



# TECHNICAL MANUAL

LEAGUE 1 ONTARIO

April 2014

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## PART I - INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Vision

League1 Ontario will be recognized as **The Best Soccer League in Canada** below the fully professional level (i.e. MLS and NASL).

### 1.2 Objectives

League1 Ontario will play a critical role in ensuring that Ontario's best soccer players achieve their full potential via the establishment of a **Standards Based** Professional league that is as an official part of the Ontario Soccer Association's recognized Pyramid for Play.

League1 Ontario will offer a viable platform for bringing together ALL of Ontario's best teams below the fully professional level, regardless of Professional or Amateur status, with the intent of eliminating most of the dilution that presently exists.

League1 Ontario will offer athletes a CLEAR pathway to the elite levels of the sport of soccer within their community or a nearby community. We will also provide talented coaches and referees with increased opportunities to work at an elite level.

League1 Ontario will always prioritize the advancement of Canadian athletes and will be aligned with the objectives of the Ontario Soccer Association's Long Term Player Development (LTPD) plan.

### 1.3 Values

- **Excellence** – We will demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to excellence in everything we do, both on and off the field of play. This will be the cornerstone of our success and will ensure that League1 Ontario will attract the best players, coaches and referees and will be worthy of loyal fan support, media attention and respect.
- **Respect** – First and foremost, we will always demonstrate the utmost respect for the sport of soccer. Additionally, we will always strive to behave in a respectful manner toward our colleagues, our competitors, the match officials and the spectators, as well as the League and its partners.
- **Integrity** - All involved with League1 Ontario will conduct themselves with highest level of professionalism and integrity.
- **Accountability** - Through the active enforcement of standards, all League1 Ontario stakeholders are accountable for ensuring that we achieve our stated operational and technical objectives.
- **Honesty** - All those involved in L1O will conduct themselves in an honest and transparent manner.
- **Alignment** – In order to give our athletes the best chance at success, it is imperative that, in addition to a commitment to being aligned with LTPD, we must be aligned with the strategic priorities of the Canadian Soccer Association and the philosophy, vision and values of Canada's National Team Head Coaches.

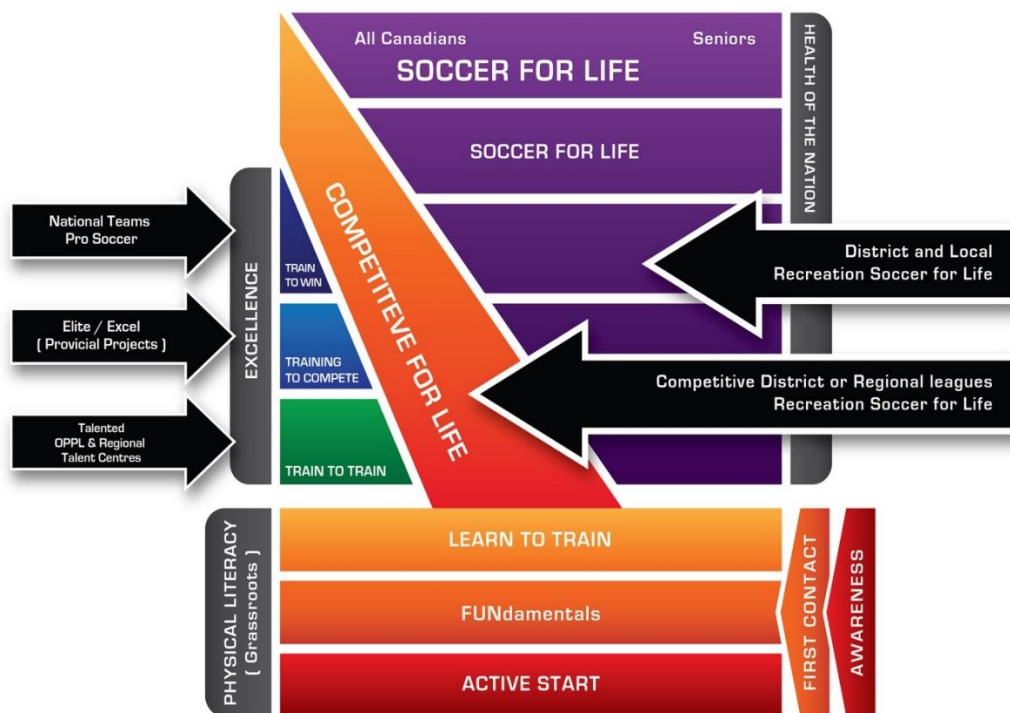


## PART II – THE OSA LTPD TALENTED PATHWAY

The OSA’s technical vision, derived from the Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) program is:

