

Parent Handbook



Richmond Strikers Soccer Club

2008-2009

www.richmondstrikers.com

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Dear Striker Family,

Welcome to Richmond Strikers Soccer Club (RSK). We are excited that you've chosen to have your daughter or son participate in what we hope will be an exciting, enriching and memorable experience. We know this involves a large commitment of time, money and energy from you. We believe, as you do, that the rewards our kids gain from this experience will reach far beyond the short time we have them in our care. This handbook is to assist parents and players in understanding the player development philosophy that drives the goals, expectations, policies and procedures of The Richmond Strikers Soccer Club.

Richmond Strikers Soccer Club is a non-profit organization, dedicated to providing a comprehensive soccer program for the youth of the Greater Richmond area. The Richmond Strikers have evolved into a quality soccer club not only for thousands of recreational players, but also for the more focused soccer players in the area. The club's philosophy is to provide a soccer program for all levels of play, from our grass roots programs through our top level USSOCER Academy teams. Through participation in the Richmond Strikers programs, players will be encouraged to build soccer skills, life skills, confidence and character.

Youth sports at their best involve a collaboration between players, parents and the club. Rest assured we continually evaluate our clubs' priorities to ensure that the values, focus and direction benefit the players and their families. As Richmond Strikers parents you also play a critical role in your child's soccer experience and development. You bring your child to practices and games and you see to it that they are prepared. You celebrate their successes and support them in their disappointments. In this regard, the Parent and Coach Handbook is designed to give you a clear understanding of how our player development philosophy and approach to training and matches has a direct and beneficial impact on your child's enjoyment and growth.

Sincerely,

Bob Jenkins
Director of Coach and Player Development
Richmond Strikers Soccer Club

Who are the Richmond Strikers?

The Richmond Strikers is a non-profit organization committed to providing the Greater Richmond area with an effective and dynamic soccer club. At RSK we are devoted to providing a developmentally appropriate structure for thousands of children ages 4—18 to experience the game of soccer at every level. We are committed to providing quality instruction and programming as well as top quality facilities. We are an organization dedicated to high standards in character, instruction and player development. The Richmond Strikers are dedicated to and understand that the true value of long-term success comes through the development of both technical skills and team play over any individual game result. We are proud to be recognized as one of fifty Nike Premier clubs in the country and one of US-SOCCER's Developmental Academy Programs.

Mission Statement

The Richmond Strikers Soccer Club is committed to developing excellence in individual and team performance through a consistent and comprehensive approach to player and team development. Our club seeks to offer a challenging, competitive, and educational program that emphasizes the importance of community, honesty, and integrity through sport.

Richmond Strikers Player Development Philosophy

Our approach to developing players begins at the grass roots level and continues through the highest levels of play at our club. The player development philosophy of the Richmond Strikers has three primary goals: 1) to create a soccer environment that is both age and ability appropriate for each of our players, and 2) to develop technically competent soccer players who are able to accurately collect and pass the ball, be effective attackers and defenders in 1 v 1 situations, and to be critical, independent thinkers on the field. 3) We believe that every player is capable of improving his or her overall soccer performance. We are committed to providing the instruction and support to give our players the best opportunity to reach their potential, regardless of age or level.

Teaching to all levels within our club

Within our organization, there are core values and objectives that our coaches will hold to at all ages and ability levels. Our challenge is to apply these core values and objectives in a meaningful and relevant manner with respect to the needs of each particular team and player.

Our goal is to provide an environment where learning is fun, and where learning is expected of everyone. Indeed, more learning creates more fun! All of our players are capable of growing as soccer players. We are committed to providing the instruction and support to give our players the best opportunity to reach their potential, regardless of age or level.

All of our players deserve the opportunity to improve their overall soccer performance, in a manner that is relevant to their potential. This includes increasing their technical skill sets and their understanding of basic tactical relationships, (1v1 to 3v3), and improving their fitness level and their willingness to compete. By doing so, we accomplish several goals: 1. We help them gain tools that they can use to further unlock the game. 2. The more tools and the more of the game they can unlock, the more enjoyable the game becomes. 3. The more enjoyable the game becomes, the more they engage in the learning process and the more competent they become, and so on.

As a club, we will always look to teach to our players' potential and to teach in a manner that exposes them to the fundamental skill sets needed to enjoy soccer. Our challenge and responsibility as a club is to find the proper level of expectations for our players, (from United to Elite levels and from ADP to our USDA teams), and then to provide an environment that is both fun and challenging at the same time.

