



LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB

PROGRAM MANUAL FOR THE PEE-WEES, ATOMS AND NEUTRONS DIVISIONS

(Our 4 And 5 Year Old Fall Intramural Program Divisions)

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OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMS

The Atoms, Neutrons and Pee-Wees Divisions are designed to give 4 and 5 year old boys and girls their first experiences in the world of soccer. It is VERY important that they have a FUN filled time or they will be turned off to the game forever.

The PRIMARY objective of these programs is to **PROVIDE EACH AND EVERY YOUNGSTER WITH A FUN FILLED EXPERIENCE IN A SOCCER ENVIRONMENT.**

Children at these ages learn mostly through experience. It is the job of the coaches and referees to provide the youngsters with an environment to experience the game in the most enjoyable way possible. Long lectures and demanding practice drills MUST be avoided.

In order to maximize participation, players are placed on small teams of up to 5 players. Games are played with each team having three or four players on the field. These age groups do NOT use a goalie.

Small sided games will maximize player involvement since the players will not have to "share" the ball (the object of their attention) with so many other people. In a full sided 11 versus 11 game, a total of 22 players have to compete for the ball. The smaller the number of players on a team, the more involved each player will be.

Players are NOT put on permanent "set" teams at these ages for two reasons: a) the players at this age don't always show up each weekend, making the scheduling of games impossible and b) the parents (**NOT** the players) develop too competitive an attitude and take the fun out of the game.

With this in mind, we at Lower Merion Soccer Club employ a "**pickup game**" atmosphere where small sided teams are randomly chosen each week. With the small sided games, the players get more involved and have more FUN. With the players not on permanent teams, the parents keep the winning, losing and competitiveness in check and the players have more FUN. With coaches not coaching the same set of players each week, they present a more relaxed atmosphere where they can teach the game without worry of winning . . . allowing the players to have more FUN.

It is important that we realize that these are 4 & 5 year olds. They do **not** care about becoming great soccer players, they do **not** want to be told how to play the game, they do **not** want to know the complex skills and tactics of the game . . . they only want to run around the field, kicking a ball and scoring goals.

We as coaches must keep this in mind. The competitiveness of sports will come for them in later years. For now, **if we get the kids "hooked" on the game through enjoyment, we have done our jobs** and later in life they will WANT to learn to be better players and WANT to learn the skills and tactics.

It is more important for coaches to have a **genuine interest in the kids** and show an abundance of **enthusiasm**. Coaches need to be good listeners, listening to the kids brag about their accomplishments. An upbeat, positive attitude is extremely important when coaching. For coaches at this level, an in depth knowledge of the game is **not** critical.

To sum all this up, in a game several years ago, the kids on both teams asked me what the final score of the game was. I told the players on the red team they won 7 - 4 and then I told the players on the white team they won 5 - 2. All the players went home with smiles on their faces and were very eager to return to the soccer field the following week.

With this philosophy in mind, please continue reading this coaches manual. Thank you very much for volunteering to coach. Hopefully, the coaches will have a lot of FUN in the program as well.

GAME DAY PROCEDURES

FIELD SETUP

The Division Commissioner should arrive 30 minutes early and make sure that the people in charge of field setup have done their job properly. This includes:

- putting up the goals
- lining the fields
- removing trash and dangerous objects (broken glass, pointed sticks, etc.) from the field
- unpacking the soccer balls and white game shirts

STARTING EACH SESSION

As the players start to show up for each session, the coaches and referees are to get the players warming up by passing a ball around in groups of 2 or 3. The size of each group should be kept to a minimum so that each child gets numerous "touches" on the ball. It is important to get the shy kids involved and not standing around. This is a good time to talk to a few players and get to know them.

Once a sufficient number of players have arrived, the Division Commissioner and the coaches should call the players into a group. At that time, the players should BRIEFLY be told what will take place for the day. The players should **NEVER be lectured**, they have way **too short of an attention span**.

