



# ***US Women's National Teams Program***

## **U12 – U19 Club, State and Region Curriculum Guidelines**

The success of the Women's National Teams Program is largely dependent on the quality of the programs that "feed" into it. True player development occurs when each player's daily training and playing environment is of the highest quality. If this environment is consistent, with a clear vision of what lies ahead for each player, development is then maximized.

Towards that end, the National Staff has put together a list of curriculum guidelines for the U12 through U19 age groups at the club, state, and regional team levels. The purpose of this document is to:

- Educate coaches as to the "standard of play" and "expectations" for each age.
- Provide coaches with a framework with which to organize curriculum decisions.
- Provide for consistency, and guidance throughout all levels of play.
- Improve "vertical integration" for player development.
- Improve the quality of play on a national basis.

It is important to note that each player and each team is different. The following document thus serves as a "*guideline*" or "*standard*" by which players and coaches can plan development. Individual and team needs can therefore be identified and addressed. Individual strengths can be stabilized while deficiencies can be improved. Of course, an accurate assessment of each player's and team's needs are essential. It is imperative that each coach take the time to observe and study the level for which their team is preparing to compete. For example, each club coach should be attuned to the state level, state coaches should make an effort to observe the regional team play, regional coaches should be familiar with the age-group specific national team level, and every coach should spend time studying the Full National Team. In this way, a more accurate assessment of player expectations is possible.

The ultimate goal of each coach should be to prepare the players to compete at the “next level.” We hope this document will assist you towards your goals of developing more sophisticated players and teams.

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*“There are many people, particularly in sports who think that success and excellence are the same thing and they are not the same thing. Excellence is something that is lasting and dependable and largely within a person’s control. In contrast, success is perishable and is often outside our control.... If you strive for excellence, you will probably be successful eventually.... people who put excellence in first place have the patience to end up with success.... An additional burden for the victim of the success mentality is that he/she is threatened by success of others and resents real excellence. In contrast, the person fascinated by quality is excited when he/she sees it in others.”*

Joe Paterno – Penn State University Head Football Coach

## Under 12

### Foundation Phase: (The Romance)

### Development of Individual Skills Individual & Small Group Tactics

The effect of the role-model is very important at this stage of development. Hero worship, identification with successful teams / players and a hunger for imaginative skills typify the mentality of this age. This is a time of transition from self-centered to self-critical. Players of this age have a high arousal level in relation to the training of basic skills. This is the “golden age of learning” and the most important age for skill development. Demonstration is very important and the players learn best by “doing.” This is also an important time to introduce and teach the basic principles of play. It is important to establish discipline from the beginning.

#### **A. Coach:**

Sensitive teacher; Enthusiastic; Possess soccer awareness; Ability to demonstrate or utilize someone who can paint a good picture (older player, assistant coach); Knowledge of the key factors of basic skills; Give encouragement.

Recommended License: USSF ‘D’ License or higher.

#### **B. Technique:**

Important to establish a good strong solid base.

Development of individual skills under the pressure of time, space, and an opponent.

Increase technical speed.

Dribbling: Encourage risk taking! Moves to beat an opponent; Keeping possession.

Shielding: Spin turns; Change of speed, Change of direction.

Receiving: Ground and Air balls. All surfaces, from a partner and on the move.

Shooting: Proper striking technique, partner serve from all angles, Turns, Cut backs; volleys.

Passing: Proper technique - Laces, Inside, Outside - Short and Long; Crossing.

Heading: Self serve; partner serve -jumping to head, turning the ball; Partner juggling.

Tackling: Proper technique, in balance, no fear.

#### **C. Tactics:**

“Dawn of tactical awareness”

**Individual:** 1v1 situations in attack and defense. Play 1v1 frequently.

**Small Group:** 2v1, 2v2, 3v1, 3v2, 3v3, 4v2, 4v3, 4v4.

Play a variety of positions; Develop an awareness / Complete player. Basic principles of play.

