

THE ELITE SOCCER PLAYBOOK



THE BLUEPRINT FOR DEVELOPMENT,
SUCCESS (AND FUN)!



Written By
BEAU BRIDGES (SOCCERNOVO)

Your Guide to Soccer Success

You've just pulled off a perfect step-over. The defender is left flat-footed as you accelerate past them. But then what? Your teammates aren't making runs. The coach is shouting something you can't quite hear. And honestly, you're not completely sure what the best decision is right now.

Sound familiar?

If you're reading this page, chances are you love soccer and want to get better.

Maybe you've watched highlight videos on YouTube trying to copy the moves. Perhaps you've wondered why some players always make the top MLS NEXT or ECNL team. Or maybe you're just starting out and feel overwhelmed by everything you need to learn.

I get it. The path to becoming a great soccer player isn't always clear.

That's why I wrote this book. As a former coach who's worked with many young players and as a soccer dad who's watched my own sons navigate their development journeys from rec leagues to MLS NEXT, I've seen what works—and what doesn't.

The Elite Soccer Playbook isn't just another collection of drills or weak advice. It's your step-by-step guide to becoming the player you want to be and maximizing your opportunities within the U.S. soccer landscape. Here's what we'll tackle together:

- The five building blocks to becoming elite
- How to build a solid foundation of technical skills that will set you apart
- The tactical understanding that helps you make smart decisions under pressure
- How to develop the mindset of top performers who overcome setbacks
- What to focus on in your own practice time to improve fastest
- How to navigate team selection, positions, and the competitive soccer landscape

- Clear pathways to high-level soccer, including college and beyond

Throughout this book, you'll find practical advice that you can apply immediately to your game. We'll break down complex concepts into simple steps. We'll explore not just what to do, but why it matters for your development.

My promise to you is straightforward: if you apply what you learn in these pages, you will become a better player. Not overnight—there are no shortcuts to excellence—but steadily and surely, with each practice and each game.

Whether you dream of playing college someday or simply want to earn more playing time on your current team, these pages will give you the blueprint to improve.

The journey of a thousand touches begins with a single step. Let's take that step together.

Welcome to The Elite Soccer Playbook.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sean Bridges".

Dad, Coach & Founder of SoccerNovo

P.S. – For the parents reading this—yes, there's a whole section for you later in the book! I've included a comprehensive Q&A addressing the 31 most common questions I get on SoccerNovo and from parents I meet on sidelines. But I encourage you to read this player-focused content too. Understanding your child's development journey will help you support them better along the way!

Table of Contents

Player Manifesto	5
Chapter 1: Building a Strong Soccer Foundation	7
5 Pillars to Player Development	7
Putting It All Together	11
Age-Specific Development: What Really Matters	12
Trust the Journey	13
Chapter 2: The Fundamentals of Soccer Development	14
Technical Skills: Your Soccer Tool Kit	14
Tactical Awareness: The Chess Game of Soccer	16
Chapter 3: Getting to Know Positions and Formations	18
Finding the Right Position for Your Skills	18
Different Soccer Positions	19
Common Soccer Formations	26
Adapting to Different Coaching Styles and Systems	29
Chapter 4: Developing a Strong Mindset For Life	31
Effort vs. Talent: Why Hard Work Wins Out	31
Embracing Mistakes as Learning Opportunities	32
Taking Ownership of Your Development	33
Avoiding Distractions to Better Yourself	34
Chapter 5: Training Outside of Team Practices	36
The Power of Backyard Training	36
Structured Training vs. Unstructured Play	37
Your Weekly Training Plan	38
Summer Training Program	42
Avoiding Burnout: The Balance Between Fun and Work	42
Chapter 6: Playing Competitive Soccer in the U.S.	45
What to Expect in Club Soccer	45
Understanding Different Coaching Styles	46
Making the Most of Team Training Sessions	49
Finding Success in Games	50
What About Game Film?	53
Handling Setbacks: Injuries, Cuts, and Performance Slumps	53
Getting Cut or Not Making a Team:	54
Chapter 7: The Path to High-Level Soccer	56

Which Path is the Best?	56
How to Join a Top-Tier League	61
High School vs. Club Soccer: Which Matters More?	65
Is College Soccer an Option For You?	68
Understanding the College Recruiting Process	74
Can I Become a Pro Player?	79
Your Soccer Journey Awaits 🎉	81
The Path Forward	81
Beyond the Game	81
Your Unique Journey	82
The Final Whistle	82
For Players: Answer To Your Most Pressing Questions	83
Parent Manifesto	86
For Parents: 31 Answers To Your Most Pressing Questions	87
Beyond the Final Whistle	98
Soccer Terms You Should Know	99

Player Manifesto

This manifesto is your compass for navigating the beautiful game and reaching your full potential. Let these simple (but impactful) principles guide your actions both on and off the field as you grow into the player you aspire to be. You got this.

1. Own Your Development

Your growth as a player is completely in your hands. While coaches guide you and parents support you, you must take full responsibility for your improvement. Put in the work beyond team trainings, because greatness happens when no one is watching.

2. Embrace the Fundamentals

Understand that mastering the basics—*passing, receiving, dribbling, shooting*—creates the foundation for everything else. Repeat the basics everyday and you're guaranteed to get better.

3. Play with Purpose

Every time you step onto the field—*whether for practice or games*—bring focus and intention. "Focused intention" is what I call it. For that hour and a half, push yourself to improve by 1%. Improving by just 1% each day compounds to making yourself nearly 37 times better by the end of the year!

4. Appreciate All Of Your Teammates

Soccer is the ultimate team sport. Celebrate others' success as your own, communicate positively on the field, and understand that making others better makes you better too. One bad relationship can negatively impact YOU.

5. Respect the Game

Show respect to coaches, referees, opponents, and the game itself. Play hard but fair, win with humility, and lose with dignity. Simply, respect and love the game.

6. Develop Mental Toughness

Soccer tests you mentally as much as physically. Embrace challenges, learn from mistakes, and bounce back quickly from setbacks. Your mindset is your greatest competitive advantage. This will carry over into the rest of your life.

7. Seek Knowledge

Be curious about the game beyond your own experience. Watch high-level soccer, study players in your position, ask questions, and constantly expand your tactical understanding. You'll need this as you get into your high school years.

8. Take Care of Your Body

Fuel your performance with proper nutrition, prioritize sleep, stretch regularly, and listen to your body's signals. Understand that recovery is as important as training. Play hard, rest harder.

9. Balance Passion with Patience

Pursue excellence with passion while understanding that development takes time. Celebrate small improvements and trust the process, knowing that progress isn't always a straight shot.

10. Remember Why You Started

Above all, play because you love the game. When challenges come—and *they certainly will*—reconnect with the joy that drew you to soccer in the first place. That joy is your ultimate fuel for the journey ahead. It should always be within you.

Bonus: Thank Your Support System

Recognize that your soccer journey wouldn't be possible without your parents, guardians, and supporters. They drive you to practices and games, pay for your gear and fees, cheer from the sidelines in all weather, and provide emotional support through ups and downs. Show gratitude for their sacrifices and understand that their investment in your passion is a gift.

Chapter 1: Building a Strong Soccer Foundation

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”
— Eleanor Roosevelt



5 Pillars to Player Development

GET PASSIONATE

find pure joy for the sport of soccer

GET ATHLETIC

speed, agility, and coordination

GET SKILLED

repeat the fundamentals consistently, everyday

GET SMART

play intelligently with speed

GET MENTALITY STRONG

setbacks can be a springboard for success

Soccer excellence isn't built overnight. The best players in the world didn't just wake up one day with magical abilities. This never happens.

They developed their talents through consistent focus on five fundamental pillars that support all aspects of the game.

Pillar 1: Get Passionate

Talent without passion fades quickly. The journey to soccer greatness is long and challenging—it's passion that fuels the journey when obstacles arise.

Passion isn't just about loving the game on perfect days. It's about wanting to practice even when you're tired. It's about watching matches to learn, not just to be entertained. It's about feeling genuine excitement when you see yourself improve.

The most successful players have an intrinsic motivation that drives them. They don't need parents or coaches to push them—they push themselves because they genuinely love the process of getting better.

Young players develop passion when they experience joy in the game. Create environments where trying new skills is encouraged. Celebrate small victories. Make training fun while still being purposeful. Allow room for creativity and self-expression within the structure.

Passion is the difference between "having to practice" and "getting to practice." When you make this shift, your development accelerates dramatically.

Pillar 2: Get Athletic

The modern game demands athleticism. Even the most technically gifted players need a solid physical foundation to showcase their skills.

- **Speed** isn't just about running fast in a straight line. It's about explosive first steps to beat defenders, quick acceleration to reach loose balls, and maintaining pace throughout a full game. The ability to change speeds effectively creates separation from defenders and opens up the game in many ways.
- **Agility** allows players to change direction instantly without losing balance and react to unpredictable game situations. Players with good agility can execute tight turns while maintaining ball control and weave through traffic in crowded areas of the field.
- **Coordination** ties everything together. It helps players combine upper and lower body movements smoothly and maintain balance while being

pressured. Good coordination means executing technical skills while off-balance and timing jumps perfectly for headers.

Remember, these athletic attributes form the foundation upon which all soccer skills are built. Focus your early development on becoming more athletic. It will drive everything in your development later.

Pillar 3: Get Skilled

Raw athleticism isn't enough. The greatest players are masters of the fundamentals.

The secret? There are no secrets—just consistent repetition of basic skills until they become second nature.

What to practice daily: Clean first touches in different directions. Passing with both feet at various distances. Dribbling with all surfaces of both feet. Receiving balls from the air. Shooting with proper technique.

Players should aim for at least 300 to 500 touches on the ball every day outside of team practice. This isn't as overwhelming as it sounds—15–20 minutes of focused skill work can easily reach this number.

The difference between good and great players often comes down to this simple truth: great players practice when nobody's watching.

Pillar 4: Get Smart

Physical gifts and technical skills reach their full potential only when paired with soccer intelligence.

Playing with speed means making decisions before receiving the ball. It's knowing your options before the ball arrives and understanding when to play one-touch vs. when to take an extra touch. Smart players recognize patterns of play as they develop and anticipate rather than just react.

Players develop soccer IQ by watching high-level games actively, not passively. They play in small-sided games that force quick decisions and seek out competitive environments that challenge their thinking. Learning from mistakes and adjusting in real-time is crucial, as is asking questions about tactical concepts.

Smart players see the game differently. They don't just see where the ball is—they see where it's going to be.

Pillar 5: Get Mentally Strong

Soccer is as much a mental game as it is a physical one. The strongest minds often prevail over the strongest bodies.

Mental strength means bouncing back from mistakes quickly. It's not dwelling on the bad pass you just made but focusing completely on the next action. It's maintaining confidence even when things aren't going your way.

Resilience in the face of setbacks defines the best players. They view challenges as opportunities to grow rather than obstacles to avoid. They embrace the difficult moments because they know that's where the most growth happens.

Players build mental toughness by gradually facing increasingly difficult challenges. They learn to control what they can control—their effort, their attitude, their response to adversity—and let go of what they can't.

The mentally strong player stays composed when others lose their cool. They maintain focus when distractions mount. They perform under pressure because they've prepared themselves mentally for those moments.

(we'll dive into the mental side more in Chapter 4)

I strongly believe your mentality is a skill that can be developed...

Putting It All Together

The magic happens when these five pillars work together. A player who embraces and develops each pillar becomes not just a complete soccer player, but a complete athlete.

Development isn't linear. Some days will focus more on one pillar than others. That's perfectly fine. The key is consistent attention to all five areas over time.

Parents: Support your child's journey by recognizing which pillars need attention and which are strengths. Create an environment where all five can flourish.

Players: Challenge yourself in all five areas. Your weakest pillar often determines your ceiling as a player. Identify it, embrace the work needed, and watch your game transform.

Remember, development is a marathon, not a sprint. The players who ultimately succeed are those who embrace the daily work across all five pillars.

Age-Specific Development: What Really Matters

If I can really boil development down into a player's age, here it is...

Ages 5-10: The Foundation Years Focus on:

- Basic movements (running, sprinting, jumping, balance)
- Multiple sports (yes, really – it helps!)
- Lots of touches on the ball
- Fun games that develop coordination

Ages 11-14: The Skill Acquisition Phase This is the golden age of technical development. Focus on:

- Mastering ball control
- Developing both feet
- Speed of play should be top of mind
- Introducing tactical concepts
- Building game understanding
- Multiple sports (yes, keep doing it!)

Ages 15+: The Game Application Phase Now it's about:

- Refining existing skills
- Applying skills under pressure
- Understanding tactics deeply
- Physical development
- Mental toughness

Trust the Journey

The journey in soccer, like life, is unpredictable. I've seen beginners make incredible leaps in their development and experienced players return to basics to overcome challenges.

What unites both groups is the understanding that a strong foundation isn't a one-time achievement – it's an ongoing process of growth, refinement, and occasional renewal.

The strongest soccer foundation is built on a combination of joy, dedication, and constant curiosity about the game. Whether you're laying that foundation for the first time or reinforcing it years into your journey, approach it with patience and enthusiasm.

Chapter Summary:

- Complete player development requires balanced growth across all five pillars—passion drives the process, athleticism provides the foundation, skills create the opportunities, intelligence maximizes effectiveness, and mental strength ensures consistency.
- Even just 30 minutes of focused daily practice can dramatically accelerate development in any pillar.
- The journey to excellence is a marathon, not a sprint—embrace the daily work and trust the process.

Chapter 2: The Fundamentals of Soccer Development

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal:
It is the courage to continue that counts.” — Winston Churchill

While there's no magic formula for creating the next soccer superstar, there are proven fundamentals that every player needs to master.

Think of these as your building blocks – the stronger your foundation, the higher you can build.

Technical Skills: Your Soccer Tool Kit

Picture technical skills as your soccer tool kit. Just like a craftsperson needs their tools, you need these core skills to express yourself on the field.

Ball Control

The ball should feel like an extension of your foot. Great ball control means you can receive passes smoothly, keep the ball close while moving, and prepare for your next move without thinking about it.

Why it matters? Ball control is the foundation that makes everything else possible on the field. With good control, you'll spend less time chasing the ball and more time making smart decisions and creating opportunities. Players with excellent ball control play with confidence and freedom, allowing their creativity to shine.

