HOBBIT WEEKLY

FOR YOUTH COACHES

The week in youth football, picked for coaches



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Cover story Safety and welfare · Aprende Entren

Train timing, not heading

Chest and thigh control before necks are ready

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FA Medical Hub gathers guidance in one place

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Keep the Ball, Not the Whistle

A group of under-10s lines up for heading practice while a coach counts repetitions, and nearby another squad finishes a session with laps before the balls come out. We see the same pattern across this issue: the youngest players spend time on work that does not look like the game.

This isn't professional football. Research on over 9,000 young athletes links parent support for children's decisions to higher motivation, and the AAP warns that excessive training and early specialization are tied to overuse injury and burnout. Heading guidance for coaches proposes no repetitive heading for under-10s, light balls and 5 to 10 minutes a month at under-12, and no more than 10 to 15 headers a week at under-14.

> **Let them set the pace.**

So before your next session, ask yourself: does this drill give my players more touches, more decisions, or just more repetitions? And if your club runs from benjamín to juvenil, does the same playing idea run through every age group, or does each coach start over?

What is one thing you will take out of your next session to give that time back to the ball?

The Hobbit editors

7 stories

5 sources

8 languages



FOR COACHES

For your next session, you can train trajectory reading and timing with chest and thigh control, soft balls or balloons, so heading technique waits until necks and bodies are ready.

01 Heading in youth soccer: The scientific and practical guide for coaches

Heading in youth soccer: Why science demands you change your methodology and how to act on the field

You read the club WhatsApp group on a Monday morning and the spark jumps: another federation restricts heading impact in lower age groups. Up pop the usual comments about the "glass generation" and how the essence of the game is being lost. Let's talk colleague to colleague: heading in youth soccer needs an urgent review based on biomedical evidence, not barstool nostalgia. Sending aerial balls to eight-year-olds session after session does not make them better footballers; it exposes their developing brains to cumulative micro-impacts that science no longer tolerates.

The biomechanical evidence: What happens in a child's head?

The human brain floats inside the skull surrounded by cerebrospinal fluid. In youth soccer stages (especially in U9 and U11), players' anatomy presents three critical vulnerabilities:

- Anatomical disproportion: A child's head mass represents a much larger percentage of total body weight compared with an adult.
- Immature neck musculature: The neck muscles are not developed to absorb or decelerate the coordinated whiplash that a header requires.

- Incomplete myelination: The brain tissue is in the middle of its development and neuronal connection process, making it infinitely more vulnerable to deformation from abrupt acceleration and deceleration.

The main danger in youth soccer is not only concussions or cuts from head clashes (which are visible acute traumas). The true silent enemy is subconcussive impacts: small repeated blows that do not produce immediate symptoms such as dizziness or disorientation, but that accumulate microscopic structural damage over the seasons.

From theory to rules: The global trend in youth football

Different international federations have updated their youth protocols, establishing strict bans on heading in the early stages. These regulations do not seek to eradicate the technical resource from the game, but to delay its repetitive training until the athlete's body is ready.

The current international consensus divides learning into three major phases:

1. Total restriction stage (U9 and younger): Any analytical or repetitive heading exercise is eliminated. If the ball flies in a match, chest or foot control is encouraged.
2. Pedagogical transition stage (U11 and U13): Conceptual introduction with light rubber or foam balls, working on jump mechanics and trajectory without hard impact.
3. Technical development and controlled load stage (U15 and U17): Real training of neck strength, jump timing, aerial duels and heading with an official ball, limiting the number of repetitions per week.

Debunking myths from the football of the past

It is common to hear disagreements in the coaches' room. Let's analyze the three most repeated myths on the training fields:

Myth 1: "If they don't head the ball when they're little, they'll never learn"

False. Eye-hand and eye-foot coordination, reading trajectories and calculating distances can be perfectly trained by catching balls with the hands, using balloons or working with light balls. Heading technique does not require thousands of impacts in childhood to be mastered in adolescence.

Myth 2: "Today's balls are light and don't hurt"

A regulation size 4 or 5 ball, dry or wet, impacting at 40 or 50 km/h against the forehead of a 9-year-old generates an acceleration force that far exceeds the tolerance threshold of a child's neck. The weight of the ball is still excessive for their bone and muscle structure.

