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# YOUTH CLUB DEVELOPMENT



**Building Comprehensive Youth Soccer Clubs By Gareth Smith**



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## Introduction – Gareth Smith

### **Experience**

Director of Coaching, WDMSC  
Assist. Men's Coach, Drake University  
ISA/USSF Coaching Education Instructor  
Region II ODP, U.S. YNT

### **Qualifications:**

USSF A, UEFA, USSF GK, National YL, NSCAA Premier,  
Scottish F.A. Children's License

### **Education:**

Doctorate Education & Leadership (present)  
MSc, Physical Education, Health and Recreation  
BSc, Sports Coaching & Development





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## Youth Development - Mentality



“The message that comes across to me is that the clubs that take the development of young players seriously can be the clubs to benefit the most.”

Liam Brady, Arsenal FC, Academy Director



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# Presentation Objectives

1. A professional approach to Youth Development
2. Identify guiding principles and “best practices”
3. Raise standards and expectations of player develop at the youth level

**“Though we are opponents on the field, we must all understand we have a duty to collaborate and share best practices for the greater good of the game”**  
**Maarten Fontein, ECA,**



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# U.S. Soccer Player Pathway





## Youth Club Overview

- Over 5000 Youth Soccer Club
- Variety based on:
  - Size and resources
  - Mission, vision and culture
  - Player development model
  - Operational guidelines/structural maturity

**“Though there is no single “best model”;  
there are proven methods and “best practices  
that increase the chances of success”**



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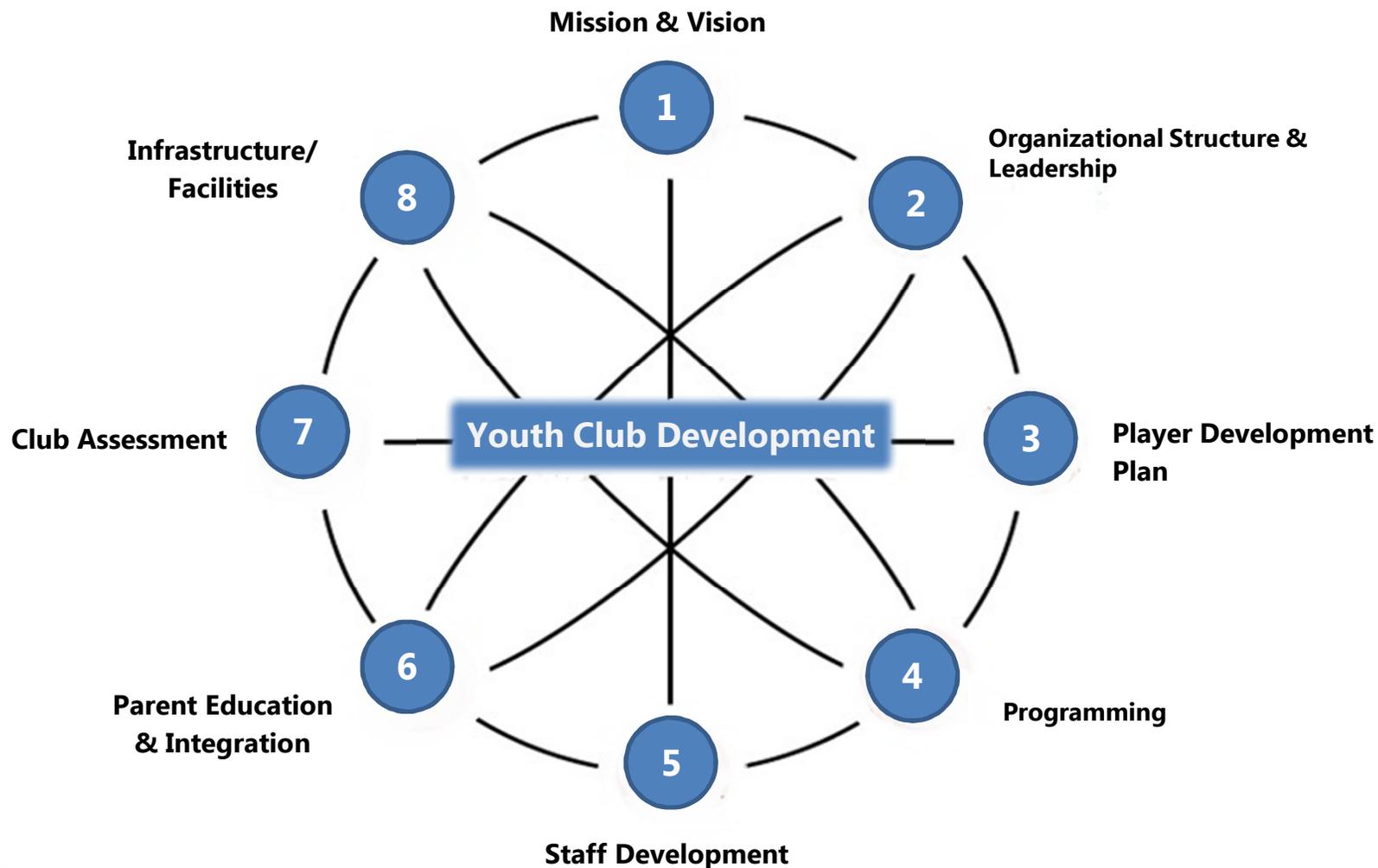
# The Business Plan