Quick Tips for Better Ball Control:

- Practice with both feet – your weak foot should become your friend
- Keep the ball within a step's reach while dribbling
- Learn to receive the ball with different parts of your foot
- Master the art of the first touch – it sets up everything else

Passing

Soccer is a team sport, and passing is how your team connects. Think of passing as having a conversation on the field – sometimes you need to whisper (soft passes), sometimes you need to shout (driven passes).

Why it matters? On 98% of occasions, passing the ball beats dribbling. Passing is the heartbeat of soccer, moving the ball efficiently toward the goal while conserving your energy. Good passing builds team chemistry and allows you to control the game's tempo, turning defense into attack in seconds.

Key Passing Concepts:

- Use the inside of your foot for accuracy
- Follow through toward your target
- Keep your head up to spot your teammates
- Learn to pass with different power levels
- Practice one-touch passing for faster play

Dribbling

Good dribblers aren't just showing off – they're creating opportunities with purpose. Dribbling helps you move into space, draw defenders, and create momentum for your team.

Why it matters? Dribbling is your problem-solving tool on the field when passing lanes are blocked. A skilled dribbler can create numerical advantages by eliminating defenders, opening space for teammates and changing the game's rhythm to catch opponents off balance.

Dribbling Fundamentals:

- Keep the ball close in traffic
- Use small touches when changing direction
- Practice moves that help you change pace
- Learn when to dribble and when to pass (it should eventually become instinct)

Shooting

Scoring goals isn't just about shooting with power – it's about precision and making good decisions. A great shooter knows how to place the ball where the keeper can't reach it.

Why it matters? Scoring goals is ultimately what wins games, making shooting one of the most crucial skills to develop. Strong shooting ability forces defenders to play you differently and creates space for teammates as opponents rush to block your shots. Any player who can shoot is dangerous on the field.

Shooting Success Tips:

- Strike through the middle of the ball for power
- Plant your non-kicking foot beside the ball
- Keep your head down and follow through
- Practice shooting while moving, not just from a standing position
- Aim for the bottom corners first. Top corners second.

Tactical Awareness: The Chess Game of Soccer

Having great technical skills is only part of the equation. You need to know when and where to use them. That's where tactical awareness comes in.

Reading the Game

Start developing your soccer IQ by watching the whole field, not just the ball. Notice how spaces open and close, how teams move together, and where opportunities might appear. Try to be one step or move ahead of every other player on the field (including your teammates).

Why it matters? Players who read the game will make decisions faster and more effectively than those who only react to what's directly in front of them. Players with good IQ seem to be one step ahead, finding time and space where others see none and anticipating danger before it develops.

Building Your Soccer IQ:

- Look up before you receive the ball
- Check your shoulders to know where everyone is
- Understand when to make runs into space
- Learn to predict where the ball will go

Positioning

Good positioning makes everything easier. It helps you receive passes, defend effectively, and create chances for your team.

Why it matters? When you're well-positioned, you'll have more time on the ball and often won't need to rely on fancy skills to be effective. Smart positioning conserves energy while maximizing your impact, allowing you to contribute both offensively and defensively throughout the entire game.

Smart Positioning Habits:

- Stay balanced between attack and defense
- Create passing angles for your teammates
- Learn to find pockets of space and run at angles into them
- Position yourself to help in multiple situations

Chapter Summary:

- Technical skills (ball control, passing, dribbling, shooting) are the foundation of soccer development.
- Ball control helps players move confidently and make quick decisions.
- Passing connects the team and keeps the game flowing.
- Dribbling and shooting create scoring chances and pressure opponents.
- Tactical awareness (reading the game and positioning) helps players stay one step ahead and impact both offense and defense.

Chapter 3: Getting to Know Positions and Formations

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any." — Alice Walker

Let's talk about one of the most important decisions in your soccer journey: finding your position on the field.

Think of it like finding the right role in a movie – you want to play a part that matches your strengths and helps the whole team find success!

Finding the Right Position for Your Skills



Every player has natural tendencies on the field. Maybe you love sprinting past defenders, or perhaps you get a thrill from making that perfect defensive tackle. These instincts are often the first clue to finding your ideal position.

Here's what to consider when exploring different positions:

Your Physical Attributes:

- Speed and agility might point you toward wing positions
- Height and strength could make you an excellent center back
- Quick reflexes? You might have a future as a goalkeeper

Your Technical Skills:

- Great at accurate long passes? Consider central midfield
- Love to dribble and take on defenders? Winger or striker positions might be your calling
- Strong at reading the game and intercepting passes? Defensive midfielder could be perfect

Remember: Don't feel locked into one position early on. Many players started in completely different positions than where they ended up. The key is to experiment and be open to trying new roles.

By around age 14, you'll find that the position you find yourself in will most likely naturally fit with your unique player characteristics.

Now, let's dive into each position and their key responsibilities.

Different Soccer Positions

We've broken down each position with a short description, key responsibilities, and how it's evolved in today's game. For our purposes, you just need a basic understanding of each.

The (#) next to each position represents that traditional jersey number players wear. It's not set in stone but this number is sometimes interpreted as the position. For example, my son plays as an "Attacking Midfielder" or "The 10".

Goalkeeper (#1)

The goalkeeper isn't just about making saves – *they're the foundation of the team's defense and the start of many attacks*. The goalkeeper is the only player allowed to use their hands within their penalty area, giving them a unique advantage in stopping shots. This position requires exceptional mental strength, as one mistake can often lead directly to a goal.

Key Responsibilities:

- Shot-stopping: Using any legal part of their body to prevent goals
- Cross collection: Coming off their line to catch or punch crossed balls
- Distribution: Starting attacks with throws or kicks to teammates

- Organizing the defense: Communicating constantly with defenders about positioning and threats
- Sweeping: Acting as an extra defender when the team plays a high line

Modern Evolution:

- Expected to be excellent with their feet
- Often acts as an additional passing option in build-up play
- Needs to read the game like a defender
- Must master different types of distribution (long kicks, short passes, throws)

"The modern goalkeeper needs to be as comfortable with their feet as with their hands. We're basically the 11th outfield player now." – Alisson Becker

Defenders

Center Backs (#4 and #5)

The backbone of the defense, center backs have evolved from simple stoppers to crucial players in building attacks. These players typically work in pairs, with one sometimes being more aggressive while the other covers. Great center backs possess a combination of physical strength, positional awareness, and the ability to stay calm under pressure.

Primary Duties:

- Marking strikers: Following and containing opposing forwards
- Aerial duels: Winning headers from crosses and long balls
- Tackling: Making clean, effective challenges
- Reading the game: Intercepting passes and anticipating danger
- Building from the back: Starting attacks with precise passing

Modern Requirements:

- Excellent passing range (both short and long)
- Comfort in possession under pressure
- Speed to cover large spaces behind the defense
- Leadership and communication skills

- Ability to step into midfield when needed

"Position yourself so you can see both the ball and your opponent. Never let a striker get goal-side of you without knowing exactly where they are." – Virgil van Dijk

Full Backs (#2 and #3)

Modern full backs are among the most demanding positions in soccer, requiring both defensive solidity and attacking flair. They typically patrol the wide areas of the field, providing width in attack and protecting against wide threats defensively. The right back (#2) and left back (#3) need exceptional stamina as they often cover more ground than any other position during a match.

Defensive Responsibilities:

- 1v1 defending against wingers
- Covering for center backs when needed
- Tracking back on counterattacks
- Maintaining defensive shape
- Supporting center backs in aerial duels

Attacking Duties:

- Providing width in attack
- Overlapping runs past wingers or midfielders
- Accurate crossing
- Combination play in the final third
- Supporting the midfield in possession

Modern Evolution:

- Often play as additional midfielders in possession
- Expected to contribute to goal-scoring
- Need exceptional stamina for box-to-box running
- Must be technically skilled to play in tight spaces
- Required to make quick tactical decisions

Midfielders

Defensive Midfielder (#6)

The defensive midfielder is the bridge between defense and attack, crucial in both stopping opposition plays and starting attacks. Often described as the team's "anchor," they provide balance and stability to the midfield. Their positioning is critical – always available for a pass while simultaneously screening the defense from dangerous attacks.

Key Responsibilities:

- Shielding the defense
- Intercepting passes
- Breaking up counterattacks
- Controlling the tempo of the game
- Supporting build-up play

Modern Requirements:

- 360-degree awareness
- Excellent positioning
- Strong tackling ability
- Range of passing
- Tactical understanding

"The key is to always be in a position to help your teammates. You're like the security blanket of the team." – Rodri

Box-to-Box Midfielder (#8)

The engine of the team, these players influence the game at both ends of the field. The name "box-to-box" comes from their ability to contribute in both penalty boxes – defending in one and attacking in the other. These midfielders typically cover more ground than any other position, requiring exceptional fitness levels and tactical understanding.

Primary Duties:

- Supporting attacks
- Covering defensively
- Making late runs into the box
- Pressing opponents
- Maintaining team shape

Physical Demands:

- Exceptional stamina
- Speed for transitions
- Strength in duels
- Agility for quick turns
- Endurance for 90 minutes

Attacking Midfielder (#10)

The creative spark of the team, responsible for unlocking defenses and creating scoring opportunities. This skilled player operates in the space between the opposition's midfield and defense known as the "hole" or "pocket." Great attacking midfielders combine vision, technique, and creativity to see and execute passes that other players might not even consider.

Key Skills:

- Vision to spot passes
- Technical ability in tight spaces
- Quick decision-making
- Shooting from distance
- Finding space between lines

Modern Evolution:

- More defensive responsibility than traditional #10s
- Expected to press aggressively
- Often plays deeper to influence build-up
- Needs to be effective without much time on the ball

- Must be able to play in multiple attacking positions

Forwards

Wingers (#7 and #11)

Modern wingers are often the main attacking threat, combining scoring and creating opportunities. These wide forwards have evolved from traditional chalk-on-the-boots crossers to dynamic attackers who can score as many goals as center forwards. Players in these positions often possess explosive pace and dribbling ability that can unlock even the most compact defenses.

Key Duties:

- 1v1 dribbling
- Cutting inside to shoot
- Providing width
- Tracking back defensively
- Creating chances for teammates

Evolution of the Role:

- More focus on scoring goals
- Tactical flexibility to play on either wing
- Expected to help in defensive phases
- Need to be effective in counter-attacks
- Must be able to play in tight spaces

Striker (#9)

The main goalscorer of the team has evolved beyond just finishing chances. The striker or center forward is often judged primarily by their goal tally but contributes much more to modern teams. They must balance the predatory instinct of finding scoring positions with the selflessness to create space and opportunities for teammates.

Primary Responsibilities:

- Finishing chances

- Hold-up play
- Creating space for teammates
- Pressing from the front
- Link-up play

Modern Requirements:

- Clinical finishing
- Movement off the ball
- Physical strength
- Aerial ability
- Technical skills for build-up play

"Being a striker isn't just about scoring. It's about movement, creating space, and helping the team. The goals will come if you do everything else right." – Harry Kane

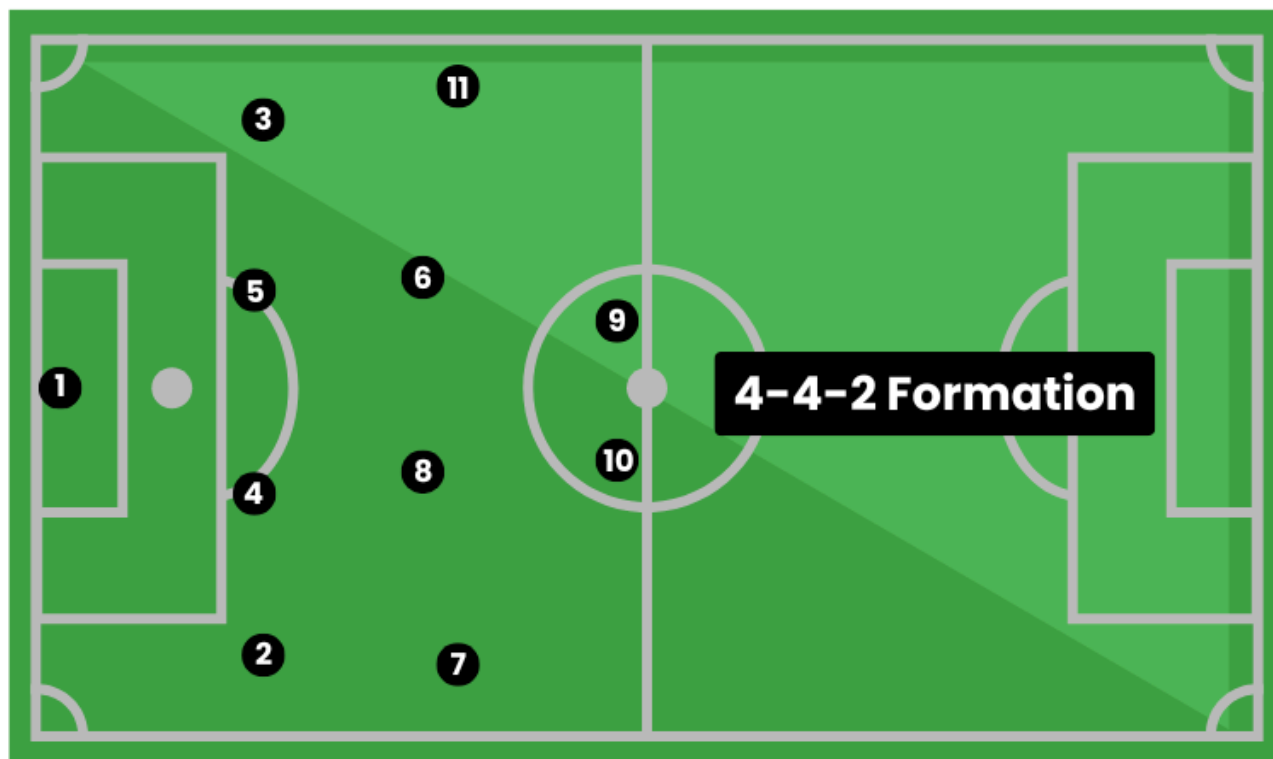
Modern Position Evolution

Today's game has evolved beyond these traditional roles. You'll often see:

- Inverted wingers (right-footed players on the left wing)
- False 9s (strikers who drop deep)
- Wingbacks (full backs with major attacking duties)
- Pressing forwards (strikers who defend from the front)

Common Soccer Formations

Now, let's decode those numbers coaches throw around, like 4-4-2 or 4-3-3. Don't worry – it's simpler than it looks!