Myth 3: "Avoiding heading makes them soft"

Protecting your squad's brain health does not make them soft; it is applying professionalism and sports pedagogy. An up-to-date coach seeks long-term performance without compromising the health of their athletes.

Methodological progression by age group

How should you adapt your training content according to the age group you coach this year? Here is the practical progression you should apply:

U10

- Absolute ban: No crosses into the box to head. No forced long goal kicks.
- Substitute content: Playing out from the back, receiving and controlling aerial balls with the chest, thigh or foot.
- Tools: Foam balls or balloons for visual reaction games without impact.

U12

- Technical introduction without load: A maximum of 5-10 minutes of specific technical work per month.
- Methodology: Low-pressure or very soft rubber balls. Short-distance manual throws.
- Biomechanical focus: Fix the gaze on the ball, keep the mouth closed, coordinate the leg drive and the activation of the trunk.

Infantil (U14)

- Strength and technique work: Start of isometric strengthening of the neck muscles (manual resistance exercises).
- Game situations: Introduction of aerial duels controlling body-to-body contact before impact with the ball.
- Repetition limit: No more than 10-15 headers per player per week in training.

Cadete and Juvenil (U16 / U19)

- Real specific training: Defensive heading (directed clearance) and offensive heading (shot on goal, flick-ons).
- Tactical contextualization: Reading crosses, gaining position, timing the jump against real opposition.
- Load monitoring: Record set-piece actions to avoid overloading the center-backs and forwards in the same session.

Practical exercises with no risk for your training sessions

To work on reading aerial trajectories without exposing your players to unnecessary impacts, use these tasks in your weekly planning:

1. "Catch the comet" (Benjamín / Alevín)

Space: 15×15 meters. Procedure: The coach or a floater throws lofted balls by hand at different heights and trajectories. The players must orient their body, calculate the bounce or the fall and catch the ball at its highest point with both hands above the head. Objective: Reading the ball's trajectory, spatiotemporal calculation and timing the jump without cranial impact.

2. "Body orientation and chest control" (Alevín / Infantil)

Space: 20×20 meters in pairs. Procedure: A teammate plays a lofted pass by hand. The receiver must attack the ball, cushion it with the chest while orienting the body toward the free space and play a ground pass to the teammate making a run. Objective: Get the player used to not turning their back on aerial balls, using safe contact surfaces and keeping the play going on the ground.

3. "Biomechanical technique with a light ball" (Infantil)

Space: Penalty area. Procedure: Work in pairs at 3 meters' distance using a soft plastic ball or a light volleyball. The focus is on the technical posture: feet set, knees bent, trunk extended, neck locked and a frontal strike with the eyes open. Objective: Automate the correct motor pattern without suffering repeated micro-impacts to the brain.

Action plan for the youth soccer coach

If you want to transform the culture of your team and your club regarding heading in youth soccer, follow these tactical steps:

1. Talk to the families at the start of the season: Explain at the parents' meeting why you are going to limit headers. Show that the decision responds to health criteria and modern methodology. Transparency builds trust.
2. Redesign the build-up from the back: If your goalkeeper is forced to launch a lofted volley from the goal kick because nobody knows how to play out, you will cause dozens of uncontrolled aerial duels. Train the short build-up from the back.
3. Regulate corner kicks and throw-ins: In the benjamín and alevín stages, take corner kicks short through combination passes. Eliminate the habit of launching a lofted ball into the small area with abandon.
4. Insist on neck strength from the infantil stage onward: Introduce simple isometric exercises into the warm-up or prevention routines in which the player generates self-resistance with their own hands forward, backward and to the sides.

Our work as coaches is not measured only in the league titles we win in May, but in the health and integral development of the kids who are entrusted to us every afternoon on the field. Prioritizing neuroscience and adapted physical preparation over the old bad habits of football does not make us less competitive; it makes us better coaches.

Source: Aprende Entrenando · Translated from Spanish aprendeentrenando.com

THIS WEEK

02 Safety and welfare

Introducing our new Medical Hub

> **For coaches** Worth bookmarking for your club: the hub holds MEAP and thunderstorm guidance plus recommended first aid kit, all usable without a course, and league medical regulations are still to be added.

In a bid to make it easier than ever for people across the game to find the support they need, we have launched a new Medical Hub on the England Football website. The Medical hub brings together football medicine information, guidance and resources - all in one place.