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# Youth Club Components





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## Mission & Vision

**“Successful youth soccer club create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to fruition”**



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## Mission & Vision – Why?

- Clarifies clubs purpose and passion
- Identifies membership being served
- Is player-centered!
- Community specific
- Is realistic, but ambitious!



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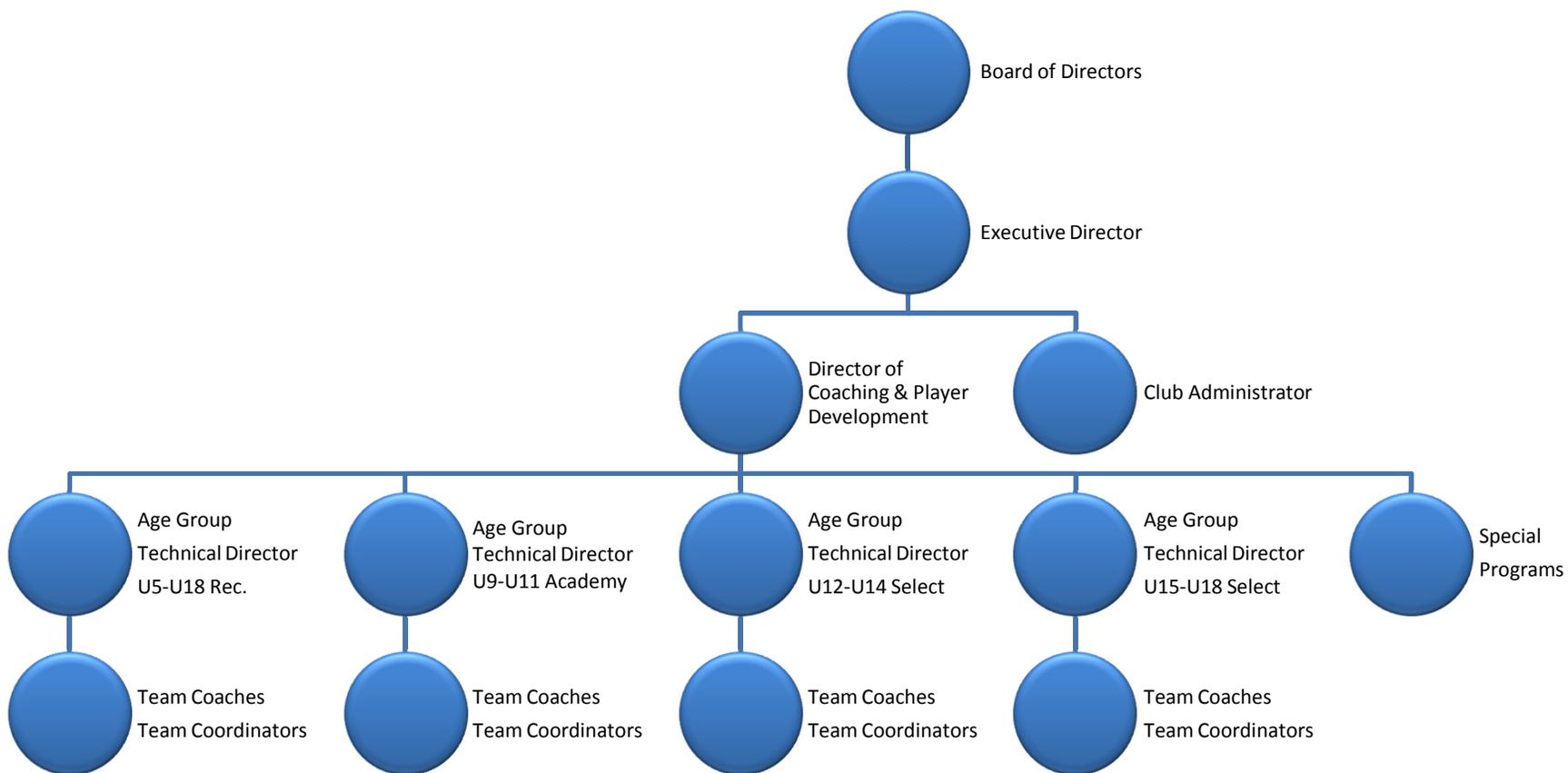
## Organizational Structure