The Basic Formation Structure:

- The numbers always go from back to front (excluding the goalkeeper)
- 4-4-2 means four defenders, four midfielders, and two forwards
- Each formation has its own strengths and weaknesses. Game formations usually play to the team's strengths.

Popular Soccer Formations:

4-4-2: The Classic

This formation provides excellent balance between defense, midfield, and attack. It features two central strikers who can work together, with one often dropping deeper while the other stays high. The 4-4-2 is relatively simple to understand, making it ideal for youth teams learning positional play.

Team Benefits:

- Creates natural passing triangles all over the field
- Provides excellent defensive coverage in wide areas
- Allows for effective pressing with two forwards

4-3-3: The Attack-Minded Setup

This formation emphasizes width in attack with three forwards spread across the field. It requires a strong midfield trio who can control the center of the pitch against potentially larger numbers. The 4-3-3 has become popular in modern soccer because it facilitates high pressing and quick transitions.

Team Benefits:

- Creates numerical advantage in central midfield
- Stretches defenses with wide forwards
- Excellent for high-pressing and winning the ball in advanced positions

3-5-2: The Flexible Formation

Using three center backs provides security at the back while allowing the wing-backs to push forward aggressively. This formation creates numerical advantages in midfield through its five midfielders. The 3-5-2 works best when players understand how to shift positions collectively as the ball moves around the field.

Team Benefits:

- Dominates central midfield with numbers advantage
- Creates overloads in wide areas when wing-backs advance
- Provides defensive security with three specialized center backs

4-2-3-1: The Modern Standard

This balanced formation features two holding midfielders providing defensive security, allowing the front four attackers more freedom. It can quickly transition between defensive 4-4-1-1 and attacking 4-3-3 shapes without changing personnel.

Team Benefits:

- Balances defensive stability with attacking options
- Creates dangerous overloads in the final third
- Adaptable to different game situations without substitutions

5-3-2: The Defensive Counter-Attack

With five defenders, this formation prioritizes defensive stability and is often used by teams facing stronger opposition. The wing-backs must provide all the width in attack, making their stamina and technical ability crucial. This setup excels at absorbing pressure and launching quick counterattacks through the two forwards.

Team Benefits:

- Extremely solid defensively with five dedicated defenders
- Efficient for teams with limited possession against stronger opponents
- Creates numerical advantage in defense against most attacking formations

How Formations Impact Your Role

Here's where it gets interesting – the same position can feel totally different depending on the formation. Let's break it down:

As a Forward in Different Formations:

- In a 4-4-2: You have a strike partner to work with
- In a 4-3-3: You might play wider and need to cut inside
- In a 3-5-2: You'll need to be good at holding up the ball

As a Midfielder:

- In a 4-4-2: Clear defensive and offensive responsibilities
- In a 4-3-3: More specialized role (defensive or attacking)
- In a 3-5-2: Extra importance on positional awareness

Closely watch professional games and focus on players in your position. Notice how they adjust their play based on their team's formation.

7v7 and 9v9 Formations

Youth soccer players typically progress from 7v7 (ages 8-10) to 9v9 (ages 10-12) before moving to the full 11v11 game, with each format using formations that mirror principles found in the full-sided game but adapted to smaller fields and fewer players.

The most common 7v7 formations include:

- 3-2-1 (which creates natural passing triangles)
- 2-3-1 (which develops width concepts)
- 2-1-3 (which emphasizes transition play)

As players advance to 9v9, they typically use:

- 3-2-3 (introducing the concept of a back three with wing support)
- 3-3-2 (emphasizing midfield control)
- 2-3-3 (teaching high pressing and advanced possession)

Adapting to Different Coaching Styles and Systems

Every coach has their own style and system – that's just part of the game. Here's how to handle these differences:

Understanding Your Coach's Philosophy:

- Some coaches prioritize possession
- Others focus on quick counterattacks
- Some emphasize defensive stability

How to Adapt:

- Ask questions about your role
- Watch game film with your team or coach if possible
- Practice the specific movements they want in your position
- Be patient – new systems take time to learn

The Mental Game:

- Stay positive when learning new positions or formations
- View tactical changes as opportunities to grow
- Remember that versatility makes you more valuable

The best players are adaptable. Being able to play multiple positions and understand different formations will make you a stronger player overall.

Quick Tips for Success:

- Communicate with your teammates about positioning
- Study the game off the field
- Be patient with yourself when learning new roles
- Stay open to feedback from coaches

Your position and understanding of formations will evolve as you grow in the game.

The key is to stay curious, work hard, and always be willing to learn. Whether you end up as a goal-scoring striker or a reliable defender, finding your perfect position is part of what makes soccer such an amazing journey!

Try not to overthink it. At the end of the day, it's still just soccer.

Chapter Summary:

- Find your best position by matching your physical traits, instincts, and technical skills—stay open to trying different roles as you grow.
- Each position has key responsibilities, from goalkeepers organizing the defense to wingers creating and scoring goals—understanding your role helps the whole team succeed
- Formations like 4-4-2, 4-3-3, and 3-5-2 impact how positions function, changing your duties based on team shape and strategy.
- Modern soccer demands versatility, with evolving roles like inverted wingers, false 9s, and pressing forwards becoming more common.
- Adaptability and soccer IQ are crucial—learn from coaches, study your position, and stay mentally flexible to thrive in different systems.

Chapter 4: Developing a Strong Mindset For Life

You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.” — Marcus Aurelius

Let's talk about something that separates good players from great ones – mindset.

I touched upon this a bit earlier but I want to provide more color. It's that important!

While natural talent is awesome to have, it's not the whole story. In fact, the way you think about soccer (and life) can make or break your success on the field.

Effort vs. Talent: Why Hard Work Wins Out



Here's a truth bomb: talent alone won't get you where you want to go. There are many examples of this. The best 10-year-old stops working hard and falls behind. Or, that fourteen year-old girl that prioritizes boy drama over soccer.

On the flip side, I've seen a kid become the best in her age group simply by not relying on her natural abilities. Instead, she pushed herself with a relentless work ethic. From ages 10-14, she was on the second on the lower-level team in her club. By the time she was 16, she was one of the top high school sophomores in her state!

What did she have to do? She started training four times a week after school. In the summer, she would work out twice (morning conditioning and evening ball work). She simply put in the effort which most players aren't willing to do. She took full control over her situation and it paid off.

Here's what consistent effort looks like:

- Showing up early to practice to work on your weak foot
- Doing those extra sprints when everyone else has stopped
- Practicing ball control in your backyard
- Asking your coach questions about how to improve
- Doing squats, pushup, and situps in your bedroom before dinner

Remember, something is always better than nothing. Do something everyday.

Embracing Mistakes as Learning Opportunities

Let's be real – messing up feels awful. For those that saw the Netflix special, remember David Beckham's red card against Argentina in the 1998 World Cup that made him public enemy #1 in England? But here's what's amazing –he used this devastating moment to become even better.

Every time you mess up, you're actually getting valuable feedback about what to work on. The key is changing how you view these moments. Instead of thinking "I'm terrible" or "I can't do this," try asking yourself:

- What exactly went wrong?
- What could I do differently next time?
- What skill do I need to practice to prevent this from happening again?
- Is this really that bad? Hint...it probably isn't.

Be like a goldfish. They have a 3-second memory. Learn to move on quickly.

Remember, even the pros make mistakes. The difference is they use them as fuel to get better.

Taking Ownership of Your Development

Here's a mindset shift that will change everything in your life: stop waiting for others to make you better.

Your development is YOUR responsibility. Not your coach's. Not your parents'. It's YOURS!

This means:

- Setting your own training goals
- Finding ways to practice outside of team training
- Being honest with yourself about your weaknesses
- Taking the initiative to ask for help when you need it
- Watching soccer when you have free time

When you take ownership of your development, something amazing happens. Look at Carlos, a 16-year-old from Chicago who couldn't afford expensive training programs. Instead of using that as an excuse, he created his own development plan.

He used cones from the dollar store to set up drills in his local park, watched tactical analysis videos on YouTube, and convinced his younger sister to be his training partner. Two years later, he earned a spot on an MLS NEXT team.

Or there's Emma, a 12-year-old who lives in a very small town with limited soccer opportunities. She turned her garage into a training space, practicing wall passes for hours and using an agility ladder she made from tape. She even organized small-sided games with players from different age groups to challenge herself. Now she travels 90 minutes to play for a top club team in her state, and her coaches say her technical skills are among the best they've seen.

The lesson? You stop making excuses and start finding solutions. Bad weather? Suck it up and get outside or find indoor space. No training partner? No problem. Work on individual skills. Limited field space? Go for a run and do sprints.

The world really is your oyster. I know you can find success if you own every part of your life. This is what I want for you!

Avoiding Distractions to Better Yourself

Let's talk about the elephant in the room – your phone.

Your phone will distract you from your goals. And, it's not worth it.

Just ask a talented 15-year-old striker who couldn't figure out why his game was declining. Tracking his screen time revealed he was spending four hours daily on social media and mindless games. When he limited his phone use to one hour per day, his focus and performance improved dramatically.

Sometimes it's addition by subtraction.

Or consider the story of Sara's high school team. They were struggling with consistency until their captain challenged everyone to delete social media apps during the playoff season. The result? Better focus in practice, more team bonding off the field, and a surprising run in the state playoffs.

Here's what these and other top young players do:

- Set specific times for phone use (after training and homework are done)
- Keep their phone in their bag during trainings
- Use screen time limits during the season
- Replace scrolling time with more family and friend time
- Don't check their phones as soon as they wake up or an hour before bed

Even pro players struggle with this. Erling Haaland has talked about using blue light glasses and limiting phone use to improve his sleep and recovery.

But it's not just about phones. Distractions come in many forms:

- Toxic friendships that pull you away from your goals
- The temptation to skip training when you're tired
- Letting drama from school affect your game
- Prioritizing short-term fun over long-term success

Your mindset isn't just about soccer – it's about life. The habits and attitudes you develop now will serve you well beyond the field.

Whether you end up playing at the next level or not, learning to work hard, learning from mistakes, taking ownership, and managing distractions will help you succeed in whatever path you choose.

Remember this: talent might decide where you start, but your mindset and work ethic determines how far you'll go.

Chapter Summary:

- Effort beats talent when talent doesn't work hard—consistent training, even when it's inconvenient, is what separates good from great.
- Mistakes are learning moments—embrace them, move on quickly, and use them to improve.
- Take ownership of your development—don't wait for others; create your own path and solutions.
- Avoid distractions, especially phones and negative influences, to stay focused on your goals.
- Mindset shapes your future—hard work, resilience, and self-discipline lead to success on and off the field.

Chapter 5: Training Outside of Team Practices

I am building a fire, and every day I train, I add more fuel. At just the right moment, I light the match.” — Mia Hamm

Ever notice how the best players on your team seem to have this magical touch with the ball? Trust me—it's not magic. Those skills usually come from putting in extra work beyond team practices.

In this chapter, we'll break down exactly how to level up your game through individual training, while keeping it fun and avoiding burnout.

Whether you've got a huge backyard or just a small patch of concrete, I'll show you how to make the most of your training time.

The Power of Backyard Training

Here's a truth that might surprise you: most youth players only get about 3-4 hours of team practice per week. That's roughly 180-240 minutes of actual training time.

Sound like a lot? Well, consider this: to truly develop your skills, I recommend at least 1,500 touches on the ball per week. You're not getting anywhere near that in team practice alone. For youth players, an extra 3-4 hours per week can make a HUGE difference.

Think about it this way: When you're at team practice, you're:

- Sharing the ball with 15-20 other players
- Following structured drills that might not target your specific needs
- Often waiting in lines for your turn
- Focusing on team tactics rather than individual skills
- The coach has to work with the team, not you

This is why training is absolutely crucial for any player wanting to excel. It's your chance to:

- Get hundreds (or thousands) of extra touches on the ball
- Work on skills you struggle with, at your own pace
- Build muscle memory through repetition
- Develop creativity without pressure
- Focus on you (and only you)

Structured Training vs. Unstructured Play

Both types of training have their place in your development. Let's break down how to use each effectively.

Structured Training

This is when you have a specific plan and goals for your session. Maybe you're working on:

- Left foot control
- Quick turns
- First touch
- Shooting accuracy

Your structured sessions might feel like work—challenging but rewarding. They're essential for improving specific aspects of your game.

Unstructured Play

You are remixing it. This is just as important! It's when you:

- Juggle for fun
- Try new dribbling techniques
- Pretend to dribble around ghost defenders
- Play pickup games
- Simply mess around with the ball

This type of play builds creativity, joy, and that special relationship with the ball that makes great players stand out.

Your Weekly Training Plan

Here's a realistic plan that any motivated player can follow. Remember: consistency beats intensity every time.

You may need to adjust this schedule based on your team training days.