There is already a wealth of useful medical content available across the England Football and FA websites, but until now it has sat across different areas and could be difficult to find. The new hub provides a clearer go-to place for football medicine. It is designed for first aiders, medical professionals, coaches, parents and carers and club administrators working at every level of the game. While it is relevant right through to the professional game, it will be particularly useful for those in grassroots football.

The hub brings together information across a range of key areas, including brain health and saving a life alongside wider medical guidance and resources such as medical forms and policies. Within brain health, users can access essential information, research and guidance on heading and concussion. The saving a life section provides the latest guidance on resuscitation and the use of AEDs in football.

The Medical Hub also brings together a range of practical information and resources. This includes medical FAQs, recommended first aid equipment, Medical Emergency Action Plan (MEAP) guidance and thunderstorm guidance. Users can also access indispensable medical knowledge to help them understand and respond to different medical situations in football.

For the first time, clubs and volunteers can access all of this information in one place, without needing to complete a course first.

It also connects people directly with our medical education pathway. Our courses support learners at every stage of their development, from Introduction to First Aid in Football and Emergency First Aid, all the way to our Intermediate and Advanced Trauma Medical Management in Football courses - giving people the knowledge and confidence to help save a life or limb in football.

While the Medical Hub is hosted on the main England Football website, we will be signposting and linking learners across to it from England Football Learning and embedding it into our learner resources, ensuring that access to the latest guidance doesn't stop when a course ends. It will also be promoted through other relevant channels, including the County FA network, helping the guidance reach clubs, volunteers and practitioners across the country.

Bringing our medical content together in one place marks an important step in our commitment to player welfare. The hub is a work in progress and will continue to grow, with league medical regulations next to be added. It will also be reviewed and updated annually, so that everyone using it can be confident they are working from the latest guidance. This will help raise standards across the game and ensure the right information is always on hand when it matters most. You can find the Medical Hub on the England Football website under Participate in Leagues and clubs, or explore it directly here.

Medical Education Senior Lead at The FA, Professor Lisa Hodgson, said: "Everyone involved in football has a part to play in keeping players safe, and that starts with having the right information in the right place. Whether you're a first aider at a grassroots club or a medical practitioner in the professional game, you now have one clear place to find the latest guidance, alongside the courses that can help you develop further."

Source: England Football Learning learn.englandfootball.com

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03 Coaching U8 to U17

Youth Soccer Methodology: The 6 Principles for Building Successful Academies

> **For coaches** Use it to check your own week: if your tasks are just queued shooting drills, these six principles give you a way to rebuild them around decisions and the ball.

Copying the trendy exercise you saw yesterday on social media is not having a youth soccer methodology. Showing up to training on a Tuesday with two cones and setting up a line of twelve children to shoot at goal without opposition is wasting their time. If your content changes according to Sunday's result or the whim of the week, you are improvising with your players' development. You need a solid structure, a clear map that organizes every pass, every correction and every evolutionary stage of the player within the club.

As academy coaches, our primary objective is to give the kids certainties. Over the years on dirt and artificial turf fields, I have confirmed that the teams that evolve best are not the ones with the best facilities, but the ones that apply a coherent line of work from the U9 age group up to the youth category. Here you have the six essential principles for building a real and efficient methodological proposal.

1. Define a clear, unambiguous core idea

The core idea is the nucleus of your youth soccer methodology. It is the conceptual framework that dictates how you want your team to attack, defend and transition. You cannot arrive at a session without knowing exactly what behavior you are looking to develop in your players.

This guiding proposal must direct every aspect of your work:

- Your discourse: The words you use in the initial talks and in the hydration breaks.
- Your correction: Attention focuses on whether the player applied the sought principle, not on the luck of the final result.
- The design of tasks: The space-times and the provocation rules must respond to the mother idea.

If you as a coach doubt your training proposal, the player perceives it instantly. Transmitting conviction generates an environment of security where the kids dare to try new things.

2. Adapt the path without betraying the identity

One of the most repeated errors on youth soccer benches is making excuses about the available squad. Saying that "this year we can't play X because we lack profiles" demonstrates an alarming lack of methodological resources.

Reliable coaches adapt the tasks, the spaces and the individual demands to the real level of the group, but they never destroy the club's training model. If one week you ask for short buildup and the next you demand a long ball forward because the opponent presses, you confuse the player and cancel out his learning process.