*Lead the development of a unified soccer family where the needs of the player are always put first; ensuring every player has the best chance to reach their potential whether that potential is playing recreational soccer or being called up for Canada.*

The outline of the OSA’s Long-Term Development Program is as follows:



The OSA’s Long-Term Development Program (LTPD) has evolved from Canadian Sport for Life’s Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD). LTAD is a federal government backed and funded initiative with the purpose of improving sport and recreation at all levels across Canada.

There are seven common stages between LTAD and LTPD and diagramed above

- |                      |                        |                                      |
|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Active Start      | 4. Training to Train   | 7. Active for Life (Soccer for Life) |
| 2. FUNdamentals      | 5. Training to Compete |                                      |
| 3. Learning to Train | 6. Training to Win     |                                      |



### Three Key Outcomes of Long-Term Player Development:

**Talented Pathway Vision**  
Ontario's best players are given the opportunity to achieve reach their full potential



**Soccer for Life Pathway Vision**  
Provide an enjoyable and challenging environment that keeps all participants returning to soccer

**Grassroots Vision**  
Making soccer more child friendly, to develop better players and people



The Training to Compete and Training to Win Stages are the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stages of the Talented Pathway and represents the development stage that League 1 Ontario will cover.



## PART III – TECHNICAL PHILOSOPHY

League 1 Ontario exists to provide a critically important pathway for our best players from the youth ranks to the highest level of soccer in the Province of Ontario below the fully professional level. This league will be both a breeding ground and a proving ground for our top players.

The technical professionals who work for League 1 Ontario License Holders will have multiple responsibilities and expectations imposed upon them:

- They will be expected to win. At this level of the game, results matter.
- They will be expected to develop their talent in a manner that is aligned with the priorities of our national team program and aligned with the expectations of the professional game as it is played at higher levels.

### 3.1 Forecast

Where is the game going? The technical leadership of the Canadian Soccer Association and the Ontario Soccer Association believe the following characteristics are critical if a player is to enjoy success at the highest levels of the sport:

**Athleticism** – Physical prowess is critical, but without compromising skill

**Creativity** – Players with great individual ability will thrive

**Efficiency** – Players must be able to keep the ball longer and/or attack more quickly than ever before

**Intelligence** – Tactical decision making by individual players and the team unit must eclipse previous levels

**Speed** – Players will need to move faster and think faster and, as such, the ball will travel faster

**Flexibility** – Game situations will change constantly, largely as a culmination of the previously listed factors and players will need to demonstrate an ability to adapt to change quickly

**Love and Respect for the Sport** – Passion and Respect for the sport will help drive an athlete to make those sacrifices required to reach their full potential

### 3.2 The Characteristics of a World Class Player

1. Technique on demand
2. Tactical flexibility
3. Dominate 1v1 situations
4. Versatile fitness
5. Committed to excellence
6. Quality of character/personality



### 3.3 Trends

What are the best teams and players doing to set them apart? What do Canadian players typically do well? Where do Canadian players need to improve?

FIFA releases technical reports at the conclusion of each of their major competitions. These reports provide a detailed analysis of the teams and players that competed in these events. The following are some of the observations that have been presented in regards to the qualities of the Canadian athletes (both male and female) that have taken part in FIFA U17 World Cups over the past 6 years.

