



Mahaska County Soccer Club
Player Development
Roadmap



Table of Contents

1. Our Goal
2. MCSC Player Pathway
3. How we get there
4. High School Soccer Readiness Checklist
5. Player Expectations
6. Measuring Success & Why We Don't Emphasize Winning at Young Ages
7. What Success Looks Like
8. Fillable Practice Plan Template



Our End Goal (The “Why”)

MCSC develops **confident, technically sound, soccer-smart** players who:

- Love the game and want to keep playing
- Understand the game (not just positions)
- Are physically prepared for the next level
- Demonstrate respect, leadership, and accountability
- Are ready for **high school soccer**, and beyond if they choose

Winning matters—but **development comes first**.



The Player Pathway (The “Where”)

Age Group	Primary Focus	What Success Looks Like
U10–U11	Skill foundation & enjoyment	Comfortable on the ball, confident trying moves
U12–U13	Game understanding & habits	Good decisions, spatial awareness, team concepts
U14–U15	Performance & consistency	Tactical awareness, physical growth, leadership
U16–HS	Preparation for HS soccer	Game-ready, mentally tough, self-directed players



HOW WE GET THERE (The “Plan”)

1 Technical Development (The Non-Negotiable)

Every practice. Every age. Every player.

Core Skills

- First touch (both feet)
- Passing & receiving under pressure
- Dribbling to beat an opponent
- Finishing
- Ball control while moving

Club Standard

- Ages 10–13: **minimum 40–50% of practice with the ball at feet**
- Ages 14+: **game-realistic technical work under pressure**

If players can't control the ball, tactics don't matter.

2 Tactical Growth (Age-Appropriate)

Teach players to **read the game**, not memorize positions.

U10–U11

- Spacing & support
- Attacking vs defending moments
- 1v1 and 2v2 decision-making

U12–U13

- Width and depth
- Simple team shape (attack & defend)
- Pressing and recovery runs
- Transition moments



U14–U15

- Team principles (press, build, counter)
- Positional roles (not fixed positions)
- Game management

U16–HS

- Tactical flexibility
 - Match analysis
 - Adjusting to opponents
 - Leadership and communication
-

3 Physical Development (Smart, Not Overdone)

We develop athletes, not just soccer players.

Age	Focus
U10–U12	Coordination, agility, balance
U13–U15	Speed mechanics, strength basics
U16–HS	Injury prevention, recovery, conditioning

Club Rule

- No heavy conditioning for younger players
 - Conditioning comes **through the ball whenever possible**
-



4 Mental & Emotional Development

This is where players separate.

We intentionally teach:

- Confidence through encouragement
- Resilience after mistakes
- Accountability to teammates
- Love for learning, not fear of failure

Coach Language Standard

- Correct → Encourage → Challenge
 - Mistakes are learning moments, not benchable offenses
-

5 Practice Structure (Consistency Across Teams)

Every MCSC practice should follow this flow:

1. **Ball Mastery / Warm-Up (10–15 min)**
2. **Skill or Theme Activity (15–20 min)**
3. **Small-Sided Game (15–25 min)**
4. **Game Play / Scrimmage (15–25 min)**
5. **Reflection / Cool Down (5 min)**

If it doesn't look like soccer, rethink it.



6 Competition Philosophy

Winning is a byproduct of development.

- Equal opportunity to learn (especially U10–U13)
 - Players rotate positions through U13
 - Game decisions support learning, not just results
 - Older teams balance development with performance
-

7 Rec vs Travel Alignment

Even with different levels, **the philosophy stays the same.**

Rec Soccer	Travel Soccer
Focus on learning & enjoyment	Faster pace, higher expectations
Equal playtime emphasis	Earned roles over time
Broad skill exposure	Position refinement
Intro to tactics	Advanced tactics



8 Coach Development (Critical to Success)

Better coaches = better players

MCSC will:

- Provide age-group coaching guidelines
- Share practice templates
- Encourage simple, effective sessions
- Support volunteer coaches (no one coaches alone)

Coaches Are Expected To:

- Follow club philosophy
 - Keep players safe and supported
 - Model positive behavior
 - Communicate with parents clearly
-

9 Measuring Progress (Not Just Wins)

We evaluate success by:

- Player confidence on the ball
 - Improved decision-making
 - Retention year-to-year
 - Players moving comfortably into HS Soccer
 - Positive player & parent feedback
 - Love for the game
-



High School Soccer Readiness Checklist

Purpose:

This checklist helps players, parents, and coaches understand what it means to be **ready for high school soccer**. Readiness is about **habits, skills, and mindset**—not just talent.

Players do **not** need to be perfect in every area. This is a guide to identify strengths and areas to keep growing.

1 Technical Readiness (Ball Skills)

A high school-ready player can:

- Receive the ball cleanly with **either foot**
- Pass accurately over short and medium distances
- Play one- and two-touch when needed
- Dribble to escape pressure or beat a defender
- Strike the ball with confidence (shooting, clearing, crossing)
- Maintain control at game speed
- Use correct technique under pressure

Green Flag: Player is confident asking for the ball

Red Flag: Player avoids the ball or panics under pressure



2 Tactical & Game Understanding

A high school–ready player understands:

- Basic team shape in attack and defense
- When to keep possession vs. go forward
- Defensive principles: pressure, cover, balance
- Off-the-ball movement and spacing
- Transition moments (attack → defend, defend → attack)
- Their role within different positions
- How to adjust during a game

Green Flag: Player anticipates play

Red Flag: Player only reacts after the play happens

3 Physical Readiness

A high school–ready player shows:

- Ability to play at a **faster pace** for extended periods
- Balance and body control in challenges
- Proper running mechanics (not just endurance)
- Willingness to compete physically within the rules
- Understanding of warm-up and recovery routines
- Basic strength and coordination appropriate for age

Note: Size is NOT a requirement. Compete, don't compare.