Tactical modifications in the academy are contextual adjustments to help the player solve problems, not 180-degree turns in the school's philosophy.

3. Prioritize global and integrated training

Isolated training in the academy is prehistoric. Running around the field without a ball on Monday or doing circuits of analytical speed without decision-making prepares no one for the complexity of the real game.

Soccer demands perceiving, deciding and executing in thousandths of a second. Your youth soccer methodology must unify four fundamental factors in every task:

- Tactical aspect: Understanding of the game and rational occupation of space.

- Technical aspect: The motor tool at the service of the tactical intention.
- Physical aspect: Movements and efforts typical of competition.
- Cognitive/emotional aspect: Stress management, attention and mental speed.

Eliminate long waiting lines. Design small-sided games, possession drills with floaters and situations of numerical superiority or inferiority where the ball is always the protagonist.

4. Generate environments of uncertainty and decision-making

Mechanical learning produces order-followers, not intelligent players. If you spend the match remote-controlling the kids from the sideline shouting "pass!", "shoot!" or "Open it to the wing!", you are shutting down their brains.

Repetition without repetition is the key. Present similar tactical problems but in always-changing contexts. Alter the dimensions of the pitch, limit or expand the number of touches, or change the scoring zones. In this way, you force the kid to scan the space, process the information and choose the best response autonomously.

5. Integrate error as a development lever

In developmental soccer, failure is an indicator that the player is leaving his comfort zone to try to acquire a new resource. If you punish error with shouting or the bench, you produce fearful players who get rid of the ball.

Replace prescriptive correction ("I told you not to give it away there!") with interrogative feedback ("what other option did you have when the center-back stepped out?"). Making the athlete reflect consolidates learning infinitely more deeply than imposing an external solution.

6. Subordinate competition to integral development

The weekend scoreline is an impostor if it is evaluated in isolation. Winning a game in the U11 age group by hoofing long balls at the tallest striker does not mean you are doing a good methodological job.

Success in the youth ranks consists of seeing how a player masters concepts in May that in September he did not even understand. When the methodology prioritizes the boys' technical, tactical and human development, the results in the table end up arriving as a natural consequence of the process.

Structuring the Methodology by Development Stages

A coherent youth soccer methodology does not demand the same from an 8-year-old as from a 17-year-old. Each age band has specific biological and cognitive objectives that must be respected.

Initiation Stage: Benjamín (8-9 years)

In this phase, the absolute priority is mastery of one's own body and familiarization with the ball. The tasks must be dynamic, with a constant presence of 1v1 and 2v2.

- Development of basic motor and coordination skills.
- Encouragement of individual creativity and dribbling.
- Total absence of fixed tactical positions. Everyone plays everywhere.

Development Stage: Alevín (10-11 years)

The phase of structuring space and understanding the first collective playing relationships begins.

- Start of work on ball retention and triangles (3v2, 4v3).
- Understanding of the concepts of width and depth.
- Introduction to the basic defensive principles: delay and body positioning.

Refinement Stage: Infantil (12-13 years)

It coincides with the jump to 11-a-side soccer and the changes of physical development. Cognitive work gains weight.

- Rational occupation of a larger field.
- Sectoral work by lines (defense, midfield, attack).
- Adequate body orientation when receiving to give continuity to play.

Consolidation Stage: Cadete (14-15 years)

Technical demands increase under high game rhythms and reduced time and space pressure.

- Automation of collective behaviors in the four phases of play.
- Reading and identification of tactical advantages (free space, free man).
- Physical preparation integrated within the tasks with the ball.

Formative Performance Stage: Juvenil (16-18 years)

The prelude to amateur or senior soccer. Maximum competitiveness is sought without losing the educational matrix.

- Mastery of various systems of play and tactical versatility.
- Optimization of set pieces (Actions from a Dead Ball).
- Mental strengthening against the demands of competitive results.

Structure of a Session Under Your Own Methodology

To apply all of this in day-to-day work, your training sessions must follow a clear internal logic. Here is the standard structure to optimize your 90 minutes on the field:

1. Contextualized warm-up (15 min): Physical and cognitive activation. Passing games with light decision-making or rondos with specific rules linked to the day's objective.
2. Main Block 1, Introduction/Position Task (30 min): Position games or retention drills where the tactical situations you want to work on are simulated.
3. Main Block 2, Real Application Task (35 min): Small-sided games or modified games with structural conditions that force the desired behaviors to appear.
4. Cool-down and Co-assessment (10 min): Gentle stretching and a participatory talk where the players evaluate what went well and what we must adjust in the next training session.

