

Framingham United Soccer Club

Coach's Helper



By Chuck Greenslit (that's me, hogging up the middle)

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1. Preface – The Pep Talk

Congratulations! You have just been elected CEO of your own “company”, a company whose “employees” are the young soccer players that you’ve either been given or have chosen. The direction, success or failure, and enthusiasm of everyone involved with this new company is in large part up to you.

Perhaps you were drafted because no one else felt willing or able to coach the team. The bad side of agreeing to this arrangement is that indeed there will be some work involved, that you’ll be an open target for criticism, and that there will be failures of one sort or another no matter what you say or do. However, there are absolutely some things that can and will happen that will more than make up for the negatives:

1. If you do any kind of reasonable job at coaching the team, your relationship with your child that’s on your team will get a lot stronger. The team will be a common point of interest for both of you, and you will be intimately involved in your child’s life in this one area of importance to him or her. Please make sure that this relationship isn’t just a lecture – your child may have some valuable input for you, too!
2. You will get to know the kids that your child has (or will!) befriend. It will be a source of great pleasure to you to watch the kids that you coached this year become excellent athletes in high school and college. Besides the athletics, you’ll also enjoy the camaraderie as a former player waves hi to you in the grocery store – both of you will remember how much fun it was.
3. You will get to know some very interesting adults, not only parents of your kids, but fellow coaches and adult referees. You’ll find yourself getting invited to parties and other gatherings, all because of your involvement with this soccer team.
4. You’ll get some fresh air and exercise. It is tough to come home from a long day at work and then get out and deal with a bunch of kids afterward. Force yourself to do it enthusiastically; you’ll find your attitude turned around pretty quickly once you get on the field and get practice going.

It’s all up to you. You can sludge through the soccer season doing the absolute minimum, the result of which will be that none of the positives will happen, and all of the negatives will. Or, you can turn this into a challenging and rewarding experience for everyone, especially including yourself. You absolutely **do not** need to know anything about soccer to make this season a success. The only requirement is your enthusiasm for the job, and your willingness to learn.

Good luck, and I’ll see you on the pitch!

Chuck

2. Coaching Philosophies

Here are some overall coaching philosophies that have worked for me. Every coach is different, so perhaps you've developed some additional guidelines that work better for you and your team than these listed below. Fine! But please keep an open mind about the following:

1. Play to improve, not to necessarily win.

Your best player now may not be your best player in two years. Every player that you have should be given the chance to excel in a "pressure" situation.

2. Have a plan for your season.

What skills do you want your kids to acquire? What tactical systems do you want to implement? Whatever you decide, it will take longer to achieve than you initially think! It will take long term planning to get there. Please see #5 for help.

3. Plan what you'll do before every practice.

The coach is a teacher, just like the people that get paid for this in schools. You must have a lesson plan, preferably written down. This lesson plan theme should be extracted from your season plan. Take a look at #6, and also at some of practices on the FUSC and MYSA websites.

4. Keep every child moving for every activity.

Kids should be placed in small groups to practice whatever it is you are practicing that day. Kids in a line aren't learning anything, except perhaps how to scuffle around with others at the end of the line.

5. Provide structure and team-wide discipline.

Don't be afraid to stop your practice and have the whole team run if even just one or two children decide to follow the beat of a different drummer. Peer pressure is a powerful weapon – use it!

3. Organizing Your Team: Getting the parents on your side.

I've been on both sides of the sidelines many times, as a coach and as a parent. In both high school and college, many times the coach of your son or daughter is inaccessible to you as a parent. That's probably appropriate, as your child needs to learn to deal with any problems on their own as part of growing to be an adult. However, parents of FUSC players will most definitely be in touch with you as a coach. This can be confrontational or pleasant, and much of how it goes depends on you and how open you've left the avenues of communications with your team's parents.

I've found that **a preseason meeting** with all parents and players can reap huge dividends in team cooperation when coaching a travel team. I'll usually schedule a picnic around the end of July or in August before play starts in September. For intramural teams, communicating the following information via email after the coaches meeting is sufficient:

- A roster of players along with first names of all guardians
- Information regarding the zero tolerance rule and the reasons why everyone should obey it
- A request that parents come and cheer as loudly as they want for their player **and their team**
- A reminder that only coaches do the coaching (e.g. no parental coaching from the sideline)
- A written confirmation that, as a coach, I am available at any time **except during a game** to discuss anything at all about the team or their child.

