



**Ontario Soccer
Grassroots Standards
(U4-U13)**



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About



In 2005, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Sport Ministers accepted “*Long-Term Athlete Development*” as Canada’s development framework and committed to full provincial and territorial implementation in 2007. Since then, these concepts have been embedded in major national, provincial and territorial agencies for over a decade. As a leading organization, Ontario Soccer is committed remove barriers to participation and performance, and help make our systems more effective for players.

Those players could be recreation or development players as both groups need to establish a solid grounding and developmental base to play and enjoy soccer for life or progress through the talented pathways and beyond. What is critical as parents, coaches, administrators, and match officials is that we understand the philosophical shift of what a quality soccer program is and why it is important in the culture shift necessary to improve the game in Canada.

Additional Information

All of the information contained within this document is not only in alignment with the framework provided by [Canada Soccer’s Grassroots Standards](#) (launched in 2021) but has also been approved by Canada Soccer. Furthermore, the information is also aligned to [Sport for Life’s Long-Term Development](#).

The best practices of both Canada Soccer’s and Sport for Life’s frameworks have been refined to better suit Ontario Soccer environments.



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OBJECTIVES





Objectives by Age Stage



Active Start

- Developing fundamental movement skills through play and general movement
- To help children feel competent & comfortable participating in a variety of fun and challenging activities and games



Fundamentals

- Further developing a wide range of fundamental movement skills in both structured and unstructured play environments
- Provide fun, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate sport and physical activity to enhance confidence and desire to participate.



Learn to Train

- Develop an understanding of basic rules, tactics, and strategy in games and a continued refinement of sport specific skills.
- Competitions should focus on skill development and maximizing the player experience for improved retention whereas training should include games and activities that are inclusive, fun, and skill based



Additional Information

For the respective age stage specific Coach Education, please visit Canada Soccer's website and enroll in the program by [clicking here](#). For further detail on the differences of each age stage or resources on Physical Literacy, please visit Sport for Life's Website: Active Start ([click here](#)), Fundamentals ([click here](#)), Learn to Train ([click here](#)), and Physical Literacy ([click here](#)).



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APPLICATION





Ontario Soccer Grassroots Standards



Match Format

The match format refers to the number of players on each team. This can range from very few players (1v1, 2v2 or 3v3) to the full FIFA regulation game format of 11v11. These have been adjusted for each age & stage of development to improve the experience of players as well as maximize their learning.

Coaching Qualification

All coaches in Ontario are required to complete the training outlined in the Ontario Soccer Grassroots Standards specific to the age group they are registered to coach. Please note the following abbreviations for the required coach certifications: Making Ethical Decisions (MED), Respect in Soccer (RIS), Making Headway (MH), and Emergency Action Plan (EAP). For more information on Coach Education, [click here](#).

Sideline Restarts

One of the greatest challenges that young players face as they are learning to control the ball is keeping the ball in play. When the ball goes out of play along the sidelines, the traditional method of returning the ball into play is via a throw-in. Beyond a throw-in being a challenging skill for young players to learn, permitting a pass-in and dribble-in from the sideline will increase the player's contact time with the ball as well as their recognition of the appropriate moments for each particular skill.

Offsides

Offside is Law 11 of the International Football Association Board (IFAB) Laws of the Game, and is recommended to be implemented for young players at the U12 level. For a deeper understanding of Law 11, please [click here](#).

Retreat Line

The retreat line was first implemented in Ontario grassroots soccer in 2014 to help develop young players' ability to play out from the goalkeeper and to keep possession of the ball as they build an attack. This teaching tool has also been used to help build confidence in players as they retain ball possession. [Click here](#) for more information.

Referee or Game Leader

Game Leaders are used to facilitate matches between young players. The Game Leader will be trained to ensure player safety, enable children to have a fun and rewarding experience while competing in small sided games, and implement simplified rules while keeping the game moving by limiting stoppages and assisting the young players with restarts. The Game Leader can be anyone eligible to participate in the Game Leader Instruction program [found here](#).

Season Length

Development programs for young players are often broken up into seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter) or into multi-week "blocks". There should be time between these seasons or blocks for players to get some rest or to sample other sports. The provided range around minimum and maximum time of the seasons/blocks are meant to ensure that organizations are able to offer appropriate programming to players.

Maximum Match Duration

A match is normally played in two halves of equal duration (i.e. A 30-minute match would be comprised of two, 15-minute halves) however, the match may be divided as required (i.e. Three 10-minute periods).