**“Every company has two organizational structures: The formal one is written on charts; the other is the everyday relationships in the organizations.”**

**~Harold Geneen**



# Organizational Structure





## Organizational Structure

Benefits of a well defined organization:

- Identifies decision makers at each level
- Communicates chain of command
- Identifies official reporting relationships
- Clarifies roles and outlines distribution of responsibilities (i.e., AGTD)



## Organization – Board of Directors

- Overarching authority of the club
- Shape the mission and vision
- Provide proper financial oversight
- Ensure legal and ethical integrity
- Oversee policy and operational guidelines
- Identify individuals for key leadership positions – then get out the way!



## Organization – Executive Director

- Link between Board and coaching department
- Responsible for day-to-day operations
- Soccer and business background
- Assist in marketing, fundraising, and overall administration of the Club
- Relationship with Club Director is critical



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## Player Development Plan



"Its about more than just football...we must educate all young people holistically, not simply to focus on football"

~Guillermo Amor, F.C. Barcelona



# Holistic Approach





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## Player Development Philosophy

### Guiding Principles:

- Develop the person, and then the player
- Player-centered decision making process
- Individual development before team development
- Focus on long term development – the journey requires **patience**, **detailed understanding**, and a **sophisticated plan**



## Philosophy – Critical Topics

- Player Development Philosophy -
  - Do you know why you do what you do?
- Player placement –
  - How do you select teams (i.e. age/ability?)
- Style of Play
  - How do you want your teams to play?
- League & Tournament play
  - Paradigm shift – quality over quantity



## Philosophy – Style of Play

- Articulate how the game should be played
- Train the way we want to play
- Have a conviction – brave and flexible
- Accept short-term loss for long-term development (i.e. playing from the back)

“Understanding relationship between style of play, training priorities, curriculum development and player development is critical.”



## Philosophy – Team Placement

### Vertical (chronological) Vs. Horizontal (biological)

Category	Vertical Approach	Horizontal Approach
Placement	Based on age	Ability based
Skill	Varied/mixed	Homogeneity
Assessment/ Criteria	Limited/none	Continued assessment
Progression	Stay with age group	Depends on development
Leadership	No interaction	Coordinated effort
Difficulty	Simple	Requires skilled leadership

**Is age more important than ability?**



## Philosophy: Placement – Age Vs. Ability

Keys to implementation:

1. Develop a transition plan
2. Transparent assessment process
3. Regular parent education and feedback
4. Equality in staffing assignments
5. Staff communication – everyone “on the bus”
6. Frequent players assessment

(Newbury, 2012).



