



ANDY MCDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

Palatine Celtic Soccer Club

House Coaches Handbook 2022-2023

<https://learning.ussoccer.com/coach>

Step **ONE**: Go to the above link, create a free account, and take the free *Introduction to Grassroots Coaching Course*. It takes 20 minutes!

From there, please consider the next course, either 4v4, 7v7, 9v9, or 11v11- depending upon what level you coach. These are all online, they cost \$25, and if that is a challenge, please contact amcdermott@palatinecelticsc.com and I will take care of it! These courses are roughly 2 hours, you can save progress and come back to it, and they are absolutely worth your time if you are coaching in our Recreational Program this year. This framework, setting up training sessions, and preparing for games will make a lot more sense after you finish the Grassroots Intro (and) a follow-up course.

Thank you!



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

Training Session Framework

Athletic, Technical, Tactical.

A flexible way to envision this for a training session is 25% Athletic/25% Technical/50% Tactical.

For a 90 minute session, that's *roughly*: 15-20 minutes of Movement Preparation and Athleticism, breaks, 15-20 minutes of Technical/Ball Mastery, breaks, then 30-40 minutes of Tactical/Situational Training, breaks.

1) **ATHLETIC**: Celtic Athleticism Program (CAP)

For improvement of performance and injury prevention.

This is an outline of an 8-week, introductory program meant to establish a framework for our technical staff to use so that our players start to grow the building blocks of good habits. Speed, quickness, explosiveness and durability are all byproducts of a strong athletic foundation that is developed and earned through training.

WEEKS 1 + 2: Establishing the **Athletic Position**, which is the base of movement.

Coaching Cue: "Be an Athlete!"

Coaching Notes:

- To find it, ask player to jump as high as they can, as if they were going to dunk a basketball, and then freeze them in their "load step" before exploding. That's close to a natural Athletic Position, where their big mover muscles are activated.
- Numbers up – they should be able to read their chest numbers in a mirror in front of them. Not bent over at the waist
- Off your heels
- Low like a lion – think about how a lion hunts, low, muscle rippling, explosive

WEEK 3: Acceleration our focus will be on the first three steps

Coaching Cue: "Three Quick Steps!"

Coaching Notes:

- Punch the ground with the balls of your feet, weight forward
- Choppy steps
- Prep for what's next (poke the ball away, pass, shoot, etc)
- Soccer is often won & lost based upon three quick steps



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

WEEK 4: Deceleration

Coaching Cue: “Dynamic Athletic Position!” This is the Athletic Position, on the move.

Coaching Notes:

- Stop Athletically, means finding the Athletic Position while moving in order to slow
- Force yourself to get low – brakes work better
- Choppy steps
- Be ready for what comes

WEEKS 5 + 6: Change of Direction

Coaching Cue: “Control then Explode!”

Coaching Notes:

- Big mover muscles activated
- Explode off that plant/base
- First step has to be intentional, drives you toward target

WEEKS 7 + 8: Top-End Speed

Coaching Cue: “Be an Efficient Machine!”

Coaching Notes:

- Efficiency Matters: what is each body part doing?
- Heel Drive + Knee Drive = Cyclical Leg Motion (easy speed)
- Stand up Tall – head to heel, straight as steel
- Arms drive your legs

PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

Introduce the concept, and then analyze their body shape and movement habits while running/moving/playing. We must be consistent in verbal cues and coaching vocabulary. Replacing bad habits with good habits takes time.

At the beginning of each session, after a dynamic warm-up, we should be spending 10-15 minutes working on this program. The concepts can be taught and practiced inside the framework of very simple running exercises, races, ladders, etc. The coaching cues and encouragement from us as coaches is crucial.



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

Example: say it's week one, and you are introducing the Athletic Position. You have a group of 20 kids. Create 4 "teams" of 5. For the instruction, have ten kids on the sideline, with ten kids waiting behind them. Have the first ten step forward and get into an athletic position (use the jump method if needed) and hold it for 10 seconds before they jog it off, past you for 10 yards, repeat with group two. Repeat 3 times, both groups. They should feel that in their legs – the beginning of a strong base. From there, you can move into multi-directional running from the Athletic Position, always returning to it each time you "freeze" them. Finally, you can move into Races with your four teams- simple relays or more complex with a ball, etc, but the next person up in line should be waiting in a strong Athletic Position while the runner is going there and back. This is all new to them, be consistent in your encouragement to Get Low, Numbers Up, on the balls of their feet, off their toes, and Be An Athlete.

