



The Knight's Football
Club
Female
Development Program



Knight's Female Development Program

Objective

The Knights wish to provide a program and club in which female football players can grow and develop their skills and teamwork in and an environment based on strong family values and a high level of sportsmanship and ethical behaviour.

Program Stages

The Female Development Program will offer players special development opportunities and skills programs, unavailable in any other club in the Hills area, specifically tailored to allow them to be the best they can be. At each age level of the program the playing and training environment will provide positive growth for player's skills and enjoyment of the game.

Under 6 Girls

Girls will play in the mixed in-house development system currently standard to all Knights under 6 and 5 players. This is a combination of Skills and team-base games designed to challenge and lift the player's enjoyment of the game. Playing in the mixed system at an early age helps promote the competitive nature of the game and provide for team work at the same time. Girls will be paired together in each mixed team so that both relationships and team work are promoted, which then can be continued as players move through the development process.

Each player will have at least one skill session per week managed by an external professional coach aimed at developing their ball skills while still enjoying fun and games. Every second week they will have two skill sessions and one match. The professional coaching is provided to each team to focus players to improve their individual skill levels. This is consistent with the GENERAL PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR COACHES found in Appendix 1.

Extra professional coaching may also be made available as a way of boosting skills. This will be determined on an ad-hoc basis.

General U6 Details:

- Game day: Saturday
- Start Time: 8:30am
- Finish Time: 10:00am
- No Rounds: 18
- Ball size : 3
- Uniform: Standard Knight's Shirt and Shorts but with female-only white Knight socks.

Under 7 Girls

Girls will play in mixed in-house development system which is standard to all Knights' under 7 players. This is a combination of skills and team-based games to challenge and lift the player's enjoyment of the game. Playing in the mixed system at an early age helps promote the competitive nature of the game and provide for team work at the same time. Girls will be grouped into groups of 3 or 4 in mixed team. The purpose is to form team work and relationship for the future when the girls move into all-girls team. These teams will be balanced with male players to promote stronger game play and to maintain their competitiveness.

Each player will have at least one skill session per week managed by an external professional coach aimed at developing their ball skills while still enjoying fun and games. Every second week they will have two skill sessions and one match. The professional coaching is provided to each team to focus players to improve their individual skill levels. This is consistent with the GENERAL PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR COACHES found in Appendix 1.

Extra professional coaching may also be made available as a way of boosting skills. This will be determined on an ad-hoc basis.

General U7 Details:

- Game day: Saturday
- Start Time: 10:00am
- Finish Time: 11:30am
- No Rounds: 18
- Ball size : 3
- Uniform: Standard Knights Shirt and Shorts but with female-only white Knights socks.

Under 8 to 10 Girls

Under 8 to 10 girls will be prepared to transition to full competition (in U11) through the use of an expanded small sided game concept. Two options will be available for this transition. The option the club selects for a player in any one year will be dependent on the total number of players and their skill level.

Challenge Level

This is for players who wish to compete at a more challenging level by participating in the Hills district hub mixed competition.

General U 8 to 10 Challenge Level Details:

- Saturday games in the Hills area in the mixed-sex hub
- Twice weekly training
- Professional Coaching By ASR Coaches
- Extra Professional Coaching sessions to build individual skills
- Uniform: Standard Knights Shirt and Shorts but with female-only white Knights socks.

This option places the girls in a more competitive environment and will therefore require additional work from them, but will build stronger, higher skilled footballers. Winning games will be harder to achieve, however when the transition to full competition sides in U11 the Knights players will be better positioned to compete.

Continuous level

This development option will be for players who wish to compete through playing in the Hills district hub female-only competition.

General U 8 to 10 Continuous Level Details:

- Sunday games in the Granville Soccer Football District Association.
- Weekly training
- Professional Coaching By ASR Coaches
- Uniform: Standard Knights Shirt and Shorts but with female-only white Knights socks.

This option will be not be as challenging as the girls will not be playing against boys, however will likely match them against girls of similar skill levels. This will also give them the benefit of playing in an exclusively female team and competition, with all the benefits of growth in their social skills and development which comes with this. Parents will need to be aware that currently these matches are played away from the Knights' fields, almost exclusively.

Under 12 through to Under 16 Girls

Knight's player will compete in the full girls competitions offered with in the GDSFA structure playing home and away competition. The Knights football club will have dedicated ladies structure setup to identify players and teams development needs being both at a high and fundamental level, please see club support bellow. Additional coaching above the standard ASR coaching will be allocated to teams as required to optimise player and team development.

