



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT POLICY

photo by: Deryck Vincent





Dear Coaches,

We've put together this easy-to-read document so all our coaches can understand our **Youth Development Policy** at Raheny United.

**OUR POLICY IS MADE UP OF OUR MISSION,
OUR DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES, AND OUR
COACHING FUNDAMENTALS. ALL OF WHICH
ADHERE TO INTERNATIONAL BEST-PRACTICE**

Once these are adopted by all coaches, we truly believe our club can go from strength to strength.

Aidan O'Looney - Chairperson

Paul McAtee - Head of Youth Development



OUR MISSION



photo by: Andy Fitz

At Raheny United, our mission in youth football is simply this:

HELP EACH CHILD TO FIND ENJOYMENT IN THE GAME OF FOOTBALL

That's it. If we can make football enjoyable for the children, their development will flow from there. If they do not love football first, we will not awaken their curiosity for the game, and they won't want to learn more.

OUR 3 DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

We'll help each child find enjoyment in football by staying true to these principles.



photo by: Deryck Vincent



photo by: Andy Fitz

#1: INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT OVER TEAM SUCCESS

Often in youth football, a club or coach will be overly-focused on the team's success; their next match, the league table, the result in the cup, and so on. The problem with this approach is that individual players' needs can get overlooked.

As an example, when the team performance and result are prioritised over individuals, what does that mean for the less developed players? Are they on the bench every week? If we don't prioritise each child, then those players gradually fall out of love with football and gravitate towards other activities that are more enjoyable for them.

At Raheny United, we want our coaches to prioritise individual development over team success. The children will look to win anyway, and of course that's not something we ever discourage. But as far as coaches are concerned, winning comes as a consequence of individual development.

Prioritising individual development over team success may require a **shift in thinking for some coaches**.

In practice this means that coaches need to:

- Ensure all players get fair game time.
- Work on individual players' weaknesses.
- Rotate players' positions periodically in the early years, for example every 6 weeks, so they fully understand the game, and players get to try multiple positions. However:
 - Some players should rotate more than others because they are still finding their position.
 - Positions will be more clear cut for other players and they will rotate less.
 - Basically, we are not rotating for the sake of rotation - we rotate to develop.



photo by: Andy Fitz

#2: BRING THE SPIRIT OF STREET FOOTBALL INTO OUR CLUB

Those of us who grew up playing street football will remember one thing about it; the freedom. There were few rules, no drills, you just played. That sense of freedom is what we want to replicate at Raheny United.

Playing with freedom has many benefits:

- It enables creative expression.
- It promotes the competitive nature of football.
- Most importantly it's fun!

We hate to see kids queuing, idle on the sideline waiting for a turn on a drill. And the kids hate it too. We train for 2 hours a week so let's not waste it by queuing! Let's play!

Ball mastery, repetitive drills, strength training etc, can all be done away from the training ground. Players get football-fit by playing football. It is of course important not to just leave the players to their own devices with total freedom. As a coach, your job is to create this freedom but within the parameters of a structured game. To prevent bad habits forming, we enable the freedom of street football, while coaching the players to understand where they are performing well, and where they need to develop.



#3: WE STREAM BASED ON A CHILD'S STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

We've all seen the video of Messi as a 6 year old running rings around whole teams.

But, you would wonder what those other kids were learning from that experience.

Were they enjoying it? Were they in love with football that day?

If players are streamed correctly, they will enjoy it more and develop faster. They get more touches of the ball, it's more competitive, and it's all in a more forgiving environment. This is when they'll fall in love with the game. That's why we stream within age groups at Raheny.

You can also stream within your team as necessary; where more developed players play against more developed players in small sided games, and the same for lesser-developed players.

Without deliberate streaming, the lesser developed kids get left on the margins. This is not only bad for them, but also leads to the more developed players picking up bad habits. For example, a more developed player might repeatedly try to dribble past multiple players when the better decision is to pass.

All players lose out without deliberate streaming.

OUR 3 COACHING FUNDAMENTALS

We'll follow these coaching fundamentals so that children at RUFC develop their game, remain curious about football, and stay motivated to come back.



photo by: Deryck Vincent



photo by: Laura Kane



photo by: Andy Fitz

#1: ALWAYS REPLICATE REAL-GAME SITUATIONS

The first and most important coaching fundamental is to ensure we are replicating real game situations. This is so the children develop in-game instinct.

