

Marblehead Youth Soccer Association



Coaches Handbook

Spring, 2019

Reviewed by the coaches of _____
(team name)

(signature) (date)

(signature) (date)

(signature) (date)

Welcome to Marblehead Youth Soccer Association (MYSA) coaching!

MYSA's purpose is to develop and deliver superior soccer programs, for the youth of Marblehead, that develop sportsmanship, fitness, confidence, leadership and team spirit among our young athletes. MYSA seeks to provide soccer training that is fun, supportive of all skill levels, and is inclusive.

This is about much more than soccer. We want to thank you for taking the time and having the patience needed to be a wonderful mentor for so many kids. This program relies upon people like you to make it work!

The purpose of this Coaching Handbook is to provide parent coaches with a reference guide to prepare for the season, and for each practice and game. As such, we have included expectations, policy guidelines, and links to online practice planning resources. While this should be a useful resource, this is not a substitute for Mass Youth Soccer ("MAYS") and US Soccer coaching courses. IT IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED THAT YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS LEVEL COURSES (which are fully available online):

From <https://www.ussoccer.com/coaching-education/licenses/grassroots>

Online and in-person (via MAYS) Grassroots courses are available for your appropriate age group:

- Clinic: 4v4
- G4: 7v7
- G6: 9v9
- G8 and older: 11v11

"At its core, the philosophy of U.S. Soccer's grassroots pathway initiative is Play-Practice-Play, a philosophy coaches learn about in the Introduction to Grassroots Coaching module. This approach will focus on the player experiencing and learning through play, while also empowering the coach to support his or her player's learning and developmental needs."

Please visit the above website to sign up for the Introduction to Grassroots Coaching module and other courses. MYSA will reimburse you for the cost of the course. As discussed later in this Handbook, many practice-planning resources (drills, etc.) are available at the US Soccer Digital Coaching Center as well as on the MAYS website (<http://www.mayouthsoccer.org>)

This Coaches Handbook is always going through revisions based upon MYSA experiences as well as the evolution of national and state level programs. We welcome comments and suggestions for improvement.

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MYSA Coaching Expectations

A good MYSA youth soccer coach will:

1. Emphasize player development over game outcomes, as much as possible providing equal playing time (every player should be on the field for at least half of a game) and player-centric appropriate developmental opportunities.
2. Make the game and practices fun and safe for all! Our goal is that every player has so much fun (while also getting valuable development along the way) that they always want to come back for the next season.
3. Stress good sportsmanship and fairness. Few players will end up playing a full career of soccer, but all can learn how to be future leaders.
4. Know and abide by the rules of the game and teach them to your players.
5. Pre-plan all practice sessions so they will be instructional, fast paced, in accordance with the Play-Practice-Play framework, and involve all team members as much as possible.
6. Use “Guided Discovery” methods. Minimize micro-directional (“joystick”) coaching from the sidelines during games. Let the players think for themselves. Ask questions more than dictating actions. Players learn more when they figure out answers for themselves than when they are told precisely every move to make. And screaming criticism from the sidelines during the game accomplishes nothing.
7. Refrain from profanity or vulgar language.
8. Treat the referee with respect, no matter what the call.
9. Discourage negative remarks and/or harassment of players, referees, and other spectators, even from team parents.
10. Communicate with parents clearly and often. Weekly team communications are the goal. Parents can be an effective coaching resource if you clearly share expectations and goals.
11. Support other MYSA coaches and their efforts to help their own team. We’re all in this together.

GUIDED DISCOVERY (adapted from Mass Youth Soccer)

If you ever attended a youth soccer game, you were likely to hear specific directions from coaches and spectators alike. We then expect this young player to sort through the information and then make a quality decision. All the contradicting information interferes with the player's ability to solve the problem.

If we asked these players to explain their decisions to us at the end of the game, or even immediately after their actions, it is unlikely they would be able to provide us with a rational explanation. If these players are placed in the same situation at a later time, they will not have experience from which to draw upon when faced with a similar situation. Many times the player will continue to make the same mistake or randomly try something else in order to please the adults.

