfootball.com

03 Research U6 to U17

Youth sports participation report: Tennis, golf see biggest gains in 2025

> **For coaches** If your club runs multi-sport or entry-level programmes, the data shows new formats and shorter sessions are pulling children into tennis and golf, so it is worth reviewing how welcoming your first sessions are.

Everyone knew that COVID would scramble the youth sports landscape. We just didn't know which sports might suffer and which might experience a bump. Several years of youth sports participation data have now answered that question and the big winners are golf and tennis.

That's what the latest release of data from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association and other organizations makes clear. Tennis and and golf experienced rises at both the entry level and through adolescent years, according to separate data shared by the U.S. Tennis Association and National Golf Foundation. Soccer and flag football also rebounded well from the historic disruption caused by the pandemic, with most of that growth among younger children.

The Aspen Institute's Project Play initiative is transitioning from its annual National State of Play report to real-time analysis of youth sports data. Instead of waiting until the end of the year for a single report combining multiple sources, Project Play will publish insights as new data becomes available to provide more timely research in support of your work.

Each year, Aspen uses SFIA data to analyze the sports ecosystem as part of its Project Play initiative focused on building healthy children through sports. The SFIA data is from 2025 and drawn from a national survey of 18,000 online interviews by Sports Marketing Surveys. The SFIA data is one measure Aspen uses to analyze the sports ecosystem as part of its Project Play initiative focused on building healthy children through sports.

The SFIA data represents the most recent snapshot of sport activity, and supplements data that Aspen analyzes from the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH). The NSCH, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, surveys a larger sample of parents annually (about 37,000 in 2024) and offers state-by-state breakdowns, but has a two-year lag in the release of its data and does not offer sport-by-sport breakdowns. The most recent data is from 2024, which showed 58% of youth ages 6-17 played on a team or took sport lessons in the past year.

1. Tennis and golf surge with help of new formats

Aspen annually tracks SFIA core participation, meaning children who played sports on a regular basis. Between 2019, the year before COVID hit, and 2025, tennis' core participation increased by 72% among youth ages 6-12 and by 46% for ages 13-17.

What's fueling this growth? According to the USTA, youth who started playing tennis in the past year were motivated to join because they:

- Heard about the health benefits
- Were looking for a new way to socialize
- Wanted to be part of a community
- Heard a lot about tennis
- Saw tennis in pop culture
- Saw fashion trends around tennis
- Played another racquet sport

Participation in tennis among all ages has grown for seven consecutive years, even with, or perhaps aided by, the rise of pickleball. Eight in 10 tennis players plan to continue playing recreationally after they are done with organized tennis, according to USTA research.

"Knowing that coaches are the most impactful influence on the youth tennis experience, USTA Coaching has also invested in making sure there are more quality coaches to deliver positive experiences," said Craig Morris, CEO of USTA Coaching, and a member of the 63X30 roundtable of national organizations that Aspen convenes to get more kids playing sports..

Meanwhile, golf's core participation from 2019 to 2025 increased by 33% among youth ages 6-12 and 36% for ages 13-17. Golf surged during the pandemic and has sustained that growth through efforts to redefine how people first experience the sport.

"The industry has made a concerted and focused effort to grow junior golf with programs like PGA Jr. League, Drive, Chip and Putt, First Tee, Youth on Course, Operation 36, Girls Golf and more," said Steve Tanner, PGA senior director of player engagement and a member of the Aspen Institute's 63X30 roundtable. "Additionally, many PGA Sections offer junior tours that create pathways for kids to develop and grow with the sport. While we should be proud of growing the sport to 4 million youth, the reality is that this returns the sport to similar levels as the early 2000s."

Who's playing golf is dramatically changing. According to the PGA, girls currently represent 35% of junior golfers and minorities represent 26% of them. That's significantly higher than 20 years ago when girls comprised 15% of junior golfers and minorities represented 6%. New programs are helping to drive these shifting demographics.

"The image of golf before COVID was that it's a sport for only old people and mostly males," said Emily Denes, director of development at First Tee, Phoenix. "It's quite a transition for golf from what it used to be."

More golf courses have adjusted from 18 holes to shorter rounds, recognizing that not everyone wants to play for many hours. Night golf gained popularity with par-3 courses and music playing to attract younger people. Putting courses emerged for those interested in only their short game. And technology has fueled interest, such as indoor golf simulators, tracer technology on driving ranges showing how far and fast a ball was hit, and venues like Topgolf and PopStroke offering informal golf games using tech.

“In the last couple years, you see with kids on social media, it’s kind of hip or cool to be involved with golf,” said Scott McNevin, executive director of the Junior Golf Association of Arizona. “You see a lot more celebrities golfing, like LeBron James has a YouTube channel where he’s golfing. It’s a lot different than it used to be and a lot more kids want to get involved in the game.”

2. Flag football keeps growing

Among children ages 6-12, soccer core participation increased 7% from 2019 to 2025, even prior to any potential bump from the U.S. co-hosting the 2026 FIFA Men’s World Cup. Soccer’s domestic profile has built steady momentum following Lionel Messi’s 2023 MLS debut, the 2024 Copa América and the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup.

“This is the single best moment in time for soccer to grow in the U.S.,” said Alex Kerman, SFIA senior director of research operations and business development.

Major League Soccer’s launch of MLS GO in 2023 established an accessible recreational-level entry point for kids ages 4-14 at lower costs than traditional travel clubs. However, pay-to-play travel models continue to dominate the youth soccer landscape, functioning as a commercialized system that frequently excludes lower-income children. In August 2026, the U.S. Youth Soccer Association voted to essentially hand control of its organization over to the U.S. Soccer Federation, a move that some view as a significant step toward reform in soccer.

Flag football also continued its rapid growth, posting five-year increases of 30% among kids ages 6-12 and 15% among teens ages 13-17. Over the same period, youth tackle football declined 6% for ages 6-12 and remained flat for ages 13-17.

“We haven’t seen any data that has said flag is a deterrent to tackle,” Kerman said. “Flag seems to be just adding to the number of children playing any form of football.”

3. Soccer and baseball face retention challenges

Soccer draws more 6-year-olds than any other sport at 21% participation, but participation peaks at that age and the sport immediately and continuously starts losing kids every year. Baseball follows a similar downward trajectory, falling from 18% at age 6 to 12% at age 17. Early sport specialization in both sports remains a key driver of burnout and overuse injuries.

In all sports, ages 11 to 14 represent a critical transition window, marked by movement into contact sports like tackle football and increased adoption of middle-school team sports like basketball and volleyball. Starting at 19% among 6-year-olds, basketball participation climbs to nearly 29% by age 13, remaining the single most played youth sport through age 17 (24%).

Flag football holds an early participation lead over tackle football until ages 10 to 11, when tackle overtakes flag. Tackle peaks at nearly 10% participation at age 15, while flag drops below 5%. Volleyball demonstrates the sharpest relative growth between ages 8 and 14, whereas lacrosse maintains flat participation levels across all youth age brackets.

4. SFIA data suggests continued progress against 63X30 goal

In 2021, coming out of COVID, only 49% of youth ages 6-17 played organized sports, according to federal government data. The Aspen Institute's 63X30 national roundtable of leading organizations in sports has embraced a goal of helping the country get 63% playing by 2030, the nation's public health goal as codified in Healthy People 2020. Progress has been made since then, with the 58% figure from 2024 as reflected in the NCHS, the instrument Aspen uses to track gains.

The SFIA data suggests that the next round of federal government data, due in spring 2027, could show a continued lift toward that goal. Potential reasons for that growth include increased post-pandemic interest by Americans to be physically active and socialize within communities. Also, investments have been made by organizations across the landscape of youth sports, including members of the 63X30 roundtable which engaged more than 3.5 million parents and invested at least $71 million in youth sport access, safety and infrastructure. Members also trained more than 263,000 coaches and administrators in 2025.