*****NOTE: for a demonstration video of these movements, terms and vocabulary, see [HERE](#).**

2) TECHNICAL: BALL MASTERY

We have the opportunity/obligation, every single time we have our players on the field with us, to help them get hundreds of touches on the ball. As they progress in age and ability, players with "soft feet" are the ones who continue to rise and stand out from the players who don't spend time with the ball.

Much like the simplified athleticism program we call "CAP," we will use a basic framework that simplifies the technical training throughout the seasons ahead, as well. Of course, coaches can go above and beyond in teaching the basic skills and ball mastery, and advanced groups will benefit from different training than beginner groups (more on this later) but by establishing this framework, we will know that- from top to bottom- ALL of our Celtic players will be learning and getting repetitions on the same techniques throughout the season.

*****NOTE for advanced teams:** none of these skills are too "easy" for your players! There is not one player in our entire club who is in any danger of being perfect... Even Leo Messi, Xavi, and Iniesta would dribble, juggle, and pass the ball at the beginning of every session. Touch on the ball is an EARNED attribute, and, if ignored, is also a DEPRECIATING skill. Remind your players that *the best players do the basics the best*. Of course, there are ways to increase the efficacy of technical training for more advanced groups: tempo of the exercise, train in competitions and rewards/consequences, add mental challenges to the technical exercises, increase ability level (eg. pass to the front foot) etc.

Here are the basic guidelines for the weeks of the season. IMPORTANT: when a week's topic is done, we do not "move on" and expect young players to be perfect dribblers after two or three sessions. But, the three bullet points in each topic should be introduced/explained/practiced, and then moving forward we continue to remind players of the broad strokes as the weeks



ANDY MCDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

progress and we don't tire of focused practice on those techniques - since all of these skills are the common tools used every time we play soccer. Conversely, you do not have to wait until Week 5 to add finishing into your sessions! This framework is a safety valve, so that we can confirm that these players are all touching these techniques at some point during the season.

Again, this is a roadmap of what should be focused on each week – but HOW you teach them is up to you! You are the team coaches, and each of your teams is proficient at different levels than other teams. It could be as simple as relay races while dribbling around cones, or as complex as your players can successfully grasp. What's important is focused practice, with quality repetitions.

Also important: we MUST encourage all players to get repetitions of all these techniques with BOTH FEET.

WEEK 1: Dribbling

- Outside of the foot
- Sole of the foot
- Fakes + change of pace to go past someone

WEEK 2: Juggling

- Different ways to pick up the ball
- 1 then catch, repeat.
- Feet only: 1 right - 1 left, then 2 – 2, 3 – 3, etc.

WEEK 3: Receiving

- PREPARATION TOUCH: first touch with a purpose
- Footwork/Body Position is key, before the ball gets to you
- Dealing with a bouncing ball, waist height or higher

WEEK 4: Short Passing (10 yards or less)

- Plant foot is the “aimer foot,” toe up/heel down, hit the middle of the ball
- Inside/Outside of the foot
- Pass is always followed by movement Pass + Move



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

WEEK 5: Long Passing

- Striking the ball with laces, top of big toe
- Foot under the ball to get it in the air
- Passing into space where your teammate is going

WEEK 6: Shooting

- Body position is key, lower yourself, plant foot wider, power through the ball, not lean away from your target
- A decent shot on goal is exponentially better than an incredible strike that misses the goal
- The best goal scorers are often the quickest shooters – prepare before you get the ball and strike immediately

WEEK 7: Heading (U12 and older - Youngers can do an extra week with Shooting as the emphasis)

- The Frontal Bone (forehead) is much stronger/harder than the ball, teach proper contact: head hitting the ball, NOT ball hitting the head
- Attacking headers, hit the top half of the ball – over the ball and down, at the goal line
- Defensive headers, hit the bottom of the ball – up and out the sides if possible

WEEK 8: Turns

- Prepare your body to receive the ball, make it easier for what you're about to do
- Inside of the back foot / Outside of the front foot
- Scanning before you receive the ball

WEEKS 9, 10, 11: Combine these technical skills into functional repetitions

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: So, what does this really look like?