So what can we do as coaches to prevent players from making the same mistakes and feeling a sense of frustration? We could continue to yell louder and hope they are listening to us. Of course, that will continue to make the game less enjoyable for the player. A better choice is to provide the players with the tools to make these decisions for themselves. If they become thoughtful, strategic players, they will have more fun, gain confidence, and your team's performance is more likely to improve continually.

By asking our players questions to which they must come up with answers, we can insure that our players are thinking, as opposed to mindlessly following our directions. By asking guided questions, we can help maintain focus and direction for our team and help provide learning experiences for our players.

When referring to guided questions, we mean that our questions should place our players on the right track (guide) in order to be able to solve the questions we pose. Some such questions may be quite direct and simplistic, such as:

- What part of the foot do you use to make a short pass?
- Where should you aim when shooting on goal?

Questions such as these are called "low order questions" as they demand factual, memorized answers. In contrast, we could ask "high order questions" that challenge our players a bit differently by asking them to weigh options within the framework of a larger process. High order questions beg interpretation and comprehension over memorization or recall. Examples of "high order questions" include:

- How can we get the ball down the field quickly?
- Why should we play high-pressure defense?
- In a 3v3 situation, what's the best way to get the ball to your teammate? Try it!

Utilizing questions such as these will help our players learn and retain information that will aid them in making optimal choices as they play.

GRASSROOTS (current US Soccer / Mass Youth Soccer methodology)

Many longtime soccer players and experienced MYSA coaches will be familiar with previous practice structures. Starting in 2018, MAYS has transitioned to the new US Soccer Grassroots format: PLAY-PRACTICE-PLAY. ***If you have not already, please strongly consider taking the online Introduction to Grassroots Soccer module and additional courses available via the US Soccer website.***

The differences between previous methodologies and the Grassroots approach are mostly about how we approach planning and running practices.

In the Grassroots approach, coaches are asked to emphasize:

1. Designing practices around three phases:
 - a. An initial **Play** stage – “Deliberate games”: The coaches’ role during this Play stage is to ensure safety, monitor the games and “take the pulse” of the players. Monitoring the games includes making sure the games are not lopsided and providing adequate stoppages to allow the players to stretch and rehydrate. During the stoppages the coach is encouraged to ask guiding questions to lead the players towards the goal and objectives of the session.
 - b. **Practice**: Use activities to create game-like situations that create problems for the players to solve and the coach to assist with the problem-solving process. Ask yourself: Does it look like Soccer? Is it organized? Is it challenging? Are there repetitions? (Of the topic being worked on) And is there coaching? (Consisting predominantly of positive reinforcement, but also the normalization of errors, as mistakes are an essential part of the learning process).
 - c. **Play**: Finishing with scrimmages or other large-group games designed to put the players into game-like situations while reinforcing the key topic of the day.
2. Allowing the players to learn while playing fun Games (rather than “skills drills”, or having players stand around and wait their turn)
3. Over the course of a full season, covering all four major phases of the game:
 - a. Attacking
 - b. Losing the ball (transition from Attack to Defend)
 - c. Defending
 - d. Winning the ball (transition from Defend to Attack)

There are many available practice plans and specific games available online – links are provided later in this handbook. Planning a Grassroots practice doesn’t have to be hard or time-intensive.

Coaches' Responsibilities

Expectations for Practices

It is important to plan your practices ahead of time. Unplanned practices can be fun, but the players don't gain what they could have, and the practice time each season is actually quite limited. Having a specific topic in mind and a plan accordingly is key.

This doesn't have to require a lot of work. Later in this handbook, links are provided where pre-packaged practice plans, as well as individual exercises, can be found. Do bear in mind, however, that many of these practice plans assume a 90 minute practice, whereas MYSA practices will often be necessarily limited to 60 minutes. So you may have to adjust accordingly.

Practice plans also should be designed to build up throughout the practice so that a targeted skill or concept is introduced early, then reinforced, and then demonstrated in a game-like situation. Many of the practice plans available online represent this approach, and also provide flexibility so the coach can adjust the degree of difficulty on the fly, or have exercises that accommodate players with varied experience and capabilities.