Attacking: Keep possession; Encourage risk taking; Take players on 1v1 in proper areas of the field. Support. Basic combination play (Wall pass, takeover). Promote attacking soccer.

Defending: Proper pressure (in front and behind); Channel player; Immediate chase.; Cover; Marking.

**Team:** Team tactics do not take priority at this age. Focus is placed on maintaining balance and playing skillful soccer. Players play a variety of positions and emphasis is placed on player development instead of getting results as a team.

Recommended System: put players out of the field for the love of the game, without spending much time coaching a system. Focus on teaching principles of play as opposed to systems. If playing 8 v 8, then play a 2-3-2. If playing 9 v 9, then play a 3-3-2. Most importantly, players should enjoy the great game!

**\*A great deal of coaching/teaching within 4 v 4 games\***

**D. Physical:**

All fitness work done with the ball, in partners, and in fun engaging activities.

Flexibility

Agility – with and without the ball

Speed

Strength

Endurance

Balance

**E. Psychological:**

Keep it FUN and ENJOYABLE to foster a desire to play (Intrinsic motivation).

Encourage decision-making

Imagination / Creativity

Increase demands

Discipline

Encourage players/teams to watch professional and national team games on tv.

**F. The Game:** 8 v 8 or 9 v 9 (Includes keepers)

## Under 14

### Formal Phase: (The Commitment)

### Development of Individual Skills Individual & Small Group Tactics

Adult standards and formal rules become applicable. The pace of development quickens at this time due to the acceleration of physical and mental maturation. The demands of skill training as well as training loads should increase thus provoking improvement in mental toughness, concentration and diligence. Awareness of tactics within the game becomes an important facet of the learning process. Players tend to be self-critical and rebellious, but have a strong commitment to the team.

#### **A. Coach:**

Strong personality; Soccer knowledgeable; Enthusiastic; Patient but demanding.  
Recommended License: 'C' License or higher.

#### **B. Technique:**

Build on the base.  
Development of individual skills under the pressure of time, space, and an opponent.  
Increase technical speed.

Dribbling: Encourage to take players on 1v1 - Feints/moves; Keep possession – shielding/spin turns.

Receiving: Quality first touch - take balls out of the air/turning: All surfaces, on the run.

Shooting: On the run; On the turn; From all angles/ crosses, volleys.

Passing: Short, long, bent, crosses, driven, chipped. All surfaces, ALL on the run.

Heading: To goal (Shoot/glance), to pass, to clear.

Tackling: Proper techniques.

#### **C. Tactics:**

Increase Tactical Speed (decision making under pressure)

**Individual:** 1v1, in attack and defense.

Attacking: Keep possession; Encourage risk taking: taking players on in the proper areas of the field.

Defending: Proper pressure (in front and behind); Channel player; Immediate chase, angles of pressure.

**Small Group:** 2v1, 2v2, 3v2, 3v3, 4v2, 4v4.

Attacking: Keep possession: Support; Combination play: wall pass, take-over, overlap, double pass. Width, depth, penetration; Crossing with proper runs in the box; Simple set plays.

Defending: Angle and distance of cover. Balance. Delaying and pressing as a group.

**Team:** Attacking: Keep possession. Play the ball away from pressure. Maintaining balance in the chosen system. Interchange of positions during the run of play. Encourage attackers to take defenders on in the final third. Keeper as an integral part of the attack (play balls back to the keeper). Players play a variety of positions.

Defending: Maintain good "shape". Zonal concepts. Knowing when to "delay" or "step." Clear decision on where the "line of confrontation" will be. Maintaining good "pressure & Cover" through all three thirds of the field.

Recommended System: the best system for player and team development; 3-4-3.

**\*A great deal of coaching/teaching within 4 v 4 and 7 v 7 games\***

**D. Physical:**

All fitness work with the ball.

Flexibility - Static Stretching and Dynamic Flexibility

Agility- Coordination with and without the ball.