"Participation is an important signal, but continued growth means creating the right conditions to keep kids in the game," said Ashleigh Huffman, senior director at the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program. "Our goal is to make sport accessible, welcoming and rewarding enough that children want to keep playing. The 63X30 roundtable's work with parents, coaches and communities is part of building that kind of experience."

By SFIA's measure, youth sports participation in 2025 reached its highest level in 12 years. Core team sports participation (meaning playing on a regular basis) among youth ages 6-17 reached nearly 41% in 2025, up 4% from the prior year. Nearly every demographic of child, across age, gender and race/ethnicity, experienced higher participation rates.

"Spending on fitness and sports remains resilient despite economic pressures," said Kerman of SFIA. "Since the pandemic, families have prioritized physical activity as an essential priority. There's just a different mindset than there used to be as families invest more of their time, energy and resources into physical activity, and that's carried through in our numbers, which is great to see."

5. Low-income kids are being left behind as costs rise

During 2025, there was a 7% single-year sports participation drop drop among children ages 6-12 living in households earning $25,000 or less. In contrast, participation across every higher income bracket grew between 2% and 7% over the same period. Coupled with rising costs to play sports entering 2026, the youth sports system may be reaching an affordability tipping point for millions of families.

Household income remains one of the strongest predictors of youth athletic participation, and that divide widened sharply in 2025. While regular participation for kids ages 6-12 in households earning $100,000 or more grew by 7% over one year, participation for youth in households earning $25,000 or less dropped by 7%. In 2022, the participation gap between the highest- and lowest-income tiers stood at 14.4 percentage points. By 2025, that gap expanded to 24.8 percentage points. U.S. Census Bureau data estimates that 11% of children ages 6-17 (5.4 million) live in households earning $25,000 or less.

“A 7% single-year drop is stunning and bad,” said Linda Flanagan, author of the book “Take Back the Game” that documents challenges in youth sports. “Is it a warning sign? It should be for public health officials, as this low-income, low-activity demographic desperately needs sports and exercise. State and local officials are going to have to start funding sports options for kids in these communities as the private options are increasingly out of sight.”

Kerman noted that manufacturers absorbed supply chain cost spikes as long as possible before raising equipment prices across the board. Combined with general inflation, lower-income family budgets were squeezed in 2025, leaving minimal margin for registration fees, equipment and travel expenses.

“We are extremely worried that all the progress we’ve made over the last several years is going to reverse,” Kerman said.

The latest SFIA data validates what Jason Clement sees firsthand managing sports facilities across the country: demand for sports is growing across all demographics, but participation among the lowest-income households is the notable exception. “This is not because these families value sports any less,” said Clement, founder and CEO of The Sports Facilities Companies. “Rather, rising costs can make participation inaccessible, and many young people must spend their time helping support their households.”

Travel expenses for youth sports are among the largest costs for families. While overall group travel as an industry stagnated in 2025, with room bookings down 1.6%, growth in youth sports travel accelerated, according to a report by the U.S. Travel Association. The report noted that youth sports has surpassed business meetings, conventions and trade shows to become the top-producing group travel segment in some cities.

SFIA data shows that declining sports participation among low-income families hits younger children (ages 6-12) harder than teenagers (ages 13-17). SFIA Senior Director Jenny Karn attributes this to teens already locked into athletic programs, making parents more willing to absorb the cost. For younger kids, opting out before starting is far easier, keeping the habit from ever taking root.

Even if costs and inconveniences are high, many parents will make sacrifices for their child to play sports if they see a net benefit, especially after shutdowns during the pandemic. That may be lifting up the participation numbers among all youth. “When kids are playing sports, they can’t be on their phones, and parents are desperate to get their kids off screens,” Flanagan said.

But Flanagan cautions that just because participation rates are increasing for most demographics does not mean many parents are thrilled with how sports are delivered. “Parents won’t accept these (cost) increases forever,” she predicted. “And as the national spotlight starts to turn on youth sports expenses, as we’ve seen in two congressional hearings on private equity in youth sports, the parents paying the bills may start to push back.”

6. Girls play more often, and boys’ participation starts to recover

Girls’ core participation rose from 33% in 2019 to 38% in 2025, the highest level since at least 2012. The lift, the fourth straight year of rising participation rates, comes in the wake of a push by many national and grassroots organizations to make sport more welcoming for girls, among them the Women’s Sports Foundation, Coaching Her and many Project Play Champion organizations, as well as Nike, the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee, Under Armour, the DICK’S Sporting Goods Foundation and other members of the 63X30 roundtable.

“Girls’ access grows when the system changes around them,” said Huffman, who manages the 63X30 roundtable for the Aspen Institute. “That’s 63X30 in action: turning a shared goal into practical support that helps girls get on the field, feel they belong and keep playing.”

For the first time, the gender gap pulled within five percentage points of that of boys. That’s in part because boys’ participation stagnated over the past decade, a development that the Aspen Institute and the American Institute for Boys and Men (AIBM) addressed in a white paper released earlier this month, with recommendations on how to get and keep more of them playing.

The latest SFIA report offered signs of hope for boys. While the gain was smaller than that of girls, boys’ participation reached 43%, up from about 40% where it largely has been stuck since 2016. The current level remains well below that of 2013 when half of all boys played team sports on a regular basis.

“These numbers fluctuate from year to year, and it’s encouraging to see a possible uptick in boys’ participation after stagnation,” said Alanna Williams, vice president at AIBM. “But we heard in our research with boys that there’s still a lot of unmet demand for play: many boys wanted to try something new or get back into a sport but didn’t feel they had enough low-pressure options. I hope these numbers reflect both continued demand and more ways to play.”

And yet a gap remains between boys and girls, but it’s not due to demand. Girls who have never played sports are just as interested in playing as boys (54% vs. 52%), according to the Women’s Sports Foundation Sport Report 2026. Interest is even higher among Hispanic girls (61%) and Black girls (58%) who have never played.

7. Asian youth participation rates skyrocket, unlike Black youth

Over a five-year period, core participation increased across all racial and ethnic groups, led by Asian (+25%), White (+6%) and Hispanic youth (+5%), according to SFIA data. The growth of sports participation by Asian youth may be tied to household income.

Annual Census Bureau reports consistently show that Asian American households have the highest median income among all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. Asian Americans are considerably more likely than Americans overall to live in upper-income households, according to Pew Research Center. Demographics with higher average household wealth are statistically more capable of absorbing rising youth sports expenses, even amid economic downturns or cuts to public sports programming.

The only racial demographic to not see a major sports participation lift are Black youth. Participation is up just 1% in the past five years, and it’s dropped 10% over the past decade. This makes Black youth the only racial demographic to experience a 10-year decline. From 2020 to 2024, Black households had a median income of $55,000 compared to $117,000 for Asian households, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

“The decline in Black youth sports participation is not a failure of interest or ambition,” said Robert Marcus, chief strategy and impact officer at Positive Coaching Alliance. “It is a failure of access and investment. We've allowed rising costs, unequal resources and a lack of affordable opportunities to shut too many Black children out of sports. Reversing this trend requires more than creating programs. It demands changing the systems that have allowed these inequities to persist.”

Chris Pulley, former Fairfax County (Virginia) community outreach specialist for athletics, said sports providers that fold too often are those serving predominantly Black communities. “If those kids are in single-family households and have transportation issues, well, what do you do to play sports?” said Pulley, who now oversees Fairfax County’s coordination of veterans.

Pulley said less sports participation by Black children may also be due to bad messaging by coaches, parents or peers. One example: if a child is not the best athlete, he or she often hear that they shouldn't play sports.

"For a lot of these kids, it's easier to resist authority and walk away when told something like that," Pulley said. "In my empirical observations, I've seen it a bunch, and the bad messaging steers kids away from group involvement in things like sports because it didn't work for them. Unfortunately, it's a cycle in the African-American community."

8. Fewer adults are coaching

Active youth sports coaches of children ages 14 and under fell from 8.4 million in 2022 to 6.9 million in 2025, marking three consecutive years of decline. (The data doesn't include coaches of high school-age athletes.) At the same time, the number of self-identified former coaches rose for the fourth straight year, climbing from 9.8 million in 2021 to 12.3 million in 2025.