SKILLS CLINIC

The Division Commissioner will lead the coaches and referees in conducting a 15 - 20 minute skills clinic at the beginning of each session. Each clinic should emphasize a **single** different skill each time (dribbling, passing and receiving, shooting, etc.). The referees will be expected to ACTIVELY participate in the skills clinic and help coach the players. Each player should have a ball (or share a ball with at most one other player) each session. The Division Commissioner should ensure that there are plenty of soccer balls for the clinics.

Before each session, the Division Commissioner should have a skills clinic planned. The Commissioner should share the plan with the other coaches and the referees. It is important to have as **high a ball per player ratio** as possible. For clinics on dribbling, there should be a **1 to 1 ball per player ratio**. For passing or shooting, there should be a **1 to 2 or 1 to 3 ball per player ratio**, never higher. The idea of a skills clinic is to keep the players involved. **The players should NEVER be standing idle in a long line.**

Players should be divided into **small** groups with each coach and referee assigned to a particular group. Players should be given a BRIEF explanation of the skill and then given ample opportunity to perform the skill. Corrections should only be made after the players have had a chance to try the skill. Players should be strongly encouraged to bring a ball to practice (be sure their name is clearly written on it).

STARTING THE GAMES

- Assign between 6 and 8 players to a field. Each group of players should have at least one coach
- Randomly give half the players a white shirt to put on over their red LMSC shirt
- The coaches should **quickly** walk the players to their half of the field and get them ready to play. There should be 3 or 4 field players per team. All other players start off as substitutes
- These age groups do NOT use goalies
- Know the name of each child on his team for the day. Players should NEVER be called by their jersey number ("Hey Number 17". . .) When organizing the players, the coach should make the players feel that he/she is their friend and get them smiling

WHILE THE GAMES ARE GOING ON

- Get the games **started** as soon as possible.
- Every **five** minutes or so, **substitute** the players not in the game. (Individual substitutions may be made while the game is going on as long as it does not affect the flow of play).
- All players are to play **equal** amounts of time, regardless of ability. If a player looks exhausted, get him or her off the field as soon as possible. If several players look tired, ask the referee to call for a short water break.
- **Do not stress complicated tactics** (positioning, teamwork, etc.). They are too young to comprehend this. Players should NOT be assigned to positions. Instead, all players in the game should be allowed to run around. They are too young to understand positions.
- Take a few minutes to **talk** with each child when he /she is off the field. Conversations do not need to be about soccer. Often times, a child just wants to talk about whatever is on his mind. Let the child dictate the conversation. **A big part of being a coach is acting as a "psychologist."** In these situations, just **listening and acting interested** and approving will do the child a world of good.
- **Look for unhappy children**, find out why they are unhappy and attempt to cheer them up. Again, **listening** to the child is the key to helping the child. When talking to the child, try to refer to them by their name. **Make them feel like they are someone important**, try to raise their self-esteem.
- Anyone who has ever read books on children will be familiar with the term **SELF ESTEEM**. If the child feels good about himself, experiences success and has a good time, then the coach (psychologist) has done his job well.

ENDING THE SESSION

- Have the players **line up** at midfield and **shake hands** with the opposing team. They should say "Good Game" to each opponent as they walk past each other in line
- **Collect the white shirts and soccer balls.** Players who bring their own soccer ball should be sure to have his/her name written clearly in magic marker
- Let the parents know when the next meeting is
- Get ready for the next group right away

AFTER THE LAST GROUP

- On Saturday, after the last group of the day has left, collect the balls and white shirts. Leave the goals up for the Sunday Pee-Wees groups to use. Be sure all other equipment (balls, shirts, etc.) is returned to the storage shed. Do not leave them out for the travel teams or other groups to use. On Sunday, collect all equipment and the goals and return it to the storage shed. The goals should only remain on the field Saturday night.
- **Clean up** any trash left in the playing areas
- **Collect any forgotten clothing** and put it in the storage shed. Hopefully it will be claimed the following week. Be sure the Division Commissioner knows about any valuable lost item in case the club receives a phone call or e-mail about a lost item

THE COACHES' RESPONSIBILITIES

SAFETY OF THE PLAYERS

Coaches are responsible for the safety of the players. If a player is playing out of control or is being a bully, the coach must correct this immediately. Coaches have the right to **remove a player from a game** in order to correct any problem. Players are NOT allowed to return to play until the coach is satisfied that the problem has been resolved.