Regardless of practice format and plan, it is expected that the goal of all MYSA coaches will be for the players to learn, have fun, and be safe. Both players and coaches should be expected to comply with the MYSA Code of Conduct. The Players' (and Parents'/Guardians') Code of Conduct are described later in the handbook. **The MYSA Coach Code of Conduct is:**

- Coaches must not use offensive or abusive language at practices or games.
- Coaches will not harass, harm or threaten other coaches, players, referees, opponents or family members of players.
- Coaches will not encourage aggressive or physical play that intentionally jeopardizes the safety of other players.
- Coaches will shake hands with the opposing team players and coaches after each game.
- Coaches will comply with the [ECYSA Zero Tolerance Policy](#) .

CORI lanyards must be worn visibly at all times on the practice field.

At the beginning of practice, coaches should greet every player and "check in" to see how each is doing in general. A great way to start practice is with a Play phase activity that can be flexible and fun and accommodate late arrivals.

During practice, in the case of lightning or thunder, the coaches must immediately get players off of the field and into a safe place (typically: coaches' and parents' cars), and then contact parents to get as many players as possible picked up early. Always avoid situations where a single coach and a single player are in isolation. But player safety is paramount. **BRING PARENT CONTACT INFORMATION TO EACH PRACTICE.**

At the end of practice, it's good to gather the team to reinforce the learnings from that session, relay any important logistical info, and to make sure each player finds their parent or guardian.

Also at the end of each practice, coaches are responsible for:

- Making certain that each child leaves with the appropriate parent or guardian
- Helping other coaches make sure no child is left unattended on the field
- Making sure goals and any other equipment are put away correctly
- Maintaining the MYSA coach's bag so that all MYSA equipment is returned at end of season

Communications are an important role of the coach. Best practice is for all MYSA coaches to provide a weekly email to parents with logistics and other useful info – see the Communications section below.

Remember that at the end of the season each coach will be asked to fill out an evaluation form for all players, so keep track of what you see in terms of strengths, areas for further development, and attendance. FILLING OUT AN EVALUATION FORM IS A CRUCIAL SEASON-ENDING TASK.

Expectations for Games

Game Day is always a fun opportunity for the players to put their training to work against an opponent! It is also a time of additional responsibilities for MYSA coaches.

Weather and field conditions can require cancellation of games and practices. MYSA will provide such notifications as early as possible, in consultation with Marblehead Parks & Rec. You can also see current field status at <https://www.marblehead.org/recreation-parks-department/pages/athletic-fields> -- please notify parents promptly in the event of a cancellation, and for ECYSA Travel games hosted in Marblehead, please also notify your opposing coaches. Contact your applicable MYSA coordinators for help in rescheduling as necessary; field availability is always a challenge in Marblehead, so expect challenges as everyone does their best to balance multiple factors.

Prior to game day, please communicate clearly with parents regarding location of the game and expected time of arrival. It's also often a good idea to communicate early in the season an expectation that parents should refrain from "coaching" from their sideline. Cheering and positive encouragement from the spectators is great! But too often parents feel like they should be providing direction to their child or other players, and this just confuses the players. This message may require reinforcement at times during the season, in the spirit of the coach-parent partnership. If problems persist, you can contact your MYSA coordinator to discuss.

On game day, please have your team arrive early for warmups and coaches' instructions (and to help prevent players arriving after kickoff). **CORI lanyards must be worn visibly at all times on the field, home or away.** Home teams will be responsible for providing the game ball,

coordinating with the referee, and wearing pinnies when necessary. Travel coaches will have additional responsibilities for games, such as presenting the team roster and passcards to the referee – your MYSA coordinator can help explain the necessary procedures.

While the ECYSA and MYSA make best efforts to provide referees for all games, a referee shortage is always a possibility. The Home team should be prepared to provide a referee if necessary, from the coaches' group, or a CORI-credentialed parent with displayed lanyard, in consultation with the Visiting team. The Visiting team has the right to accept or reject the use of an acting referee prior to the scheduled game time.

During the game itself, while winning is a fun motivator, it's important to realize that our goals as coaches are more than wins and losses. Always bear in mind the MYSA Coach Code of Conduct described above. Let's make sure to be safe, respectful, and to have fun.