Monday: Technical Foundation Day

Perfect for: Starting your week strong after weekend recovery

30-40 Minutes Total

1. Juggling Progression (10 minutes)
 - Start with thigh juggling (both legs) - 25 touches
 - Move to feet only - 50 touches
 - Combine feet and thighs - 25 touches
 - Challenge: Try to beat your personal record
2. Wall Work (10 minutes)
 - One-touch passing (2 minutes)
 - Two-touch passing with both feet (3 minutes)
 - Receiving and turning (3 minutes)
 - First-touch to different directions (2 minutes)
3. First Touch Circuit (10 minutes)
 - Soft touches inside foot to outside foot
 - Roll-stops with alternate feet
 - Bounce ball, control, pass back to wall

- Practice receiving with all surfaces (feet, thighs, chest)

Tuesday: Pre-Practice Preparation

Perfect for: Getting sharp before team training

20 Minutes Before Team Practice

1. Ball Mastery Warmup (8 minutes)
 - Inside/outside touches (2 minutes)
 - Sole rolls forward/back (2 minutes)
 - Figure 8s through legs (2 minutes)
 - Quick toe touches (2 minutes)
2. Quick Explosion Moves (7 minutes)
 - Scissors (right & left foot)
 - Step-overs
 - Quick cuts
 - Your favorite move combination

Wednesday: High-Intensity Development

Perfect for: Mid-week skill building

30-40 Minute Power Session

1. Speed and Agility (10 minutes)
 - Cone dribbling patterns
 - Quick direction changes
 - Acceleration/deceleration with ball
 - Side-to-side movement drills
2. Shooting Circuit (10 minutes)

- Power shots from stationary ball
- First-time shots from rolling ball
- Turn and shoot
- Finesse shots to corners

3. Creative Play (10 minutes)

- Practice new moves you've seen
- Create your own combinations
- Film yourself trying skills
- Challenge yourself with harder variations

Thursday: Recovery and Maintenance

Perfect for: Active recovery after Wednesday's session

Post-Practice Cool Down

- Dynamic and static stretches
- Light juggling progression (10 minutes)
 - Start with easy patterns
 - Focus on touch, not numbers
 - Mix in some walking juggling
 - End with relaxed freestyle

Friday: Pre-Game Skill Sharpening

Perfect for: Light training before weekend games

25-Minute Confidence Builder

1. Dribbling Circuit (10 minutes)
 - Quick touches through cones

- Change of direction moves
 - Speed dribbling
 - Close control patterns
2. 1v1 Move Practice (10 minutes)
- Practice your go-to moves
 - Work on new skills slowly
 - Combine moves together
 - Visualize game situations
3. Target Practice (5 minutes)
- Accuracy passing to targets
 - First touch to specific spots
 - End with confidence-building shots

Saturday: Game Day

Perfect for: Performing your best

- Focus on the game
- No extra training
- Mental preparation
- Good nutrition and hydration

Sunday: Rest & Recovery

Perfect for: Charging your batteries

Use the day after a game to fully recover. No matter how many minutes you've played, resting the mind, body, and soul can set you up for a great week.

Pro Tips for Your Weekly Plan:

- Listen to your body and adjust intensity as needed. Be fluid in your weekly plan.
- Always do a proper 5-minute warmup
- Keep water nearby
- Track your progress in a training journal
- If you're extra tired, it's okay to take additional rest
- If you're feeling great, turn it up a few notches (focused intensity will help you make quicker progress)
- Try to train at the same times each day to build a better routine

Summer Training Program

Summer is the perfect time to make huge improvements in your game.

Let's not overcomplicate it. I would recommend repeating the weekly training schedule (or a variation of it) above and do double.

Also, add in any larger group scrimmages or personal trainings you can.

You should enjoy your summer but also use the "down time" to work on your craft.

Depending on how far you want to take your soccer journey, the summer months are where you can really separate yourself from the crowd!

Avoiding Burnout: The Balance Between Fun and Work

Let's talk about something serious: burnout. It's real, and it can happen to anyone who trains too hard without enough recovery or enjoyment.

Burnout depends on you...the individual. One player can go hard for 3 hours every day while another can max out at 45 minutes.

Signs you might be doing too much:

- You're dreading training sessions
- Your body feels constantly tired
- You're not enjoying the game like you used to
- Your performance is getting worse, not better
- It feels like a job you hate

Here's how to keep the balance:

1. **Listen to your body:** If you're truly exhausted, it's okay to take an extra rest day. One or two skipped sessions won't ruin your development, but burnout definitely will.
2. **Mix up your training:** Don't do the same drills every day. Variety keeps things interesting and helps develop well-rounded skills.
3. **Include play time:** Always reserve some time for pure fun with the ball. Try new tricks, play small-sided games with friends, or just freestyle.
4. **Set realistic goals:** Start with 15–20 minutes of extra training. Build up gradually as it becomes part of your routine.

Remember: The best training plan is one you can stick with consistently. It's better to do 20 minutes every day than to burn yourself out trying to train for two hours straight.

In the next chapter, we'll dive into how to stand out in competitive club soccer and perform at your highest level during games.

Chapter Summary:

- Individual training is essential—team practices alone aren't enough to truly develop skills; extra work builds confidence, creativity, and consistency.
- Backyard training adds thousands of touches and lets players focus on personal needs, without waiting or sharing reps.
- Balance structured drills and unstructured play—both are key to improving technique and building joy with the ball.
- Follow a weekly plan with short, focused sessions that include ball control, agility, shooting, and recovery days to stay sharp without overtraining.
- Avoid burnout by listening to your body, keeping sessions fun, mixing up routines, and setting realistic, consistent goals.

Chapter 6: Playing Competitive Soccer in the U.S.

“Pressure is a privilege—it means people expect something of you.”

— Trinity Rodman

Welcome to the exciting world of competitive soccer! If you're reading this chapter, you're probably already playing for a club team or seriously thinking about it.

Either way, you're about to embark on an incredible journey that will challenge you, develop you as a player, and hopefully be incredibly fun along the way.

What to Expect in Club Soccer



Club soccer is a big step up from recreational and travel leagues. The pace is faster, the training is more intense, and the expectations are higher. Oh, and you'll be playing for 10 months out of the year! But don't let that intimidate you – it's exactly what you need to grow as a player.

Here's what your typical week might look like:

- 2-4 high-level team training sessions (usually 90 minutes each)
- 1-2 intense games on the weekend
- Additional strength and conditioning work as you get older
- Possible goalkeeper-specific training if that's your position
- Lots of time in the car

...And, 2-3 tournaments or showcases throughout the year.

The biggest adjustment for most players isn't the physical demands – it's the mental ones. You'll need to manage your time better, stay focused during longer training sessions, and learn to balance soccer with school and other activities.

One thing that often surprises new club players is the emphasis on tactical understanding. You're not just learning how to kick the ball anymore; you're learning why we make certain decisions on the field. Embrace this! Understanding the tactical side of the game will make you a much better player.

Understanding Different Coaching Styles

Let's talk about something every player needs to navigate: coaches.

Throughout your soccer journey, you'll encounter all kinds of coaches, and honestly, you won't click with all of them. That's normal, and it's actually part of your development as a player.

The Different Types You'll Meet

Tough Love Coach:

- Pushes you hard and may seem harsh at times
- Doesn't give praise easily
- Has high expectations and isn't afraid to show disappointment
- Can be intimidating, but often helps players develop mental toughness

The coach's intensity usually comes from wanting you to reach your potential

The Tactician:

- Focuses heavily on strategy and positioning
- Might seem obsessed with small details
- Expects you to understand complex concepts
- Can be frustrating if you prefer just playing

It can feel "boring" but this type of coach will develop your soccer IQ tremendously.

The Player's Coach:

- Builds strong relationships with the team
- Creates a positive, encouraging environment
- Might be more relaxed about mistakes
- Focuses on building confidence

Don't let the friendly atmosphere make you too comfortable and prepare for favorites.

The Old School Coach:

- Emphasizes fundamentals and discipline
- Might seem behind the times with training methods
- Values hard work above all
- Can be inflexible about their approach

You will look back on this coach and thank them for everything that was taught.

Making Any Coach Relationship Work

You won't love every coach you play for, and that's okay. The sooner you accept this reality, the better equipped you'll be to handle different coaching relationships throughout your career. The key is to approach each situation with an open mind and a willingness to learn.

Every coach you'll encounter knows something you don't, regardless of their style or approach. Try to identify their strengths and focus on what you can learn from them, even if their methods don't always resonate with you.

Interestingly, the coaches you clash with often end up teaching you some of the most valuable lessons – both about soccer and about navigating challenging relationships.

Understanding your coach's style is crucial to building a productive relationship. Pay attention to what they value most in players – is it work ethic, tactical understanding, technical precision, or something else?

Once you figure this out, you can adapt your communication approach to match their preferences. Notice how they give feedback and adjust your responses accordingly. Some coaches want questions, while others prefer players who simply execute their instructions.

When you're struggling with a coach, don't retreat into frustration. Instead, ask specific questions about what they want to see from you. Show them you're putting in extra effort both during and outside of practice. Be honest but respectful about the challenges you're facing – remember that coaches are human too, and most will appreciate your maturity and self-awareness.

Sometimes a simple conversation can clear up misunderstandings that have been holding you back.

If you're not getting the playing time you want, approach the situation constructively rather than with resentment. Ask for concrete areas where you need to improve, then dedicate yourself to working on them. Show up early to training and stay late whenever possible.

Maintain a positive attitude around the team, especially when you're on the bench. Be patient and understand that earning a coach's trust takes time – sometimes several months of consistent effort before you see results. Your response to limited playing time often determines whether you'll get more opportunities in the future.

Making the Most of Team Training Sessions

Training sessions are where great players are built, long before anyone sees them on game day. This is where the real magic happens.

While games might be more exciting, it's what you do in those 90-minute training sessions that truly defines your development as a player.

The best players understand this secret: games merely reveal what you've already become in training.

They approach training not as something to get through, but as a place to work on their craft every week.

Here's your game plan for maximizing training:

Before Practice:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early to properly warm up
- Have all your gear ready (including uniform, water and cleats)
- Stay loose and interact with your teammates

During Practice:

- Stay focused even during water breaks
- Ask questions when you don't understand something
- Watch and learn from teammates who do things well
- Do everything you can at game speed
- Give 100% effort, especially in conditioning drills

After Practice:

- Take mental notes about what you learned
- Appreciate the hard work you just accomplished
- Just kick it with your teammates and coach

There's no such thing as a "bad" training session if you're learning from it. Some practices may be more frustrating than others but try to move on from it. Try not to bring it home. Remember to have a mind like a goldfish (short memory).

Finding Success in Games

Game day. The moment when you get to compete, the whistle blows, and everything you've worked for is put to the test.

But here's what separates the truly exceptional players from everyone else: they understand that game day success isn't random or magical—it's engineered through practices, preparation, mindset, and execution.

The players who consistently perform when it matters most aren't leaving anything to chance. They've built systems and routines that maximize their potential on the field. They treat every aspect of game day as an opportunity to gain an edge, from what they eat for breakfast to how they process the match afterward.

95% of success in games is how you approach it before.

Let's break down everything you need to know about maximizing your performance on game day.

Pre-Game Preparation (The Day Before)

Your game preparation actually starts the day before:

- Get a good night's sleep (at least 8 hours) – this is the most important
- Hydrate consistently throughout the day
- Eat a balanced dinner with good carbs and protein
- Pack your bag with everything you need
- Check the weather and prepare appropriate gear
- Mentally visualize positive game scenarios

Game Day Morning

Your routine matters more than you might think:

- Wake up early enough to eat a proper meal 3 hours before kickoff
- Keep breakfast familiar and light – game day isn't the time to try new foods
- Stay hydrated but don't overdo it
- Keep activities at a minimum and avoid anything too physically demanding
- Review any team tactics or set plays you've been working on
- Listen to music that gets you in the right headspace
- Avoid mindlessly scrolling through social media

At the Field

Arrive at least 45 minutes before game time. Here's your pre-game checklist:

- Connect with your teammates – positive energy is contagious
- Complete your warm-up routine thoroughly (ease into it)
- Check your cleats and equipment (make sure to have shin guards!)
- Listen carefully to the coach's final instructions
- Take a moment to center yourself mentally

During the Game

When you're playing:

- Start simple – make your first few touches clean and straightforward
- Communicate constantly with teammates
- Stay focused on your role and positioning
- Make quick decisions but don't rush
- Keep moving off the ball – create options for teammates

- Read the game's rhythm – know when to slow things down or speed them up
- Prioritize relentless effort over everything else

When you're on the bench:

- Stay engaged and watch the flow of the game
- Study your opponent's tendencies
- Support your teammates
- Stay warm and ready to go in
- Listen to coach feedback to other players
- Use your different perspective to spot patterns you can't see while playing

Post-Game Habits

What you do after the game matters too:

- Cool down properly
- Hydrate and refuel
- Thank coaches and refs
- Take quick mental notes about what worked and what didn't
- Reflect on the game, but please don't dwell on it
- Start preparing for the next opportunity

The best players aren't just the most skilled – they're the ones who can think on their feet and make smart adjustments throughout the match.

Like I've mentioned before, the mental game is huge at this level. Don't get too high with the successes or too low with the failures. Every game is a chance to learn and improve, whether you win or lose.

Focus on your performance and contribution to the team rather than just the final score.

What About Game Film?

One of the best tools for improvement in modern soccer is game film. Many clubs now record games using Veo or something similar. If yours doesn't ask your parents to record when possible.

Watching yourself play can be uncomfortable at first, but it's incredibly valuable. Here's how to make the most of it:

- Watch your positioning without the ball
- Study your decision-making when you receive passes
- Look at your movement off the ball
- Note both positive plays and areas for improvement
- Watch high-level players in your position and compare their decisions to yours

Pro tip: Don't just watch the highlights. Sometimes the most valuable learning comes from analyzing the mistakes.

Handling Setbacks: Injuries, Cuts, and Performance Slumps

Let's be real – setbacks are part of every soccer player's journey. How you handle them often determines how far you'll go in the sport.

Dealing with Injuries:

- Never ignore injuries as they could get worse over time
- Follow your doctor's and trainer's advice exactly
- Stay involved with the team during recovery
- Use the time to study the game and work on mental aspects
- Be patient with the recovery process
- Return gradually – don't rush back

Performance Slumps:

- Remember that every athlete goes through them
- Focus on the basics and rebuild confidence slowly
- Talk to your coach about what they're seeing
- Sometimes taking a day off can help reset your mind
- Keep a journal to write stuff down (sometimes it's beneficial to get it out of your head)

Getting Cut or Not Making a Team:

As a player, sometimes you won't make the team you want to play on. It stings in the moment but I understand that life goes on. Here are some helpful tips...

- Allow yourself to feel disappointed – it's normal
- Ask for specific feedback about areas to improve
- Create an action plan based on that feedback
- Look for other opportunities to play and develop
- Use it as fuel to motivate and prove yourself

Some of the world's best players faced major setbacks early in their careers. What matters isn't the setback itself, but how you respond to it.

In youth soccer, I've seen many kids not make the top team in their club but end up being the best player after a couple years. In the moment, I understand that it is a terrible feeling. These kids used their disappointment as fuel to make huge progress.

Remember, your journey in competitive soccer is unique to you. Don't get caught up comparing yourself to others or trying to follow someone else's path. Focus on your own development, stay patient with the process, and enjoy the ride!

Chapter Summary:

- Club soccer is a big step up—it's faster, more intense, and runs year-round, requiring commitment, focus, and time management.
- Coaching styles vary, and learning to adapt to different coaches is part of a player's growth—every coach offers something valuable.
- Maximize training sessions by arriving prepared, giving full effort, and viewing every rep as a chance to improve.
- Game day success comes from preparation, strong routines, and staying mentally sharp before, during, and after the match.
- Setbacks (injuries, cuts, slumps) are part of the journey—how you respond to them shapes your development more than the setback itself.