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# Club Programming

## WDMSC Player Development Pathway





## Programming – Things To Consider

Can you meet the players need at each stage?

- Age: youth to adults (e.g., 40+ 8-a-side)
- Gender: male, female, coed
- Level of Play: Rec, Competitive, Elite
- Identify the gaps – partner when necessary
- Type: league, camps, specialized programs (Mental Skills Training, T.O.P.S., etc.)
- Systems alignment: consider external programming to manage training volume



## Curriculum – Why is it so important?

- Blueprint for coaching staff - continuity
- Age specific training priorities/objectives
- Connects each phase of teaching process
- Criteria for staff assessment/accountability
- Means to assess program effectiveness
- A 'club way' provides identity and image

“Failure to address one phase will limit a players potential for all remaining phases”



# Curriculum Example

## WDMSC Programs: U11-U12 Programs

### LTPD Training Priorities and Player Capacities

(1) Maintain a love for the game. (2) Emphasis on soccer specific technical skills, develop through correct repetition (with and without pressure) through Small Sided Games (SSG). (4) Introduce basic elements of small group tactics (i.e. 2v1, 2v2).

TECHNICAL	TACTICAL	PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL	PERSONAL
<p>(1) Dribbling; change of direction, close control; fakes/moves to beat opponents and shielding.</p> <p>(2) Passing: Short sharp passing, instep drive, the chip pass, crossing.</p> <p>(3) Receiving: ground, bouncing, and air balls with instep (cushion) and sole-inside-outside of foot, thigh and chest control</p> <p>(4) Shooting; with laces, inside and outside of foot, volley and heading to score - placement versus power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goalkeepers: footwork, distribution, low dives</li> <li>• Technical/Tactical Training: develop basic patterns of play - 5v0, 5v3, 6v4) to goal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement defense and attack principles in SSG</li> </ul> <p>(1) Defending: pressure and covering defender, basic defense concepts</p> <p>(2) Attacking: passing patterns, basic combinations (wall pass)</p> <p>(3) Passing/possession: Supporting angles, showing for the ball, movement off the ball, timing of runs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical/Tactical Training: combination of technical skills in game related functional activities to goal (3v2, 4v3, 5v3 situations).</li> </ul> <p>Game related</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement basic systems of play (2-3-2)</li> <li>• Rotate players through different positions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All activities should involve regular contact with the ball</li> <li>• Continue to develop ABCs of movement Education.</li> <li>• Continue to develop speed, flexibility, power and endurance through fun games</li> <li>• Warm-up (dynamic), cool-down (static) stretching is mandatory.</li> <li>• Basic core stability and strength development.</li> <li>• Flexibility training.</li> <li>• Basic body awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to mental concepts: concentration levels, confidence, and emotional control, intrinsic motivation</li> <li>• Understanding of the role and link between practice and game performance.</li> <li>• Sportsmanship: winning and losing gracefully.</li> <li>• Goal setting (short term) on performance and homework related technical skills (juggling etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character development</li> <li>• Accept discipline and structure</li> <li>• Understand the relationship between effort and outcome.</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills and learning to work in a team environment</li> <li>• Positive communication</li> <li>• Parental support</li> <li>• Commitment to improve/achieve goals</li> <li>• Personal responsibility and character development.</li> <li>• Homework: Dedication to training outside practice.</li> </ul>

Low Training Priorities: (1) Winning/team results; (2) Team tactical development - specific positioning,.