CARING FOR INJURIES

If a child is injured, the referee should **IMMEDIATELY stop the game**. Coaches should remind the referee of this if the referee fails to stop play. In the event of an injury, coaches should have all other players **sit down** on the field **AWAY** from the injured player. The other players **ARE NOT** to be kicking the ball around since it might accidentally hit the injured player. If desired, the players can be given a water break when a player is injured and is unable to get up off the ground.

When a player is injured, the coach should try to **calm the player down**. Chances are that the player is frightened and unable to catch his breath. Have the player take **slow and deep breaths** to bring his breathing back under control. The coach should comfort the child and try to relieve any fear or anxiety.

An injured child should **NEVER** be helped off the ground until the injury has been diagnosed and the player has regained his composure. The player should **remain on the ground** until the coaches are sure that it is OK for him to get up. If necessary, the player's parents should come onto the field to try to calm the player down.

In the unlikely event that a serious injury has occurred and the player's parents are not nearby, the Division Commissioner should be notified. The Division Commissioner will have a list of the players' phone numbers and can use a cell phone to call the player's house. An attempt should first be made to see if the parent of a friend of the child is present. If the injury is serious, do not move the player off the field just to continue the game. Let the player stay on the field as long as is necessary.

COACHING DURING THE GAME

One of the biggest problems in youth sports is "**over-coaching**" by an over eager parent. This can be described as a coach who is **constantly yelling** out instructions to the players. This is both **annoying and confusing** to the players who probably don't understand what the coach is yelling.

It is very important that coaches **minimize** their coaching. They should limit their comments to the important things and not shout instructions every time a player touches the ball. The majority of comments made by a coach should be limited to "**encouragement**" and "**enthusiasm**." Negative comments should be kept to a minimum.

Instructional comments should only be made **when play is stopped or a player is away from the ball**. These comments should be 1 on 1 to the player and again have a positive upbeat atmosphere so as not to discourage the player. **Do not talk to the player when he / she is in possession of the ball.**

The majority of a child's learning during soccer comes through "experience," not from "listening." Coaches should **NEVER** lecture the players, they have too short an attention span.

Coaches should not stand in the middle of the field. This merely blocks the vision of the players. Coaches may quickly go onto the field when necessary, but in general, they should not stand on the field. It is greatly preferred that the coaches stand behind the sideline on one side of the field.

ABOUT THE REFEREES

It must be reemphasized that the referee's job is to ensure the safety of the children and maximize their enjoyment of the game. Coaches must realize that the referees will also be quite young (11 years old and up).

COACHES AND PARENTS ARE NOT YELL AT THE REFEREES

The referees **ONLY** take orders from the LMSC Officers and the Division Commissioner. Referees should work **WITH** the coaches but are not to take orders from the coaches.

Every effort will be made to provide the necessary amount of referees. In the event that there is a **shortage of referees**, coaches must double as referees. There will most likely be a referee shortage during the fall season on Columbus Day Weekend (early October) since many of our referees are players in the LMSC Travel Team Program who will be involved in a two day tournament that weekend.

UNCOOPERATIVE PARENTS

Coaches and referees should notify the Division Commissioner or LMSC Officers about any parents who are too vocal, interfering with the game or being bothersome to other people. The Division Commissioner or LMSC Officers will talk to the parent if necessary. If the problem with that parent should persist, the LMSC Officers will remove the child of that parent from the program.

SAFETY OF OTHER PEOPLE AT THE FIELD

Occasionally parents will leave the player's brothers or sisters at the field unattended while they dash off to the stores. While coaches are not baby sitters for these other players, they need to keep an eye out for other children who are at the field.

NOBODY should be climbing on the nets of the goals. Tell them to get off the goals **immediately**. Older kids should not be kicking balls around near the players. If one of the younger players gets hit by a ball kicked by an older kid they could get hurt. Be sure that no older kids are presenting a danger to the players. If a stray dog wanders on the field, be sure to keep it away from the players. Many children are afraid of stray dogs, no matter how big or small the dog is.