Stopping improvising requires effort, analysis and patience. But when you see your players making correct decisions on the field thanks to the structured work over months, you understand that there is no other way. Build your youth soccer methodology, keep conviction in your proposal and the developmental results will come on their own.

Source: Aprende Entrenando · Translated from Spanish aprendeentrenando.com

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04 Research U5 to U6

I’m an athletic trainer, here’s how to know when kids sports are too intense

> **For coaches** Watch for persistent fatigue, falling performance, changed sleep or lost enthusiasm in your players; those signs point to recovery lagging behind training and are worth raising with parents.

At a recent T-ball game, I was talking with another father who mentioned that his son had never played before. As we watched our children falling over trying to scoop up a ground ball, we laughed about how they were still figuring everything out. There was something refreshing about seeing kids learn a game without worrying about how well they were playing.

That moment stayed with me. I’ve spent years as an athletic trainer in collegiate and professional sports, helping athletes stay healthy, handle the demands of competition and perform at their best. Today, I’m a clinical associate professor of kinesiology and chief health and performance adviser for an NCAA Division I athletics program. Given my work, you might expect me to take an active role in developing my own children’s athletic abilities, especially in a youth sports culture where early specialization and greater commitment are often seen as advantages.

And I understand the appeal. Like any parent, I want my children to have opportunities, and it’s easy to wonder whether another practice or lesson might help them get ahead. But with twins who are nearly 6, I’m more interested in whether they enjoy sports than how good they become at them.

As they get older, particularly if they want to pursue sports seriously, my role as a parent will change. Right now, I can step back and let them explore. But as training and competition become more demanding, I'll want to become more involved in understanding and questioning those demands. Research on training, recovery and athletic development can help parents navigate what's appropriate as their children's sports experiences intensify.

Knowing when to step back

When I'm watching my children play, I'd rather be their dad than their performance coach. When they ask to practice hitting or throwing, I'm happy to help. They usually decide when we're done. Twenty minutes? Great. Five minutes? That's fine too.

Practice matters, but giving children some control over when and how they practice can help keep it from becoming another obligation.

Research involving more than 9,000 young athletes found that children tend to be more motivated to participate in sports when parents support their ability to make decisions about their participation.

As children get older, their goals may change. Some will want to compete at higher levels or focus on a particular sport. Those ambitions deserve support, but giving children a voice doesn't mean parents should step away from important decisions. As commitments grow, parents may need to ask more questions about training schedules, recovery time and the expectations placed on their children.

More isn't always better

I've heard parents describe traveling hours for youth sports tournaments, only to discover that many of the teams competing came from the same communities they had traveled from. One parent recalled driving to Houston for a tournament where six of the eight teams were from the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

I understand how families end up in these situations. An extra practice, private lessons or joining a more competitive team can each seem reasonable. Over time, those commitments become expectations, and saying no isn't always easy when your child is part of a team.

But more training doesn't automatically produce better athletes. My experience in sports medicine and performance has taught me that improvement depends on how athletes respond to training, not simply how much they do. Training places demands on the body, and athletes need time to adapt.

The American Academy of Pediatrics cautions that excessive training and early specialization are associated with increased overuse injury risk and may contribute to burnout. Risk depends on training volume, recovery and individual development, particularly during adolescence.

As training demands increase, parents should pay attention to how their children are responding, not just whether they're experiencing pain. Persistent fatigue, declining performance, changes in sleep or a loss of enthusiasm may suggest that recovery isn't keeping pace with training. Even an athlete who loves their sport can reach a point where the demands become too much. These are reasons for a parent to discuss the workload with their child and coaches, while persistent or worsening pain warrants medical evaluation.

Athletic development also benefits from variety. Running, climbing, jumping and exploring different activities can help develop coordination and a range of movement skills. The International Olympic Committee recommends varied physical activity and developmentally appropriate training, including for children who may eventually specialize.

Just as important is whether young athletes want to keep playing. Children who enjoy sports are more likely to want to continue participating, research shows. When young soccer players were asked what made sports fun, they identified working hard, improving and spending time with teammates. Even the best training program won't accomplish much if an athlete no longer wants to participate.