Playing Time

One of the most challenging tasks for a Grassroots coach is to track & manage playing time. Regardless, it is important that players get equal playing time so that their enjoyment of soccer is maximized. When matches begin to occur at U7, all players must be given "fair" playing time across all positions. This means that coaches will do their best to ensure that all players get to play as much soccer as possible and, over the course of a season, experience all positions & roles on the field.

Field & Goal Size

Ranges for field width and length as well as goal size have been provided at each development stage. Education and communication with municipalities and facility providers is important to ensure alignment with the provided field & goal dimensions from Ontario Soccer's Grassroots Standards.

Substitutions

Substitutions are used to ensure that players have an opportunity to play different positions and to get rest as needed. While ensuring that all players get exactly the same playing time is a challenge, it is important for players to have an opportunity to play as much soccer as possible.

Match Day Format

Ontario Soccer recommends that Grassroots programs for players U7-U12 utilize the Festival Format for match days. Traditional league play format should not be introduced until U13. A Festival Format is a competition that includes multiple matches in a single day, whereas league play includes only a single match per day.



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Team Travel Time

For young players to fall in love with the game of soccer, they should not spend more time in a car traveling to a match, festival or tournament than they would spend on the field playing. Even for Ontario Soccer Districts bordering other provinces or countries, interprovincial and international travel is not recommended for U13 and below and is not permitted if it exceeds the Team Travel Time. Travel is calculated from the District boundary to the match venue. Please note, all travel outside of a district requires District approval.

***Interlocked Recreational programs at U7 could see travel restrictions expanded to "60 minutes each way" with prior District approval.

Match Day Roster

The match day roster is the list of players that a coach has available to play in a given match. It is important for coaches to not exceed the maximums provided whereas too few players increases the risk of fatigue, burnout & injury. Too many players increases the risk of boredom as players will spend too much time on the sidelines and not enough time playing soccer. Organizations are expected to use the Open Roster (or Player Pool) system which differs from the traditional team focus. This allows coaches to better manage for the ups & downs in competition day roster numbers due to unavailability of players as well as focus on developmental priorities week-to-week.

Minimum Rest Between Matches

When playing multiple matches in a given day, player's must not be pushed beyond their physical limits. In order to ensure that our young players are safe, a minimum of the duration of one match must serve as rest before playing another match. Furthermore, in the interest of maximizing enjoyment for the young players, a rest period should not exceed more than 2 total match durations.

Additional Information

For Grassroots Soccer (U13 & below), please note that there are no scores, standings, promotion or relegation. To support the implementation of the Ontario Soccer Grassroots Standards, the following resources can be found on the Ontario Soccer website: General information on Grassroots Soccer ([click here](#)), Sample Session Plans ([click here](#)), & Session Video Examples ([click here](#))

Player-to-Coach Ratio

In order for coaches to enjoy their experience and be able to build meaningful relationships with their players, Ontario Soccer has provided a range of player-to-coach ratios, from "Ideal" to "Maximum". This ensures that all players will have the opportunity to interact with their coach or coaches as much as possible.

Practice-to-Match Ratio

This is the number of practice sessions (practices) that players participate in during a week compared to the number of match days (Festivals, Memorable Events) in that same week. In the younger development stages it is critical that players learn the basic skills to be able to enjoy and progress with soccer. The appropriate practice-to-match ratio helps foster these necessary skills which are practiced and later reinforced in competition.

Structured Practice Duration

It generally begins at the time the coach gathers all of the players for the start of the practice (prior to the warm-up, if required) to the time the coach has a debrief with the players at the end of the practice session. This does not include the coach's set up and take down time before and after the practice session.

Number of Competition Days Per Week

Players spend far more time on the ball in practice learning the skills they need to enjoy soccer than they do in a match. Practice is where players learn the fundamental movement & sport-specific skills to enjoy soccer, and matches are where those skills are applied or tested. The limitations on the number of match days per week are to encourage more meaningful practice sessions and to shift the importance of matches and competition as a tool to assess player's learning.

Maximum Match Time Per Player Per Day

In order to ensure that our young players are safe, we do not want them to be pushed beyond their physical limits. The maximum match time per player is the total amount of match time each player experiences on match day. This is especially important for festivals or other forms of competition where there are multiple games per day. Total playing time of each player should be tracked to stay below the age specific maximums and reduce the risks of burnout or injury.

Memorable Events

Playing in tournaments and special events is an important part of a positive soccer experience for young players. Some of their most memorable experiences will be when they participate in tournaments and festivals. These events are where lifelong friendships are formed, and they are important to a young player's soccer experience. To safeguard the player's best interests, it is best that memorable events are phased-in gradually relative to the player's maturity.