- Athletic players (female)
- Patient build-up play from the back through midfield (male)
- Strong, hard-working players (both)
- Compact defence (male)
- Defence-splitting passes (male)
- Determination (both)
- Disciplined, well-organized defence (female)
- Counter-attacks (female)
- Influential goalkeeper (female)
- Influential individual players (female)
- Players with pace (female)
- Deep defensive block (female)
- Rapid transition from defence to attack (female)
- Immediate pressure after losing the ball (female)

The following is a list of the qualities of the world's top U17 teams at these competitions. These statements do not apply to Canada's teams and players and thus represent potential areas where we can look to improve. They are broken down into several categories:

#### Technical

- Good control, good ability to run with the ball
- Game-opening diagonal balls
- Good variety of game-opening passes
- Good finishing ability
- Long-range shots
- Strong dribbling skills
- Excellent passing game – good options for the player in possession
- Good individual technique



#### Mental

- Winning mentality
- Ability to stay focused after falling behind

#### Physical

- Ability to change direction/pace suddenly

#### Attacking Tactical

- Constructive build-up play
- Flexibility and movement
- Attacks using the width
- Effective use of fullbacks
- Dangerous at set pieces (attacking corner kicks, free kicks, special throw-in routines)
- Good wing play
- Ability to break through following successful pressure
- Excellent off-the-ball movement
- Good links between the team lines

#### Defending Tactical

- High defensive line, goalkeeper covers the space behind the defenders effectively
- Aerial dominance in defence
- Midfield pressing

#### General Tactical

- Tactical flexibility (adapting to the state of play)

### 3.4 Canadian Strengths

The following observations have been made about the strengths demonstrated by Canada's top young players when competing on the world stage:

1. **Committed** – Our players are very hard working and determined.
2. **Athletic** – Our players are strong, healthy, blessed with good genes and could most likely excel in any other sport but have chosen soccer.
3. **Defensive** – Our players are disciplined and well-organized defensively.
4. **Influential** – We do have some individual players that are on par with the best in the world for their age.





### 3.5 Canadian Weaknesses

It may be more striking to notice what is not being said and therefore constitutes the weaknesses of our top youth players:

1. **Technique** – Our players are not known for their high level of technical ability or creativity.
2. **Attacking** – Our players are not known for their ability to play attacking soccer.
3. **Culture** – Our players are not known for their innate sense of how the game is played (e.g., our players are ineffective at managing a game. They do not know when to speed the game up or when to slow it down in order to influence the result in our favour).
4. **Mindset** – Our players need to improve their mental toughness and willingness to win. At present, the Canadian player is fairly characterized as being overly naïve and gullible.

### 3.6 Opportunities

While maintaining our strengths, we must improve in these four areas of weakness if we hope to make any further gains on the international stage and if we hope to advance more athletes to the fully professional level of the sport.

We can improve in these four areas with the proper mix of training, competition and coaching. The Ontario Soccer Association has introduced the Ontario Player Development League (OPDL) to address these needs for youth players aged 13 and up. League1 Ontario will strive to continue to develop our best athletes as they graduate from the elite youth level.

### 3.7 The Ontario Technical Philosophy

In light of the future direction of the game and our strengths and weaknesses, the OSA presents its overarching philosophy for players in the Talented Pathway of LTPD:

*Develop a modern style of play that produces an efficient brand of soccer with individual and collective habits of creativity, skill and control.*

It is imperative that L1O Licensees absorb this philosophy and implement it when working with their teams.

These are the qualities we must nurture in our players so that they are better able to advance to higher levels of the professional game and so that they can begin to change the prevailing reputation of the Canadian soccer player on the international level.



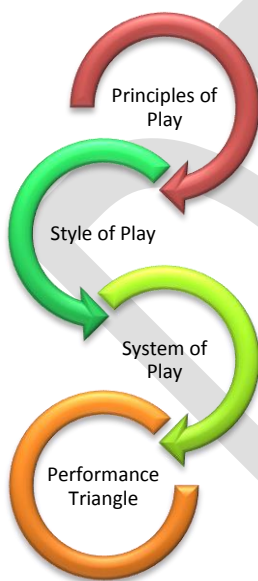
## PART IV – TECHNICAL BRAND/IDENTITY

### 4.1 Introduction

Best practice derived from the FIFA U17 World Cups, along with advances in sports science, provides us with the foundation for the development of talent. As it has been noted already, players today are quicker, faster and stronger, technically more proficient and tactically more astute. It is quite rare to see a player today rise to the top of the sport without the support of a well-structured development program behind them.