General U12 to 16 Girl's Details:

- Sunday games in the Granville Soccer football District Association.
- Ladies game play in GDSFA
- Weekly Training

- Higher level teams - two nights per week.
- Social teams - one night per week.
- Professional Coaching by ASR Coaches
- Uniform: Standard Knights Shirt and Shorts but with female-only white Knights socks.

All teams are limited to a maximum of 16 players who participate on match day although they can many have more registered players. The 16 must be selected each week from their total number of players. This enables them to bolster numbers where players are missing due to work or other commitments. Players are graded based on reports from their previous coach (where available) and their performance during grading. Females have the option of playing in mixed teams (on Saturday), in female-only teams (on Sunday), or both via dual registration.

Ladies' Development

Knight's player will compete in both All Age Ladies and Over 35 Ladies competitions in the GDSFA. The Knights will have dedicated personnel responsible for providing support for the player's and team's development needs.

General Ladies' Details:

- Sunday games in the Granville Soccer football District Association.
- Weekly training
- Professional Coaching By ASR Coaches if required
- Uniform: Standard Knights Shirt and Shorts but with female-only white Knights socks.

Generally Ladies Teams have between 11 and 16 players, although they can have more registered players where necessary as a result of work or other soccer commitments. Players are graded based on reports from their previous coach (where available) and their performance during grading. Females have the option of playing in mixed teams (on Saturday), in female-only teams (on Sunday), or both via dual registration.

School Program and Development

The Knights have a strong School Development Program which is being expanded to take in all local schools in the area. A special focus system will be developed to promote female football and encourage female players to join the club as a part of this process.

General Schools Development Program details:

- Dedicated Registration days at specific schools.

- Sponsored Ladies teams.
- Development and Skills days at the schools.
- Newsletter advertisements
- Flyer distribution
- “Come and Try” Program.

Recruitment

The Knights will implement a targeted Female recruitment program each year with the aim of increasing the depth of existing teams as well as encouraging new players and teams to the club. From time to time there will be one off inducements to players to increase player participation.

The following methods will be used for recruitment:

- Flyers for distribution
- Targeted School development programs
- Advertisement with Sister Clubs - Netball and Baseball.
- Newspaper Advertisements
- Inducements programs
- Stands at local shopping centres
- Advertisement at local special events

Club Support

The Knights are proud of their history of player development and to continue the high standard already set will designate a number of club officials to help support the club’s female players and teams. The descriptions below are a guide to the roles and the services the club officials will provide.

Director Female Football

The Director Female Football is placed at the Executive level of the operation committee reflecting the importance of the position. Female football issues and requirements are handled and solved at the highest level of decision making within the club. The Director Female Football is the primary contact on matters of policy, club direction and major issues around female football.

Club Coach

The Knight’s Club Coach has the responsibility to ensure that all teams are coached to the highest standard possible and to supervise all team and player development for the club. The Club Coach is to be contacted for all issues of coaching or player development. The Club Coach allocates all ASR coaching and “Coach the Coach” courses.

Team Coach and Manager

Each team will have one parent nominated as the team Manager and one as team Coach.

The Manager's position is an administrative position only and is to have no coaching responsibility. The team Manager is the interface between the club and the team. The team Manager will be expected to attend all club information and communication events. All communication between the team and club will be through normal club communication via email, website, and newsletters or through the club's Age Managers to team Manager then to the team. This system is in place to allow the Coach to focus on player performance only.

The team Coach is to provide skills and team coaching as well setting the standard in sportsmanlike behaviour for the team. The Knights will provide support and coaching education for all team coaches.

Age Manager

The age manager is the first contact point for all team coaches and Managers as follows:

- Be the main Contact for all teams in their age group.
- Receive and distribute information from and to teams.
- Work with team Leaders to develop the SSG experience for the players.
- Be the primary person to assist in forming teams at season commencement, including coordinating with parents.

ASR Coaching

Volunteer coaches will undergo specific coach training sessions run by ASR. This will provide the opportunity to further develop his/her skills as a coach, which will of course, ultimately benefits all of our players.

ASR skills coaching will be provided for all female teams as a part of player registration. This coaching may be held at the beginning of the season to get teams ready or may be held during the season to address player or team skills issues. This coaching will be conducted by professional Academy ASR football coaches and in addition to the Volunteer coaches training.

Our St Michael's family club philosophy of fun and development will always be at the front of our mission statement. These coaching development pathways initiatives will ensure the continued growth & prosperity of our club and offer greater opportunities to all of our players.