This surge in former coaches highlights a clear retention problem.

"Recruiting and retaining coaches is a consistent challenge for youth sports providers," said Brian McFadden, youth sports program manager with the National Recreation and Park Association, a member of the 63X30 roundtable. "Time constraints, lack of confidence, insufficient training and unchecked parental behavior all put a strain on the youth sports coaching ranks. Providers who ensure quality training, clear expectations and gracious recognition are the ones most likely to find success attracting and keeping coaches in the game."

Additionally, coaches ages 55 and older now comprise 43% of the coaching field for youth 14 and under, driven largely by retiring baby boomers stepping into volunteer roles.

"We need to make sure that lack of coaches is not the bottleneck that keeps kids from being able to play," said Karn of SFIA. "We need to do more to get people interested in being coaches, and then also retain them once they're there."

Meanwhile, the percentage of head coaches or assistant coaches of 14-and-under teams who are women reached 34% in 2025, the highest on record tracked by SFIA since at least 2013. As recently as 2019, only 26% of surveyed head and assistant coaches were female.

In recent years, many organizations have created initiatives and resources to grow the number of female coaches. One example: 35% of the U.S. Tennis Association's 20,000 coaches are women through efforts to help them learn different coaching pathways as teenagers, college athletes and professional women.

"Women need to know coaching is an option for them and it can be a whole career path where you make money," said Megan Rose, who recently departed as managing director of USTA Coaching.

9. Training for coaches has decreased

While 94% of active youth coaches in 2025 reported receiving training at some point in their lives, annual ongoing training has fallen significantly.

Coaches completing training within the previous 12 months declined across every category measured by SFIA between 2020 and 2025. Annual training in CPR/basic first aid, concussion management, general safety/injury prevention, physical conditioning, sport-specific skills and motivational techniques all suffered double-digit percentage drops over the five-year period.

What's causing the decline in training? The SFIA data in and of itself doesn't explore those answers. Dr. Vincent Minjares, Aspen Institute Sports & Program manager, identified some possible explanations:

- An older coaching workforce that has already completed CPR or concussion training.
- Uneven training incentives, requirements and enforcement, due in part to concerns about costs, administrative hurdles and impact on volunteerism.
- Low rates of training for injury prevention, physical conditioning, sports skills/tactics and motivation suggest that many coaches feel they already have this knowledge.
- Bias of coaches toward self-directed learning (such as YouTube and clinics) and away from formal training and education.
- Coaching in completely unregulated environments (such as private trainers and independent clubs) and parents don't think to ask about their training.

"As our collective attention to coaching grows, this data only reinforces the larger challenges before the youth sports sector," Minjares said. "Too many coaches still have not completed the foundational training needed to keep kids safe and coach them well. As a field, we must develop solutions to overcome barriers to training, including helping local providers implement incentives and enforce requirements, designing great training that coaches value, and engaging independent coaches that operate outside of regulated environments. It can and must be done."

The Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) commissioned an online, nationally representative survey from Sports Marketing Surveys (SMS), which the Aspen Institute uses annually to track participation and coaching data. In 2025, the most recent year with available data, SMS conducted 18,000 online interviews among a national sample representative of the U.S. population ages 6 and older. Quotas were applied for gender, age, income, geographic region and ethnicity. Activity reporting is based on a rolling 12-month participation rate.

Jon Solomon is Research Director for the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program. Email him at jon.solomon@aspeninstitute.org.

Source: Aspen Institute Project Play projectplay.org

04 Policy and clubs U5 to U18

Football NSW Freezes Community Registration Fees for Junior and Youth Players in 2027

For coaches If you handle club registrations, explain to families that the Football NSW fee stays the same but a separate $22 Football Australia contribution is collected at sign-up.

Football NSW has confirmed a fee freeze for junior and youth community footballers in 2027, reaffirming its commitment to keeping the game accessible and affordable for players and families across New South Wales.

Senior players will also benefit from a modest increase of less than 1.5 per cent, as Football NSW continues to manage rising costs while supporting the growth and development of football across the state.

This puts the fee freeze front and centre, directly supports the headline and clearly communicates the benefit to players and families.

Under the 2027 fee structure, registration fees for junior players aged 5 to 12 and youth players aged 13 to 18 will remain unchanged at $54.42, inclusive of GST. Senior registration fees for players aged 19 and above will increase by $1.50, from $106 to $107.50.

Football NSW CEO John Tsatsimas said maintaining affordability for younger participants and their families remained a key priority for the organisation.

“Football is the game of the people, and we recognise the importance of keeping participation accessible for families across our state. By freezing our registration fees for junior and youth players in 2027, we are continuing to support the next generation of footballers and help ensure that cost is not an unnecessary barrier to participation,” Tsatsimas said.

“We have worked hard to manage the pressures facing the game, particularly around insurance, while ensuring Football NSW can continue to deliver the services and support our clubs, associations and participants expect. For senior players, we have kept the increase to less than 1.5 per cent, well below the rate of inflation.”

Football NSW continues to face inflationary pressures across its direct and indirect operating costs, making it important to balance financial sustainability with the need to keep football affordable for its members.

The Football NSW registration fee comprises two components: an insurance component, which contributes to the cost of the Football NSW Insurance Program, and a capitation component, which supports the organisation’s operations. The insurance component is calculated using claims data, claim values and participation numbers across different categories of football, with the aim of ensuring that each sector contributes its fair share towards the cost of the program.

Following adjustments to its insurance program, Football NSW has secured savings across its total insurance costs. As a result, the insurance component of community registration fees will decrease by 3.11 per cent in 2027. The organisation has also reported that the upward cost trend in the personal accident component of its insurance program has ended, helping to ease pressure on registration fees.

Football NSW will continue working with clubs and associations to identify practical measures to manage risks and address rising public liability costs, with the aim of placing downward pressure on insurance expenses.

For 2027, Football Australia has also consolidated its previous National Registration Fee and PlayFootball service fee into a single charge known as the National Football Development Contribution (NFDC). The contribution will be $22 for junior and youth participants and $49 for senior participants, inclusive of GST.

The NFDC is collected directly by Football Australia at the time of registration and is separate from the Football NSW registration fee. It does not pass through Football NSW or contribute to the organisation's operating revenue.

The 2027 registration fee structure reflects Football NSW's ongoing commitment to managing costs responsibly while maintaining the services and support required to grow and develop football throughout the state.

By freezing fees for junior and youth players and limiting the increase for seniors, Football NSW aims to provide greater cost certainty for participants, families, clubs and associations ahead of the 2027 season.

Source: Football NSW footballnsw.com.au

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05 Safety and welfare

Do We Really Need EKGs for the Pre-Participation Examination?

> **For coaches** Before tryouts, make sure families fill in the personal and family history questions, and treat fainting or chest pain during exercise as a reason to stop and see a doctor.

As a coach, you already have a lot of responsibilities to deal with, and making sure athletes have the appropriate medical clearance required for participation can add another layer of stress to a busy early-season schedule. Increasingly, caregivers and athletes may be asking you if young athletes should undergo an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG) test before tryouts.

Here, Dr. Michele LaBotz, TrueSport Expert and sports medicine physician, explains why some people recommend the test, and what you as a coach need to know about the results.

Current research

Put simply, an EKG records the heart's electrical activity, which controls the rate and rhythm of the heartbeat. "The primary purpose for doing the EKG during a pre-participation evaluation is to detect potential causes or risks of sudden cardiac death in young athletes," explains LaBotz. "For as long as I have been in this field, the question of EKGs as part of the pre-participation examination has been an area of ongoing debate. While sudden death in any young athlete is tragic, sudden cardiac death in young athletes is rare, and we need to understand the role EKGs may, or may not, play in reducing this risk."

LaBotz explains that the way the numbers are reported can be confusing. Researchers talk about the risk of sudden cardiac death in terms of "athlete-years," not "athletes." One athlete participating in one year of athletic participation equals one athlete-year. Some statistics also include athletes who experienced sudden cardiac arrest but were successfully resuscitated and survived.