Phases of Soccer Development*

A players' experience can be organized into three general phases: Youth (up to 12 years old), Junior (up to 18 years old) and Senior (18 years and older). The focus of the Richmond Strikers is developing players through the Youth and Junior stages, with the goal of preparing those who choose to, the skills they will need to participate at the Senior level. A player's chances of success at the Senior level are greatly enhanced by mastering the building blocks of soccer that are best addressed at the Youth and Junior levels. It is our belief that if a player skips a step at the Youth or Junior levels, he will find success and enjoyment more difficult as he moves toward the senior level.

Youth

In the Youth phase, ball skills, enjoyment of and experimentation within the game are key for a player's development. In the earlier stages of the Youth phase (up to 7 or 8 years old, our focus will be all about fun and getting comfortable moving with the ball. Everyone will have a ball for most of each practice. We will not focus on positions during this phase. At the later stages of the Youth level (ages 8 to 12) our goal is to provide training and game environments that promote the continued growth of ball skill, an increasing game awareness and an appreciation for taking calculated risks in the attack through the 3 v 3 to 8 v 8 game model. There will be more discussions about positioning than positions.

Junior

Development for players in the Junior phase include an emphasis on ball skills, enjoyment and insight into the game (tactics), with a gradual introduction to fitness, mental toughness, game management and learning to win. At this point, success winning matches should begin to be the product of a consistent and systematic approach to the game that focuses more on player development than on team-building. (The theory being that individually competent soccer players that are placed together on a team are more prepared to win than well-organized players who are unable to stand alone on their soccer abilities). By the middle of the Junior level phase of player development, players need to use all these qualities together, along with a commitment to excellence, in order to figure out *how* to win. In addition, players at these ages need to become familiar with positional roles.

Player Development Principles

At both the Youth and Junior levels, there are several consistent principles that guide our coaching decisions:

- (1) The game is the best teacher - we will let the kids learn from the game by setting up lots of opportunities for them to play.
- (2) Kids learn best in environments that are sensitive to age and ability (cognitive, emotional and athletic) and that offer a variety of experiences.
- (3) Age and ability competition is a central element in a player's development. At the youth level, a competitive environment is not a result-oriented environment. A competitive environment at the youth level encourages decisions from player and coach alike that focus on performance rather than results. We favor ball skill and inventiveness as the means to find success within the rules and spirit of the game.
- (4) At the junior level, technical skills and attacking soccer continue to be important themes, but now there is a greater focus on developing players' insight into the game by emphasizing the role of the game itself as a forum for learning. (Still focusing on the performance, rather than the result)

*USSOCCER Best Practices for Player Development in the United States

Club Policies

The following policies are grounded in the commitment to find the environment that is best for each of our players, within the parameters that exist in club soccer.

Tryouts

In the age groups below U-12, players are evaluated and organized into pools or groups of players that are typically evenly divided by ability. This ensures a competitive parity among the groups.

Beginning with the U-12 age group, players are organized into United, Premier and Elite level teams.

Unless a player is specifically notified by the club Director of coaching, all Striker players must tryout within their own age group so that they can be properly evaluated according to the standards set by their age group peers.

Decisions regarding player placements are based upon all the available information for each player. This includes the tryout period as well as recent player performance.

Pools of players instead of team focus at the younger ages

At the Richmond Strikers, our aim is to prepare today for tomorrow. We believe that the collective strength of any team or club is only as good as the individual competency of its players.

Our focus therefore, is to create environments that allow for the greatest number of players the opportunity to develop to the best of their abilities.

At the younger ages (5-11 years) we strive to equip our young players with the fundamental skills that they will need to carry with them as they continue to develop. For this reason, our focus at these ages is to develop the individual and small group skills of our players. For purposes of organizing our players for competition they will be divided into “teams”. However, the players will be considered part of a larger “pool” of players for training that includes all the players within their age group.

As our focus begins to include team tactics and game management (U12 and above) teams are formed and are divided into Elite, Premier and United based on a player’s ability.

Roster Sizes

Whenever possible, coaches are encouraged to form rosters that will allow all players significant playing time over the course of a season.

Coaches are encouraged to build rosters that allow players the opportunity to experience meaningful competition during each match.

Coaches are encouraged to roster only those players who can maintain the competitive level of their particular team. (for the competitive travel programs only)

Playing up in on older age group?

The player development philosophy of the Strikers is to create a soccer environment that is age and ability appropriate for each of our players. We believe that the best environment for youth players allows for a variety of challenges and experiences. Under some circumstances, a player can benefit from competing in an older age group.

Under what circumstances will a player play up?