NEW PLAYERS WISHING TO SIGN UP

LMSC does not close registration for these divisions, although the earlier time slots will close out well before the start of the season. New players wishing to join one of the afternoon divisions may register on site during the middle of the season. (This is not possible in the older divisions since players are put on set teams and roster sizes are limited once the season starts).

The player is to fill out an LMSC Intramural Registration form and give it to the Division Commissioner who will forward it to the LMSC Officers. It is **very important to get the registration form forwarded** so that the player will be covered by our insurance policy and so that we can put the player on the mailing list for all future soccer events.

The Division Commissioner should have a supply of extra red LMSC game jerseys so that players who sign up late will be able to have their own jersey.

HEADING A BALL IS ILLEGAL

The United States Soccer Federation has mandated that players under the age of 10 not be allowed to head a ball in games or in practices. This rule took effect throughout the USA in 2016. Coaches are instructed to **NOT** teach heading to players. Referees have been instructed to treat intentionally heading ball as a foul.

THE DIVISION COMMISSIONER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Each division will have at least one commissioner in charge. The Commissioners will ensure that all of the following responsibilities are delegated and taken care of:

FIELD SETUP

The playing fields must be completely setup BEFORE the players arrive for the first game of the day. This means that goals are setup properly and all trash and obstacles are removed from the playing area.

EQUIPMENT

- **Size 3 balls** (enough for the skills clinic). Players should also be encouraged to bring their own soccer ball each week (with the player's name written in magic marker)
- **Blue pinnies**, a minimum of one for every two players will be needed
- **Red shirts** (for players who sign up late)
- **Whistles** for referees who forget to bring one
- **Pump** for players to use if their ball is not fully inflated

ADMINISTRATION

The Division Commissioner should always bring his **list of players** with phone numbers. This is used at the beginning of the season to give out jerseys and at the end of the season to give out end of season trophies to each player.

During the season, the Commissioner should bring plenty of **registration forms** for any new players who wish to sign up. There are always a couple dozen players who learn about the program after the season has started. Late registration forms should be given to the Division Commissioner. The Commissioner should also have a supply of **extra red LMSC jerseys** to give out to players who sign up after the season.

END OF THE SEASON

At the end of the last meeting of the season, the Division Commissioners are asked to return to LMSC all equipment (goals, balls, white shirts). Each coach will be given a program evaluation form which they may use to critique the program and share their ideas on how to improve the program. The Division Commissioners will be supplied with a set of trophies to be given out to each player as soon as the last games finish.

RAINOUT CANCELLATIONS

In the event that a particular day must be canceled due to rain, the Commissioner should have someone at the field to notify anyone who shows up. LMSC will post a message on the web page (www.lmsc.net) if games are to be canceled.

SUPERVISION OF REFEREES

The Division Commissioners are in charge of the referees. The Division Commissioners will decide which field each referee is assigned to. The Division Commissioners have the authority to have the referees help with skills clinics, issuing uniforms, distributing and collecting the white tee shirts, issuing trophies, setting up goals, returning equipment and goals to the storage shed, etc.

BEYOND THE ATOMS, NEUTRONS AND PEE-WEES DIVISIONS

THE OLDER INTRAMURAL DIVISIONS

Coaches should be aware of how the older divisions are set up. In the older divisions, players are placed on permanent teams for the season. Each team has its own head coach (plus an assistant coach when available). The next age groups beyond the Atoms and Neutrons are as follows:

DIVISION	AGE GROUP	GAME FORMAT
Bantams:	6 year old boys	4 vs. 4 without goalies
Microns:	6 year old girls	4 vs. 4 without goalies
Juniors:	7 year old boys	5 vs. 5 (includes goalies)
Quasars:	7 year old girls	5 vs. 5 (includes goalies)

In these age groups, there are 12 players on a team. Games are played 4 v 4 in the 6 year old divisions. Each team is divided into two smaller groups. Each group of six players will play two simultaneous games against another team, also divided into two smaller groups. Goalies are added in the seven year old divisions.

Teams in these age groups will have a game every weekend and one practice a week (weeknight or Sunday afternoon). Most games will be played on Saturday (between 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM). Teams might have one Sunday afternoon game during the season. Each team will be given their own unique jersey color. While scores are kept for each game, there are no standings and no championships.