*For Under -8, Under-9, Under 10, and Under-11 players may travel to two (2) venues of their choice providing that the venue is located within the province of Ontario and meets all criteria as set out in the Ontario Soccer Grassroots Standards. The travel requirements for these two (2) events are waived.

**For Under -12 and Under -13 age groups may travel to four venues of their choice. Of the four Memorable Events permitted, two (2) of these events must be located within the province of Ontario and meet all Ontario Soccer Grassroots Standards criteria. The travel requirements for these two (2) events are waived. The other two (2) Memorable Events may be located in Ontario, other parts of Canada or Internationally and do not have to necessarily meet all Ontario Soccer Grassroots Standards criteria.



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SUMMARY





Ontario Soccer Grassroots Standards



Revised: October 4, 2021

	Active Start	Fundamentals		Learn to Train	
Criteria	U5 and U6	U7	U8 and U9	U10 and U11	U12 and U13
Match Format	No Formal Matches	3v3	4v4 (no GK) or 5v5 (with GK)	7v7 (including GK)	U12: 9v9 (including GK) U13: 9v9 or 11v11
Coaching Qualification	Active Start + MED + RiS + MH + EAP	Fundamentals + MED + RiS + MH + EAP	Fundamentals + MED + RiS + MH + EAP	Learn to Train + MED + RiS + MH + EAP	Learn to Train + MED + RiS + MH + EAP
Maximum Match Duration	Informal Play	30 minutes	40 minutes	50 minutes	U12: 70 minutes U13: 80 minutes
Maximum Match Time per Player per Day	N/A	60 minutes	60 minutes	80 minutes	100 minutes
Minimum Rest Time between Matches	N/A	Duration of 1 match	Duration of one match	Duration of one match	Duration of one match
Maximum Goal Size	Pop-Up Goals 0.91m (3ft) x 1.52m (5ft)	Pop-Up Goals 0.91m (3ft) x 1.52m (5ft)	1.52m (5ft) x 2.44m (8ft)	1.83m (6ft) x 4.88m (16ft)	1.83m (6ft) x 5.49m (18ft)
Field Size	N/A	Width: 18-22m Length: 25-30m	Width: 25-30m Length: 30-36m	Width: 30-36m Length: 40-55m	Width: 42-55m Length: 60-75m
Ball Size	3	3	3 (or 4 super light)	4 (or 5 light)	4 (or 5 light)
Memorable Events	N/A	N/A	*Two (2) per Year	*Two (2) per Year	**Four (4) per year
Referee or Game Leader	N/A	Game Leader	Game Leader or Small Sided Referee	Small Sided Referee	Referee
Sideline Restarts	N/A	Pass in and Dribble in	Pass in and Dribble in	Pass in and Dribble in	Throw-in
Offside	N/A	N/A	No	No	Yes





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Criteria	Active Start	Fundamentals		Learn to Train	
	U5 and U6	U7	U8 and U9	U10 and U11	U12 and U13
Retreat Line	N/A	Yes (Halfway Line)	Yes (Halfway Line)	Yes (One Third)	Yes (One Third)
Substitutions	N/A	Unlimited (any stoppage or during play)	Unlimited (any stoppage or during play)	Unlimited (any stoppage)	Unlimited (any stoppage)
Season Length	6-16 weeks	6-16 weeks	6-22 weeks	10-22 weeks	10-22 weeks
Team Travel Time	Within Organization	***Within Organization	Under 60 minutes each way	Under 60 minutes each way	Under 60 minutes each way
Playing Time	Players all play	Fair time in all positions	Fair time in all positions	Fair time in all positions	Fair time in all positions
Player-to-Coach Ratio	Ideal (4:1) Maximum (8:1)	Ideal (6:1) Maximum (8:1)	Ideal (8:1) Maximum (10:1)	Ideal (10:1) Maximum (12:1)	Ideal (12:1) Maximum (16:1)
Practice-to-Match Ratio	N/A	1:1	1:1 or 2:1	2:1 or 3:1	2:1 or 3:1
Structured Practice Duration	30-45 minutes	30-45 minutes	45-60 minutes	60-75 minutes	60-75 minutes
Match Day Roster (Game day only)	N/A	Ideal: 6 Maximum: 8	Ideal: 8 Maximum: 10	Ideal: 10 Maximum: 12	Ideal: 12 Maximum: 16
Match Day Format	N/A	Festival Format	Festival Format	Festival or League Format	Festival or League Format
Number of competition days per week	N/A	One (1)	One (1)	One (1)	One (1)



For questions or more information,
contact Ontario Soccer's Player
Development Team

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