Too much time and energy is spent on drills and practice that do not replicate realistic game scenarios. Unrepresentative training like exercises without opponents or dribbling around cones are not optimal for player development.

THE MORE REALISTIC GAME SCENARIOS THE CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED TO OVER TIME, THE MORE FINE-TUNED THEIR UNCONSCIOUS AND INSTINCTIVE DECISION MAKING BECOMES.

The match format is your starting point for all training sessions. From there, you should simplify the game format. For example at U8 the format is 5v5 on match day, so games in training should be 1v1, 2v2, 2v1, 3v1, 3v2 etc but only up as far as maximum 5v5.

You then overload during the season with variables, such as changing pitch sizes and/or the number of opponents / teammates.

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photo by: Darren Kearney

Here are the basic elements that must be present in an exercise to ensure it replicates a real-game situation:

- 1. There must be a ball.**
- 2. There must be two teams playing against each other at all times.**
- 3. There must be a goal to attack and defend.**
- 4. There should be no artificial constraints (e.g., 2-touch, or counting passes for goals).**
- 5. There should be no children idle on the sideline. This might require multiple pitches going at the same time.**
- 6. Always referee the game so players get used to applying the laws of the game.**

In a nutshell, training should always look and feel like a game of football.

Not only is this approach optimal for developing in-game instinct, but representative training like this is better for preventing injury too. Unplanned movements are when injuries occur. Unplanned movements occur naturally in football games, less so in repetitive structured drills. So we must train for that from very young ages to allow players to adapt to them.



#2: WE COACH ‘TEAM INTENTIONS’

Our second coaching fundamental is that we coach team intentions (aka tactics). We call them ‘Team intentions’ (and not tactics) because it is more than just a formation or shape. Rather, it’s the collective intention of a team in any given situation.

At very young ages we should implement one basic team intention for each of these four functions in the game;

- 1. DEFENDING**
- 2. TRANSITION TO ATTACK**
- 3. ATTACKING**
- 4. TRANSITION TO DEFEND**

As the kids get older, the team intentions become more sophisticated and nuanced. But the basic premise is the same:

1. First, we make it simple.
2. Secondly, we make sure everyone is on the same page. We must work hard to ensure everyone knows, understands, and anticipates a particular team intention at any given moment. For example, when we have the ball (i.e. attacking), what’s the plan? Does everyone know the plan? If all players are on the same wavelength, they’ll execute together as a team.

Examples:

- An example of a team intention for younger ages when defending is: nearest player presses the ball.
- When attacking, an example might be: get a player on the ball behind the next opposition line of players. As the kids get older, a team intention when attacking might be: exploit the space in behind the opposition defence.



#3: WE COACH 'GAME INSIGHT PRINCIPLES' (USING PMDS)

Every football action whether it is passing, creating space, shooting etc, can be described and evaluated using four characteristics; **POSITION, MOMENT, DIRECTION & SPEED**. For example, let's imagine a player gives the ball away in training. It could be a problem with one or more of the 4 characteristics:

- Was the player in the right position to give a good pass?
- Was it the right moment to pass?
- Was it in the right direction?
- Was the pass at the right speed?

In this case the player passed the ball forward to the centre forward, but the direction of the pass was to the side where the defender was, making it easier for the defender to win the ball. At this point we might stop the session briefly to help the players with the direction of their passing. But before we do, there are a few things to consider (stopping play too frequently or for too long takes players out of their flow). We only stop if it is:

1. Something that happens regularly, and
2. Applies to multiple players

Every single situation in the game is slightly different so we use this specific game situation to give the players a general reference which we call a game insight principle. I.e., in this case, the game insight principle for the players to take away is "when passing the ball forward to a teammate with a defender on their back, pass to the foot furthest away from the defender".

Players can then take that game insight principle and apply it to many situations in future.



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT POLICY

OUR MISSION:

Help each child find enjoyment in football.

OUR 3 DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

1. We prioritise individual development over team success.
2. We bring the spirit of street football (with guidance) into our club. Games before drills!
3. We stream based on a child's development.
Every child develops at a different pace.

OUR 3 COACHING FUNDAMENTALS

1. We replicate real-game situations to develop in-game instinct.
2. We coach Team Intentions.
3. We coach Game Insight Principles using PMDS -
(*POSITION, MOMENT, DIRECTION, SPEED*).



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