## Curriculum Implementation

- Provide clear and concise content
- Regular communication and education
  - Formal and in-house education
- Utilize a range of curriculum tools
  - Articles, video, graphic software, [animations](#)
- Encourage staff input and feedback
  - Bridge the gap between theory and practice

**“curriculum provides coaches with the blueprint to train the right things at the right age and time”**



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## Coaching Department



**“The first mission of coaches is to try to help players with their behavior; the second is to show them how to be good players.”**

-Albert Puig, FC Barcelona. Academy



## Coaching Department

Keys to building a successful staff:

- Directed by one coaching authority
- Only recruit 'team players'
- Provides specific roles and expectations
- Consistency and continuity are critical
- Place according to education/personality
- Controlled coaching turnover
  - Transition and successor plan



## Director of Coaching

### Roles and responsibilities:

- Reports to Executive Director and Board
- Executes Technical Development Plan
- Designs coach and player education resources
- Recruit, develop and assess coaching staff
- Oversees all programming and levels of play
- Manages tryout process and staff placement
- Represent at State, Regional/National level



## What does it take to be a DOC?

Key characteristics:

- Highly educated with strong administration
- Possess a 'development first' mentality
- High standards personally and professionally
- Diplomatic, responsive, perseverance
- Strong convictions on player development
- Life-long learner – education never stops!

**You can only lead others where you yourself are willing to go... ~Lachlan McLean**



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## Age Group Technical Directors

Roles and responsibilities:

- Reports to the Director of Coaching
- Oversee specific phase of development plan
- Monthly reports on age group developments
- Mentor staff within their age groups
- Coach multiple teams across age groups
- Must possess conflict management skills



## Youth Team Coaches

What does it take to be a successful coach?

- Always put players first – no ego's!
- Respectful, humble and good character
- Understand role in relation to the 'big picture'
- It's their passion, not just their profession
- Have mentors and are life-long learners
- Brave – make tough decisions



## Team Managers

- Provide administrative support - coach/team
- Responsible for team communication and registration (i.e. tournaments etc.,)
- Are the direct link to the parents – need to be protected!
- Selected wisely - can make or break the team



# Parent Education

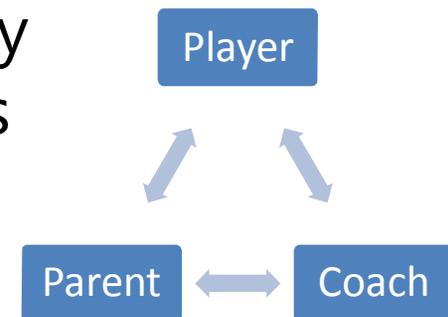




## Parent Education

What you need to know...

- They are the investors!
  - You need to get them to buy in
- They trust us with their prized possession
  - We must value this responsibility
- Critical to the development process
  - Don't shut them out!
- Possess limited knowledge
  - Education, education, education...





## Parent Education

### Managing Expectations:

- Provide clear expectations
    - Code of conducts, grievance process
  - Pre-season club-wide meetings conducted by club director and coaching staff
  - Regular feedback on player development
    - mid-season evaluations, conferences etc.
  - Annual surveys addressing club experience
- Take the time to listen...



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## Club Assessment



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## Club Assessment

“To ensure quality education, clubs must receive information from a neutral source on where they rank and where there is potential for improvement”



## Club Assessment

- **Club Assessment** - annual parent survey and external assessor (i.e. NCSP)
- **Player Assessment** – frequent including all parties (i.e. Zoom Reports).
- **Coach Assessment** – completed by AGTD and DOC based on objective criteria.

To ensure quality and continuous improvement, all facets of a club must be assessed regularly



## Closing Thoughts

Progress has been made, but...

- Standards and expectations must continue to be raised in all areas of youth club development
- A more professional mindset is required to create a more comprehensive environment.
- There is no silver bullet, it is a long-term commitment to a long-term process



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## Closing Thoughts

“The future belongs to the youth of this country. The development of a more sophisticated approach to youth development is a key issue and will always remain so.”

Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, ECA Chairman



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## Recommended Reading

- ECA Report on Youth Academies in Europe, 2012
- DFB, 10 Year Academy Anniversary
- US Youth Soccer, Player Development Model
- U.S. Soccer Player Development Curriculum
- The Model Soccer Club By Robert Parr et al.,