Here's a quick list of items that I also include in the preseason write up:

- Names and contact info of your assistant coaches, or if you don't have assistants, a plea for help!
- Practice day(s), time(s) and location(s); first practice day and what to bring.
- "Orange Duty": assigning a family to bring cut up oranges (or some other healthy snack) to each game—this should be done when you email out the game schedule.
- Tournaments you plan to enter.
- Other season events that you plan to hold: fall season ending dinner or get-together, winter soccer plans, end of spring season party ideas, etc.
- Team rules: these might include: have fun, never argue with a ref (zero tolerance), be positive with teammates, play the position you are asked to play, etc.
- Some information about myself and my family.

In addition to having a midseason get-together to discuss how things are going, it is always good at a chance encounter with a parent, to tell them how much you think their child is improving (if it is true!) or how much you've enjoyed coaching him or her. Lastly, if a player is injured at practice or a game, always call the parents that evening to be sure they know and to find out how their child is doing.

I've made some fabulous friendships with parents of some of my players; it is worth the effort!

4. Preseason Checklist

1. Pre-season Meeting: Try to have a pre-season meeting (or general email) with all of your parents and players, at which time you'll discuss team rules and expectations, and parental rules and expectations. You can also solicit a volunteer to be your team manager (collect funds for tournaments, help organize non-soccer team activities, etc), and one or two other parents to help as assistant coaches. One of your team/parent rules you should always talk about is FUSC's Zero Tolerance Policy.

2. Develop a Season Plan. What are the skills and the tactics that you want the players to learn? In general, the younger your team, the more skill oriented your practices should be. Some skills that you might write down for a younger team could be: short passing, short pass receiving, long passing, long pass/high ball receiving, man on defense, dribbling, goaltending, and shooting. For the older crowd, you might additionally include heading, support defense, triangle play, overlapping, takeovers, blind side runs, and the like. Each skill or tactic that you write down can be a practice, and you should always try to reinforce previous skills into subsequent practices. Also, don't be afraid to re-run a practice. I was once told by a former MLS coach that he only had 7 planned practices, total.

3. Preseason Administration: For travel teams, make sure you have submitted a team name and the names of your assistant coaches to the registrar using the forms on the website. In addition, you can submit jersey numbers for your players so that your official BAYS roster. In the spring, make sure that your players are all properly registered. Your age-director will let you know which of your players is not registered. It is your job to chase down the parents to have them complete the registration process. Lastly, if you are an MTOC-eligible team, you will have to submit jersey numbers to play in the spring.

4. Email Distribution List: Put everyone's email address into a distribution list, so you can send correspondence to the group as a whole with one click.

5. Team Schedule: Email out a team schedule to everyone. The schedule should include games, practices, tournaments and orange duties.

5. Develop a Season-long Plan

It is an excellent idea to write down some of the skills and tactics of soccer that you'd like the players on your team to improve on. This doesn't have to take long, but the process will help you in organizing your practices and will keep you focused on where your team is going.

Before I create a single practice, I'll sit down and write out what I'd like my kids to learn for this season of soccer. The list is always somewhat age-dependent, and depends a little on my estimation of the team's skill level, but it always includes the basics. Here's a generic example of what I might jot down as things that I want my team to get better at:

Short passing	Short pass receiving
Long passing	Long ball receiving/high ball traps
Dribbling	Shooting
Finishing	Man-on (primary) defense
Support defense	Shielding
Give and gos	Triangular Offense
Goalkeeping	Heading (U12 and older, only)

In addition to these skills, I always have my players work on footwork/ball skills every practice.

Each one of these areas listed above is a full practice session, and each practice session can be organized in approximately the same manner. The kids are always taught the fundamental skill so that they can practice it without the need for speed or competition. After they have the idea, introduce a drill/game with some speed/no competition, then a third drill/game with some speed/some competition, then finally you can try a game with full defense or offense.

Please notice that I used the word "game". You'll get more out of children if you make each drill a game rather than a rote repetition.

Also, please notice that I didn't write down any formation (X's and O's) work in the list. You can have the most fabulous formation ever in your mind, but it will come to nothing if the kids can't do some of the skills enumerated above. I do some formation work with my teams, of course, but when I do it, I attempt to incorporate the practice theme. For example, after you've taken the kids through a progression of drills regarding short passing, you might put them on the field in the formation that you want with no defense at all, and just pass one or more balls around as you correct positioning. I try never to do any formation work for more than about 10 minutes at a time, as the kids will get bored with it quickly.