Appendix 1

GENERAL PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR COACHES

TECHNICAL RECOMMENDATIONS Female Player from U-6 THROUGH U-12

INTRODUCTION

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

U-6/U-7: The Dawn of Technique (Player and Her Ball)

The first stage of development is mostly a technical stage, where the players learn how to control and manipulate the ball. Most players at this stage cannot pass or receive the ball and are just learning how to 'feel' the ball and stroke it without losing control of it. Since all their energies are focused on mastering the ball, they cannot solve any tactical problems nor are they capable of posing tactical problems for their opponents. There is very little tactical development here. There is no distinction yet between recreational and select play. Although some players are already athletically more advanced or possess better coordination, all the players are 'starting from scratch' technically speaking.

U-8/U-10: The Dawn of Tactics (Player, Her Ball, and Her Partner)

The variation in speed, strength and coordination start to play a part in separating players into recreational and select level. The observations made here apply to both recreational and select players, only to differing degrees.

Technically and in terms of leg power, most players at this stage can only execute short ground passes 10-20 yards long with the correct pace and accuracy. Most are not able to chip or deliver long air passes or crosses, unless they are hitting a ball that is rolling towards them. They cannot bend passes and are limited to simple push passes or outside-of-foot passes with a short passing range

Tactically, the select level players in this age group can control, dribble and pass short passes consistently, and are therefore ready to start solving tactical problems. For example, the player on the ball is beginning to make decisions on when to pass, when to dribble, and when to shoot. The player without the ball begins to think about her position and movement in relation to the ball and opponent. But the limited range of passing and the tactical naiveté of the players mean that only the players in the immediate vicinity of the ball are engaged in play at any one point.

Put it simply, technically, the players are at the 4v4 game range and tactically, the players are learning to cope with the 2v2 game.

It might sound logical to presume that, since the players have been playing 3v3 and 4v4 at the U6 and U-8 levels, they must now be ready for the 8v8 game. It's important to make a distinction here that U-8 players are not really playing 4v4 but are playing at 4v4. Each team might have 4 players on the field, but their poor technique does not allow them to learn the tactical lessons that a 4v4 game can offer.

By the same token, when our U-10 teams are playing 8-a-side, the players are not really playing 8v8. They are playing 3v3/4v4 within the 8v8 environment we have created for them. This is observed at the select level and, even more so, at the recreational level.

U-11 and U-12: The Dawn of Team Tactics (Player, the ball, and her Supporting Group)

As players improve their technique and passing range, their tactical vision expands accordingly. Players at this age can make 10-30 yard passes comfortably, are beginning to chip the ball and can lift and cross the ball over short distances. They are still unable to handle the passing and crossing demands of the 11-a-side game and are still struggling to deal with the bounce, speed and height of trajectory of long passes.

Tactically, some of these players understand the concept of ball circulation and switching play, but their limited technique causes frequent turnovers when they attempt to play beyond their range of accuracy. This obviously happens often when they play 11-a-side. They still have problems bypassing, or 'skipping' a player when switching across the field. They also find it difficult to skip a line and pass from the backline to the front line or from the midfield into the spaces behind the opposing defence. Very little build up from the back is attempted, again, due to the limited passing range and the poor support options around the ball.

Teams are not yet able to keep possession for long periods. The ball changes possession often and goes out-of-bounds frequently due to poor technique. When the game is played on a big field (11-a-side) and teams cannot keep the ball for long, defenders don't have many opportunities to join the attack and midfielders and forwards are not able to interchange. This can lead to the development of one-dimensional players.

THE ROLE OF COACHES – CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Players will improve even without coaching, by virtue of playing. The more they play and the more they watch soccer, they better they will get. Also, players' performance is enhanced when they play instinctively. But this is only true if their instincts are correct. This is where good coaching comes into play. Although players will get better without coaches, good coaches can speed up the rate of improvement. They do that by helping the players develop good instincts and acquire good habits.

Successful development occurs when good instincts are ingrained. There is a world of difference between 'learned' and 'ingrained'. Players learn tactical concepts from coaches. But for the concepts to become ingrained, it takes time, repetition and success. This begs the questions: Which environment is more conducive to ingraining correct instincts with 8 to 11 year-olds? 6v6, 8v8 or 11v11? Would 2v2/3v3/4v4 practice activities be sufficient on their own to ingrain good instincts, or do we need to reduce the numbers in games? In the heat of battle, learned instincts often go out the window and bad instincts take over if the environment is too complex. Every field size places its own demands on the players. If our players are asked prematurely to solve the 11-a-side field problems, they might be forced into the wrong instincts. The result is a sometime helter-skelter sometimes 'track meet' game with a sprinkling of creativity by a few exceptional players.

