



## Foundation Phase - 8 to 12 Years of Age.

### Train to Love the Game

At the front of what we do, we are trying to help build a love and passion for the sport we all love so much. This is especially true in the Foundation Phase as we focus on ‘training to love the game.’

As a club and individual coaches, we strongly promote training our players in age/skill level appropriate development training. Focused on players 8-12 years of age, we develop this love by encouraging creativity and rewarding risk-taking (and creative failure) in a fun environment.

### Foundation Phase Focus

Overall, our coaching approach is similar to gardening — ‘we cannot force plants to grow, all we can do is provide the conditions for the growth, and they will flourish.’ Our soccer practices are the same way and revolve around a simple checklist of must-haves: Does it look like the game? Is it fun? Does the session inspire players to train outside of practice?

As a coaching staff, we are here to educate the players and guide them through their soccer journey to help them become the best player they possibly can. We use a [guided discovery approach](#) and, even at such a young age, want players to take ownership of sessions, their development, and helping each other to develop (everyone plays a role in the development process).

In the Foundation Phase, we highly value technical skill development.

It is our goal to make our players a master of the ball and give them the confidence to be calm when challenged with the ball at their feet. We have a modern football philosophy and approach to how the game is played today, not 40 years ago. Certain aspects of the game will remain constant, but the game is adapting and changing. So, we continue to ask: What is working at the top academies around the world? What are the best practices for developing players in the 21st century?

We do not have to reinvent the wheel but can manipulate how it goes round.

### Individual Player Focus

Every player is different. This doesn’t change what we are teaching but the approach, speed, and expectations we have for each individual player in an attempt to meet everyone’s development needs. Grouping players in ability-based groups gives players opportunities to play and develop at the right level so they’re not overwhelmed.

### Technical Excellence

Our technical excellence focus, in the Foundation Phase, is achieved through the game itself, utilizing small-sided games as the cornerstone to training. We create scenarios where players are forced to make decisions founded on their technical skillset. This way, practices are fun, and the learning is deeper and disguised within the game.

We believe that exercises and games must have defenders (pressure) to teach the real game. Beating a cone is easy but having to beat an actual person is what you can expect to find in a game.

Players can expect to find themselves with a ball at their feet for large parts of a training session in order for them to get the highest amounts of reps possible, trying to work on a technique.

## **Tactical Understanding**

Just because our main focus is technical excellence doesn't mean we aren't teaching the game and the tactical understanding that the game requires. For players to achieve tactical requirements, they have to have the technical skills to carry out the tactical aspects of the game.

We have a game model and philosophy for the club that starts with U8 and continues through to the oldest team at U19. With each year, and then phase, we are adding new layers of tactical requirements for players to absorb. Our formations from 7v7 – 9v9 – 11v11 have a flow and build on these layers of tactical understanding that is required.

## **Winning at All Costs Vs. Development**

Firstly, development is winning. Seeing players grow, develop their skills/game, and passion for the game is a big part of winning. Undoubtedly, we all want to win games. Winning and losing is a part of development, of course –how do we react and respond to both sides of the coin.

We have team targets and goals for our players in training and games. These are the things we are always looking for our players to do well every time they step foot on the pitch. We believe in not sacrificing our development goals/targets to win a game in a style that doesn't relate to our game model.

## **Our Expectations for Players On/Off the Pitch**

The Critical Training Essentials we instill at the Foundation Phase are the essentials that we expect of all players and what they should expect of themselves.

1. Work Rate
2. Effort
3. Focus
4. Attitude
5. Responsibility

Every player wearing a USAI uniform is representing our program. We expect players to conduct themselves in a manner that represents our principals as a club.

## **Preparing for The Youth Development Phase**

Our goal is for players to start playing with us in the team setting at U8, so each player has 5 years in the Foundation Phase working on and developing the tools required for the next phase of learning in the Youth Development Phase: U13-U15, where they Train to Understand the Game.

With YDP advancing to the 11v11 game, our goal in the Foundation Phase is to have laid the foundation for our players to move to the real game. It's only at leaving the Foundation Phase we should begin to expect a more, clear picture of the game and the players full understanding.