"The risk of sudden cardiac death in athletes under 18 is about one in 100,000 athlete-years, but if we include athletes who survive an episode of sudden cardiac arrest, the risk is about one in 65,000 athlete-years," says LaBotz. "Risk is significantly higher for males compared to females, and it goes up as athletes get older, which is why more collegiate programs are requiring EKG tests for athletes. Sport matters too. Football and basketball are the two sports with the highest rates of sudden cardiac death, and Black collegiate basketball players appear to be an athlete population at uniquely elevated risk."

One of the problems with EKG testing is the potential for "false positives," where the EKG suggests an issue, but the heart is actually healthy. "There are a lot of changes that happen in the hearts of athletes," she says. "Their heart muscles tend to be bigger. There can be changes in the rhythm. Some of those normal athletic changes overlap with changes often associated with cardiac disease, and that leads to false positive tests."

False positives can create panic and potentially impact an athlete's season, but they can also strain the medical system and family resources because further tests are needed before an otherwise healthy athlete can be cleared to play. An athlete with an abnormal EKG will typically need an echocardiogram or a cardiac MRI, both of which involve specialized equipment and a cardiologist who can interpret the results and clear an athlete for play. These tests can be expensive for many families, and many areas lack ready access to cardiologists who can read the results and counsel athletes and their families.

Current requirements

In the United States, EKGs are not routinely recommended for athletes younger than college age. Instead, the current approach is individualized. “If there are any red flags in the family history, or if there are concerning symptoms or findings during a physical exam, then an EKG might be recommended. Many colleges are routinely performing EKGs during their pre-participation exams, but these decisions are made at the institutional level.”

LaBotz also notes that for athletes who haven’t reached puberty yet, an EKG typically won’t show the warning signs for the most common cause of sudden cardiac death in that age group, anomalous coronary arteries, which can only be detected with a cardiac MRI or an echocardiogram.

As technology continues to develop, current recommendations could shift to recommend EKG testing for more athletes. Researchers are working to refine EKG criteria for athletes to reduce false positives. LaBotz also notes that the technology is rapidly changing, and artificial intelligence (AI) detection tools may make reading EKGs more accurate and more efficient, allowing more youth athletes to be tested and cleared.

Should you recommend that caregivers get athletes tested?

In most cases, the decision about whether to get an EKG is best left to the athlete’s health care provider. Coaches can help by making sure families complete thorough pre-participation materials, including the personal and family history questions in the American Heart Association’s 14-element screening checklist. These questions can help health care providers decide whether an EKG is needed.

“There is convincing evidence that EKGs do a good job of detecting conditions that are associated with sudden cardiac death,” says LaBotz. “But there’s not good data showing that implementing EKG screening programs actually reduces the risk of sudden cardiac death in young athletes.”

Whether or not an athlete has had an EKG, LaBotz says coaches should watch for two red flags that may indicate a potential cardiac issue:

- Passing out during exercise, regardless of the temperature outside or the athlete’s effort level, is a serious concern and should be evaluated by a doctor before further participation. Even if the athlete regains consciousness quickly, this episode may signal an underlying serious condition and needs medical evaluation. If an athlete does not regain consciousness immediately, be prepared to implement your emergency action plan, including dialing 911 and locating the nearest automated external defibrillator (AED).
- Chest pain during activity is another reason for athletes to immediately stop play and seek medical attention.

What happens after a concerning test result? “

It depends on the issue detected," LaBotz says. "Once a potential 'red flag' is identified on the EKG, the athlete and their caregiver should discuss any possible sport or activity restrictions with their health care provider. Some conditions allow athletes to keep playing, while others may require sitting out until a definitive diagnosis is made."

Because being inactive comes with its own physical, mental, and emotional risks, doctors will often help athletes keep training to some degree while waiting for further results. Coaches can support that by helping to assure that the athlete is following any restrictions the doctor sets and by finding safe ways to keep the athlete connected to the team. "When you pull kids out of sport, and away from their teammates, oftentimes they don't come back," LaBotz says. "And that isn't healthy either."

Source: TrueSport truesport.org

FROM THE COACHING COMMUNITY

06 Safety and welfare U14

If player's dad is a known racist, would you coach the player?

> **For coaches** Welcome the child, but set behaviour rules early for players and parents alike, and be ready to remove a parent from games.

U14

Top replies, most upvoted first

- (+30) I love coaching kids that have it rough. Can be the best part of their day/week to be in a normal environment. That being said; I don't tolerate behavior issues at all so, be strict/firm and set the tone early. That goes triply for parent behavior, and do not be afraid to anon report a parent early.z
- (+18) Don't visit the sins of the father on the son.
- (+9) Yes definitely. But that wouldn't entitle dad to come spew his bullshit. So kid welcome, dad subject to same rules as everyone else. You don't have to be a good person, but you do have to keep your shitty opinions to yourself yknow
- (+9) Yes, please never punish children for the actions of their parents

- (+7) I'm a black guy in a rural Appalachian county that is 94% white per the US Census. I've surely coached 100+ kids whose parents were racist. The only time it really became an issue is a family that insisted on wearing Confederate flag hats and blankets to the fields. They threw a fit when I asked them to leave that stuff at home, and I didn't see their kid for the last couple of weeks of that rec season. In 12 or so years, I've never had issues with kids themselves in rec or club. For the club families, I definitely notice that the sideline behavior is a little more aggressive when we travel...
- (+6) Be the change you want to see in the world.
- (+5) Coach the kid if they're coachable. Take a strong line on any kind of negative talk. 13/14 is old enough to tell a kid straight that "your parent may say X at home but that's unacceptable here." Be quick to discipline and quick to kick dad out of games if he's a problem. Racism words (you know the ones) are one of a handful of things that get you a straight red on the field so a kid who uses them is a liability (in more ways than one).
- (+4) Yes
- (+4) Upvoting your post for visibility. The short version is if the kid is coachable. Coach the kid. I'm not the same as one part of my family. I'm thankful for my coaches and the other side of my family. Truth be told I would say it's important for you to coach that kiddo.
- (+4) Train the kid and teach inclusion, respect and morals amongst your team. You can't control who the parents are or what their views are but you can control how your players behave when training. If kids are only exposed to racism they're gonna be racists, but if kids are exposed to different and better ways of thinking etc then as they grow they decide for themselves, but at least there could be forks in the road rather than a one way street
- (+3) Yep
- (+2) Yes. The suns of father dont transfer to the son. If the kid acts racist, then you treat it like you would any other kid acting that way.

Source: r/SoccerCoachResources · 27 comments reddit.com

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07 Coaching U11

Competitive Club Playing Time

> **For coaches** Call the coach and ask directly how many minutes your son is likely to get and what he should improve.

My son plays U11 club soccer on a top 5 team in the state. There is a tournament coming up and the coach sends a message to the team saying he really wants to win and playing time is not guaranteed. He says to consider that before paying for the tournament and to call him if you have questions.

- Is this the right way for a coach to handle the situation? It seems like reaching out to the few people he already has in mind that will not play or play very little, and talking to them privately would be much better.
- At this age level is it the norm to completely bench players? These are kids that normally play about half the game, make solid contributions, and attend all games and practices. I'm not sure if this is just the reality of competitive sports at this age or if the guy is going a little overboard.

There are 4-5 subs on the team. What do you guys think?

Update - This is in Texas. The confidence of my kid getting crushed is a major concern. He feels like a normal part of the team until this happens, then he feels like he doesn't belong? I'm leaning towards just going and hoping to get at least a little playing time vs completely excluding ourselves from a major team event.