Chapter 7: The Path to High-Level Soccer

“Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice, and most of all, love of what you are doing.” — Pelé

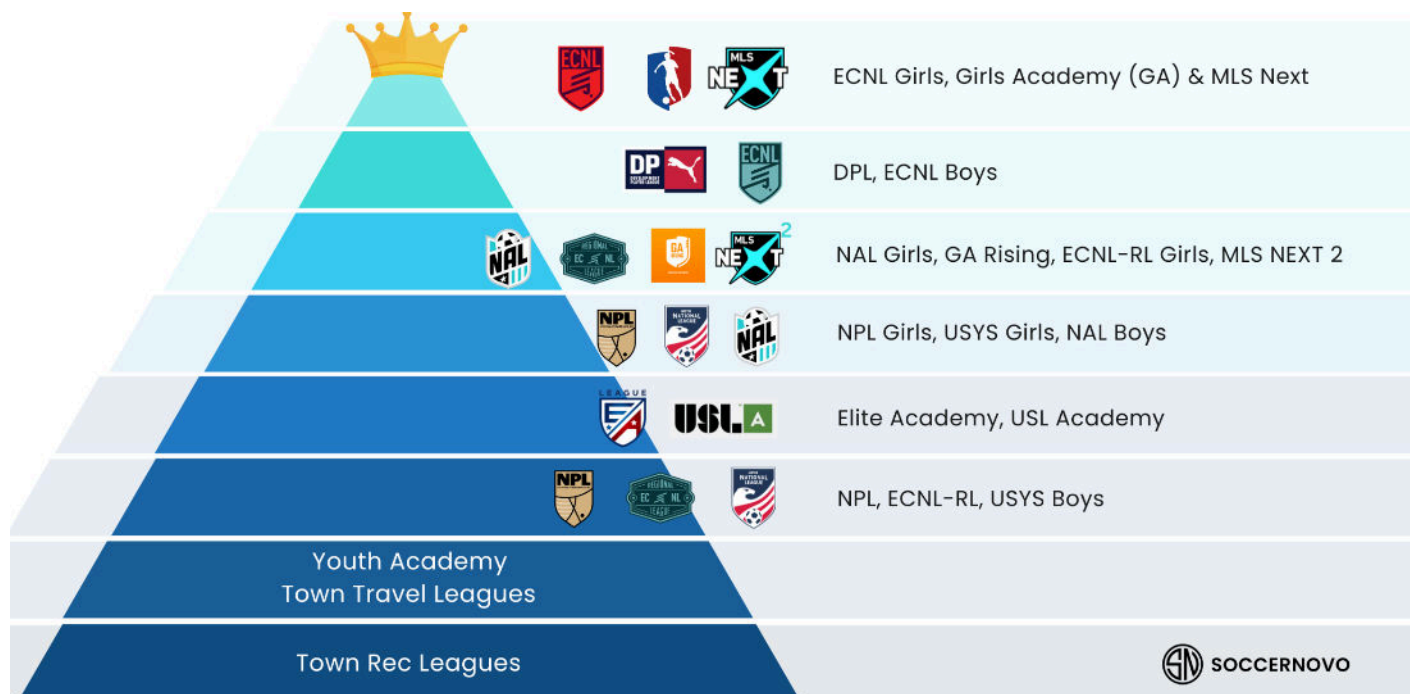
Let's dive deep into the world of high-level soccer. Whether you're aiming for college scholarships, dreaming of going pro, or simply want to compete at the highest level possible, this chapter will be your roadmap.

We'll explore every option in detail so you can make informed decisions about your soccer future.

Which Path is the Best?

Youth soccer in the United States is organized into three main buckets: recreational, travel, and club soccer – with increasing levels of competition, commitment, and development opportunities as you move up the pyramid.

The exact structure varies by region, but there's a general hierarchy that has emerged in recent years.



The current youth soccer pyramid typically looks like this:

Tier 1 (Most Elite)

- Boys: MLS NEXT
- Girls: ECNL Girls or Girls Academy (depending on your region)

Tier 2

- Boys: ECNL Boys
- Girls: Development Player League (DPL)

Tier 3

- Boys: MLS NEXT 2
- Girls: National Academy League (NAL), GA Rising, and ECNL Regional Leagues

Tier 4

- Boys: National Academy League (NAL)
- Girls: National Premier Leagues (NPL) and USYS National League

Tier 5

- Boys: Elite Academy League, USL Academy
- Girls: Various club leagues

Tier 6 (Foundation Level)

- Recreational leagues
- Town travel teams

What makes this system uniquely American is that it's overseen by multiple organizations rather than a single national federation. The three major sanctioning bodies are:

- **U.S. Youth Soccer (USYS):** The largest youth sports organization, sanctioning MLS NEXT (in partnership with MLS), Girls Academy, and National League conferences.
- **U.S. Club Soccer:** Endorses ECNL, ECNL Regional Leagues, and National Premier Leagues (NPL).
- **United States Sports Specialty Association (USSSA):** Sanctions the Development Player League (DPL) and Elite Academy League.

This fragmented system can be confusing for families, but it also creates multiple pathways for development based on your goals and circumstances

Breaking Down the Elite Pathways



Let's look at each major league in detail to help you understand where you might fit best.

MLS NEXT represents the pinnacle of boys' youth soccer in America. It's designed specifically to develop college and professional players, with many clubs directly affiliated with MLS teams. Training can be intense, with 3-5 sessions weekly plus games, and the focus is primarily on producing elite players.

The quality of coaching in MLS NEXT is exceptional, with most coaches holding top-level licenses and professional experience. However, this pathway isn't for everyone. There is significant travel – players might drive 5–6 hours for regular season games and fly across the country for showcase events like MLS NEXT Fest. If you're serious about the sport and your family can handle the commitment, this could be your path.

ECNL (Elite Clubs National League) takes a slightly different approach. While still extremely competitive, it places more emphasis on college preparation alongside elite development. Originally created for girls' soccer (where it remains the premier platform), ECNL now offers strong opportunities for boys as well. Each member club must maintain high standards for facilities and coaching.

What makes ECNL unique is its showcase model, which brings together teams from across the country for college exposure events. The training environment is professional but typically allows more flexibility than MLS NEXT, with 2–4 weekly sessions and the ability to participate in high school soccer if desired.

The Girls Academy (GA) emerged as another elite platform specifically for female players after the dissolution of the Development Academy. Working closely with the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), GA focuses on creating a professional environment while supporting holistic player development. Recently, GA and MLS NEXT announced a strategic partnership, though this is unlikely to significantly change the structure of either league in the immediate future.

The National Academy League (NAL) offers an alternative path that many families find appealing. While still providing high-level competition, it offers more flexibility and usually lower costs than the top-tier leagues. This can be an excellent option for players who want to compete at a strong level while maintaining balance with other activities or managing family commitments. Starting in Fall 2025, many NAL teams will compete as part of the MLS NEXT Tier 2 program.

ECNL Regional Leagues (ECNRL) were developed to improve coordination between teams of different levels within the same ECNL club. Unlike regular ECNL teams that compete nationally, ECNRL teams typically play within their region, providing a good competitive environment with less travel.

Development Player League (DPL) is an all-girls national league designed to bridge the gap between high-level regional competitions and top-tier national leagues like ECNL. Their motto is "To develop the player and empower the person in a purposeful and memorable environment."

Making Your Choice

When deciding which path to pursue, consider these key factors:

1. **Your ultimate goals:** Are you aiming for a college scholarship, or simply the highest level of competition you can handle while maintaining balance in your life?
2. **Family circumstances:** Can your family manage the time and financial commitments of the most elite leagues? Remember, there's no shame in choosing a path that better fits your family's situation.
3. **Current level:** Be honest about where you are now and what environment will best help you develop. Sometimes, being a standout player in a slightly lower league can be better for development than struggling for playing time at the highest level.
4. **Location:** Not all pathways are available in every area. Consider what's realistically accessible for your family.

Remember, the "best" path isn't always the highest-level league - it's the one that best matches your talents, goals, circumstances, and development needs.

Many successful players have reached college soccer and even the professional ranks through different pathways. The key is finding the right environment where you can develop, compete, and most importantly, continue to love the game.

How to Join a Top-Tier League

Maybe you're watching MLS NEXT, ECNL, or GA games and thinking, "That's where I want to be." Or perhaps you're already playing club soccer but want to move up to a more competitive league. Let's talk about how to make that jump.

Understanding the Landscape

First, it's important to know the hierarchy of leagues in your region. We went over this in the previous section. It's important to note that the landscape might change a bit depending on the region. For example, on the girls side, Girls Academy is stronger than ECNL in some states.

Research thoroughly to determine which is the right fit for your goals and circumstances.

Timing Your Move

The soccer calendar follows a specific rhythm for tryouts and team formation:

- Most younger teams hold official tryouts in late winter/early spring (often February–May)
- Most older teams (U14 and up) typically don't hold formal tryouts. Instead, they invite players for a "trial," where the player practices with the team to assess fit and skill level.
- Teams are typically formed by early summer for the following fall–spring season
- Some clubs offer mid-season tryouts for limited roster spots

The key is to start your research and outreach 3–4 months before the official tryout period. This gives you time to get on coaches' radars, possibly attend training sessions, and prepare properly.

If you're a U14 player or older, your goal isn't to get on a team but to get invited to a trial first.

Getting on the Radar

Here's how to approach getting noticed by top clubs:

1. Research thoroughly:
 - Study the club's philosophy, playing style, and development track record
 - Look into the coaching staff's background
 - Talk to current or former players/parents about their experiences
2. Make initial contact:
 - Email the age group coach AND the club director/technical director
 - Attend their games to watch the level and style of play
 - Register for any club-sponsored ID camps or clinics (if they have it)
3. Get feedback:
 - Ask your current coach for an honest assessment of your readiness
 - Consider hiring a trainer with connections to top clubs for evaluation
 - Seek feedback from neutral coaches at showcase tournaments

The Trial Process

Most top clubs will want to see you in action before offering a spot. This typically happens in one of several ways:

- Official tryouts (open or invitation-only)
- Guest training sessions with the team (trial)
- Invitation to a scrimmage or friendly match
- ID camps run by the club

Be prepared for multiple sessions. Clubs want to see consistency and how you respond to different situations. The more times you get invited back, the more promising it is.

Sample Email Template

Here's a template you can customize when reaching out to clubs:

Subject: Player for [Age Group/League]

Dear Coach [Last Name],

My name is [Your Name], and I'm a [Birth Year] [Position] currently playing for [Current Club] in the [Current League].

I'm writing to express my interest in trying out for [Club Name] for the upcoming season.

Here's a little about me...

[Brief description of your strengths/style]

I'm interested in [Club Name] because [specific reasons why this club appeals to you – *be specific about their style of play, development philosophy, or success with players like you*].

I would really appreciate the opportunity to attend a training session with your team or information about upcoming tryouts.

You can view some of my recent highlights at: [Link to video if available]

My parents can be reached at [Parent's phone number] or [Parent's email] to discuss any details.

I know I can make an impact in your program! I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Pro Tips for Successful Trials

The more you can integrate with the team, the better for you. Here's some tips:

1. Do your homework:
 - Watch the team play before your trial if possible
 - Learn the coach's name and coaching style
 - Follow some players on social media
2. Make a strong first impression:
 - Arrive 20-30 minutes early
 - Introduce yourself to the coach with a firm handshake
 - Chat it up with some of the players
 - Have a ball with you to warm up individually
3. During the trial/practice:
 - Play to your strengths but within the team structure
 - Communicate clearly and positively
 - Show enthusiasm and incredible work rate
 - Be receptive to coaching
4. Follow up:
 - Send a thank-you email within 24 hours
 - Express specific things you enjoyed about the session
 - Ask about next steps in the process
 - Be patient but persistent

Remember: Even if you don't make the team on your first attempt, many players get accepted after multiple trials as they develop and as coaches get to know them better.

The key is to be persistent, work on the feedback you receive, and maintain a positive attitude throughout the process!

High School vs. Club Soccer: Which Matters More?

This is one of the most common debates in youth soccer. Let's break down both paths to help you make the best decision for your situation.

Club Soccer Benefits

Training Environment: The quality of coaching in club soccer tends to be more consistent at a higher level. You're typically moving from volunteer coaches to professional, salaried coaches with accredited licenses and more sophisticated training methodologies. The focus is more on development and less on simply winning games.

Club soccer also provides year-round training opportunities. While high school is seasonal (typically just fall), club runs nearly year-round, allowing for consistent development without long breaks.

Competition: One of the biggest advantages of club soccer is the consistently higher level of play. You're regularly competing against other serious players who are dedicated to improving. The game is faster, more technical, and more tactical – preparing you better for college soccer.

Exposure to College Coaches: As mentioned earlier, college coaches spend the vast majority of their recruiting time at club showcase events, not high school games. These showcases bring together top talent from across the country, making it efficient for coaches to evaluate multiple players in one place.

Major showcase tournaments, ECNL events, and MLS NEXT matches are specifically designed to facilitate college recruitment, with organized formats that make it easy for coaches to identify and evaluate talent.

High School Soccer Value

Community Impact: There's something special about representing your school. The local rivalries, community recognition, and school spirit create memories that many players cherish long after their playing days are over.

Playing for your school connects you to your community in a way that club soccer often doesn't. Local media coverage, recognition from classmates and teachers, and the pride of wearing your school colors all contribute to a unique experience.

Personal Growth: High school soccer often provides different leadership opportunities. You might be playing with teammates of varying skill levels, requiring you to step up as a leader, mentor younger players, and develop communication skills.

You'll also typically face different tactical styles and challenges than in club soccer, which can help you become a more adaptable player.

Where High School Soccer Fits in the Bigger Picture

The reality is that high school soccer exists somewhat outside the traditional pyramid of club soccer. Many top-level players, especially those in MLS NEXT, don't participate in high school soccer at all due to schedule conflicts or restrictions from their club programs.

Middle school and high school soccer are often viewed as supplemental to club soccer rather than as primary development environments. That said, they can provide valuable experiences that complement your club development.