Speed

Strength – non-weight bearing, core strength and stability

Endurance

Balance

**E. Psychological:**

The game should remain fun and enjoyable. Players should have a passion for the game.

Imagination/creativity

Increase demands

Establish training targets

Maintain discipline

Encourage players/teams to watch professional and national teams games on tv.

**F. The Game: 11 v 11**

## Under 16

### Fervid Phase: (The Dedication)

### Development of Individual Skills Individual, Group & Team Tactics

This is a critical time in the player's development. Many stop playing due to other interests, lack of success, shortage of playing opportunities, poor leadership, or other reasons. Players tend to lack mental toughness and self-confidence. They tend to be self-critical and struggle with their desire to be competitive or need to be more competitive. There is a need for attention and security. A great focus on team spirit, leadership and discipline within the team.

#### **A. Coach:**

Charismatic; Experienced; Knowledgeable; Articulate; Disciplinarian; Managerial know how; Thoughtful persuader.

Recommended License: 'B' License or higher.

#### **B. Technique:**

Skills should be mastered leading to artistry and improvisation: All under match conditions.

-Individual skill covered during the warm-up, and/or in competitive situations.

-Increase technical speed. *It is important that technique is still highly emphasized at this age.*

-Strike balls cleanly over distance with accuracy under pressure.

#### **C. Tactics:**

Increase tactical speed (decision making)

**Individual:** Decisions based on thirds of the field.

##### Attacking:

Application of varied technical abilities in order to increase tactical options.

Aggressive attacking mentality in final third. Emphasis placed on predicting what the game will need next. Knowing what each player's specific roles and responsibilities are lends to greater understanding of the big picture.

##### Defending:

Clear understanding of how the quality of pressure effects team defending success.

Being able to take options away from the attacker.

**Small Group:** 4v4, 7v7, 9v9

##### Attacking:

Balance of needing possession and penetration

Combination play: wall pass, take over, overlap, double pass, third man running

Penetration

Creativity in solving problems

Mobility – movement without the ball

Crossing – picking out a runner rather than putting it in the box

Box Organization – penetration, width and support for every ball played in the box

Attacking as a group of 3 (forwards, midfielders and defenders)

Set plays (80% success rate: where we get: 1)Goal 2) Shot on Goal, or 3) Corner Kick

##### Defending:

Compactness

Cover, Delay, Dictate and Recover

Communication (Who, what, when, where)

Defending as a group of 3 (forwards, midfielders and defenders)

Enjoy winning possession of the ball and dictating the play

Set plays

**Team:** Clearly defined team tactics... how the team decides to play as a group.

Attacking:

Comfort with direct and indirect styles

Sustained possession as a means to break down the opponent's defense

Understanding how to counter attack

Decisions based on thirds of the field.

Defending:

Comfort with "high pressure" and "delayed high pressure" styles

Understanding of zonal and man-to-man marking play

Goalkeeper as the last defender

Keeping good team compactness

Stopping the counter attack

Decisions based on thirds of the field and different systems of play

Recommended Systems: expose players to various systems using a 3-4-3 and a 4-3-3.

**\*A great deal of coaching/teaching within 7 v 7 and 9 v 9 games\***

**D. Physical:**

Fitness work with and without the ball.

Flexibility - Static stretching after training / matches.

Dynamic Flexibility – partner stretching

Importance of discipline for warm-up and cool-down

Agility - with and without the ball

Footwork - keeping the feet active when moving / playing

Endurance - Aerobic and anaerobic

Strength - Upper and lower body. Core strength and stability

Balance

Nutrition - Proper diet - pre-game, post-game, tournaments, etc..

Prevention and care of injuries.

Importance of rest/recovery – schedule issues relative to the physical demands.

**E. Psychological:**

Increased concentration

Leadership / player responsibilities

Discipline

Respect for the game

Goal setting

Vary program- Satisfy player's urge for competition

Establish pre practice and pre game routine (as individuals and team).

Encourage players/teams to watch professional and national team soccer on tv.