The most forward thinking soccer countries have realized this and have moved on to create systems and structures to identify and develop top talent and surround them with competition structures that are challenging and meaningful. These systems have become part of the country's soccer culture and the philosophy becomes woven throughout all levels right up to the national teams. With the design of these programs well in hand for many soccer powers, they now look to innovation as the means by which to find the competitive edge over their counterparts.

Before immersing ourselves in every little detail of successful design from top soccer nations, we first have to ensure that it best serves our specific needs as Canadians. The appropriate approach is to take the best practices from existing designs and merge and/or adapt them to own Canadian-specific realities and culture.



In this process, we must recognize that there will always be elements of the sport of soccer that are quite flexible and open to interpretation. However, there are also components that are ageless and unchanging in their application to the game. It is important to be able to identify the fixed elements from those that are adaptable.

**Principles of Play** – These are the attacking and defending constants of our game and do not change wherever you go in the world.

**Style of Play** – In order to honour the principles of play, these are the overarching choices a team or organization makes regarding how to go about attacking and defending. This is the brand or identity.

**System of Play** – The various positional frameworks available to best bring to life the chosen style of play.

**Performance Triangle** – A combination of three concepts (mindset, skillset and structure) that serves as a compass for a team's style of play and system of play.



## 4.2 Principles of Play - Attacking

### Support/Depth

Passing options provided through 360° to the player on the ball.

### Penetration

The ability to eliminate opponents from being goalside of the ball.

### Dispersal

Positively using the large playing space by having players spread out all over.

### Mobility/Movement

The movement of players around the field in order to cause opponents problems.

### Surprise

The use of deception to hide a team's attacking intentions.

### Individualism

The ability of an individual player to do the unexpected.



## 4.3 Principles of Play – Defending

### Support/Depth

Counters attacking support/depth. The arrangement of players to deny the opposition the opportunity to pass or run in anticipation of a pass.

### Delay/Containment

Counters penetration. Slowing the forward movement of the ball by opponents.

### Compactness

Counters dispersal. The resistance to being stretched and spread out by the opponents.

### Balance/Cover

Counters mobility/movement. The fluent defensive team movements made to contain and resist the opponents' attacking runs.

### Control/Restraint

Counters attacking surprise. Defending with composure, individual/team understanding and awareness.

### Surprise

Counters Individualism. The use of unusual and unexpected defensive actions.



#### 4.4 Style of Play Summary

##### **OFFENSIVE**

League1 Ontario teams will be expected to engage in an attacking style of play based around keeping possession of the ball.