Many players opt to do both when possible – playing for their club team year-round and joining their high school team during the fall season. Most ECNL, GA and NAL teams allow their players to do both. This allows kids to enjoy the social and community aspects of high school soccer while maintaining their development in the more competitive club environment.

For college recruitment, understand that while success in high school is nice, college coaches are much more interested in how you perform in your club environment against high-level competition.

A player with all-state high school honors but limited club experience will typically get less attention than a solid performer on a top club team.

Making It Work Together

If you decide to play both club and high school soccer:

- Communicate clearly with both coaches about your commitments
- Manage your workload carefully to avoid burnout and injury
- Prioritize rest and recovery during the busiest periods
- Be strategic about which events and games you participate in
- Be aware that conflicts will arise, and have a plan for handling them
- If you want to get seen, do your best to attend club showcases

Finding the Right Balance

The "right" decision varies for each player. Consider your overall goals, the quality of your high school program relative to your club, and the policies of your club regarding high school participation.

Remember that while club soccer typically provides better development and college exposure, high school soccer offers unique experiences and memories that many players value just as much.

The ideal situation for many players is finding a way to experience both worlds when possible.

Is College Soccer an Option For You?



I have to be completely honest here – playing college soccer is HARD. Really hard.

It's not just about being excellent on the field; it's about dedicating years of your life to the sport, maintaining exceptional academic standards, and navigating a highly competitive recruiting landscape where thousands of talented players are fighting for a limited number of roster spots.

Only a small percentage of youth players will ever make it to the collegiate level, and the journey requires extraordinary commitment, sacrifice, and perseverance along the way.

Let's break down what you really need to know about playing at the collegiate level.

Understanding the Requirements

First, let's talk about what colleges look for in soccer recruits. Every college coach wants players who can contribute to their program, but they also need students who can succeed academically. Here's what you need to focus on:

Academic Requirements

Your academic performance matters more than you might think. For NCAA Division I and II schools, you'll need to:

- Graduate from high school
- Complete 16 core courses (specific classes in English, Math, Science, etc.) - your high school guidance counselor should be able help you keep on track.
- Maintain a minimum GPA in these core courses (2.3 for DI, 2.2 for DII)
- SAT/ACT: Test is optional (as of now; not required for eligibility, but may be needed for college admissions)
- Amateurism Certification: Must be cleared by NCAA Eligibility Center (for DI & DII)

The earlier you understand these requirements, the better. Many players miss out on opportunities because they didn't take the right courses early in high school or maintain the necessary GPA.

Athletic Requirements

The athletic bar for college soccer is significantly higher than most players realize. College coaches, at all levels, are looking for complete players who can handle the physical and mental demands of collegiate competition.

You need to possess a strong technical foundation – the ability to control the ball, pass, and execute skills consistently under pressure. This isn't about flashy moves; it's about reliable, consistent technical execution at high speed against quality opposition.

Physical fitness and athleticism are non-negotiable at the college level. The game is faster and more physical than even the highest levels of youth soccer. Coaches want players who have the speed, strength, endurance, and agility to compete against elite athletes. Unfortunately, many recruiting prospects get overlooked simply because they lack the physical tools, regardless of how skilled they are technically.

Soccer intelligence – the ability to read the game, make quick decisions, and understand tactical concepts – separates college-level players from the rest.

Coaches watch how you position yourself off the ball, how you anticipate play, and how you solve problems on the field. They're not just recruiting athletes; they're recruiting intelligent soccer players who can execute their game plan.

Perhaps most importantly, coaches seek players with mental toughness and competitive drive. College soccer is demanding, both physically and emotionally. You'll face adversity, competition for playing time, academic pressures, and physical challenges. Coaches need to know you have the resilience to push through difficult moments and the character to be a positive team member whether you're starting or sitting on the bench!

In summary, here's what typically makes a college-level player:

- Strong technical foundation
- Good physical fitness and speed
- High soccer IQ and decision-making ability
- Competitive experience at the appropriate level
- Mental toughness and ability to handle pressure

Breaking Down the Divisions

NCAA Division I

This is the highest level of college soccer, but it's not necessarily the best fit for everyone. DI soccer is essentially a full-time job alongside your studies. You're looking at:

- 20+ hours per week in season for soccer activities
- Year-round training expectations
- Highly competitive environment where playing time isn't guaranteed
- Strong academic support but challenging balance
- Limited time for other activities or interests

Many American D1 players have competed at the highest levels of youth soccer (MLS NEXT, ECNL, GA, etc.) and have extensive experience in showcase tournaments and elite competition.

NCAA Division II

D2 offers excellent soccer while typically allowing more balance with academics. The competition level is still very high, but the time commitment is sometimes lower than D1. You'll find:

- Strong competition with more regional focus
- Better balance between athletics and academics
- More opportunities for playing time as a freshman
- Partial scholarships combined with academic aid
- More flexible schedule for other activities

Many successful D2 players came from strong club programs but maybe weren't starting on the absolute top teams.

NCAA Division III

Don't underestimate D3 soccer - many programs compete at a very high level, but with a different philosophy. D3 focuses on:

- True student-athlete experience
- Strong academics with competitive athletics
- No athletic scholarships, but often good financial aid
- More normal "college experience"
- Opportunity to pursue other interests

Some D3 programs are actually more competitive than lower-level D1 or D2 programs, especially in certain regions.

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)

The NAIA is a college athletics association separate from the NCAA that governs sports programs at smaller colleges and universities across the U.S. and Canada.

The NAIA offers another path to college soccer with some key differences:

- Different academic eligibility rules (often more flexible)
- Earlier recruiting timeline
- Scholarship opportunities available
- Wide range of competitive levels
- Strong focus on character development

The Reality of College Soccer Scholarships

Let's be honest about athletic scholarships. In men's soccer, D1 programs have 9.9 scholarships to distribute across their entire roster (usually 25–30 players). Women's programs have 14 scholarships. This means:

- Full scholarships are rare, especially for men
- Most players receive partial athletic scholarships
- Academic scholarships often provide more money
- D3 schools often provide better overall financial packages through academic and need-based aid

Men's College Soccer Scholarships 🎓

Level	Max Scholarships Per Team	Approx. # of Programs
NCAA DI	9.9	205
NCAA DII	9.0	215
NCAA DIII	0	415
NAIA	12.0	185

Level	Max Scholarships Per Team	Approx. # of Programs
NCAA DI	14.0	335
NCAA DII	9.9	270
NCAA DIII	0	440
NAIA	12.0	200

Why are there more women's college soccer programs than men's? *Because of Title IX and the need to balance out large men's football rosters, many schools add women's soccer to provide equal athletic opportunities.*

Women's soccer is also one of the most popular and cost-effective sports to offer, making it a go-to choice for colleges aiming to meet gender equity goals.

Making Yourself Recrutable

To maximize your chances of playing college soccer:

Start Early:

- Research programs that match your academic and athletic level
- Understand the academic requirements for your target schools
- Create a realistic list of schools in different divisions
- Attend ID camps at schools you're interested in
- Get quality game film starting in your sophomore year

Showcase Yourself:

- Play in college showcase tournaments
- Create a video highlight reel that actually highlights your strengths
- Develop relationships with your club and high school coaches who can advocate for you
- Consider what positions are in demand – being versatile can help

Be Proactive:

- Reach out to coaches directly (following NCAA contact rules)
- Visit campuses when possible
- Ask good questions about the program, not just about scholarships
- Keep your grades up - this gives you more options
- Stay realistic about your level and be open to different divisions

Remember, playing college soccer is achievable for many players, but it requires planning, dedication, and realistic expectations. The key is finding the right fit - both athletically and academically - rather than just chasing the highest division possible.

Understanding the College Recruiting Process

The recruiting process requires organization and early preparation. Let's break down each year's focus.

8th Grade Year

Focus on skill development and playing at a competitive level. Begin learning about the recruiting process and setting long-term athletic and academic goals.

Freshman Year

Begin building a strong academic foundation and start researching college soccer programs. Join competitive teams, attend local college camps, and create highlight reels to prepare for future recruitment.

ACADEMICS

- Focus on good habits to get your GPA up; it's harder to shovel out of your mess than to keep rolling
- Meet with your high school guidance counselor to make sure you are taking the required classes
- If your schedule allows, participate in community service and/or school activities (i.e. - math club)

Soccer Recruiting

- Understand the landscape of college soccer
- Start thinking about which colleges you'd like to attend (be ambitious and realistic)
- Attend local college games
- Create a recruiting profile (SportsRecruits, NCSA, etc.)
- Try to play in the most competitive league available for your skillset
- Start creating a library of game clips
- Start your social media profile (focus on Instagram and X)
- Summer: Go hard in your offseason training. Focus on the skills that will accelerate your game at your position.
- Attend local college camps in the summer (doesn't need to be ID camps)

Sophomore Year

Start reaching out to college coaches after the fall season and attend ID camps to gain exposure. Continue improving your skills and building your resume with game highlights and accolades.

Academics

- Continue focusing on your schoolwork. Do your best not to fall behind on your workload.
- Meet with high school counselor to review soccer goals and academic plan (make sure you are taking the right classes to keep on track)

Soccer Recruiting

- Set up your recruiting email
- Start asking your coaches and academy directors what you need to do to play at the next level.

- Identify your interests: major, level, geography, big vs small school, financially
- Start building your list of dream and safety schools. Make a list of 10 dream schools and 10 safety schools. Don't just look at which division they are. Consider academics, sports, and lifestyle.
- Create a list of schools to consider – ongoing list
- Start emailing coaches during the winter months. For DI and DII schools, don't expect a reply back.
 - Introduction
 - Local games or events
 - Showcases
- Continue recording game clips and make a highlight video from the fall and spring seasons.
- Find ID Camps at your desired schools and email the coach before attending
- Register online with NCAA Eligibility Center (end of Sophomore year)
- Go watch a college game and get familiar with the campus and soccer facilities
- Fill out the recruiting questionnaire on the school's website (not required but may help get your name in front of the right people)

Junior Year

This is a critical recruiting year—maintain contact with coaches, visit campuses, and attend showcases. Finalize and distribute your highlights and narrow down your list of prospective schools.

ACADEMICS

- Meet with your high school guidance counselor to review your academic plan
- Make sure you tidy up your coursework and ensure you are taking all the NCAA-eligible classes
- Review college applications with family and/or guidance counselors

Soccer Recruiting

- Register online with NCAA Eligibility Center (if you haven't done so already)
- Narrow down your list of schools based on interests, affordability, and proximity (if these are important factors)
- Continue building your network of coaches and players.
- Continue attending ID camps (focus on the schools you have on your list)
- Arrange unofficial campus visits
- Get letters of recommendation from your high school and/or club coaches
- Visit college campuses. Try to meet with the coaches and players.
- If you rule out a school, politely let them know via email
- Email out highlight videos to your dream and safety schools (cover a wider net)
- Continue reaching out to coaches prior to any showcases.
- Keep coaches updated on your progress and send any updated highlight videos
- Meet with your coach and/or club director to review your opportunities
- Start applying to schools end of junior year

Senior Year

Commit to a program by signing with a college or continue exploring options with walk-on opportunities or lower divisions. Ensure all academic and athletic eligibility requirements are met for college admission.

Academics

- Meet with your guidance counselor to ensure you are still on track and your class schedule satisfies the NCAA core course requirements
- Send official high school transcripts to the NCAA Eligibility Center and schools that you applied to

- Finalize applications to school
- Start the financial aid process (by January 1st) and continue applying to colleges
- Meet all application, scholarship, financial aid, and housing deadlines (different for every school)
- Maintain a strong GPA (many of your peers will start easing up)

SOCCKER RECRUITING

- Narrow your list of schools to 3-5
- Continue arranging campus visits (best if you go during the fall season - home game)
- Continue collecting letters or recommendations
- Continue replying to coaches (never leave an email or text unreplied)
- Commit to a college that has shown interest in you and you think will be a great fit! Most times, your intuition and gut will let you know.

Keep in contact with college coaches who are interested in you. More than ever, players are entering the transfer portal so there may be roster spots that open up late.

Too many touchpoints are never enough. You are making an important decision so never leave it to chance!

Can I Become a Pro Player?

Let's have an honest conversation about professional soccer. Yes, it's possible to become a pro player – but you need to understand what that journey really means.

The Reality of Going Pro

First, let's address the numbers: about .04% of youth players make it to the professional ranks. That's not meant to crush your dreams, but to help you understand the extraordinary level of dedication required to beat those odds.

Going pro isn't just about talent – it's about an almost obsessive commitment to improvement that few players truly understand until they've lived it.

Professional players aren't just the ones who practiced more than their teammates; they're the ones who were obsessed with getting better, who trained when everyone else was resting, who studied the game constantly, and who made sacrifices in their social lives that most teenagers aren't willing to make. They're the players who pushed through injuries, setbacks, and criticism with unwavering focus.

Also, early talent and luck play a HUGE role.

The beautiful thing about chasing this dream, however, is what it makes of you along the way. Even if you don't make it pro, the journey of trying will forge you into someone special.

The discipline, work ethic, resilience, and mental toughness required to pursue professional soccer will serve you extraordinarily well in whatever else you choose to do in life.

Many successful business leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals credit their athletic backgrounds for teaching them how to work hard, overcome adversity, and perform under pressure.

So DREAM BIG – there's nothing wrong with wanting to be a professional player. Just make sure you're developing yourself as a complete person along the way.

Keep your education as important as your training, build strong relationships within the soccer community, and focus on continuous improvement rather than

comparing yourself to others. That way, no matter where soccer takes you, you'll be prepared for success.

Chapter Summary:

- Elite youth soccer paths in the U.S. include leagues like MLS NEXT (boys), ECNL (boys and girls) and Girls Academy (girls), with different tiers offering varying levels of competition, travel, and exposure.
- Club soccer is key for college recruitment, offering better development, coaching, and visibility compared to high school soccer, though both have unique value.
- Playing college soccer is possible but competitive—success requires strong academics, elite-level skills, fitness, soccer IQ, and mental toughness.
- Recruiting starts early and often—players should research programs, attend ID camps, create highlight videos, and communicate proactively with college coaches.
- Going pro is rare but sometimes worth chasing (for the right player)—it requires obsessive dedication, but even the pursuit builds skills and character that benefit players for life.

Your Soccer Journey Awaits 🎉

You've made it to the end of this book, but your soccer journey is just beginning—or perhaps entering an exciting new chapter.