Top replies, most upvoted first

- (+26) Clubs do this all the time. I'm a fully even play-time coach. And I'll be the first to say, tournaments are rough. There are a lot of emotions on the line, especially if you win a couple games and have a shot at the championship. That said, I refuse to bench kids at the youth level. I coach because I enjoy developing kids, and crushing a kid by telling them they aren't good enough to play is the opposite of what I am in it for.
- (+25) This isn't about age level. This is about competitive level. I appreciate the coach's transparency. He's setting expectations before parents commit their time and money. I coach a U11 bronze team, and I wouldn't approach playing time this way, but you describe your team a top-five team in the state. Competitive level matters more than age here. If you're uncomfortable with playing time being determined by the desire to win, you should consider a less competitive team. You signed up for this.
- (+20) At that age, that feels a tad much - but, I think it’s healthy that he is communicating it? I guess? Bring it up in passing and see what the other parents are saying Edit: if this is a prestigious event, it’s way less weird
- (+11) He said to call him if you have questions. If you think your son is not one of their top players, I'd suggest calling him and asking him directly whether your son would see decent minutes during the tournament. Better yet, ask him where your son's areas of improvement are, and see if you can help your son work on them outside of team practice. As long as playtime is more equitable in league games, I don't see anything wrong with competing to win in a tournament. Winning sometimes matters and if there is a realistic chance the team can do well and place high in a tournament, the kids should be...

- (+8) This isn't normal for a lot of competitive teams, but this is what I'd call top team problems. The best teams in our area are far more likely to not give playing time to each player, since the reason they can recruit players is based on the performance of those top teams. I would say that if you are playing for one of the best clubs, and on their first team it's likely that your playing time is performance based.
- (+8) You want to tell everyone your kid is on a "Top 5" team in Texas but then complain about playing to win. Play at a lower level if that is a concern.
- (+7) What state? If one like CA with 1300+ teams at U11 there is an element of prestige that's important with a top 5 team (the rankings really aren't that arbitrary that far up). The club cares about reputations, recruiting into the pipeline, etc. If there are 6-8 flights of teams then there are plenty of options available for parents who demand equal playing time, etc. Sucks to be on the receiving end but I guess the upside is at least you know ahead of it.
- (+5) I guess think of the flip side-he makes everyone pay for the tournament and some kids barely play. Sounds like with 4-5 subs, everyone should play as opposed to being benched the whole game.
- (+5) No. It's pretty shitty at U11. Limited playing time kinda comes with being a "top team " to a degree. But not completely benching players. It gets worse when teams start bringing in guest players to help teams better compete.
- (+5) I think it's better than having you pay for the tournament, travel and then not get minutes. So, yes, this is a good way to handle. Maybe the "best" but there's nothing wrong with it either. I would be upset about benching players if the tournament fee was baked into the club fee then you've already paid for the tournament, so your kid should get to play. But if you haven't paid and he's telling you ahead of time that this tournament is about winning then parents can make informed decisions.
- (+4) At that age it is a little overboard, but also, not uncommon. To clarify, if the coach usually gets everyone good quality minutes in regular season games, but switches to this exclusively for tournaments, I don't see anything wrong with it. He is communicating his plans beforehand, which gives everyone an option to opt out. You could probably reach out to get a read on how impacted your own child would be.
- (+4) This sounds a lot like him trying to get the lower players out and bring better guest players in based on the lower level players "not being available" I don't care about competitive level... this is BS and shitty coaching at its finest. He's trying to nicely say "we aren't good enough unless I bring in some ringers". Play your team unless you actually have people unable to make it. Bring some kids in to help fill spots if short handed. I coach a competitive team at this age and this is what makes me furious about youth coaches in our country. Winning at this age does not matter! There is no...

Source: r/youthsoccer · 95 comments reddit.com

08 Coaching U10

What age should we start giving more time to the stronger players?

> **For coaches** Keep everyone near even minutes at U10; if you adjust, do it game by game against the opponent, not mid-season.

I'm a U10 travel coach of a mid flight team. We have a 12 player roster and play 7v7. We play 4 blocks/rotations per half, so 8 total, and when everyone is there, the four strongest players get one extra rotation. My philosophy is that everyone plays at least half the game, and if there are extra rotations, the players who've earned those, should get them. We started the season 2-0. Then we played in a tournament where we lost both games to two teams a flight above us. Following the tournament losses, my assistant began talking about playing the stronger players more to try to win. I thought he was overreacting to the loses, and I told him that I didn't believe that was necessary until at least U12, and even if it weren't true I wouldn't want to change the rules about playing time in the middle of a season. I would want to wait until the spring to establish that expectation before the season started. We've since lost both of our next two league games. One was a blowout, but the other we should have won and probably would have won if I followed his philosophy. I asked our town president if there was any sort of policy, and he said that I should be playing the stronger players 60-70% of the game and the weaker players 30-40% depending on scores, otherwise we'll lose the top players. Am I wrong and crazy for wanting to stick to my guns?

Top replies, most upvoted first

- (+33) Age 14 or 15, maybe. No younger. If you restrict playtime for the weaker players then they'll never catch up. At U10, the results don't matter. Say it again, and keep saying it until you believe it.
- (+6) I try to play all players at least 50% of a game, even still at u13. The best players may play 100%. In a game for a league or tournament championship I might cut the lesser players minutes some, but not a ton. It may be worth pointing out that you'll soon move up to 11v11 and need more players and more capable players. Keep developing those kids who work hard and show up for every event.
- (+6) I adjust game to game depending on the quality of the opponent. Against tougher teams I might give an extra rotation to better players or leave the change an extra couple of minutes. Against a worse team I give way more minutes to worse players. Last game we were up comfortably and a kid who isn't as good but came to extra optional practices got an extended run at forward. He scored a great goal on a through ball and it made his year. I don't think he was worried that he didn't get as many minutes the game before.

- (+6) As a parent - I would stick to broadly even playing time per player. Focus on becoming a good passing team which requires all the players to become skilled (not just the strong ones). Results really don't matter at U10. As long as you get parents to buy into that vision of longer term development as a team, I they will appreciate that.
- (+6) I thought he was overreacting to the loses, and I told him that I didn't believe that was necessary until at least U12, and even if it weren't true I wouldn't want to change the rules about playing time in the middle of a season. You are 100% correct. On all counts. However I asked our town president if there was any sort of policy, and he said that I should be playing the stronger players 60-70% of the game and the weaker players 30-40% depending on scores, otherwise we'll lose the top players. Is also correct. Welcome to youth soccer. Where all choices are equally wrong, and you will be...
- (+3) I think you've probably got it about right. The reality is that it is impossible to keep everyone happy. The stronger kids may leave for teams where they play more. The weaker kids too. Both groups may get upset. The pressure does build when you go a few games without a win. Every parent will want your team optimised for their individual child. Idiot coaches think they are there to win rather than develop. What I used to do at that age is similar to you, everyone gets roughly the same with a few of the better kids getting a little extra, but averaging it out over a few games/the season. It...
- (+2) What this guy said.
- (+2) You're not wrong, but that's a big roster for 7v7. Now that may be out of your control, but that may be just as much of an issue as playing time. You have 6 field players and you gotta rotate in 5 guys off the bench, so 1 guy gets to stay on (I reckon those spots are your strongest guys?) so your chemistry and then gets totally nuked. When I was coaching U7 4v4 I had a 7 or 8 kid roster so I had the same issue. I just didn't have it in me to make a kid sit 2 rotations in a row. Totally not fair. But I would have weaker players sub for each other every rotation. This is travel rec right? Or is...
- (+2) 15, imo. However, realistically, its when they start playing 11v11.
- (+2) I'd suggest sticking to your guns. When those kids are adults, they won't necessarily remember the games, but they will remember how you treated them. Your assistant sounds like he has had his ego hurt a little by a game involving 9 year olds. I'd also say that your approach will benefit more of them in the long-term - not just in terms of performance but also staying in the game.
- (+2) At least 50% of every game always. That is the law. Your option is to simply not take a kid at tryouts. Once they are on the team; absent injury - 50% of every game.
- (+1) But also at 15-35 , players can't develop unless they...umm...dare i say it...play?

