

COACHING THE HILLWOOD WAY

Fun first. Development first. Players first.

THE GOAL

- Create a positive, fun and inclusive environment where kids want to keep playing.
- Help every player develop skills, confidence, creativity and a love for soccer.
- We are not trying to create hundreds of professional players. We would love to create hundreds of lifelong soccer players and fans.

Our Basic Coaching Philosophy

- **FUN MATTERS.** Kids learn more when they are engaged and enjoying themselves.
- **DEVELOPMENT OVER WINNING.** The result of a youth game is never more important than long-term growth.
- **BE PLAYER-CENTERED.** Focus on what the players need, not on controlling every moment.
- **LET THEM MAKE DECISIONS.** Ask questions, guide them and give them room to solve problems.
- **LET THEM MAKE MISTAKES.** Mistakes are part of learning. Players need freedom to experiment without fear.
- **KEEP THEM INVOLVED.** Minimize lines, lectures and standing around. Maximize touches, movement and play.
- **BE POSITIVE.** Praise effort, improvement, good decisions, bravery and sportsmanship.

Build Practices Around Play

1. PLAY

Start with a small-sided game. Let players play while you observe.

2. PRACTICE

Use a focused, game-like activity that develops the day's skill or idea.

3. PLAY AGAIN

Finish with a game. Step back, use minimal interruption and let them apply it.

A good session includes: ball mastery • 1v1/2v2 and small-sided games • game-like decisions • variety and challenge • lots of touches • positive reinforcement

HILLWOOD COACHES • QUICK GAME-DAY & TEAM GUIDE

What Player-Centered Coaching Looks Like

- Ask instead of always telling: “What did you see?” “What could you try?” “Where is the space?”
- Keep explanations short. Demonstrate, then get them moving.
- Use games to teach. Soccer is a decision-making game, so practice should include decisions.
- Give players appropriate challenges and opportunities to lead, create and teach each other.
- Measure success by improvement, effort, confidence, teamwork and love of the game — not the standings.

FOR OUR YOUNGER / MICRO TEAMS

- No joystick coaching. Do not direct every dribble, pass or movement from the sideline.
- Do not coach from the field. If you are refereeing, let the players play and learn.
- Prioritize individual ball skills, especially at U6-U7. Passing will come.
- No rigid plays, cherry-picking or leaving a player parked back by the goal.
- Avoid elimination games and never use laps or physical activity as punishment.
- Teach the game through the game: throw-ins, goal kicks, corners, restarts, spacing and basic shapes.

Set the Team Culture Early

Four simple standards: BE SAFE • BE KIND • BE BRAVE • HAVE FUN

- Talk with players about what each standard looks like and hold one another to it.
- Define success without using wins and losses as the answer.
- Create an environment where players feel safe taking risks and trying something new.

Parents & Game Day

- **Coaches coach.** Parents cheer. Referees ref.
- Parents belong on the opposite sideline from the team.
- Encourage parents to be supportive rather than giving tactical instructions.
- No jewelry at games. No dogs at playfields.
- Model respect for players, opponents, referees and other coaches — especially when a game is difficult.

THE SIMPLE TEST

- Are the kids active?
- Are they getting lots of touches?
- Are they making decisions?
- Are they learning?
- Are they having fun?
- Do they want to come back next week?

If the answer is YES, you are doing a lot right.