Remember this: every player you admire once stood exactly where you are now. They faced the same challenges, doubts, and crossroads that you're experiencing.

What separated them wasn't just natural talent. It was their willingness to put in the work when nobody was watching!

The Path Forward

The beauty of soccer is that it rewards those who commit and enjoy the process. Each touch of the ball, each training session, each game—they all stack up over time, building upon something remarkable.

Your development isn't a straight line. There will be setbacks. There will be coaches who don't see your potential. There will be games where nothing seems to work.

These moments don't define you—how you respond to them does.

Beyond the Game

The lessons you're learning through soccer extend far beyond the field:

- How to work within a team
- How to handle disappointment
- How to manage your time
- How to set goals and methodically achieve them

These are skills that will serve you throughout your entire life, regardless of how far you go in soccer.

Your Unique Journey

No two soccer journeys are identical. Some players develop early, others bloom later. Some thrive in high-pressure environments, others need to figure it out slowly.

Trust your path. Listen to your instincts. And remember that enjoying the game is crucial to long-term success!

The Final Whistle

As you set this book down and step onto the field, carry this thought with you:

Every day is a chance to improve by 1%. It doesn't sound like much, but those small improvements compound dramatically over time.

The player who commits to getting 1% better each day will be 37 times better by the end of the year.

So lace up your cleats, grab your ball, and get to work. The beautiful game awaits, and your version of soccer success is out there—ready for you to claim it.

Your biggest fan and supporter on this journey,

Beau

For Players: Answer To Your Most Pressing Questions

1. **What should I eat before a game or practice?**

Eat a balanced meal 2–3 hours before playing—think carbs for energy (like pasta, rice, or whole grain bread), some lean protein (chicken, eggs, yogurt), and a little healthy fat. Avoid greasy or heavy foods. A banana or granola bar is great for a quick snack 30–60 minutes before kick-off.

✗ Foods and drinks to stay away from:

- Any and all fast food (even Chick Fil A)
- French fries
- Fried chicken
- Chips
- Mozzarella sticks
- Skittles
- Gummies
- Soda
- Milk

2. **Should I play through an injury or rest?**

You know your body best. You can play through a minor ache, pain, or sickness. A little cold or a minor sore foot injury is probably fine to play through.

If you're really hurt, speak up. Playing through pain can turn a small issue into a big one. Tell your coach or trainer and listen to your body. Resting and recovering properly can get you back on the field faster and stronger.

3. **What if I don't make the top team at my club?**

It's not the end—it's a step. Keep working hard, improving, and showing your dedication. Plenty of great players didn't start on the top team. Use it as motivation, and remember: development is more important than team labels.

I've seen players who didn't make their top club team for 3–5 years and then make it when they were 15–16 years old. Peaking later is to your advantage.

4. How can I improve my chances of getting noticed by college scouts?

Start early and often. You need to put yourself out there. I call it shameless self-promotion.

Make sure to join a club and attend showcases. If you don't play club soccer, focus your attention on ID Camps.

Train consistently, play in showcase events, and build a highlight video. Reach out to coaches with emails, including your schedule and links. Most importantly—stay coachable, work hard, and keep your grades up!

5. Is it okay to play other sports during the soccer season?

Yes! Playing other sports can help your overall athleticism, coordination, and even prevent burnout. Just make sure you're not overloading your schedule or risking injury.

I'm all for playing as many sports as possible and then focusing on soccer when you get into high school.

6. How do I become a team leader even if I'm not the captain?

Lead by example. Work hard, stay positive, encourage teammates, and be reliable. Leadership isn't just about the armband—it's about attitude and effort.

You don't need a Captain armband to lead. Anyone can do it.

7. What's the best way to deal with nerves before a big game?

It depends on the person but understand that nerves are normal! Focus on your breathing, visualize good plays, and remind yourself that you've prepared for this. Confidence comes from practice—trust your training.

Also, focus on your warm up rather than the game itself. Once you get going, momentum usually defeats nerves and performance anxiety.

8. **How do I stay motivated every day as a soccer player?**

Staying motivated every day isn't always easy—but it is definitely possible.

One of the best things you can do is set small, achievable goals that give you something to focus on and celebrate daily. Instead of only thinking about long-term dreams like playing in college, aim for simple goals like improving your weak foot, hitting a juggling target, or staying positive during practice.

Some days you won't feel like training, and that's okay—just show up and do *something*, even if it's short.

Motivation will always come and go, but discipline and routine will carry you.

9. **How do I talk to my coach if I'm not getting enough playing time?**

First of all, are you being realistic and working to stay on the field? If you are, try this...

Be respectful and honest. Ask for a quick one-on-one and say you want to understand how you can improve. Coaches appreciate players who want to grow—not just complain. Show you're willing to work for it.

10. **Should I be on social media as a soccer player?**

Social media can be a great tool *if* you use it the right way.

It can help you connect with other players, follow your favorite pros, and even get noticed by coaches or recruiters if you're sharing highlights and showing your journey.

But it can also be a HUGE distraction or a source of negativity if you get caught up in comparing yourself to others or spending too much time scrolling. The key is balance.

If you're on social media, use it with purpose—follow accounts that inspire you, promote your growth, and show who you are as a player and person.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, take a healthy break. Your mental game matters more than your physical game.

Parent Manifesto

Your child's soccer journey should be one of growth, joy, and learning. As parents, our approach can make all the difference! These six principles will help you support your young player while keeping the game fun for everyone.

1. Remember Why They Play

Soccer is about fun first. Not for you but your child. When decisions get tough, ask yourself: "Will this enhance my child's joy in the game?" Your job isn't to create a pro athlete—it's to support a child who loves a sport.

2. Be Their Fan, Not Their Coach

This is often easier said than done. Leave coaching to the coaches. After games, don't analyze their performance. Simply ask: "Did you have fun?" or Just Praise: "Awesome job today!" Show them you value them over their performance.

3. Respect Development

Progress isn't linear. There will be plateaus and breakthroughs. Praise effort and resilience—not just results. Celebrate the small victories in their journey, not just the scoreboard. This is super important to do as a Parent.

4. Build Coach Relationships

Understand their coach's philosophy and expectations. If concerns arise, schedule appropriate times to discuss them—never right after games and never in front of your child or other parents. Advocate within reason.

5. Model Sideline Excellence

Your child notices how you react to referees, opponents, and other parents. Be the adult you want your child to become. Show respect and appreciation for good play, regardless of which team it is.

6. Never Take it Too Seriously

The years fly by faster than you can imagine. You'll look back and regret not enjoying every moment because it goes by so quickly. Enjoy the games, car rides, sideline conversations, and post-game celebrations. These become the memories that last forever!

For Parents: 31 Answers To Your Most Pressing Questions

Here are some of the most common questions I get through my site, *soccernovo.com*, and from parents on the sidelines. Whether you're new to the club soccer world or have been in it for a while, these answers are meant to give you honest, practical insight into what to expect, how to support your child, and how to navigate the journey with confidence!

1. Is club soccer worth it?

Club soccer is a big investment of time, money, and energy—but for many families, it's absolutely worth it. It offers high-level coaching, challenging competition, and a structured environment for development and exposure.

Beyond soccer, kids learn discipline, teamwork, resilience, and responsibility. If your child loves the game and wants to grow in it, club soccer can be an incredibly valuable experience—just make sure the journey aligns with your family's goals and values.

My son has been in the club system for 8+ years and neither of us would trade it for the world. It's been an incredible journey so far!

2. What's the long-term goal — development, scholarships, fun, or something else?

It's important to align on what success looks like for your family. For some, it's playing in college. For most, it may be to simply have fun playing a sport they love.

Club soccer opens many doors, but it also demands clarity, communication, and commitment. Keep the long-term vision in mind—and remember, it should ultimately be about your child's happiness and growth through the game!

3. How much does it cost to play club soccer per year?

Club soccer in the U.S. is a significant financial investment. Depending on the level, club, and region, yearly costs typically range from \$2,500 to \$10,000+. This includes registration fees (avg. approx. \$3,500), training, tournaments,

uniforms, coaching, league fees, and travel expenses. Some clubs offer payment plans or limited financial aid, but most families should prepare for both fixed and variable expenses throughout the year.

You'll find a few clubs in your area may be fully funded for the top teams but this is rare.

Pay-to-play unfortunately is the sad reality of youth soccer in the U.S. At the end of the day, you should do what's best for your family.

4. What if we can't afford club soccer?

Club soccer can be expensive, but many clubs offer scholarships, financial aid, or flexible payment plans. Don't be afraid to ask—clubs want to support talented and dedicated players regardless of income.

Additionally, some families offset costs by carpooling, sharing hotels, or fundraising. Being transparent with the club early on can open doors and ease the financial burden.

On the boys side, if your child is good enough, MLS Academies are free. But, they can also be cutthroat. MLS Academies (i.e. – New England Revs, Philly Union, etc.) will let go of players ruthlessly if they aren't performing well.

Don't overlook town travel—it's a more affordable option with fewer travel demands. Your child will still face strong competition from talented local players.

5. What are the travel requirements during the season and off-season?

Travel is a key part of club soccer. Teams often play in regional or national leagues that require weekend trips, sometimes several hours away.

Tournaments or showcases may involve overnight stays or flights, especially for higher-level teams. Your son or daughter may miss some school days because of the travel requirements.

Off-season events like friendlies, ID camps, or additional tournaments can also require travel. It's not uncommon to be on the road 10–20+ weekends a year.

6. How many days a week is training, and how long are practices?

Most club soccer teams train 2–4 times per week, with each session lasting about 90 minutes. In addition to regular practices, there may be strength training, technical skills sessions, or video analysis. Matches are typically played on weekends, and some clubs offer optional training during off-seasons. Club soccer is a 10–commitment in many cases.

7. What happens if my child isn't motivated to train or play anymore?

Loss of motivation can happen, even in high-level environments. It's important to understand the root cause—*burnout, pressure, team dynamics, or personal interests*. Have open conversations and work with the coach if needed.

Sometimes a short break or a mental reset can help, but if the spark doesn't return, it's okay to reassess your child's path. Club soccer requires commitment, and a player's buy-in is essential.

I've seen kids find their joy going from club to town travel soccer. Their mental health should be the number 1, 2, and 3 priority.

8. Should we hire a private trainer for extra development?

Private training can be a valuable supplement in club soccer, especially if your child is motivated and looking to sharpen specific skills. However, it's not mandatory for every player. Many club programs already offer high-quality coaching.

If you pursue private training, make sure the coach aligns with your child's developmental goals.

It should be someone that can relate to your child and push them to become better. This is what you pay for.

9. How do I know if my child is being developed properly?

Player development isn't always easy to measure week-to-week, but you should see steady growth in technical skill, tactical understanding, confidence, and love for the game. Look for progress over the course of a season—not just goals or wins.

A good club will provide feedback, evaluations, and a clear development plan. If your child is stagnant or confused, it's worth initiating a conversation with the coach.

10. Am I doing enough for my child's soccer journey?

If you're showing up, encouraging your child, and giving them the space to grow—you're doing a lot.

The best thing you can do is support them emotionally, communicate openly, and help them manage the ups and downs.

You don't need to be a coach or trainer. Or, worse, their agent.

Most importantly, ask your child what *they* need from you and listen. Their voice matters more than ours.

11. Is it okay for my child to play multiple sports, or will they need to specialize?

For sure! I'm a huge fan of playing multiple sports when an athlete is younger. I strongly feel the different movements and muscles mold them to be more athletic. This will prove to be a difference maker as they get older.

While many clubs prefer committed, year-round players, some still support multi-sport athletes—especially before age 14. That said, higher-level club soccer often conflicts with other sports due to the training and travel demands.

If your child is serious about soccer, specialization may become necessary by the end of middle school to keep pace with the level of play and development expectations.

12. How do I choose the right soccer club for my child?

In club soccer, selecting the right environment is crucial. Look for clubs with a strong development philosophy, experienced coaching staff, a clear player pathway, and a healthy team culture. Consider the coaching style, team competitiveness, facilities, and exposure opportunities. The best club is one where your child feels supported, challenged, and excited to show up every day.

Be proactive in your search. Go to games, ask other parents, and stalk their social media.

13. How do we know if a coach or club is the right fit for our child's personality?

Watch how your child responds after training—are they excited, challenged, supported? A great coach will strike a balance between pushing players and building confidence. Observe the coach's communication, feedback, and approach to development. Ask your child how they feel about the environment. Club soccer is demanding, so the right cultural and coaching fit is essential for long-term growth.

14. What should we look for in a coach's communication style and philosophy?

Look for a coach who provides clear, constructive feedback, holds players accountable, and emphasizes long-term development over short-term results. They should be approachable, organized, and consistent in how they treat players and families.

A good coach in club soccer builds trust and prepares players for higher levels—not just wins games.

Sometimes you won't get this and you'll need to adjust. For example, my son had a coach that did not speak to parents. We had to encourage our son to advocate for himself more which made him socially stronger.

15. When should we consider switching clubs?

Switching clubs is a big decision and should be based on your child's development, enjoyment, and opportunity—not just wins or team drama.

If your child isn't progressing, isn't playing, or dreads training, it may be time to explore other options. Consider switching during the off-season (end of spring into summer) to avoid disrupting team dynamics, and always communicate professionally with your current club before making a move.

Remember, you don't have to stay anywhere but developing within a system can compound a player's development.

16. What level should my child be playing at — ECNL, MLS NEXT, GA, etc.?

This depends on your child's ability, goals, and commitment. MLS NEXT (boys) and ECNL Girls/Girls Academy (GA) are top-tier national platforms for aspiring college or pro players.

ECNL on the boys side is also highly competitive and college-recruiting focused. Not every player needs to be at the "top" level—regional or strong local club teams may offer great development without as much travel.

Other leagues like ECNL, ECNL-RL DPL, NAL, GA Rising, USYS National League, Elite Academy, and USL are also great.

Choose a level that challenges your child but also suits their mindset and schedule.

17. How important is it for my child to be on a winning team at a young age?

It matters a very little. In club soccer, development should still outweigh winning—especially in the younger age groups. A winning team isn't always the best at developing individual players.

The focus should be on technical ability, decision-making, and learning the game in a competitive setting. A strong development culture with playing opportunities will serve your child better than simply chasing trophies.