Source: r/SoccerCoachResources · 41 comments reddit.com

ON THE PITCH

09 Coaching U9 to U10

Is 8-a-side soccer unique to Japan? Tell me whether we should have players train with odd numbers of players, like they do abroad, so the move to 11-a-side is easier

> **For coaches** When you set up a small-sided game, count the triangles your shape creates rather than the number of players, and let the formation shift when the head count changes.

I agree with Japan's development guidelines that let everyone touch the ball in small-sided games, but 8-a-side is unique to Japan, isn't it? We received a consultation from a dad coach wondering: wouldn't having kids play 7-a-side or 9-a-side, odd numbers like overseas, make the transition to 11-a-side easier?

Tadashi Ikegami, who has served as a development coach at JEF United Ichihara Chiba and as Home Town Academy Director at Kyoto Sanga F.C., and who has coached more than 600,000 children in total, shares the key points of 8-a-side and odd-number practice and what matters in the U-10 age group. (Writing and composition: Yuko Shimazawa)

＜Question from a dad coach＞

Hello, nice to meet you.

I am involved with a local club as a parent and coach. (Coaching age group: U-10)

What I would like to ask about, rather than consult on, is "8-a-side" in the elementary school age group.

In Japan's development age groups, I think there are good aspects to guidelines aimed at small-sided games where everyone can be involved with the ball, but the number of players per age group differs from overseas, right? Isn't 8-a-side unique to Japan?

I hear overseas uses odd numbers, and it's said that makes the transition to 11-a-side easier, but is that true? If so, should we have them play 7-a-side or 9-a-side from around the upper grades?

If we use odd numbers, what would be the key points, for example? (Positioning, distance from the opponent, differences from 8-a-side)

It's not every year, but our team sometimes goes overseas and plays against local teams, so I wondered whether they might be confused once they get there, which is why I'm asking. (Though confusion and things not going well are also experiences, so that's fine.)

Thank you in advance.

＜Advice from Ikegami＞

Thank you for your consultation.

8-a-side in the development age groups is not unique to Japan; it is also used in other countries.

In Germany and elsewhere, the upper grades generally use 9-a-side, but it is very flexible there. Depending on the opponent that day, the team, or what they want to try, they change it, like "let's do 9 today" or "7."

Specifically, to go from 11 to, say, 9, you change a two-top to a one-top, pull out one defender and make it a three-back, or something like that. When reducing the number of players, they think about how the soccer system connects smoothly. As the age group goes down, it changes to 7-, 5-, and 3-a-side futsal-style games.

■ Even if the number of players changes, the basic idea, the formation of triangles, does not change

That said, even with 8-a-side, the basic idea does not change. In soccer, it is good if triangles are formed in various places.

If so, excluding the goalkeeper, you place three in defense, one midfield player in the middle, and two players spread wide slightly ahead. If there is a top there, it becomes 3-1-2-1 with seven field players, making it 8-a-side.

I would be happy if you could picture this in your head: there is one player in the center of defense, and if you connect the slightly advanced fullbacks on both sides and the center of midfield with lines, it forms a diamond. Next, if you connect the one central midfielder, the wide attackers on both sides, and the forward at the top, that also forms a diamond.

When you look at it, the left and right sides always form triangles. Connecting the left fullback, the left wide player, and the midfielder also makes a triangle. The right side is the same. In this way, the basic soccer idea of triangles can be learned in 8-a-side. I tell coaches who teach 8-a-side to have the players think that way.

In contrast, not a few coaches see it as 3-3-1. This is often seen even in J-League youth academies. When seen that way, triangles become harder to imagine.

■ Key points for using odd numbers

Next, let's talk about what the key points are for using odd numbers. With odd numbers, the field players become even, but if you play soccer while being conscious of the various triangles described above, the basics are the same.

In Japan too, since about 15 years ago, elementary school age groups have started building up from the goalkeeper. This is because around the world the keeper is now considered another field player.

Therefore, excluding the keeper, it is better for the field to be even. If you keep the keeper and make the field players even, it is easier to organize the relationships and positioning of the positions.

■ Experiencing the local regulations becomes a "new experience" for the children

Also, since your club has opportunities to go overseas and play against local teams, you are worried that they might be confused once they get there. For example, I hear that elementary school kids these days have opportunities to go to international tournaments held in Hawaii. Hawaii probably attracts them because it has many fields and well-equipped facilities.

So it seems they discuss whether to play by the local rules (regulations) or by Japanese ones. Since they are going all the way to Hawaii to play, if they played by the local rules, the children could have a new experience.

I think so, but Japanese coaches apparently think, "It's a competition, after all." They choose the option they are used to. That makes me wonder what the point of going abroad to play is.

When I was a YMCA coach, we went on tours to Taiwan for years. We played matches on grounds where the soccer goals had no nets, and we also played on a court where blocks were buried in the dirt. It was an elementary school playground, so instead of track lines being painted, white brick-like objects were buried there. They stuck up about 3 centimeters. We played matches on such a court. Even in such an environment, referees with FIFA licenses came.

Source: サカイク · Translated from Japanese sakaiku.jp

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10 Coaching

Individual skills improvement training by a personal coach who works with pros to raise "body control and thinking suited to the situation

> **For coaches** The contact drill asks your players to attack the impact first rather than brace for it, and to keep the ball outside their body width so they can turn straight into a dribble.

This time's theme is "training methods to raise the situational body control and thinking skills that form each individual's base." The coach is Masaki Ozeki, who serves as representative of MAVEN SOCCER SCHOOL.

Alongside coaching at the school, Ozeki also works as a personal coach for more than 30 professional soccer players in Japan and abroad.

Furthermore, as representative of the athlete training gym "MAVEN SPORTS LABO," he serves as personal coach not only for professional soccer players but also for mixed martial arts fighters and others, a total of 50 professional athletes.

How can individual skills be made into something that can be demonstrated in matches? In the first part, he introduced practical menus ranging from coordination that approaches the nervous system, to contact skills, one-on-one facing and non-facing situations, and passing training that incorporates tactical elements. (Text by Tomoyuki Suzuki)

Arm circles that connect the brain and body

What is done in the first part is an approach to the nervous system and one-on-one training. Coach Ozeki describes the key points of the overall menu as follows.

"The key point of this training is the way of thinking that raises situational awareness and individual skills. I coach with the intention of raising precision while the intensity of play is increased."

The first menu is coordination done in pairs. While circling the right arm forward and the left arm backward, dribble forward, turn, and pass to your partner.

Next, switch left and right, and proceed while being careful not to let the arms make the same movement. Once players get used to it, change the dribbling to juggling.

Coach Ozeki raised the speed in stages while calling out, "Move big and dynamically from the shoulder blades," and "Keep your head up, don't look at the ball."

Don't be passive, attack from yourself

What is done next is contact skill training. Dribble from sideline toward sideline, and against the defender who comes in to bump, the attacker attacks from himself.

What Coach Ozeki emphasized was not blocking in an attempt to endure, but going to hit first.

"If you try to endure it and block when you are bumped, you get pushed back and taken into the negative. Attack first against what is coming, and take the direction of force into the positive. If you do that, even if you lose the duel, you only end up slightly in the negative."

He also required players to put the ball outside the width of the body, widen the stance, and create a state where they can immediately move into dribbling or turning.

After that, it was on to one-on-one facing and non-facing situations. In the facing situation, players face the opponent and beat them while holding left and right options.

Look before the ball comes and while it is traveling

The last part of the first part is passing training that incorporates tactical elements.

With markers placed in a V shape in the center imagined as defenders, to avoid positional relationships where a defender overlaps between the passer and the receiver, players try play that increases options by changing lanes.

They are required to raise pass speed and play speed while always being conscious of the attacking direction, such as back to front and side changes from right to left. Coach Ozeki says.

"Mistakes will definitely happen. What matters is to correct quickly afterward and enter the next play. Mistakes where you lose the ball because you weren't looking around cannot be fixed just by repeating practice. Look before the ball comes, look while the ball is traveling. I want you to build the habit of demonstrating skill within this double check and connect it to the game."