It bears to remember that these observations are based on today's players. In a few years, our entry-level players might be technically and tactically more sophisticated and this report may no longer apply. But for now, the writer believes we are fast-tracking our players into the 11-a-side game and that it hurts their long-term development.

In conclusion, the level of our players has improved tremendously over the past 10 years. However, we must ask ourselves whether we are transitioning too fast from 4v4 at U-8 to 11v11 at U-12. Are our players conditioned to play a game that is often beyond their technical range? Is it tactically too advanced for many of them? Some of the preceding statements might seem over critical, but are made from a global frame of reference. One has to compare our young players to the select level from other countries to fully appreciate the intended message of this report.

COACHING RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding sections provided a technical and tactical assessment of U 5 to 11 year-old players. This section contains recommendations on structuring the appropriate environment in each age category for optimum development.

U-6/U-8: The Dawn of Technique (3v3 and 4v4 Game Format)

Programs along the lines of the KINS concept should be utilized here, where the emphasis is on the skill of dribbling and where parents and coaches are discouraged from coaching from the side lines. Practices should include a lot of free dribbling activities where players are required to dribble in different directions to satisfy a variety of commands or fun challenges, but not against an opponent since they are not ready for that. Aimless booting of the ball should be discouraged. The time wasting set plays such as throw-ins, goal kicks and corner kicks are not even necessary and can be dispensed with, in order to maintain a focus on maximum ball touches. The KINS Manual on our web site can be used as a guide for play structure and practice priorities.

The aim is to produce U-9 players who are comfortable with the ball, are not afraid to hold on to it, even under pressure, and whose instincts are to 'absorb' the ball rather than kick it forward as far as possible with every first touch.

Although soccer is a passing game, players who are good dribblers are more likely to develop their ball control to its full potential and expand their passing repertoire. As they become confident on the ball, they can make better decisions whenever they face an opponent.

U-9/U-10: The Dawn of Tactics (6v6 Game Format)

The technical priorities should be to continue to fine-tune dribbling and the ability to take players on, as well as introduce passing and finishing. Whereas in the U-6/U-8 stage practice activities do not involve as much live opponents, now it is time to increasingly introduce opponents at practice in order to learn technique-on-demand. But the majority of these opposed activities should be in the 1v1, 2v2 and 3v3 environment. The 2v2 grid should be the primary practice environment for the age group.

Observations of 8 and 9 year-olds play reveal that most would struggle to solve a simple problem such as the one shown in the diagram: When to play a split pass (option 1), when to play a wall pass (option 2) or when to dribble past opponent. These tactical shortcomings are disguised in large group play since players have more options and they can always kick the ball forward for a chase if they are pressured. It all goes back to the key question: Which instincts are we trying to ingrain here? A smaller game field size with fewer players will likely induce the more creative options out of players. The increased touches of 6v6 over 8v8 will provide players with more opportunities to cement these creative combinations into their repertoire.

Tactically, the 6-a-side game provides a great learning tool and an ideal springboard for 11-a-side play. Although teams can play 2-2-1 or 2-1-2, the recommended formation is 3-2, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, remember that U-8 play does not have positions or lines and does not provide any meaningful tactical lessons (for reasons previously mentioned). Hence, it is better for players entering the U-9/U-10 level to start their tactical education within a two-line system rather than the traditional three lines. Before our players are thrust into the complicated three line formation (defenders, midfielders and forwards), they should learn how to link two lines, how to pass from one line to the next, how to maintain a good shape, and how to step up and

support or overlap into the next line. With 8v8, coaches are forced to use three lines, but with 6v6, it is possible to use only two lines, such as in a 3-2 formation.

Secondly, the 3-2 formation presents the functional demands and situations of all the 11-a-side positions. Positions O1 and O3 will train all the future wide defenders and wide midfielders.

Position O2 will be relevant to all the future central defenders and defensive midfielders. And positions O5 and O6 will be the training ground for all the future forwards and attacking midfielders. Furthermore, all the passing patterns and movement of the 11-a-side game can be learned and duplicated within the 3-2 formation. The 2-2-1 or 2-1-2 formations are not as effective in replicating the 11-a-side patterns. For example, team width is difficult to attain and players scrambling wide tend to receive balls facing the wrong way (outwards instead of inwards).