- It is in the interest of the player, team and club.
- Ability level—player is capable of competing well in the older age group
- Player will receive significant playing time in the older age group
- Player will benefit from playing in the older age group
- The player wants to move

The decision to have a player compete in an older age group will be made with input from parents, player, age group coaches and the full time technical staff.. The ultimate decision will be made by the club's Director of Coaching.

Under no circumstance should coaches exploit the situation by holding players back in their quest for winning team championships, nor should parents push their child in an attempt to accelerate their ascension to the top of the soccer pyramid. In addition, playing up under the appropriate circumstances should not preclude a player from playing in his or her own age group when it is evaluated to be in the best interest of the player's development.

Player movement between teams during the season

The Richmond Strikers believe that—under the proper conditions—players can benefit by practicing and competing with players who are outside their own team, who are of different ages, and possess different playing abilities . We support this idea for the following reasons: 1. It is beneficial for players to have experiences playing with better and older players, and with players outside of their immediate social circle. 2. It can provide additional incentive for players to perform well with their own team. 3. It reinforces a sense of club identity. 4. We also acknowledge that players' rate of development (emotional, physical, cognitive, etc)

basis and try to find experiences within the club that best reflect this growth. These situations present players with different sets of challenges that provide important lessons—how to play a supporting role, how to play with and learn from more experienced players, how to play at a faster pace, etc

In situations where our coaching staff believes that it is in a player's best interest, we will give him/her the opportunity to practice on occasion with another team within the club. All decisions concerning player movement, for both practice and matches, will be made by the technical staff.

The benefit of unstructured “Free Play” opportunities

Children need to have the opportunity to experience both structured and unstructured soccer environments. Participation in team sports can help children develop many skills that they will use throughout their lives. In the proper environment, children learn valuable lessons in such areas as skill development, leadership, independence, competition and social skills. However, the current landscape of youth sports, with its focus on parent supervised and ultra-structured learning, often inhibits much of the learning development that is essential to a young child's growth. We believe that it is important to understand that our young soccer players can also benefit from the learning and growth that occurs in situations where the children are playing on their own terms, without adult direction. These are opportunities for children to interact on their own terms with their peers, learn how to resolve conflicts and to organize activities. At the same time, it is an opportunity for children to develop their soccer personalities through the development of their ball skills in a “fear-free” environment. Our goal is to provide opportunities for our children to play in unstructured environments throughout the season. We ask you as parents to encourage your children to participate in as many free-play opportunities as possible and that you support these opportunities for exploring their independence.

Playing time guidelines

All players benefit from having more opportunities to play and experience soccer first-hand. The younger the player, the more developmentally critical it is that they be on the field experiencing the game, both in terms of the total minutes played and in the length of uninterrupted playing time on the field. This will give him/her a better feel for the flow and rhythm of the game, and more opportunities for repetition (both technical, cognitive and situational) that is so critical to devel-

opment. At the older ages (U-14 and older), playing time will be based on a variety of factors, including fitness, attitude and performance.

Substitution

Substitution should be used to address issues such as injury, fatigue, lack of effort. At the older ages, it can also be used for tactical reasons. It should not be used to punish a player for a soccer-related decision.

The Richmond Strikers player development philosophy favors allowing players to play for longer periods of time. For example, it is more beneficial for a player to play for 12 straight minutes, than for him or her to play in two 6 minute periods.

The Role of A Starter and the Role of a Reserve

We believe that it is important for a player's development that they have the opportunity during a season to be a starter, and to be a reserve who comes off the bench.

Oftentimes in youth soccer, players often minimize the role of the reserve player. However, games are often won or lost by the actions of the players who enter the game from the bench. Their preparation is different from a player who starts the game. They need to be focused on the game while they are on the bench. They need to bring energy and an understanding of their role for that particular game (are they winning or losing—do they need to help defend or should they push forward to help get a goal?)

As our players continue to develop and evolve as players, their role on a particular team may change. It is important that our players embrace their role on the team and look at every opportunity to play as a chance to grow.

Practices, Matches and Time -Off

We believe that player development is a process that involves lessons learned from practices AND from matches. In order for players to improve, they need to have the opportunity to practice the lessons that are learned from the match. This requires a ratio of 1:1 (practice:match) at the youngest ages and expanding to at least 3:1 at the oldest ages.

The Richmond Strikers believe in the following principles with respect to organized, structured programming within the club:

1. Players benefit from quality, competitive programming.
2. Players benefit from having mandatory breaks from organized practices or matches.
3. All players will benefit from a healthy balance between competition and breaks.
4. The younger the player, the less matches, less practice, less travel.