The training gradually changed the settings, and besides midfielders receiving and distributing, patterns were added such as playing the ball deep and getting involved as the third man, gradually bringing it closer to real match situations.

That concludes the training in the first part.

Coach Ozeki summarized: "Depending on the player, both the way of thinking and the way of using the body differ. Even with the same instruction, some players can do it right away, while others understand it in their heads but their bodies cannot keep up. That is exactly why it is important to watch each individual's movement and change the way you speak to them."

In the next second part, training themed on situational awareness and judgment will be conducted.

[Instructor] Masaki Ozeki / He serves as a personal coach for more than 30 professional soccer players in Japan and abroad, and coaches in one go everything a player needs to level up: video analysis x skill training x physical training. Since 2023 he has opened MAVEN SOCCER SCHOOL, with more than 350 elementary school members enrolled from Tokyo, Chiba, Saitama, Kanagawa, Ibaraki, and Gunma Prefectures. In August 2026, he will open "MAVEN SPORTS LABO," where top athletes to junior athletes train. Athletes from various sports such as soccer, baseball, basketball, and martial arts gather and train there. Currently he serves not only as a coach for soccer players but also as physical coach for fighters of the martial arts organization RIZIN. He holds the Spanish Football Association-certified Nivel1 and the Japan Football Association-certified B license.

Source: サカイク · Translated from Japanese sakaiku.jp

11 Safety and welfare

Under Armour Launches Protect This Mind, a Free Student-Athlete Mental Wellness Platform With Damar Hamlin

For coaches The coaches' guide and the Mental Rest Day Pledge give you ready-made language for building recovery time into your week, whatever age group you coach.

- Under Armour says Project Rampart has reached more than 50,000 student-athletes, and their feedback directly shaped the new mental wellness platform.
- Four nonprofits co-developed the program: Athletes for Hope, Born This Way Foundation, MEN'S X MENTAL and Positive Coaching Alliance.
- Coaches will be asked to sign a Mental Rest Day Pledge that sets aside time for athlete recovery and mental wellbeing.
- The initiative reaches below high school, funding elementary and middle school programming through Athletes for Hope's athlete-led CHAMPS Program.

Under Armour on October 29, 2026 launched Protect This Mind, a student-athlete mental wellness initiative that pairs a free online resource hub with peer-to-peer support and expanded coach training. NFL player Damar Hamlin, who is joining Under Armour's football roster, serves as the platform's athlete ambassador. The program extends Project Rampart, the company's high school sports initiative, which Under Armour says has reached more than 50,000 student-athletes.

What Is Under Armour's Protect This Mind?

Protect This Mind is a free platform built for students, coaches and educators. Its central piece is an online hub that collects mental wellness tools, athlete stories and educational material, according to Under Armour.

Two resources anchor the hub at launch. The first is the Be There Certificate, a free online course created by Jack.org in partnership with Born This Way Foundation. The second is a coaches' guide produced by Born This Way Foundation.

Distribution runs on two tracks. Students at Project Rampart partner high schools get direct access, while the online hub opens the resources to anyone, the company said.

Peer Support and a Mental Rest Day Pledge for Coaches

The initiative goes beyond content. Starting this year, Under Armour and MEN'S X MENTAL will pair members of the Project Rampart Student Athlete Leadership Council so they can connect around balancing athletics, school and personal wellbeing. Under Armour said the peer program will expand to other student-athlete communities over time.

On the coaching side, Under Armour plans to work with Positive Coaching Alliance to broaden coach education. The partnership will introduce a Mental Rest Day Pledge, which asks coaches to build dedicated time for mental recovery into their programs.

Younger athletes are also in scope. Through Athletes for Hope's CHAMPS Program, Under Armour will support mental wellness programming for elementary and middle school students so they develop coping skills before reaching high school.

How Project Rampart Feedback Shaped Student-Athlete Mental Wellness Programming

Under Armour built the platform around what it heard from student-athletes in Baltimore, Oakland and Washington, D.C., where Project Rampart operates. According to the company, those students repeatedly asked for practical tools and trusted support for their mental health.

Lynn Quayle, Under Armour's Senior Lead for Global Community Impact and Volunteerism, said Project Rampart has delivered equipment, apparel, facility upgrades, leadership development and coach training. "We consistently have heard from our Rampart student-athletes that they are looking for connection and guidance to better manage their mental wellbeing," Quayle said.

Student-athletes also contributed input during development, alongside the four nonprofit partners, according to Under Armour.

Hamlin Joins the Roster as Rampart Pairings Begin

Hamlin's role is to promote the platform's resources and encourage young athletes to seek support and look out for one another. "It's about letting young athletes know that it's okay to ask for help, prioritize their wellbeing and lean on the people around them," Hamlin said.

Under Armour said Project Rampart athletes and members of its pro roster will help shape future content as the program grows. The first confirmed milestone is the MEN'S X MENTAL peer pairings inside the Rampart leadership council this year. The company has not said when, or to which communities, that peer program will expand next.

Source / Adapted From: UA Newsroom, October 29, 2026, https://about.underarmour.com/en/stories/2026/11/under-armour-launches to protect-this-mind, a-new-mental-wellness.html

Source: Youth Sports Business Report youthsportsbusinessreport.com

12 Safety and welfare

Tips for Parents About Knee Injuries in Youth Sports

> **For coaches** When a player limps or needs painkillers to train, take the session off; strength and mobility work off the pitch is your best protection against knee trouble.

Knee pain and knee injuries are common in young athletes and can be incredibly difficult to manage. One knee injury can easily end a season, so prevention is key, as is a fast diagnosis and a good treatment plan that keeps an athlete healthy and active as they recover.

Here, Dr. Michele LaBotz, TrueSport Expert and sports medicine physician, breaks down common knee issues she often sees in young athletes, and what caregivers need to know to best advocate for them.

Common Knee Injuries In Youth Athletes

Knee injuries in young athletes tend to be different from injuries seen in adults. “For example, in adults, one of the most common issues is a meniscus injury because our menisci are wearing and tearing,” LaBotz explains. “But meniscal issues are much less common in kids than they are in adults, unless there’s a significant trauma or congenital issue.”

Acute injuries happen from a single incident and can include injuries to muscle, tendon, bone and/or ligaments. “Knee injuries tend to differ depending on sport, as well as biological sex,” says LaBotz. “For male athletes, particularly those in contact sports, MCL [medial collateral ligament] tears are the most common. For young female athletes, ACL [anterior cruciate ligament] tears are more common, particularly after puberty, and are often non-contact injuries.”

For young athletes, periods of rapid physical growth bring their own challenges because bones often lengthen faster than the ligaments or tendons around them can keep up. That can contribute to chronic pain, including IT (iliotibial) band issues, which are especially frequent in running sports. “Males who are growing very fast find that their hamstrings get really tight, and if they don’t work on flexibility, they are at greater risk for injury,” LaBotz adds. Rapid growth can also cause clumsiness while an athlete’s coordination catches up to their new height, something LaBotz refers to as ‘the Bambi effect.’

Alignment changes that occur during puberty impact risk for knee-related issues as well. For example, females often experience a widening of the hips, which can change the alignment of the knee and hip, says LaBotz. This can lead to issues with how the kneecap (patella) moves over the front of the knee. This is one of the most common causes of knee pain in young athletes, particularly in running sports, and is known as patellofemoral syndrome, but is often referred to as ‘runner’s knee.’ Patellofemoral syndrome is three times more common in females than in males.

Many chronic knee issues are more common in sports that involve a significant amount of running. The risk is higher when an athlete is new to the sport, less conditioned than their teammates, or going through a growth spurt during the season. Acute injuries are more common in sports like soccer, football, and basketball where athletes are changing directions rapidly potentially making contact with other players.

Preventing Knee Injuries

Of course, not every injury is preventable. At some point, your athlete may simply turn the wrong way during a particular play on the soccer pitch, or block a shot on the basketball court and have an unfortunate landing. But there are ways to prevent chronic injuries and better mitigate the risk of acute injuries. Doing "too much too soon" is one of the most common causes of chronic knee issues in young athletes. LaBotz suggests a good rule of thumb is to avoid increasing volume or intensity by more than 10% per week, regardless of what sport your athlete is in.