EXAMPLE: Week One: Dribbling. They've already done 15 minutes of the Athletic warmup and CAP training. Players get a 3-5 minute break for water, recovery, socialization. Then, each player gets their ball and lines up on the sideline, 3 yards apart, facing Coach. There are cones making a line parallel to their sideline, 10 away.

- Dribble however they want, to cones and back, 2X



ANDY MCDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

- Coach evaluates capability of players
 - Coach explains the biomechanics of dribbling with the “pinkie toe” or outside of foot and why it’s naturally faster and more functional
- Dribble to cones and back, right-footed, pinkie toe
- Dribble to cones and back, left-footed, pinkie toe
- Dribble there and back, either foot, pinkie toe
 - Coach points out that everyone looked way more athletic and capable
 - Coach explains change of direction, using the inside/outside of each foot and transitioning athletic position to other side of the ball
- Dribble there and back, right-footed, outside-inside-outside-inside
- Dribble there and back, left-footed, outside-inside-outside-inside
- Dribble there and back, left outside-inside then right outside-inside, working hard to shift their athletic position
 - After a quick break (mental/hydration), Coach explains an inside of the foot cut and change of direction, and then an outside of the foot cut and change.
- Group 1 dribbles at speed to the line, focusing on their cut and change direction back to start, then Group 2, etc
- Next progression – players dribble at speed until Coach yells CUT or whistles or claps – players have to keep ball close to them so they can cut as quickly as possible
- Finally, Coach can set 3 cones into a “Z” pattern, and form two/three teams for relay races
 - Coach can emphasize that they’ve learned the quickest/most efficient way to move the ball at their feet and the winning team is the team that cares for the ball best...

*****NOTE: for more exercises and ideas, see my friend Tommy’s video series, [HERE](#).**



ANDY MCDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

3. TACTICAL: HOW TO INTERACT WITH OTHER HUMANS ON THE FIELD

This is where coaches teach players how to make use of their *Athletic* ability and *Technical* capability to be a more impactful player on the field. After all, everything we do in training should point each player to be more effective in the game of soccer. Since this is such a broad topic – never-ending, really- we will use an extremely simplified framework that coaches use to plan sessions and guarantee that the general facets of the game have been introduced to every player in the club. Coaches will decide how to teach these ideas, and how much they will expand and build upon them.

NOTE: this Tactical phase of each training session will be roughly the last 50% of the training time. A coach can focus on the tactical emphasis listed here by introducing some of these thoughts and setting up exercises for the players to engage in meaningful repetition.

END WITH A GAME/COMPETITION! This is for more than just fun – coach should watch for a teaching moment or two when they can “freeze” the action and drive home one of the concepts from the session’s emphasis.

WEEKS 1 and 2: One vs One Dribbling / One vs One Defending

The concepts behind these two “skillsets” should be taught and practiced together. Again, HOW coaches train this is up to each coach, but the basic ideas that we want all Celtic players to understand are:

Attacking:

- When to take on a defender?
 - Generally speaking, when TO risk attacking a defender 1v1:
 - Some players relate well to the Triage statement- Shoot, Pass Dribble. When you receive the ball, can you shoot? No, can you progress the ball forward with a pass? No, then maybe you can create your own solution by dribbling.
 - When you’re already moving at speed, it is much easier to dribble past a defender
 - Your attacking half of the field. Especially in the opponent’s 18 yard box.
 - When you identify a mismatch
 - In general, when NOT TO risk attacking a defender 1v1:
 - Minimize the damage that will occur if the defender takes the ball from you. Damage control: dribbling out of your defending third should be last resort, if ever
 - It’s much more difficult to beat a defender, and accelerate past them, when you start from a stop



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

- When there are better options
- To increase your odds of success:
 - There are many “moves” which might work, but the best players have mastered one move to the right, and one to the left
 - Crucial aspect – the change of speed. The most incredible move ever might get you one step past the defender but won’t create separation unless you accelerate.
 - The choice to dribble must be a surprise – if you dribble every time you get the ball, you become predictable and easy to defend

