

CANADA SOCCER GRASSROOTS PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

To ensure that a holistic development environment exists for players and coaches, Canada Soccer grassroots programs will be guided by the following principles:

Contact time with a ball will be high

For Canada to produce a consistent stream of high calibre players, we must create more environments where players can develop their skills and comfort with a ball. Relevant, game-realistic skill development should be the outcome of all training sessions. This means that coaches should design challenging sessions that involve players manipulating the ball under various game-like conditions and tasks¹.

Training will resemble the game

Skills are not developed in isolation; for skill development to be most effective, the training environment must resemble the game. This means that the four moments of the game (attacking; defensive transition; defending; and attacking transition) must be present. This does not mean that coaches simply organize games; rather, the training session must involve game-like conditions and tasks that allow players to solve problems through perception-action coupling (the relationship between what a player sees and how they decide to act). This relationship is best developed through activities that closely resemble the game.²

Training will be fun for everyone

When young soccer players were asked recently why they play soccer³, the number one response was “I like playing the game because it’s fun.” Other reasons that children gave included “I like scoring or stopping goals”, “I like to show my skills” and “It’s important to be with my friends.” This information is important to adults because it must be used to create environments that will keep kids involved and engaged in soccer. Grassroots programs must be operated with the principle that training should be fun and enjoyable for everyone^{4 5} – not just for a chosen few. This means that coaches must work with all players, encouraging them to develop their skills and to be creative in finding solutions to the challenges presented by the game.

Grassroots programs will be accessible

One of the key ingredients in any successful player development program is opportunity. Young players need to have access to good environments and good coaches. To ensure that all players have this opportunity, grassroots programs should be open to any player wishing to participate. Within training sessions, coaches have the discretion to group players based on competency, as appropriate, but coaches are strongly encouraged to design sessions that focus on developing all players, regardless of ability.

¹ Jurbala, Paul (27 Oct 2023): [Reimagining the athlete development pathway: constraints-led, learning-based, life-long](#), Sports Coaching Review, DOI: 10.1080/21640629.2023.2275402

² Jurbala, Paul (27 Oct 2023): [Reimagining the athlete development pathway: constraints-led, learning-based, life-long](#), Sports Coaching Review, DOI: 10.1080/21640629.2023.2275402

³ Ontario Soccer, Grassroots Player Survey, 2014

⁴ Visek, A.J., et.al. [The Fun Integration Theory: Towards Sustaining Children and Adolescents Sport Participation](#). J Phys Act Health. 2014 Apr 17;12(3):424-433. doi: 10.1123/jpah.2013-0180

⁵ Martin, Nicole. (21 Mar 2025). [Play Hard, Be a Good Sport, Have Fun: Coaching Strategies to Keep Kids in Sports](#). Association of Applied Sport Psychology.

All players and parents will receive meaningful feedback from coaches

Meaningful feedback is constructive, specific, and focused on helping the recipient learn and improve. It goes beyond generic praise or criticism by providing actionable insights tied to a larger goal. This type of feedback helps individuals understand the impact of their actions, fosters growth, and increases motivation. By engaging the players in this process, they will develop a growth mindset, which is important for them to overcome the inevitable ups and downs of development in soccer. Parents also have a crucial role to play in the development of their children in soccer. By clearly communicating the goals and principles of grassroots soccer to parents and by providing them with meaningful feedback about the development of their children, coaches will develop a network of player development allies. Parents want what is best for their children. By engaging parents in a meaningful way, they are more likely to support and assist coaches in the development of their children.