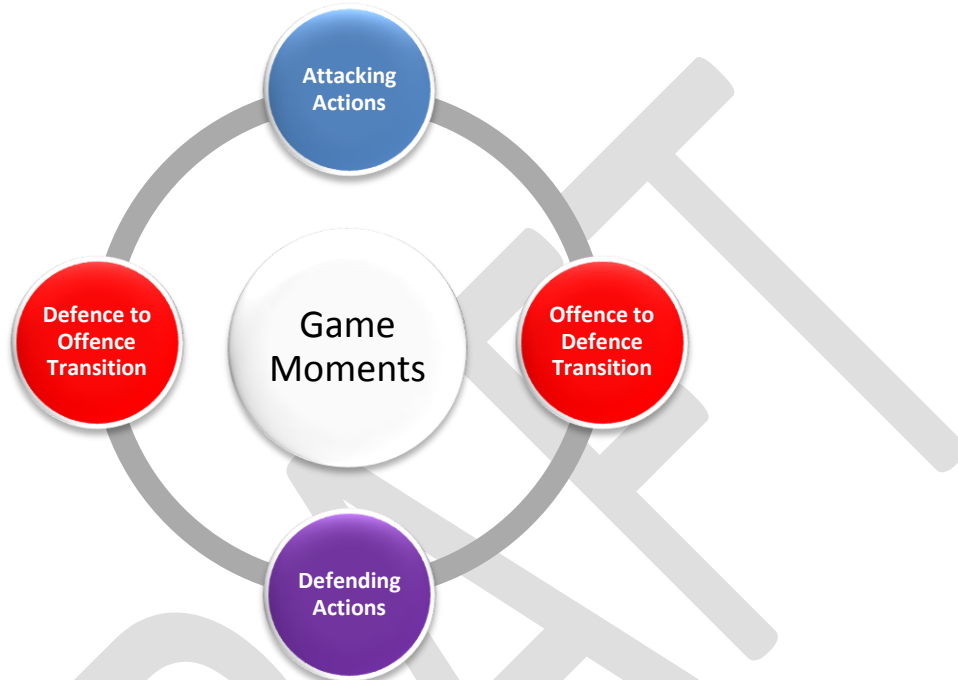
##### **EFFICIENT & EFFECTIVE**

Precise and clinical finishing is a byproduct of quick, organized movements off the ball.


##### **FLUID STRUCTURE**


All players are expected to both attack and defend. While defending requires more rigid positioning, it is expected attacking will feature more free flowing movement stemming from positional play.


## 4.5 The Moments of the Game and Style of Play



**The attacking moments of the game impact style of play and include:**

- 

**Produce** Score a goal, take a shot or create a goal scoring opportunity. Efficiency and effectiveness are the keys.
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**Penetrate** Play the ball forward in a controlled manner with the intent of production. When a high quality penetrating pass is accomplished, it will effectively eliminate opponents from defending the ball. This is an area within the OPDL that players will also require some development.
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**Possess** When immediate forward play is denied, possess the ball and probe for an opening. Speed of play. Keep the ball moving but vary that movement – slow or fast as the situation arises. Increased possession boosts the number of opportunities to play the ball forward, which in turn enhances goal scoring opportunities.



**The defending moments of the game also impact style of play and include:**

**Press**

Get the ball back as quickly as possible by playing to our current defensive and athletic strengths as elite Canadian players. This is done using zonal defending principles.

**Transitions also impact style of play and require the team to answer an immediate question before proceeding with the appropriate plan of action:**

**Offence to  
Defence**

Are we organized as a team? If yes, press the ball. If no, then first get organized into defensive shape/positions. Beware of the counter attack.

**Defence to  
Offence**

Are the opponents organized as a team? If no, counter attack quickly to take advantage of their lack of defensive shape/positioning. If yes, possess the ball but remember to possess with the intent of producing a goal scoring opportunity or a goal.

**The Challenge:** Do our players possess the necessary cultural understanding of how the game of soccer is played in order to identify these scenarios quickly and correctly and to take advantage effectively?

## 4.6 System of Play

System of Play (Tactical Formations) will not be dictated upon our License Holders by the League or the Ontario Soccer Association.

League1 Ontario teams are free to set themselves up according to whatever system(s) they deem appropriate in order to meet the dual goals of playing winning soccer while encouraging their teams to conform to a general style of play (as noted above in section 4.5) that will be entertaining to watch and which will better prepare players for success at the higher levels of the game, both professionally and internationally.



## 4.7 Individual Characteristics Required for the Desired Style of Play

### TECHNICAL

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**Passing and Receiving** – Continuous movement of the ball on the ground over a variety of distances.

**Shooting** – Ability to shoot the ball from a variety of ranges and encouraged to shoot from appropriate distances.

**Ball Control and Turning** – Keep tight and continuous control of the ball and possess a variety of turning techniques to escape the opponent.

### TACTICAL

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**Playing Out from the Back** – It is important that all teams display a comfort in playing the ball from their goalkeeper to their defenders through to their midfielders and on to their forwards.

**Possession** – It is expected teams will try to keep possession of the ball using limited touches on the ball. Players will be encouraged to receive, then pass and then offer themselves as support to the ball again. In developing this possession ability teams must then learn how to most efficiently and effectively move the ball from area to area of the field.