Defending:

- Mindset
 - #1 priority is to keep your body between the attacker and your goal. It is NOT to win the ball immediately.
 - It matters not if the attacker touches the ball 30 times and does 10 stepovers in front of you, if you are keeping a good athletic position and you’re in between him and your goal
 - Delay, slow the attacker down, wait until the odds are in your favor again
- Technique
 - Athletic position with a “bladed” stance
 - Run backwards with the attacker – it’s never reach at the ball from a standing spot and hope you get lucky
 - Watch the ball and your surroundings, without focusing on any one thing
 - Timing is everything – wait until you have help, or the attacker makes a mistake, before you actually try to win the ball.
 - When tackling, try to have more than a foot engaged – the more body weight and positioning behind the tackle, the better.

WEEK 3: Two vs One, Three vs Two, etc – “Find and Exploit the Mismatch”

If you could teach only one attacking concept to your group, this could be it. Essentially, that’s how to find success in the game of soccer – Find and Exploit the Mismatch. That could mean a lot of things: 2 v 1, 3 v 2, attacking a less-capable defender, positioning a fast player vs a slow player, a height advantage on a set piece, or any other ways to put the odds in your favor. A few coaching points:

- A great way to create mismatches is for players to learn how to find space between “lines” and separation from defenders. Sometimes you’re making a run that isn’t to get the ball, but to create space for a teammate that becomes a mismatch



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

- Move the ball quicker, take fewer touches, be aware of your body position before you ask for the ball, know what's next before you receive it
- Players should learn that in an "overload" situation, the attacking player with the ball should drive at the defender to make them commit before passing the ball to their teammate to exploit that mismatch.

WEEK 4: Turning and Switching Play Away From Pressure

- Central players should act as a "pivot" that creates space for himself/herself to receive the ball from one side of the field and has the ability to quickly find a penetrating pass forward up the field, or turn and find the mismatch on the other side of the field.
- This should become an identifiable trait of all of our teams- that we continually look to connect a pass or two, find a central player, and then he/she plays a longer pass across field to a wide player, or if the defender is tight to that player, then the pass goes into space behind the wide defender for us to run into that space.
- Players will learn why the technical skills of "turning" are so critical to master- if done well, it unlocks the game

WEEK 5: Defending with Pressure, Cover, and Balance

- "Lions hunt in packs." Don't press by yourself – delay and contain the situation until cover arrives to help.
- Communication is key: "I got ball!" "Push her right!" "Step tight! Win that!" Roles have to be clearly defined, where the closest player to the ball applies PRESSURE, the next defender provides COVER, and then the next defender(s) make the field compact and provides BALANCE so that we don't allow the opponent to find and exploit a mismatch against us.
- Reinforce the hard-to-learn lesson that players do not have to win the ball right now, right now! They don't have to force a bad position, and in so doing, make a bad situation even worse when they miss a tackle and take themselves out of play.
- For the youngers: "Fly fast, land slow." Means cover the ground quickly to close the distance, but then don't sprint up to the attacker in such a way that you are easy to beat. Decelerate athletically and position yourself between them and your goal so you can delay effectively.



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

WEEK 6: Goal Kicks

This is such a massive part of youth soccer. As annoying as they can be, we should frame the opportunity as a positive; a chance to teach our players how to build out of the back, connect passes, and move intelligently.