MYSA aims for equal playing time for all of the players on each team. Coaches should strive for each player to be on the field for at least half of each game.

Coaches should also discuss their roles ahead of time with the goal of each player on the field only receiving instruction and questions from one "voice" – multiple coaches shouting at once isn't a great way for kids to learn. Coaches can divide their responsibilities between "bench coach" and "field coach" or by specific position group, and can rotate roles per game, there are many configurations that can work. But it's best to have it sorted out before the whistle blows to start the game.

While both the MYSA and ECYSA make best efforts to match up teams with similar-strength opponents, it doesn't always work out. You may face situations as a coach where your team is significantly outmatching an opponent. **As a coach, you have responsibility for demonstrating good sportsmanship, and for doing your part to make it a positive experience for both teams.** Plan ahead to take action necessary to avoid winning by more than a five-goal differential:

- Change formations to reduce your number of players on offense
- Take the opportunity to encourage your players to pass instead of shoot
- Without being loud and obvious about it, instruct your players "no more goals."

After the game, the coaches' responsibilities are not over. After shaking hands with your opponent and thanking the referee, the coach should gather the team together and provide an insight or two but mostly praise for a job well done (regardless of the final score). Research has shown that the best time to provide constructive criticism to players is not immediately after a game, but instead during the following week's practices.

After the game the coaches are also responsible for making sure each player is reconnected with the appropriate parent or guardian. If it is the last game of the day, they may need to help put equipment and goals away as well. Especially for Travel away games, try to make sure no MYSA gear is left on the field.

Representing the MYSA Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct Policy

Marblehead Youth Soccer is committed to providing a positive soccer experience through practice, play and teamwork. Our goal is to be inclusive to the entire community and to provide each child with an opportunity to play the game at the appropriate level and develop technical and tactical skills, a sense of team spirit, leadership qualities, and sportsmanship. Coaches should also be extended the same benefits of the program, and receive an opportunity to further develop their own skills as well as act as a responsible role model for players. To achieve these goals, MYSA has established a Code of Conduct for players, parents/guardians and coaches. MYSA reserves the right to dismiss a player or coach who does not comply with the Code of Conduct.

Player Code of Conduct:

- Players must not use offensive or abusive language at practices or games.
- Players will not harass, harm or threaten coaches, teammates, or opponents.
- Players will not speak to or engage a referee unless the referee initiates a discussion or in the case of an emergency or safety issue.
- Players will shake hands with the opposing team players after each game.
- Players will comply with the [ECYSA Zero Tolerance Policy](#) (see further below).

When a player violates the code of conduct the first time, coaches should try to correct the behavior directly, speaking with the player. **Upon a second violation, the coach should notify the appropriate MYSA Coordinator and VP.** Players who consistently violate the above code of conduct are subject to the following penalties:

- Initial violation: A verbal warning from the coach
- 2nd violation: Player is excused from playing in the next game and is not permitted on the field during that game
- 3rd violation: Player is removed from the team for the remainder of the season. Future participation in the program will be subject to review by the officers of MYSA.

Coach Code of Conduct:

- Coaches must not use offensive or abusive language at practices or games.
- Coaches will not harass, harm or threaten other coaches, players, referees, opponents or family members of players.
- Coaches will not encourage aggressive or physical play that intentionally jeopardizes the safety of other players.
- Coaches will shake hands with the opposing team players and coaches after each game.
- Coaches will comply with the [ECYSA Zero Tolerance Policy](#).

Coaches who consistently violate the above code of conduct are subject to the following penalties:

- Initial violation: A verbal or written warning from an MYSA officer or age group coordinator.
- 2nd violation: Coach is removed from the team for the remainder of the season. Future participation in the program will be subject to review by the officers of MYSA.

Parent/Guardian Code of Conduct:

- Parents/guardians must not use offensive or abusive language on the fields during practices or games.
- Parents/guardians will not harass, harm or threaten coaches, players, referees, opponents or other families.
- Parents/guardians will not encourage aggressive or physical play that intentionally jeopardizes the safety of other players.

All families, including coaches, players and family members, agree to the terms of this code of conduct by registering a child for an MYSA program. Repeated violations should be referred to the appropriate Coordinator or VP.