Leaving the game at the field

In collegiate and professional sports, reviewing performance is routine. After competition, staff identify what worked, what didn't and what needs attention. But children don't need a performance review every time they climb into the car.

I let my children start conversations about their games. If they want to talk about a missed ball, something funny or something that upset them, I'll listen. If they want to talk about something else, that's fine too.

Researchers who recorded parent-child car rides around sporting events found that much of the time passed in silence and sports came up relatively infrequently. They also observed occasions when parents interrupted or provided feedback before children could respond. The findings don't establish one right way to handle the drive home, but they offer parents a reason to consider whether their children want feedback in the first place.

No parent knows whether their child will become a competitive athlete, play recreationally or eventually find interests outside organized sports. I'm comfortable leaving that future open for my children. As a father, I'm far more interested in whether my kids will want to play again next week than how well they played today.

Source: The Conversation theconversation.com

05 Coaching

Training for situational awareness and decision-making that sharpens the "look, decide, express with the body" skills shared by players who don't lose the ball

> **For coaches** In your next possession session, give players a moment to place the ball before the first touch, and treat a slow, accurate pass as better than a fast one into an opponent.

This time's theme is "training the three elements needed to shine in matches, technique, perception and body, as a set." Leading the session is Masaki Ozeki, 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. In addition, he serves as personal coach for a total of 50 professional athletes, including mixed martial arts fighters.

In the first part, we introduced everything from coordination training that approaches the nervous system, to contact skills, one-on-one play facing and not facing the opponent, and passing training.

In the second part, with perception and decision-making as the theme, we had the players go from 4v2 possession to a game that applied those points. (Text by Tomoyuki Suzuki)

Positioning and Ball Placement That Exploit Numerical Superiority

The first menu item of the second part is 4v2 possession. The theme is how the attacking side, in a numerically superior situation, can keep that superiority going and play while using it effectively.

Coach Ozeki asked the players whether they could switch the play when they received the ball, and whether they could look for a vertical pass through between the defenders.

What becomes important first for that is positioning. If you spread out too much thinking only about switching play, the passing lane into the gap gets cut off.

"Basically, stand in a position where you can play a vertical pass into the gap. If you do, the space to switch the ball left and right also opens up."

Coach Ozeki also mentioned body orientation and where to place the ball.

"I want you to hold the ball so you can kick to three spots with the same motion. For example, if you place it on your left-foot side, you can only kick to one spot, but if you place it on the outside of your right foot, you can kick to three spots with the same form."

When you can't create options with where you place the ball, you recreate them using return passes. After sorting out the purpose of the training and how to use return passes, the players went into playing.

Eliminating the Mistake of Kicking the Ball Into an Opponent

During play, Coach Ozeki stopped the training once and again asked the players what it means to increase options.

"Tinkering with where you place the ball is for increasing options. And yet there's no point if you kick it and hit an opponent. Being able to place it in a good spot means you've taken the initiative. If the passing lane is cut off, you won't lose the ball if you don't kick it."

Rather than only demanding that play speed be raised, prioritize accurate play and correct decisions. Coach Ozeki also says "sometimes slower is better."

"Playing slower can open up the gap or open up the space to switch play. Take the initiative with the first touch, and from there it's about decisions. The worst thing is the mistake of kicking the ball into an opponent. You won't lose it if you don't kick it, so let's make sure everyone shares this point and values it."

If You Can't Place the Ball Open, Run Diagonally

The last part is a 5v5 game-format training. As a point for connecting what was worked on in possession to the game, Coach Ozeki took up the movement of the side players during build-up.

"In the area where you want to advance the ball forward, you want to place the ball open. If you do, you can kick it vertically, return it backward, and play it inside. If you place it inside, the vertical pass disappears and you limit your own play."

That said, there are situations where the opponent is close and you can't place the ball open. In that case, running diagonally to get free creates new options.

"If a defender follows you, the vertical pass goes into the passing lane that opened up. If they don't follow, you can receive the ball yourself as is. I want you to always play with these two points in mind."

On the other hand, to the defending side he pointed out that "if you just drop while staying on your mark, you'll be carried forward forever." He asked the players in the forward positions to press while cutting off passing lanes with their backs, and for those around them to coordinate with them.

That concludes the training. Coach Ozeki summed up as follows.