6. Developing Weekly Practice Plans

In the Season Long-plan, a list was made of the skills and tactics that you wanted the members of your team to acquire, in order to give them some chance of success when they play a real game of soccer. The first practice session is coming up, so it is time to plan out specifically what you are going to do.

Suppose that you are just starting your season, so that the first skill that you want to work on is short passing. Here's how a short passing practice might be organized for a ~ 90 min practice:

10 min	A simple warm up game (not a heavy scrimmage)
10 min	Stretches
10 min	Conditioning: a run with differing speeds mixed in
15 min	Skill work (juggles, foundations, ball touches, two-touch & 1 touch passes, various traps, heading, volleying, different turns, moves to get by – not all at every practice!)
2 min (max)	Go over the fundamentals of executing a short pass.
10 min	Non-competitive (no direct defensive challenges), no-speed drill, the primary focus of which is short passing.
10 min	Not-so-competitive drill with speed added.
10 min	Competitive drill with speed.
10 min	Scrimmage with two dribbles max allowed – emphasize good short passing.
5 min	Warm down jog and light stretching.
2 – 3 min	Brief talk about the practice and/or the upcoming game.

The drills that you use don't have to be complicated at all, and if you can make a game out of them, you'll get a lot more out of the kids. For example, for your non-competitive, no-speed game, you might have everyone partner up across a large circle, then try to knock down cones in the center (1st partnership to knock down the cones five times wins). The non-competitive game with some speed added might be a large game of monkey-in-the-middle around the same circle, with only two or three defenders in the middle (5 complete passes is a goal; be sure to switch defenders often), or 5-v-2 keep-away (2 touch) within the circle. The competitive speed game might be the same knock down the cones as in your first game, but with full defense; turnovers allowed! In addition, detailed, age-appropriate practice plans can be found on the MYSA website.

Once you've written it up and implemented it, be sure to note what worked and what didn't for your team. And run this same, but corrected practice again if you notice that your team's short passing is getting sloppy in practices or games.

7. Certification: Obtaining coaching licenses

After you've dipped your toes into the soccer coaching waters for a season or so, you may want to consider getting a few tips from the pros. One way to do this is by attending a coaching license course sponsored by the Mass Youth Soccer Association (MYSA).

Soccer coaching licenses start at the letter G and move upward all the way to the letter A. We are lucky to have an A licensed coach that is associated with FUSC, Chris Swain. If you are lucky enough to be able to attend a session run by Chris, you won't regret the time and effort that it takes to be there. In any case, the G, F, E and D licenses are not difficult to obtain; it mostly just requires the effort and time on a weekend to get it done. Some of the advantages of obtaining a few licensing letters next to your name are:

- Official recognition that you have achieved some competency at coaching soccer
- You'll learn some of the basics on how to teach soccer to kids
- You'll have a lot of fun doing it
- You'll meet other coaches from other towns; you may have even coached against a few of them
- You'll undoubtedly get better at soccer yourself
- The head coach's child(ren) play for free with the appropriate license level (see the FUSC website for details).

A link to the MYSA coaching license course calendar can be found on the FUSC website. Alternatively, you can try and find it at www.mayouthsoccer.org. Be sure to keep a receipt for what you paid because FUSC will reimburse all coaches the expense for completing any MYSA or CPR course.

8. Coaching Etiquette

Most soccer coaches are quite passionate about the game. You've worked hard with your team, so when game time comes around, you would really like to come away with a satisfying win; you care more about your soccer team than you do about the Pats. In spite of this, you must try to keep yourself under control. You are the example of how to behave to your players (and your own kids, too!). So, some elementary rules and understandings that most coaches have:

- Try to keep a good rapport with the other team's coach. You might chat with him or her for a few minutes before the game, and it is good sportsmanship to wish the other coach well with a handshake before the game starts.
- Keep to your own sideline area, roughly defined as a few yards shy of midfield, to about 20 yards away from the end line depending on the size of the field you are playing on. The other team will invariably be on the same sideline as your team, but on the opposite side of midfield.
- It will be thoroughly frowned upon if you, your players, or your spectators are seen behind either goalie. This will especially lead to harsh words if it is the other team's goalie!
- Advise your parents (preferably before the season begins) that they should cheer from the opposite sideline from both team's area.
- Continually yelling instructions from the sideline during the game shows that you haven't done your job in practice. Your kids should know where to go and what to do, based on your previous coaching.
- There are many unsure and novice youth referees, and some are certain to make bad calls or non-calls while refing your game. Think about it: would you want some overly-excited adult yelling at your child for any reason whatsoever? Try to accept that bad calls are a part of soccer—more so at the youth level—be an outstanding example, and don't come down on the ref.
- No matter how upset your team is after a game, have them line up and shake hands with the other team after the game. It is also very much appreciated by the ref if you and your team shake their hand too, and at least tell them "thank you".
- After the game, make certain that your team's area is cleaned up. Leftover water bottles and discarded medical stuff won't be appreciated by the next team.
- As unfair as it may seem, you are responsible for your team's parent's behavior. The referee is entirely correct if he or she asks you to speak to one or more spectators cheering for your team in an inappropriate manner. BAYS (the league that Framingham's soccer teams play in) has a no-tolerance rule in which players and parents are not allowed to speak to the referee (there are a few exceptions for players and coaches, but NOT for parents).