Communications

MYSA coaches should regularly communicate with parents. It's important to think about parents as key partners with shared goals of player development, safety, and fun.

For each team, one coach should take the lead on communications. That doesn't have to be the "head coach", just whatever coach is facile with emails and willing to take responsibility for regular communications. That coach should make sure to send out:

1. A welcome email to the entire team before the season, with clear expectations for players, coaches and parents alike. This should also include key logistical info (reminders about uniforms, schedule, etc.) and contact info for the coaches.
2. Weekly emails recapping the last game, setting goals for the week to come, and providing key logistics info.
3. A year-end wrap-up email to give a sense of the progress made that season.

Not all parents are great at checking and responding to emails, of course. So it's good to get everyone together at the first practice of the season to reiterate these points, and a season-ending get-together can also be fun. Additionally, mobile platforms like TeamSnap can be useful for communications and tracking attendance, etc.

How the coaches work together will go a long way toward making the season successful (or not). Typically, one coach will be designated Head Coach but it should be a team effort, whether that coach actually takes the lead each week, or alternatively the "head" role rotates or is otherwise shared. Get together as a coaching group before the season to figure out the division of roles, as well as major developmental goals for the season, Emergency Action Plans, preferred formations, etc. During the season, be respectful of your fellow coaches by clearly and respectfully communicating with each other.

Whether or not a group of coaches for a team has one that is designated as a "head coach" taking the lead (optional – set expectations for roles and sharing of responsibilities with your co-coaches before the season), one coach should take the lead role in planning and running each practice, in consultation with and collaboration with the other coaches. In short, for each practice make sure it's clear who's responsible for bringing and executing the Practice Plan. It's also good to coordinate who's doing what role on each Game Day ahead of time, so that you don't end up (for instance) having three coaches talking to the players on the field and no one coaching-up the players who are on the sidelines.

Risk / Injury Management and Prevention

An integral component of all coaching and playing activity throughout the season must be the prevention and management of injury to players (and coaches). There are numerous simple tasks a coach can and should do in order to secure the health of his or her players. Before the season begins, the coach should make sure all parents know the emergency procedures for all situations (injuries, accidents, weather problems). This procedure should be clear and simple. If it includes cell phone use, the coach should make sure he/she gets reception at all playing sites.

Field Safety/Weather Conditions

Before starting practice or a game, it is important to check the field for dangerous objects. Often glass and other sharp objects can be found on fields, as well as holes and other hazards. Goals need to be inspected and anchored properly, or moved away from the playing area if not being used. When moving goals, it is important to utilize adults and to supervise them, as often it is the first time they are moving goals. They may not know how to move them or realize how heavy they are. At every field, look to see where you could go in case of lightning or heavy rain. Is there a building or public bathroom nearby where you could fit all the children? If not, do enough parents stay to watch practices and games in order that all the children could fit in their cars in case of severe weather? At the first sign of lightning, get the players into a safe environment. This is where your written emergency plan comes into use.

Seeing all the Children

Players cannot be let out of your sight. Often times, young players need to go to the bathroom. Make sure they are supervised when they go (preferably by their parent). Never allow a child out of your sight without adult supervision.

Second Adult Present

Always have a minimum of two adults at every practice. This allows one person to care for injuries or bathroom breaks as the other tends to the rest of the team. It also provides for another witness in the case of injury or accident. Make sure that both of you are present until the parents of the last child arrive. You should stress to parents they should arrive on time to pick up their children. All MYSAs coaches are required to maintain a current CORI certificate through the Mass Youth Soccer, and to display it visibly at all times when coaching.

Injury Prevention and Management for Common Injuries

Significant injuries to the lower body are happening more frequently for young athletes. It is important to include a proper warmup before both practices and games. "Run a lap around the field and do stretches" is no longer best practices – studies have shown that dynamic stretching can both prevent injuries that day, and help strengthen knees and ankles in general. A good example of a dynamic stretching program is the FIFA 11+, a 20-minute program which can be adapted to fit into shorter practice and pre-game sessions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R6HMDUtGBg>

Concussions are a significant concern as well. MYSAs are all required to maintain a current CDC Heads Up training certificate, filed with the MYSA (<https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/youthsports/training/index.html>). Currently, headers are prohibited for G4 or younger players at either practices or games. For G6 players, some limited practice at headers (no more than once a week and no more than 15-20 headers per player) is allowed and headers are NOT allowed in games. MYSAs must use proper concussion procedures during a practice or game if there is any suspicion at all of a concussion – remember that a concussion can occur even without a direct blow to the head.