"When I look back at scenes where the ball is lost in matches, I feel that rather than a lack of technique, the causes are often that the player wasn't looking, that the decision was late, or that the player lost in how they used their body. That's exactly why it's important to train technique, perception and body as a set."

"Whether professionals or elementary school players, what players who don't lose the ball have in common is the ability to see, decide and express it with the body. Why do we lose the ball, and how can we improve? As one idea for that, please use this content as a reference for your daily activities and training."

[Instructor] Masataka Ozeki / He serves as personal coach to more than 30 professional soccer players in Japan and abroad, providing unified coaching in video analysis x skill training x physical training, everything a player needs to level up. Since 2023 he has run MAVEN SOCCER SCHOOL, with over 350 elementary school-age members enrolled from Tokyo, Chiba, Saitama, Kanagawa, Ibaraki and Gunma. In August 2026 he will open MAVEN SPORTS LABO, where athletes from top athletes to junior athletes train. Athletes from various sports, including soccer, baseball, basketball and martial arts, gather there to train. Currently he serves as physical coach not only for soccer players but also for fighters of the martial arts organization RIZIN. He holds the Spanish Football Federation Nivel 1 license and the Japan Football Association Class B license.

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

ON THE PITCH

06 Rules and formats U13 to U19

N1 Postseason Details

> **For coaches** If your club plays in N1, the district-winning route to the postseason is worth mapping out with your age-group coaches before the season starts.

CHARLESTON, S.C. (Nov. 5, 2026), The National 1 League, the top team-based competition in US Club Soccer and US Youth Soccer, is proud to announce its inaugural postseason in summer 2027, which is a collaborative series with ECNL.

There will be four ECNL Conference League Playoffs, of which the top two U-13 through U-17 teams of each then advance to the ENL Conference League Finals. The U-19 age group is a single-stage postseason with teams competing for that respective Playoff event’s title, rather than advancing to the Finals.

N1 teams must win their district to earn a spot in the postseason with a handful of second slots per district awarded via lottery. A breakdown of the qualifying spots per district is on the Postseason web page.

At the ECNL Conference League Playoffs, N1 teams will face off against ECNL Regional League qualifiers. ECNL recently announced its full 2027 postseason details, inclusive of ECNL, ECNL RL and the ECNL Conference League. While ECNL RL continues to have its own postseason events, this summer, opportunities within the ECNL RL have now expanded to include the collaboration with N1.

2027 ECL Conference League Playoffs (U-13 through U-19 qualifiers)

- South / June 11-15 in Dallas, TX at Dallas Sports Park
- West / June 11-15 in Davis, CA at Davis Legacy Soccer Complex
- Central / June 18-22 in St. Louis, MO at Creve Coeur Park Soccer Complex
- East / June 25-29 in Greensboro, NC at Bryan Park Soccer Complex

2027 ECNL Conference League Finals (U-13 through U-17 qualifiers from the Playoffs)

- July 15-18 in Atlanta, GA at Arthur M. Blank U.S. Soccer National Training Center

“The foundation of the National 1 League is collaboration, and the inaugural postseason is demonstration of that, said Marc Frankland, N1 Commissioner. “I’m grateful to ECNL for hosting the postseason series and to U.S. Soccer for welcoming us at the National Training Center. N1 teams are going to impress this summer, and I can’t wait to cheer them on.”

The National 1 League is made up of 34 districts across the country and is expected to eclipse 120,000 players in the 2026-27 season, demonstrating significant momentum and support for the platform and its founding principles. Its most fundamental principle is creating a clear pathway in youth soccer that values participants over brand infighting. In its inaugural season, the N1 platform has welcomed previous National Premier Leagues and National League participants, empowering US Club Soccer-sanctioned leagues and US Youth Soccer-sanctioned leagues and state associations to be the custodians of the National 1 League districts. While acceptance into the National 1 League is an achievement for teams alone, its connectivity to the ECNL Regional League for the postseason and promotional potential for top-performing N1 clubs into the ECNL RL are also major highlights for the N1 platform.

Earlier this week, the National 1 League published an application for other leagues to become N1 qualifying leagues, beginning with the 2027-28 season.