18. How can I help my child improve without putting too much pressure on them?

Support your child by being present, positive, and patient. Ask open-ended questions about how they feel rather than critiquing their performance. Let coaches handle the technical side, and emphasize effort, attitude, and enjoyment.

Club soccer is demanding enough, and emotional support from parents is essential to long-term development and mental well-being.

Remember, it's their journey. Not yours.

19. What role should I play on the sideline during games?

Less is best. On game days, your role is to cheer respectfully and model good sportsmanship. Avoid coaching from the sideline, as it distracts and confuses players. Respect the referee, the coach, and the process—even when things aren't perfect. Club soccer is a professional environment, and your behavior reflects on your child, the team, and the club.

Just don't be "that parent."

20. What if my child gets injured — how should we approach recovery and return?

Injuries are part of the game, especially in a high-demand sport like club soccer. Prioritize proper medical attention and follow the recommended rehab plan.

Don't rush back, even if your child is eager. Be their voice of reason. Setbacks can be regretful.

Communicate with the club, coach, and trainers throughout the process. A thoughtful recovery can prevent re-injury and build resilience—mentally and physically.

21. What's the commitment like during the school year and during holidays?

Club soccer is a near year-round commitment, including the school year and many holidays. Practices usually occur on weeknights, with games and tournaments on weekends. Some clubs train during school vacations or expect participation in holiday tournaments.

Typically, there will be a short break around December and July. This is where you want to squeeze in family vacas, drivers ed, a part-time job, etc.

While it can be intense, most clubs understand family commitments if communicated early. Still, players are expected to prioritize soccer in season.

22. How can we manage school, soccer, and social life effectively?

Time management becomes critical for club players. Use a calendar to track training, homework, and rest.

Encourage your child to communicate with teachers and plan ahead for missed school due to travel.

Social life may look different, but being part of a club team also builds friendships.

Support a balanced lifestyle that includes rest and mental downtime—burnout is real, even for talented athletes.

23. How is playing time handled in club soccer?

Playing time in club soccer is not guaranteed and often depends on performance, effort, attitude, and the coach's strategy.

Unlike rec leagues, minutes are earned, not equally distributed. Coaches may limit time during competitive matches, especially in showcase or high-stakes games.

However, development-focused clubs should still provide meaningful minutes for all players over the course of the season, especially at younger ages.

24. What if my child is sitting on the bench a lot?

It's tough to see, but it's also part of the process. Everyone goes through it.

First, encourage your child to talk with the coach about how they can earn more minutes. Growth comes from adversity, and learning to compete for a role is a valuable lesson.

If the situation persists with no feedback or developmental plan, it may be time to evaluate if the team or club is the right fit for your child's growth and goals. This should be your final resort.

25. What should I do if my child feels left out or disconnected from the team?

Club environments can be competitive, and sometimes players struggle with confidence or friendships. Encourage your child to speak up and help them navigate how to communicate with teammates and coaches.

If the issue persists, talk privately with the coach or director. Keep your tone as casual as possible. You want it to be a two-way conversation. A healthy team culture is critical, and good clubs work to support both performance and personal connection.

26. What if I can't stand the other parents on the team?

Let's be real—sideline dynamics can be tough. But remember, you're there for your child, not to win a popularity contest.

Stay focused on supporting your player, keep interactions polite, and create some healthy boundaries if needed.

If it becomes toxic, you can always watch from a quieter spot or limit your involvement in group chats. Protecting your peace is part of being a supportive soccer parent.

27. What if my child isn't growing physically?

Stay patient—every kid develops at their own pace. Physical growth, especially in the pre-teen and early teen years, can vary dramatically.

Some players hit their growth spurt early, while others don't until high school.

Club coaches usually understand this and typically evaluate players based on potential, technical skill, and decision-making—not just size.

I've seen it happen many times: A big 11-year-old dominates U12 but struggles at U16 because they relied on their size too much. While a smaller 11-year-old grew up to play D1 because they focused on the technical and mental aspects of the game.

Keep focusing on development, good habits, and confidence—growth will come.

28. When should we start thinking about college recruiting?

Club players interested in college soccer should begin thinking about it around 9th or 10th grade, especially if they play in recruiting-focused leagues like ECNL, Girls Academy, or MLS NEXT.

Start by researching schools, building a highlight reel (for each season and showcases), and attending ID camps. Most importantly, communicate with your coach—they can guide the process and provide exposure opportunities.

The entire process ultimately lands on the player. There will need to be many emails and follow ups sent. Videos created. Social media profiles to maintain. But, the sacrifice is worth the dream of playing college soccer.

It's a marathon, not a sprint, and academics matter just as much.

29. Do kids get recruited from high school or club soccer?

In today's landscape, the vast majority of college recruiting happens through club soccer, especially from leagues like ECNL, GA, and MLS NEXT.

High school soccer can still be a meaningful experience and occasionally open doors, but most college coaches scout at club showcases and ID events.

If your child is serious about playing in college, club soccer is typically the main vehicle to get there.

30. Is it worth investing in ID camps, clinics, or showcases at a young age?

For younger club players (U12–U14), the focus should stay on development through training and competitive games. ID camps and showcases become more relevant around U15+ when college exposure begins to matter.

Be selective—choose events tied to your child's interests or target schools, and don't fall for every marketing pitch. Talk to your coach about what's appropriate for your child's age and stage.

The best ID Camps are the ones you are invited to or the school you are interested in hosts it.

31. How do I avoid being a “nutty” soccer parent?

Start by remembering: it's *your child's* journey, not yours.

Let them take ownership of their game, their effort, and their emotions. Support them with love and encouragement—especially when things don't go well.

Stay off the sideline as a second coach, don't obsess over stats or rankings, and resist comparing your kid to others.

Focus on long-term growth over short-term results, and when in doubt, ask yourself: “Is what I'm about to say or do helping my child enjoy the game more?” If the answer is no, take a step back.

Just enjoy the moments! They pass in an instant. You don't want to regret it because you were so caught up in *who knows what*.

Beyond the Final Whistle

Wishing you nothing but the best in this exciting journey 🚀

For Players

Your soccer journey is uniquely yours, filled with victories, defeats, and growth. The life lessons that the sport teaches you will propel you to a better life.

What separates players is the work they put in when nobody's watching. The extra touches, fitness sessions, and time studying the game will elevate your play.

Enjoy the entire process, embrace challenges, and remember—your most exciting chapters are still ahead.

You got this.

For Parents

Our role is crucial yet delicate—supporting without overwhelming, encouraging without pressuring. Focus on the long game, as development happens over years, not weeks.

Trust the process, but always trust your instincts first. You know your child better than any coach or club.

The memories you create together—from carpools to sideline conversations—will last far longer than any trophy.

Enjoy this journey through the beautiful game together.

Soccer Terms You Should Know

Sometimes for players and parents (especially), the soccer terms can be confusing. For this reason, I've compiled the common words and paired them with simple-to-understand definitions.

Advantage: On some occasions, a referee will NOT call a foul if it hurts the non-offending team. The ref will let the teams play on and give the "advantage".

Assist: When a player passes the soccer ball to a teammate who then subsequently scores. The player who passed it gets an assist.

Attacker: Anyone who is in possession of the soccer ball and trying to make a play down field.

Bar Down: When the soccer ball hits the underside of the crossbar but still goes in the goal.

Bicycle Kick: An overhead kick when the body is parallel to the ground. This is a very difficult shot.

Biobanding: The practice of grouping players based on their biological maturity (such as growth and physical development) rather than their chronological age.

Boom Ball: A long-distance kick with no intent except to get the ball on the opposing team's side of the field.

Brace: When a player scores two goals in a single soccer match.

Cap: When a soccer player plays a match for his or her country.

Chip Shot: A soft, lofted shot or pass, intended to lift the ball over an onrushing keeper or defender while maintaining control.

Clean Sheet: When the defensive side and goalie don't let any goals in, it's considered a clean sheet (or shutout).

Cleats: Footwear specialized for soccer players with studs that allow for better traction on the field.

Corner Flag: The flags are located at each of the four corners of the field.

Corner Kick: When the ball goes over the end line and is last touched by the defending team. Corner kicks are considered “direct kicks” and can be scored with or without another player touching it first.

Counter Attack: An offensive attack launched by a defending team after it regains possession of the soccer ball.

Cross: When a pass is kicked across from the sides of the field to another offensive player.

Crossbar: The top horizontal part of the goal that connects the two side posts.

Defender: A player in a team’s formation who is responsible for preventing the other team from scoring.

Direct Kick: Wherever placed, the ball can be scored without any other player touching the ball first.

Double Pivot: A trick shot or pass where a player kicks the ball by crossing the kicking leg behind the standing leg, creating a surprise or stylish delivery.

Draw: When a game ends in a tie.

Drop Kick: Also known as a half-volley, a drop kick is when a goalie drops the ball from their hands and kicks it immediately after the ball touches the ground.

Dummy: When a player steps over the ball and lets the soccer roll past them to a teammate.

End Line: The line that extends from the goal line to the corners of the field.

Fixture: A scheduled match.

Flop: When a player fakes being fouled to get awarded a free kick.

Forward: A position on a team whose primary responsibility is to move the ball down the field to score.

Formation: The position on the field that the players take in relation to each other.

Foul: A stop in play when the referee judges a violation against an opposing player.

Free Kick: When a team is awarded a kick because a foul was committed by the opposing team.

Fullback: The defensive position that is lined up behind the midfielders.

Goal: When the entire (!) ball crosses the goal line and a point is awarded.

Goal Area: Also known as the 'six-yard box', and limits where the soccer ball can be placed in order to take a goal kick.

Goal Kick: A free kick that is awarded to the defending team when the offensive team touches it last before it crosses the end line.

Goalie: Also known as a goalkeeper or keeper, the main objective of this player is to keep the ball out of the net. They are the only players on the pitch who can use their hands (if the ball is inside the penalty area).

Goal Posts: The two vertical poles that support and attach to the crossbar.

Golazo: A Spanish word that means a spectacular goal.

Hand Ball: When a player illegally touches that ball with their hand or arm.

Hat Trick: When a player scores three goals in a single soccer match.

Header: When a player strikes the soccer ball with their head. In most leagues, heading isn't legal until the age of eleven to avoid possible concussions at the younger levels.

Holding Midfielder: A player in the midfield position whose primary focus is defense and breaking up opposition attacks.

Indirect Kick: Wherever placed, the ball must be touched by a player first before it can be scored.

Injury Time: Additional time added to the end of each half to compensate for game stoppages.

Inswinger: A cross or corner kick that curves inward towards the goal.

Juggling: The skill of keeping the ball in the air using different parts of the body such as feet, thighs, shoulders, and head.

Kickoff: Started directly in the middle of the field, kickoffs happen at the beginning of each half.

Linesman: Also known as an assistant referee (AR), is the official who positions themselves on the sidelines.

Match: A competitive soccer game with two equal halves. Many Americans often call a 'match' a 'game'.

Midfielder: A position on the field between the defenders and forwards. They often have both defensive and offensive duties.

Nil: When a team fails to score a goal and they have 0 points on the scoreboard.

Nutmeg: Also known as a “meg”, is when a player dribbles or kicks the ball through someone else’s legs.

Offsides: When an offensive player receives the ball and is closer to the opponent’s goal than the last defender (excluding the goalkeeper).

Outswinger: A cross or corner kick that curves away from the goal.

Overlap: A wide player (often a fullback) moves around the outside of a teammate on the ball, offering a forward attacking option.

Own Goal: When a player scores a goal in the net they are defending.

Penalty Kick (PK): A free direct kick from a spot 12 yards away from the front of the goal.

Penalty Shootout: Used to determine the winner of a match if the teams are tied after regulation and overtime. Typically, each team is allotted five penalty kicks (PKs). Each player can only shoot once and it will continue going until a winner is determined.

Rabona: A trick shot or pass where a player kicks the ball by crossing the kicking leg behind the standing leg, creating a surprise or stylish delivery.

Red Card: A disqualification from the soccer game as the result of a dangerous play or abusive language towards a referee. Two yellow cards also equals a red card.

Save: When a goalkeeper prevents the ball from entering the goal.

Set Piece: A play specifically designed for when there is a free kick or corner kick.

Shot: A shot is any attempt to score by the offensive team.

Shot On Goal: A shot that results in a goalkeeper or player saving it.

Striker: Often known as a forward, their primary goal is to score or put their team in the best position to score.

Stoppage Time: Also known as ‘added time’, is when the referee adds additional time to the end of the half or game because the play was stopped during the game due to injuries.

Sweeper: In some formations, a single defender plays between the keeper and other defenders. This position is a bit outdated in modern formations.

Switch of Play: A long pass that quickly transfers the ball from one side of the field to the other, often catching opponents out of position.

Tackle: When a defensive player stops the opposing team from progressing down the field with the soccer ball.

Throughball: A pass that is played in the final third to a teammate to run onto.

Throw In: An overhead throw by a player whose opposition touched it last and went out of bounds on the sidelines.

Touchline: The lines along the longer side of the field. When it crosses completely over the touchline, the ball must be thrown in.

Underlap: When a player runs on the inside of a teammate who has the ball, creating space for the teammate to pass the ball.

Volley: When a player kicks the ball in the air before it hits the ground.

Wall: When a group of players line up shoulder-to-shoulder to defend the goal on a free kick.

Wingback: A player who plays the role of a fullback and midfielder. They provide defensive coverage and support the attack from the wide areas of the field.

Yellow Card: When a referee presents a card to caution a player for unsportsmanlike conduct, repeated infringement, or something similar.

Youth Academy: The current system where young soccer players are trained and developed by professional clubs.

Zonal Marking: A defensive strategy where each defender is responsible for covering a specific area of the field rather than matching to an individual player.



About the Author

Beau Bridges is a Soccer Dad, former youth coach, and the founder of [SoccerNovo.com](https://soccernovo.com), a platform dedicated to helping families navigate the youth soccer landscape in the United States.



A lifelong fan of the game, Beau played competitively as a kid and returned to the field in 2014 when his son started playing.

Since then, he's coached, trained, and mentored young athletes with a focus on development, enjoyment, and opportunity.

Through SoccerNovo, Beau aims to provide honest, easy-to-understand content that empowers parents, players, and coaches to make informed decisions. With firsthand experience in everything from recreational to MLS NEXT, he's passionate about leveling the playing field for all youth players.

Connect with him at beau@soccernovo.com.