US Soccer has provided a comprehensive injury prevention and recovery program online at <http://www.recognizetorecover.org/>. **All MYSAs must review this information**, and it is recommended that you refresh your review before each season, as best practices may change over time.

Any injury suffered, even if minor, should be communicated to the parents so that they can monitor the player and assist in injury recovery. Player health and safety is paramount, so coordinate with the parents to make sure appropriate medical treatment has been provided and that players are fully recovered before participating in any practices or games. Major injuries and incidents should be reported promptly to the MYSA.

Practice Plans and Other Resources

What is a Practice Plan?

A practice plan is a pre-determined, step-by-step outline of how your entire soccer practice will proceed from start to finish. If you have attended soccer coaching courses, you are probably quite familiar with the benefits of a pre-designed plan. The structure of these are designed to be shown in a simple, easy to understand format.

The benefits of using a pre-designed practice plan include:

- While focusing on a single main topic of the day, building up (via Play-Practice-Play) the players' knowledge by doing it, rather than being lectured about it
- Fewer missed opportunities to teach
- Better communication of expectations to players
- More efficient field set-up for less "dead time"

MYSA coaches are therefore expected to use Practice Plans to organize practices. These can be designed by the coach themselves, or fortunately there are many resources online with individual exercises or even entire practice plans laid out in detail. Using a practice plan doesn't need to be complicated or time-intensive. It is just a few clicks away.

MAYS and US Soccer planning tools

Mass Youth Soccer's website (http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/coaches/session_plans/) has session plans organized by week and topic, for each of the age groups as well as specifically for goalkeeper training.

Registering with US Soccer's Digital Coaching Center (<https://dcc.ussoccer.com/>) unlocks additional session plans, as well as online tools for designing your own exercises and session plans from scratch.

Mandatory and recommended training programs

The only mandatory training programs for MYSA coaches is the concussion safety online course described earlier in this handbook.

However, it is highly recommended that all coaches take on some of the readily-available online and in-person courses at MAYS and the US Soccer website. In particular, all coaches should take the time to complete the Introduction to Grassroots course (<https://www.ussoccer.com/coaching-education/licenses/grassroots>) if they can, and further Grassroots online coursework for specific player age groups is also recommended.

MAYS also provides additional in-person workshops located regionally. This is the best way to experience how professional coaches plan and organize practices, for those interested.

Formations and styles of play

MYSA doesn't have specific formations or styles of play that coaches must adhere to. Use your best judgment based upon your own experience, the make-up of your team, and the styles of your opponents.

THANK YOU FOR BEING A COACH. YOUR VOLUNTEER EFFORT IS GREATLY APPRECIATED BY THE CHILDREN, THE PARENTS, THE TOWN, AND MYSA.

Appendix
(special bonus content for those who've read this far)

TEN TIPS TO BE A BETTER SOCCER PARENT

("Touchline" magazine, Spring 2000)

1. Soccer is a team sport.
2. Our children are on the team, not us.
3. If you want your child to improve his/her skills and performance, then leave it to the coaches.
4. If you think you can offer good advice to one of the coaches, then arrange to take the coaching certification exam.
5. If you want to coach from the touchlines without coming to team practices, coaches clinics or coaches meetings, keep the thought to yourself until you can watch soccer on TV.
6. Although coaching advice from parents is generally not appreciated, communication is very important. If anything at all is bothering your child, let the coach know as soon as possible so that he/she has an opportunity to adjust if possible to make your child's experience more rewarding and enjoyable.
7. If you think you can offer good advice to a game official...(see #5 above)
8. A soccer match is not won or lost by any child. (see #1 above)
9. Follow the rules and use good judgment and everyone will have a great season.