ABOUT NATIONAL 1 LEAGUE: The National 1 League is the top team-based competition in US Club Soccer and US Youth Soccer, elevating teams across the country into a unined nationa competition platform that culminates with the ECNL Conference League Playoffs and Finals. Beginning with its inaugural season in 2026-27, the National 1 League brings together two established league platforms, US Club Soccer's National Premier Leagues and US Youth Soccer s National League, in ar extraordinary display of collaboration. Participants and their families benefit from a carefully constructed system of conferences and districts that provide clarity, reduce travel and costs, and increase access to talent identification and college scouting opportunities. The National 1 League offers a pathway into the ENL Regional League for top-performing clubs and a pathway into National 1 for teams excelling within their local competitions and state associations.

Source: Oregon Youth Soccer oregonyouthsoccer.org

VIEWS AND THE GAME

07 Policy and clubs

Exciting News: Oregon Helping Shape the Future of U.S. Soccer

> **For coaches** Nothing changes for your club yet, so keep registering and playing as normal while the governance, staffing and finance talks continue.

Dear Club Presidents, DOCs, and Club Leaders,

I wanted to share some exciting news about the future of soccer in Oregon and across the country.

Following the historic US Youth Soccer (USYS) vote in August to move forward with integration into U.S. Soccer, significant progress has been made toward developing a new organizational structure designed to strengthen and grow the game at every level.

I'm excited to announce that Oregon Youth Soccer Association (OYSA) has been selected as one of the initial 14 State Associations to participate in this initiative, and we have officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with U.S. Soccer to begin developing its proposed Local Office model.

This is an important milestone for Oregon soccer and an incredible opportunity to have a meaningful voice in shaping the future of our game, both locally and nationally.

What does this mean for Oregon?

The proposed Local Office model is designed to bring U.S. Soccer's national resources and expertise together with the local knowledge, relationships, and experience that already exist within our State Associations and clubs.

The goal is to create a stronger, more connected soccer community by:

- Strengthening support for clubs and leagues through improved resources, shared services, and reduced administrative burdens.
- Making soccer more accessible and affordable by addressing participation costs, unnecessary travel, and access to facilities.
- Expanding opportunities for players, coaches, and referees through stronger education and development pathways.
- Bringing additional investment into Oregon through national partnerships, fundraising, and community development.
- Connecting soccer at every level, from grassroots and recreational programs to competitive, adult, and professional opportunities.

Oregon has a wonderfully diverse soccer landscape, and what works in Portland may not always work in Bend, Medford, Pendleton, or along the coast. Having a seat at the table gives us the opportunity to ensure that Oregon's unique needs and perspectives are represented throughout this process.

What happens next?

Signing the MOU allows OYSA and U.S. Soccer to begin the next phase of detailed planning and collaboration, including discussions around governance, staffing, finances, and future operations.

Importantly, the MOU does not finalize integration, and there are no immediate changes to your club registration, your competitions, your programs, or any of your existing relationships with OYSA. Any formal transition will require additional agreements and approvals.

Over the past two years I've had the opportunity to participate in discussions with U.S. Soccer leadership, US Club, ECNL, GA, MLS, and all 53 other State Association executives, and I'm genuinely encouraged by the vision and the collaborative approach being taken. As many of you are aware through our discussions here locally, this has been a long journey to get to this spot. It's incredibly exciting to be at the point where meaningful, and actionable change begins. There is still plenty of work ahead, but we're excited to roll up our sleeves and get started!

I've linked three documents that provide further details about this initiative:

1. OYSA Member Update, Details of our MOU with U.S. Soccer

I encourage you to review these materials and share them with your leadership teams.

As we move forward, we will continue communicating with our members and providing opportunities for your voices to be heard. This is about building on the tremendous work already happening throughout Oregon, not replacing it.

Ultimately, the success of this initiative won't be measured simply by a new organizational structure or a different name. It will be measured by whether we make soccer better, more accessible, and more enjoyable for the people who participate in it every day.

That's what excites me most about this opportunity.

Thank you for your continued leadership, partnership, and commitment to soccer in Oregon. We wouldn't be in this position without the incredible work you do for your clubs and communities every day.

I look forward to sharing more as we move into this exciting next chapter together.

Thanks everyone. Let's get to work.

Source: Oregon Youth Soccer oregonyouthsoccer.org

HOBBIT WEEKLY

Ideas you read, used in your next session.

Tell Hobbit your team's age and what you want to work on this week, and it writes a complete session from one sentence, with a diagram for every drill.

Scan for the web edition and every past issue