"What caregivers and athletes need to understand about the knee is that it's a hinge," says LaBotz. "Picture a door hinge that's slightly off-kilter. If it's not lined up just right, the door won't close correctly. Our knees are like that. If the knee is not aligned properly, it's going to create issues."

"From your hip to your ankle should be in a fairly straight line when you're moving," she adds. "Anything that makes it curve is going to interfere with the function of the knee." If your athlete is experiencing knee pain during activity, working with an athletic trainer or physical therapist to check their alignment can be a valuable addition to their training.

Ultimately, LaBotz is a fan of anything athletes can do that enhances the ability of the knee to function as a well-aligned hinge. That means going beyond sport-specific practice to include strength training, conditioning, and mobility work, as well as choosing shoes that support the athlete's gait and promote proper alignment.

The best offense is a good defense, and LaBotz notes that every athlete should be thinking about their leg muscles as the best defense against knee injury. "Strong muscles not only let you do your sport, but they're also good shock absorbers," she says. "The stronger the muscle is, the more impact it takes off of the knee joint itself."

Diagnosing Knee Injuries

Simply put, if an athlete has enough pain that they're limping and not moving normally, they need to stop, says LaBotz. Her rule is that athletes should not take any kind of over-the-counter painkillers to reduce or minimize the pain in order to keep training. Instead, they should pause training and take the day off. If the pain improves substantially or goes away, they may be able to return to activity. If pain continues beyond a day or two, or if they need pain medication to get through the day, it's time to seek medical care. And, pain that continues at night should be investigated early.

"Painful mechanical symptoms are another red flag," she adds. "If the athlete has the sense that their knee is locking, or the joint is uncomfortable or painful as it makes clicking, catching, or popping noises, that can be a problem with the cartilage."

LaBotz also urges caregivers to watch for swelling. "Significant swelling after an injury, or particularly if there is swelling with no injury, it's important to get that checked out. We're seeing more and more cases of Lyme disease causing knee swelling," says LaBotz. "If an athlete has a swollen knee but can't point to an injury that caused it, other causes should be ruled out."

Ultimately, she urges caregivers to take knee issues seriously, because if left too long, they can progress to problems that are harder to treat and rehabilitate.

This doesn't mean you should panic at every twinge an athlete mentions, though. "If an athlete just started running and they're having pain all around the kneecap with no swelling or limping, they can take a couple of days easy and see if the pain goes away," she says.

"If an athlete's team or school has an athletic trainer on staff, that is often a good first contact to make regarding knee pain, LaBotz says. For athletes without access to an athletic trainer, talking to their healthcare provider is the best option.

If an athlete is seeing a healthcare provider for a knee issue, LaBotz suggests gathering information on:

- Any past knee issues
- What makes the pain better or worse
- How long the pain has persisted
- What caused the pain initially
- Any swelling or symptoms that are no longer present

This information can help a doctor rule out certain injuries, and better pinpoint which tests might be needed. LaBotz states that taking photos of any swelling or bruising to show the healthcare provider can be helpful, as well as any video of how the injury occurred.

“Most common diagnoses can be readily made just by doing a patient history and physical examination, an X-ray isn’t always needed,” she says. “The way the knee is situated, a physical exam can really rule a lot of injuries in or out. If a doctor suspects a cartilage or ligament issue like a sprain or a tear, they may order an MRI.” LaBotz notes that because knees are nearly symmetrical, comparing the two can provide valuable information for the health care provider.

Treatment for Knee Injuries

LaBotz points out that every athlete’s treatment plan will differ. “Treatments for knee injuries are highly variable, and so are recovery protocols,” she says. “First and foremost, your athlete should understand that their treatment and recovery may not look like that of their teammate or another athlete on social media, even if they have the same injury.”

For most knee injuries, the goal should be to move as much as possible without pain. “My rule for exercising during an injury is simple: If it hurts, don’t do it,” says LaBotz. “But with a knee injury, the whole body doesn’t need to rest. The knee may need time to recover, but the more athletes can move the rest of their body, the better they’re likely to feel. While they recover, they can work on maintaining core and upper-body strength. I often recommend Pilates.”

For an overuse injury, often a couple of days of lighter movement or rest will lessen the pain so that the athlete can return to play. From there, they should increase volume or intensity by no more than 10% per week. Caregivers can also support recovery through nutrition.

Swelling in the knee can cause complications and make movement harder, even for an injury that isn’t severe. LaBotz recommends seeking timely medical guidance for swelling after an injury, “Use compression wraps during the day, but don’t sleep with a knee compression wrap on at night. Use ice packs as well, the more swelling you can get out of the knee before an exam or before surgery can make an injury easier to diagnose and treat.”

The goal in treatment and recovery is to get the injured knee working as well as the healthy one. “When your doctor is working on a treatment plan, they’re looking not just at how to best treat the pain, but how to best restore the function of the knee,” says LaBotz. This includes looking at all the muscles surrounding it, because a knee injury often affects the whole leg, especially if the athlete needs a lot of time off to treat the injury. Recovery will go beyond knee mobility to include rebuilding weakened muscles and ensuring that the entire leg from hip to ankle is in alignment.

“Often, people go to training or rehab after a knee injury and they’re confused because the physical therapist worked on their hip and not the knee,” she says. “But they worked on the hip because those hip muscles are in charge of how the rest of the leg lines up.”

Finally, if your athlete does require surgery for a knee injury, LaBotz notes that prehabilitation can make a big difference in how well they recover. “For instance, if an athlete is getting their ACL reconstructed, the goal is to keep the knee stable and to let them get around as comfortably as possible beforehand,” she says. “That may mean your athlete needs crutches to get around. Oftentimes, we’ll put on some type of hinged brace, but with these injuries you typically don’t want to immobilize the knee entirely. The brace is not to limit motion, because you want somebody to go into ACL surgery with as much range of motion as they can possibly get, the brace is just to provide support, but that’s often misunderstood and caregivers assume the athlete should move as little as possible.”

Source: TrueSport truesport.org

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13 Safety and welfare

Civil claim guidance released

> **For coaches** If a survivor or a family at your club asks about legal options, this booklet sets out the process and where to find qualified support, and it gives you a concrete place to point them.

Guidance on pursuing a civil claim for survivors of child sexual abuse

Whether or not to pursue a civil claim. That's the topic of The FA Survivor Support and Safeguarding Advisory Group's (FASSSAG) latest guidance booklet for survivors of child sexual abuse in football.

It is the second in a series of FASSSAG guidance booklets - the first covered considerations to weigh up before deciding whether or not to waive anonymity.

"The booklet is not intended to steer anyone towards a particular course of action," says a FASSSAG member who has not waived their anonymity. "It's really to outline what's involved in making a civil claim, the journey it will take you on - and some of the challenges you will face."

Producing these guidance booklets, based on lived experience, is part of a wider aspiration for FASSSAG, formed in 2018. The Group comprises former footballers alongside independent safeguarding professionals and specialist organisations. It has an important role in challenging and informing The FA's thinking in relation to the needs and experiences of survivors.

"The booklet is a tangible example of how we can play our part in ensuring survivors make informed decisions of some of the inevitable questions they will face," says Jimmy Aggrey of the Jimmy Aggrey Foundation. "As one survivor says in the booklet, they wish this booklet had existed before they commenced their claim, so they would have known what to expect from the legal process and the impact it would have on them and their family."

The booklet covers topics on the type of civil claim you could make, how to find qualified legal support, as well as a lived-experience look at what pursuing a claim entails. It also lists organisations inside and outside football which offer support to survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

"The message throughout the booklet is a simple one to every survivor: we want you to come to a decision that's right for you and those closest to you, as every case is unique," says Ian Ackley, Survivor Support Advocate at the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA).

Source: The FA thefa.com

HOBBIT WEEKLY

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