The 3-2 formation allows the introduction of twin forwards and all its related tactical nuances. It also can be used to introduce players to zonal defending in a 'numbers-up' environment. Attacking wise, the 3-2 is ideal for teaching 'playing out of the back'. The players in positions O1 and O3 have the freedom and the opportunities to overlap constantly and enter into the 'attacking third' scenarios a lot more often than within the 8v8 environment. In fact, observations of 8v8 play reveal a penchant for playing 3-3-1, which inhibits the overlapping of defenders into attack. With 3 midfielders in front of them, there is no room for wide defenders to overlap. In 3-3-1 play observed, the defenders did not cross the half line once and were always stuck behind the midfielders. Coaches recognize their limitation and solve it by rotating players. Players who played in the back line the first half were put in midfield the second half. But modern soccer demands the development of attacking defenders. We can only accomplish this by forcing defenders to overlap. The 3-2 formation is more conducive to attacking defenders than 3-3-1.

In short, the 3-2 is ideal for replicating just about all the 11v11 scenarios. The 3-2 prepares players to play 11-a-side, using the 6v6 environment that fits perfectly within the technical range of U-10's and does it via a simpler, two line formation. Once the players graduate to U-11/U-12, they will be more ready for the introduction of a three line formation such as 3-2-2. This play format is recommended for both select and recreational players.

U-11/U-12: The Dawn of Team Tactics (8v8 Game Format)

After spending 2 years learning the nuances of team play within the 6v6 format, the players will be ready for 8v8. As presented previously, the 11-a-side game is still too advanced for most of them.

The technical focus is still in place, with emphasis on increasing passing range and type of passes, using a variety of passing surfaces, dribbling, crossing, and finishing. Heading can receive more attention now. The speed of play should also increase.

Tactically, the emphasis should be on building out of the back within the three line system. The 3-3-2 formation is ideal for teaching 'playing out of the back'. It creates the 3-defenders-pluskeeper vs 2 forwards situation, which best replicates the 11-a-side game. In the 3-3-1 formation, it's too easy to play out of the back against only one forward. Also, in 3-2-2, the defenders can play the ball to midfielders or into the forwards showing for the ball. In the 3-3-1, there is only one forward, making it harder to find the front player with a pass.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This report includes many generalizations about players' capabilities that some coaches might disagree with. It is difficult to provide anything but a general assessment. One must remember that not only is there a wide range within an age group, but that players improve from month to month. Observations of U-10 play in the spring season reveal improvement in

team play compared to the fall season. Players adapt and improve, but we are still moving too fast for them and not giving them a chance to solidify the technical and tactical foundation before embarking on 11-a-side play.

The notion that the better players will be more challenged by playing 11-a-side is flawed. Players will be challenged by playing against better players, regardless of field size. The level of competition in practice and games determine the challenge, not the playing format. Having said that, the average and weaker players are usually less gifted athletically than the best players and would benefit from 6v6 over 8v8 and 8v8 over 11v11 because it is physically less demanding. The best players will still improve if they are matched against other good players.

There is a school of thought that if we are going to play 11v11 in the fall, we need to play 11v11 in the preceding spring to prepare the players for the upcoming 11v11 fall season. Most of what we do in the spring is irrelevant for the fall. Players will have been away on summer vacation and will start from scratch in the fall pre-season. The only relevant preparation for the fall is done in the pre-season August period. There might be some residual effect transferred from spring to fall but, for the most part, what we do in April prepares our players for April, not for September.

Logistically, the 6v6 game allows for better usage of space. In all the sites visited, the area used for an 8v8 field could easily be split into two 6v6 fields. This means that 24 players can play in the 6v6 format in the same area that currently holds 16 players playing 8v8. However, there will be a need to use more coaches with 6v6. For every 50 players, a club will have to add one more coach to the staff in a switch from 8v8 to 6v6.

The U-12 age group club teams travel extensively outside the state. This would necessitate the coordination with our neighbouring states regarding play format. Many of the states in our region have voted to play 8v8 at U-12, starting in 2005, just as we did. If we play 11v11 and the rest play 8v8, we would be out of sync.

One argument often put forward against small-sided soccer is that players like to play the 11-a-side game. Youngsters like to emulate adults. They see the professionals play on TV. No doubt kids of any age would get excited if allowed to play the 'adult version' on a big field, where they can pretend to be Mia Hamm or Freddy Adu. But after a short while, the novelty of 11-a-side would wear off and replaced by boredom when the ball is far away and frustration when the game's complexities overwhelm. Clubs can certainly organize 11-a-side games, just for fun, once in a while if they wish. But the bread and butter soccer environment for 5 to 12 year-olds should be small-sided soccer.