**Transition** – Positioning within the team's formation is important to transition. When possession is lost players must quickly work to regain it. Upon regaining possession, proper positioning allows for the consideration of an immediate counter attack.

### PHYSICAL

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**Speed and Agility** – Speed (or the lack thereof) decides games. Agility is the characteristic that most sets soccer players apart from other types of athletes in other sports.

**Endurance** – The key actions in the game are a direct result of the application of speed. The faster that players can recover from these high intensity episodes and the more fully they can recover, the more effective they will be.

**Strength and Power** – Strength is the application of force. Power is strength and speed combined. Soccer players first need to be strong (especially core strength) to move towards the development of power and to reduce susceptibility to injury.





## PSYCHOLOGICAL

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**Intrinsically Motivated** – The relentless desire to be the best comes from within. To have an intense need to succeed.

**Self-Belief** – Clearly sees playing for Canada or playing professionally in their future.

**Details-Oriented** – Determined attitude towards getting things done right. No detail is too small and no amount of repetition is too much if it means achieving success.

## SOCIAL

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**Lifestyle Choice** – Choosing to play the sport at this level requires that the athlete make serious lifestyle choices that come with a high price in the form of effort and sacrifice.

**Cooperation** – Every player's individual goals are best achieved through the continued development and success of the team. Players must be able to work effectively as part of a unit.

**Respect and Discipline** – The development of a player's personal character is the golden thread that runs through both their conduct on and off the field.

## 4.8 The Performance Triangle<sup>1</sup>

The "Performance Triangle" helps consolidate direction. It cannot tell you where to go but it can help you get there.

**Mindset** – Drives intensity. A mental attitude that determines our behaviour that can influence the style of play and emotional approach to the game.

**Skillset** – Drives accuracy. This is composed of technical habits and physical influencers. A technical habit is a routine of behaviours that is repeated regularly under pressure and tends to occur subconsciously. A physical influencer is an individual trainable athletic aspect that can enhance the playing style or philosophy of the team.

**Structure** – Drives clarity. The team's selection (i.e., who is playing what position) and shape (i.e., attacking and defending organization of players).

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<sup>1</sup> Created by Dr. Ceri Evans, Gazing Performance Systems, 2008



## 4.9 The OSA Game Model

The combination of the Performance Triangle, system of play, style of play and principles of play as they were outlined above creates a unique provincial/national identity. This brand of soccer connects us to those strong soccer playing nations around the world while still honouring the elements that Canadian players do well.





## PART V – COACHING

### 5.1 Coach Expectations

In order to achieve the objective of helping develop professional and international level soccer players, we need to match those players with truly outstanding coaches.

An outstanding coach should be able to:

1. Create a positive relationship and learning environment with a player (or group of players).
2. Implement a suitably challenging training program that meets the needs of the participants.
3. Create and deliver a series of sessions linked to an overall plan that leads to significant and sustainable improvements in participant competence and confidence.
4. Assist and prepare players in moving to the next higher level of play.

There are three points of awareness that the League1 Ontario coach needs to take into account in their planning:

- **Awareness #1** - Concentrate on providing player's with a solid foundation.
- **Awareness #2** - A player's technical ability dictates the quality of that player's performance level from a tactical perspective. Therefore, mastering technique as executable skill actions within the game is a top priority.
- **Awareness #3** - If technique is the raw mechanical action required to perform an activity, then skill is the tactical awareness of when and where to use a particular technique. Coaching activities used to improve technique in training must lead to the transfer and creation of skill that can be used in a game. Tactical game behavior must improve as a result of the coach's selected training methods.

The key coach development principles include:

- **Outcome-Focused**
- **Player-Centered**
- **Inclusive**
- **Applicable/Practical**
- **Integrated**
- **Flexible**
- **Holistic**
- **Take Ownership**
- **Continuous Improvement** – Outstanding, highly skilled coaches must have an inherent thirst for knowledge. Learning never ends.

To meet our collective objectives, our coaches must combine the most effective traditional methods of instruction with the most modern advances in learning.