9. Coaching a Travel Team

After you've coached a few younger intramural teams, you might consider applying to coach a travel team for Framingham in early spring (April). Travel teams start at U10 and go all the way to U18. At the U14 level (U12 Girls) and older, there are only travel teams. Travel teams play against other town's travel teams in a BAYS (Boston Area Youth Soccer) division, generally made up of six teams. All schedules, standings, and other information can be found at: www.bays.org.

If you are picked to coach a travel team, congratulations! There will be more work involved, but more satisfaction, too. Tryouts for your team will occur during May and June for play beginning the following September. You'll have the kids that the travel committee (which you just joined) has chosen for your team for both the fall and the spring seasons, so you'll have lots of time to mold them into a state championship team! The travel committee is made up of all the coaches for your age and gender group, the FUSC age director, FUSC boys or girls director, and a FUSC board representative.

If you decide to continue coaching an intramural team, you should definitely encourage all of your players to try out for a travel team. There is absolutely nothing wrong with your players continuing to play intramural soccer, but there are benefits to playing travel:

- Your players will be playing on a team of approximately equal skill level as their own, so the frustration feelings are diminished.
- Your players will be playing against teams of approximately equal skill level, so they will definitely be challenged to improve
- Your players will be on a team for a year instead of a season, leading to many fast and enduring friendships

It is true that it is sometimes inconvenient to travel to another town to play. However, most playing fields are within 20-30 minutes of Framingham. If you are interested in coaching a travel team, please speak to me, a FUSC travel coach, or a FUSC board member.

10. Coaching Assistance/Training

Framingham United can help you if you are a new coach, or a coach that knows sports but doesn't know soccer. The club's primary interest is in seeing your team and you improve, while having fun doing so. FUSC has absolutely no desire to interfere in any way with your practices or games, but only desires to help at a level at which you are comfortable. Accordingly, we reimburse all coaches for any completed MYSA or CPR course. Our website www.fusc.org also has quite a bit of material for organizing practices and coaching tips. In addition, we highly recommend that you utilize MYSA's inventory of practice plans for the different age-groups. If these materials are still not sufficient, please contact our Education Director education-director@fusc.org for more guidance.

11. Wrapping It Up

Regardless of how your season went, you should organize some sort of an end-of-season party for your team. For intramural teams (especially at the U6 level), a folding table and cupcakes at the field after the last game is sufficient (remember no alcohol on FUSC fields). Sometimes, a parent with a pool will volunteer to host the party, but that's not necessary for this gathering to be a success. The primary purpose is for you to express your appreciation to the players and parents of your team for the effort that they've put forth throughout the season. I've held some of these breakup parties at Papa Gino's (call them beforehand), and at player's homes; they've all been fun!

After everyone has eaten, it is really appreciated if you talk briefly about each player. Always keep the remarks positive, and a little award of some type will be treasured by the player. For the younger kids, a trophy works well (check the FUSC website for ordering). For the older kids, who already have enough dust collectors, a soccer memento (e.g. ball bag, team photo, water bottle, etc.) is more appreciated. Along with these trinkets of appreciation (which hopefully your team manager took care of, including collecting the money), I always generate Award Certificates to each player:

Joe Jones – tie, most improved player
Tom Smith – best goalkeeper
Jim James – best center midfielder
Steve Stopper – best defender
...and so forth.

You can buy these award papers from a trophy place for \$2 each, or easily print them off of the web somewhere, or make your own FUSC-logo inspired award certificate on fancy paper. Be sure to also acknowledge and honor your assistant coaches and manager.

You may think the certificates are corny, however, I've had the occasion to visit a few of my former players at their houses a few years after a breakup party, and have been amazed to see the award certificates posted prominently in their kitchen or living room. The effort is worth it, especially since you may be coaching these kids next season.