**F. The Game: 11 v 11**

## Under 19

### Elite Phase: (The Full Bloom)

### Development of Functional & Team Play

Fulfillment of a player's potential depends on her own efforts, the support of her teammates and the unselfish guidance of her coach. She must be exposed to a playing and training environment, which extends her mental, physical, tactical and technical capabilities to the limit. She must have a sound understanding of the games' principles and concepts. Players should show emotional stability when confronted with pressure situations. Demanding and challenging training sessions and matches are a must!

**A. Coach:**

Charismatic, well informed, up to date, experienced, knowledgeable, articulate, disciplinarian- No doubts about his/her authority; Managerial know-how.

Recommended License: 'B' License or higher.

**B. Technique:**

Mastered skills leading to artistry: All at speed under match conditions - Demanding excellence. Individual skill covered during warm-up and competitive situations.

**C. Tactics:**

Increase tactical speed (decision making). Increased pressure and competition. Having the ability to change and adapt to game dynamics, up or down a goal, management of the clock and flow of the game.

***Individual:***

Attacking:

A good deal of time spent in functional training environments

Decisions based on thirds of the field

Comfort in playing in the different areas of the field/team (back, middle, front, center, wide).

Confidence to hold possession as an individual and solve problems at the individual level.

Defending:

Clear understanding of how the quality of pressure effects the ability of the team to defend

Decisions based on thirds of the field.

Comfort at playing two different positions

***Small Group:***

Attacking:

Improvisation/deception encouraged

Advanced understanding of combination play and how to combine to break down a defense

Balance of possession and penetration with a purpose to score goals

Recognize opportunities to penetrate by a variety of means.

Attacking in groups of 3 (forwards, midfielders and defenders)

Defending:

Pressure, cover, balance

Control of the game's speed and direction due to defending decisions

Recognition of double team opportunities

Defending in groups of 3 (forwards, midfielders and defenders)

**Team:**

Understanding of lines and linkage. Positional and Team needs.

Attacking:

Comfort with direct and indirect styles of play

Combination play with tactical implications

Sustained possession as a means to break down the opponent's defense

Speed of play: the game is faster and more physical

Creativity, quality of final ball to beat backs

Understanding how and when to counter attack

Serving runners in the box

Organizing the box with runners (penetration, width and support)

Decisions based on thirds of the fields

Set plays (80% success rate: where we get: 1)Goal 2) Shot on Goal, or 3) Corner Kick

Defending:

Comfort with "high pressure" and "delayed high pressure" styles

Understanding of zonal and man-to-man marking play

Goalkeeper as the last defender

Keeping good team compactness

Stopping the counter attack

Decisions based on thirds of the field and different systems of play

Pressing (when and where to pressure, channel and dictate defensively)

Recommended Systems: All. Based on a variety of factors (individual/team abilities, opponent, field conditions, game management etc....). The US Women's National Team, U21, U19 and U16 National Teams predominantly employ 3 forwards using a 3-4-3 and 4-3-3 system.

**\*A great deal of coaching/teaching within 9 v 9 and 11 v 11 games\***

**D. Physical:**

Fitness work with and without the ball.

Flexibility - Static stretching after training / matches.

Dynamic Flexibility – partner stretching

Importance of discipline for warm-up and cool-down

Agility - with and without the ball

Endurance - Aerobic and anaerobic

Strength - Upper and lower body. Core strength and stability

Balance

Nutrition - Proper diet - pre-game, post-game, tournaments, etc..

Prevention and care of injuries.

Importance of rest/recovery – schedule issues relative to the physical demands

**E. Psychological:**

Increased concentration

Leadership / increased player responsibility

Discipline

Accountability

Goal Setting

Respect for the game

Self confidence, self motivation - goal setting.

Vary program - satisfy player's urge for competition.

Will to win. Mental Toughness/Competitive Mentality

Establish pre practice and pre game routine (as individuals and teams)  
Encourage players/teams to watch professional and national team games on tv.

**F. The Game:** 11 v 11