Coaches—moving with a team or staying with an age group

At the Richmond Strikers, our staffing goal is to place the coaches in the age groups and ability levels where these coaches are most qualified and effective at teaching the age appropriate approach and information.

It is beneficial for players to be exposed to different coaches. It is also beneficial for players to be coached by coaches who are familiar with the on and off field considerations of that specific age.

Under most circumstances, Richmond Strikers coaches will remain within an age group, (ADP and U-9 to U-11, U-12 to U-14, U-15 to U-18, for example) rather than move with a specific team.

Matches

At the youth and junior levels, matches are important as a means to player development (enjoyment, ball skill, insight, fitness), not as the aim. Matches are a forum for players to test their ball skills and game awareness, and should be considered an additional means of development, rather than the objective. Results become important as they give the players a competitive focus in the match. At the Junior level, matches will be used as a forum for learning how to win through team tactics and game management.

At all ages in the Richmond Strikers Soccer Club, coaches are encouraged to promote soccer that:

is continual; therefore the technical staff will evaluate players on a continual

- Is free flowing,
- Is coach-guided, not coach-directed,
- Demands that all players on the field – regardless of their specified position – participate in defending and attacking.

Tournaments

If approached with the proper mindset, any cup competition can provide for a rich learning experience for players. At the youth level, tournament competitions should be approached as competition in the name of development. The choice and decision to participate in tournaments will be made jointly with the team coach, the program director and the club director.

The RSK determines tournament participation based on the following principles:

- The game-practice-game cycle is a learning process that should allow enough time for players and coaches to experience the game, reflect on the game, discuss the game, apply the lessons to practice to prepare for the next game, play the next game and begin the process again.
- Participation in tournaments should fit into the rhythm of the season.
- Choice of event should present team with a developmental opportunity.

It is the Richmond Strikers long-term goal to be in compliance with the recommendations of the National Governing Organization for soccer in the United States, (USSOCCER) with respect to technical guidelines for multi-day events. The two fundamental aspects of these guidelines are as follows:

1. One game per day
2. A day off after two consecutive game days.

For a more detailed discussion of proper player development practices, please refer to USSOCCER's "Best Practices For Coaching Soccer in the United States" available at www.ussoccer.com.

Role of Parents

Parents play a critical role in all facets of their child's development. At the Richmond Strikers, we encourage you to support your child's interest in the game in a

manner that supports the spirit of sport and fair play. For the purposes of this club and the positive impact you can have on your child's experience, we encourage you to consider the following recommendations.

Communicate responsibly and in the spirit of the game

- Be your child's best fan and support him/her unconditionally. Don't withdraw your love when he/she performs below their standard.
- On transporting your child home, please be supportive and always place primary focus on the positive aspects of their game.
- Parents must not coach from the side line during matches and training.
- Refrain from criticizing your child's performance; when appropriate, the coach will offer constructive criticism in support of your child's development.
- Do not criticize your child's coach to your child or other parents. If you are not happy with the coach you should raise the issue with the coach.
- Support all the players in your child's squad. Do not criticize any player.
- Do not criticize the opponents, their parents, coaches or the referee.

Nurture Independence and Responsibility

- Develop a responsibility in your player to pack their own uniform, to clean their soccer shoes and to bring along a water bottle.
- As it is appropriate for the age of your child, encourage him or her to communicate any issues, concerns or conflicts with the coach. If your child is having difficulties in training or games, or can't attend training etc. encourage him to speak directly to the coaches.
- Encourage your child to take responsibility for his own performance and to not place blame on others.
- Allow your child the freedom to practice with his or her team without your active presence and evaluation. If you must stay at the field, please find something else to do. You will provide your child with another opportunity to behave independent of your scrutiny.

This "responsibility taking" is a significant part of maturing. By handling these and off the field tasks, your child is claiming ownership of all aspects of the game.

Teach Proper Off-Field Habits

- Monitor your child's stress level at home. Keep an eye on the player to make sure that they are handling stress effectively from the various activities of life.
- Monitor eating and sleeping habits. Be sure that your child is eating the correct foods. Players should be in bed at a reasonable hour on the night before a game and early enough on other nights to ensure adequate rest.
- Help your child maintain healthy priorities. He/she needs to maintain a focus on schoolwork, relationships, and other interests in addition to soccer.

Help your player to focus on the performance and not the result.

- Ask your child to focus on the execution of skills and themes addressed at practice (for example, collecting and passing balls, combination play, shots on goal, successful tackles).

This document can also be found on our website at www.richmondstrikers.com

For additional reading on the topic of player development, please refer to “Best Practices For Developing Soccer Players in the United States at www.ussoccer.com