The Fall Intramural Program also has older age groups, providing soccer for children up to 13 years in age.

Each year there is a shortage of volunteers willing to be a head coach for a team. **We are always in need of people willing to serve as a head coach.** Please help by volunteering to serve as a head coach in future seasons.

THE TRAVEL TEAM PROGRAM

One of the primary objectives of the younger intramural programs is to develop the more talented and enthusiastic players for the LMSC Travel Team Program. The travel teams compete against teams from other clubs such as Downingtown, West Chester and Nether Providence (Media area).

LMSC fields up to four boys travel teams and up to four girls travel teams in each age group from Under 8 up through Under 15. LMSC will also field older teams U-16 through U-19 that will compete after the high school season has ended. The exact number of teams formed in each age group will be dependent on the number of players trying out and the number of qualified head coaches available in that age group.

The more talented and enthusiastic players in the intramural program are encouraged to tryout for the Travel Team Program when they are old enough. The travel teams generally provide more experienced coaches, better competition and a more extensive soccer experience for both boys and girls.

Lower Merion Soccer Club's Travel Team Program is among the best in the state. LMSC teams have won 70 State Championships since 1989. In 2016, we had three teams crowned state champions: U-11 boys, U-15 boys, U-15 girls. In 2014, our U-9, U-10 and U-16 boys travel teams were all crowned state champions. Our U-13 girls reached the state championship game, but lost in penalty kicks after two overtimes.

Several former LMSC players have progressed to the professional level. Numerous LMSC players have been chosen for the State Select teams. Former LMSC player Jimmy McLaughlin played for the Philadelphia Union for several years. Former LMSC player Ben Olsen played for the USA in the World Cup in 2006 in Germany as well as the Olympics in Sydney, Australia in 2000. Former LMSC player Jon Conway was an All-American selection at Rutgers and now plays for Toronto FC of MLS (Major League soccer). Conway was a member of the USA Under 20 National Team.

Former LMSC player Matthew Real plays for the Philadelphia Union and is on the USA Under 18 National Team. In 1999, former LMSC player Suzie Grech was chosen as the starting goalie for the Spain Under 18 Women's National Team. In 1990, former LMSC player Will Kohler was a member of the United States Under 17 National Team and started in the Under 17 World Cup for the USA. In 2006, former Max Kurtzman was selected for the Under 15 National team.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRAVEL TEAM ACADEMY

Each spring, LMSC holds tryouts for their Developmental Travel Team Academy. This program is for our top 6 and 7 year olds. For the 2018-2019 season, the Developmental Academy will include players born in 2011 and 2012.

The Developmental Academy trains from September through early April under the supervision of our very experienced staff coaches. During the fall, the team will train two times a week and play small sided games once a week. Academy players also compete in two tournaments in early November, playing against other local area clubs. In the winter, each team will play in local indoor soccer leagues at a nearby indoor soccer facility.

The Developmental Travel Team Program will give our more talented players a chance to develop their skills and prepare for the actual Travel Team Program that will start the following fall. LMSC staffs the program with very experienced staff coaches who have been coaching for many years.

COACHING KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION

It is important that coaches in these divisions continue to educate themselves about soccer since they will be more than likely evolve into head coaches in the older intramural age groups. LMSC provides several age appropriate coaching books and coaching manuals for coaches in the various levels of our program.

In addition, the United States Soccer Federation sponsors coaching licensing programs at six different levels for coaches to learn more about both soccer and coaching. Courses start with the basic 'E' level course (18 hours) and progress up through the 'A' level course geared for college and professional coaches.

LMSC FULLY reimburses the registration cost of any USSF coaching which an LMSC coach successfully completes. The LMSC guideline for what level license a coach should be at is as follows:

- 'E' level: Head coaches in the intramural program, as well as assistant travel team coaches
- 'D' level: Head coaches for all travel teams

LMSC will mail out information about these courses to all travel team and intramural coaches. Courses are generally held during the winter months, after the fall season has finished and before the spring season has started. Those adults who are not signed up as a coach but who would like to register for a coaching course should contact LMSC.