- Keeper should NOT be afraid of getting the ball and making mistakes. In fact, we should get out ahead of that and announce to the team and educate parents that our keepers WILL make mistake(s) and give up goals because of these errors and that the world will not stop spinning when that happens... That said, the GK needs to be a playmaker when playing out of the back, or at least another option to connect with.
- GK starts with the ball in the middle of the goal on the 6. Sounds obvious, but it's not.
- Two defenders, even in 7v7, should be at the corners of the 6, facing the field – no reason they need to face the GK, that's just wasted motion when they must turn with the ball and face the field.
- Two wide players and at least one central option. Players should learn that they have a numerical mismatch in the back, when it's the GK, 2 defenders, and a central player against a 2-3 opposing forwards.
- GK should pass to one of the defenders, one of the wide players, or the central option. Rarely should they see the direct opportunity to kick it as long as they can – in fact, it makes more sense that, even if they want to go long, they can first pass to a defender – who can then make that direct long pass, or go back to the GK who can then hit the long pass. Advantageous because the opposing team should have shifted forward and we may be able to exploit a mismatch when the other team is unbalanced.
- Assuming that we are training to master our “preparation touch,” we should be able to take a touch, make a pass, and move into the next passing lane as another option. Eventually we look to make a penetrating pass in behind their defenders and move our lines forward.
- If the opposing team commits more players forward to “press” on our goal kicks, then we look to relieve that pressure by passing forward earlier, but not at the expense of seeing the pictures of the field, making a good decision, and break lines by passing to a higher player or by passing into space.

WEEK 7: Final Pass and Making Runs into the Box

- Whenever possible, players should serve the ball from the end line. This creates more problems for the opposing defenders and GK, who are all forced to run backwards and fight to keep an eye on the ball and the attackers. Options for this final pass:
 - A firm pass across the six yard line if your runners are arriving with you
 - A pass back away from the GK, on an angle toward the penalty spot
 - A lofted pass to the far post over the defenders
- Optimally (and rarely), we'd get three key runners into the box:



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

- A near post run, which should beat the defender to the near post
 - A far post run, which is beyond the far post where he/she is hard to defend
 - A penalty spot run, which either beats the defender to a ball played across the six yard line, or which halts his/her run around 12 yards for a ball played back on an angle from the end line
- The best finishers in the world keep it simple and get their shot on goal. This is an extremely difficult scenario for any GK, so there is no need to attempt the world's greatest goal when a simple finish will do. "Give the keeper a chance to have a bad day!"

WEEK 8: Transition

It's our belief that most soccer games are won and lost in transition moments.

- Our players should understand the 5 phases of a game:
 - Your team is in possession
 - The moment when your team loses the ball
 - Your team is defending
 - The moment when your team wins the ball back
 - Set pieces
- In the first ~5 seconds of those transition moments, our players should practice what should happen until it becomes a "right now" reaction.
 - When they lose the ball-
 - Can they win the ball back immediately?
 - If not, can they organize their defensive shape immediately and prevent/delay the opponent's counter-attack, cued by the person closest to the ball positioning themselves as pressure, the next as cover, and so on?
 - When they win the ball-
 - Can they look ahead and make a dangerous, penetrating pass to launch a counterattack while the opponent is unbalanced?
 - If not, can we keep possession of the ball long enough to switch the ball away from pressure and find/exploit the mismatch elsewhere?

WEEKS 9, 10, 11....: Game-like Scenario Training, incorporating all.

*****NOTE: for more exercises and ideas, go to the [US Soccer Learning Center](#) and search *tactical, possession, etc.* in the Resources and Planning sections**



ANDY McDERMOTT
DIRECTOR OF SOCCER

Competition

Let's remember that our #1 priority is player development, NOT winning. These are not mutually exclusive, of course! We can do both, and that is the ultimate goal. But, as a club, we will commit to:

- Everyone plays!
 - Competition is a critical part of player development – the opportunity to test themselves and put into a “pressurized” situation everything that they’ve been learning and practicing in training sessions.
 - Optimally, as we grow and improve as a club, we will be able to place each player at the right level- in the best possible development environment. This will prevent rosters from having too much disparity in ability from the top to the bottom.
 - “Playing time” has to be the MOST common complaint from parents throughout the world of youth sports. We must try our best to make sure every player, at every game, plays enough that they don’t feel that the coach is avoiding him/her.
 - Remember – the “worst” players this year could very well be the “best” players a year from now, but only if we give them the experiences, the repetitions, and the encouragement this year – even through their struggles of catching up to the rest of the team.
 - Until players are HS age, they should be learning different roles and positional tasks on the field.
 - Goalkeepers: we CANNOT blame the goalkeepers! Yes, they make mistakes, but so does every other player on the field. Remember, until 11v11, and maybe not even then, a player should not be a full-time goalkeeper. They need to experience other roles and responsibilities, and develop their foot skills.