4 Mental & Emotional Readiness

A high school–ready player demonstrates:

- Confidence to make decisions under pressure
- Resilience after mistakes
- Ability to handle coaching and feedback
- Focus during training and games
- Emotional control in tough moments
- Willingness to take responsibility

Green Flag: Responds to mistakes by working harder

Red Flag: Shuts down or blames others

5 Work Ethic & Coachability

A high school–ready player:

- Arrives on time and prepared
 - Listens and asks questions
 - Applies coaching points in games
 - Competes in training
 - Gives consistent effort regardless of role
 - Understands roles may change based on team needs
-



6 Team & Leadership Qualities

A high school–ready player:

- Communicates positively with teammates
- Shows respect for referees, opponents, and coaches
- Encourages teammates
- Leads by example through effort
- Understands team goals over personal stats
- Accepts responsibility for team standards

Leadership \neq loud.

Leadership = consistent behavior.

7 Training & Commitment Expectations

Players and families understand:

- HS soccer is more demanding than club soccer
 - Attendance matters
 - Effort in practice impacts playing time
 - Off-season preparation is important
 - Recovery and injury prevention are part of the process
-



8 Parent Support Readiness

Parents are prepared to:

- Support the player through challenges
 - Trust the coaching staff
 - Encourage effort, not just results
 - Allow players to advocate for themselves
 - Model respectful sideline behavior
-

Overall HS Readiness Snapshot

- Player enjoys competition
- Player wants to keep improving
- Player understands soccer is a team sport
- Player is physically and mentally prepared for increased demands

Bottom Line:

A high school-ready player is not defined by goals, speed, or size—but by **confidence, understanding, work ethic, and love of the game.**



Player Expectations

At Mahaska County Soccer Club, we believe soccer should be **fun, challenging, and rewarding**. Every player plays an important role in creating a positive team environment. The expectations below help ensure a safe, respectful, and productive experience for everyone.

1. Attitude & Effort

- Come to every practice and game with a **positive attitude**.
 - Be willing to **learn, listen, and improve** at each session.
 - Give your **best effort**, even when things are challenging.
 - Accept coaching and feedback with an open mind.
 - Encourage teammates and be a good sport at all times.
-

2. Attendance & Commitment

- **Regular attendance** at practices and games is expected.
 - Players should make soccer a priority during the season.
 - If a player must miss a practice or game, notify the coach as early as possible.
 - Consistent attendance helps individual growth and team development.
-

3. Punctuality

- Arrive **on time and ready** for all practices and games.
 - Being on time means:
 - Dressed and ready to start at the scheduled time
 - Shoes on, shin guards on, and water bottle ready
 - Late arrivals disrupt learning and team preparation.
-



4. Respect & Sportsmanship

- Show respect to:
 - Coaches
 - Teammates
 - Opponents
 - Referees
 - Facilities and equipment
 - Use positive language—no bullying, taunting, or inappropriate behavior.
 - Win and lose with class.
-

5. Safety & Equipment

For the safety of all players:

- **Shin guards are required** at all practices and games.
 - Players must wear **proper soccer footwear**.
 - Bring a **water bottle** to every practice and game.
 - Players should arrive prepared for weather conditions.
-

6. Growth Mindset

- Come to every practice with the goal to **get better**, not just to compete.
- Mistakes are part of learning—embrace them.
- Effort, attitude, and improvement matter more than results.



Our Goal

By following these expectations, players help create a soccer environment that is:

- Safe
- Respectful
- Fun
- Development-focused



Why We Don't Emphasize Winning at Young Ages

At Mahaska County Soccer Club, we believe **long-term development matters more than short-term results**, especially for younger players.

When winning becomes the main focus too early, players may:

- Avoid taking risks or trying new skills
- Become afraid of making mistakes
- Lose confidence or enjoyment
- Burn out or leave the sport altogether

Instead, at younger ages we emphasize:

- Ball mastery and creativity
- Decision-making and problem-solving
- Confidence and enjoyment
- Learning through mistakes

As players grow older and progress into Travel soccer, competition becomes a **tool for learning**, not the sole measure of success.

By prioritizing development first, we help players:

- Improve faster over time
- Become more confident and resilient
- Develop a lifelong love of the game

Winning is a result of good development — not the goal.



What Success Looks Like for MCSC

- ✓ Players stay in soccer longer
 - ✓ Skill improvement
 - ✓ Confidence on and off the ball
 - ✓ High school coaches recognize MCSC players
 - ✓ Players enjoy practices and games
 - ✓ Families trust the development process
 - ✓ Positive player and parent feedback
 - ✓ Winning follows development—not the other way around
 - ✓ Love for the game
-



MCS C Practice Plan Template

Team / Age Group: _____

Program: Just for Kicks Recreational Travel

Coach: _____

Date: _____

Practice Objective (1–2 focus points):

1. Arrival Activity (5–10 min)

Activity: _____

Coaching Points: _____

2. Technical Activity (10–20 min)

Skill Focus: _____

Activity Description: _____

Key Coaching Points: _____

3. Game-Like Activity (15–30 min)

Game / Condition: _____

Decisions to Emphasize: _____

4. Scrimmage (10–20 min)

Format (numbers / field size): _____

Key Observations: _____

5. Wrap-Up (2–5 min)

Positive Takeaways / Player Praise: _____

Notes / Adjustments for Next Practice: