



Ascot United Football Club

A Charter Standard Community Club



Football development through the Age Groups

This article was written by members of the club's Football Development Group to provide managers, coaches and parents with guidance about how we develop children's footballing abilities through the age groups.

We are here to develop children's footballing ability and have fun!

In order to achieve these aims we need to have some guidelines for managers coaches and parents which explain how children progress through the age groups at the club. An important part of development is streaming and this can be a contentious issue in any form of education or sport/leisure activity. However it is necessary because it is important that children can develop at a pace commensurate with their own ability and those they play with and against. One of the consequences of this is that it will only be in exceptional circumstances that a boy will play in a team in an older age group (There will be more flexibility in this regard for girls football until it becomes fully established)

It is the Age Group Co-ordinator's role to ensure that the manager's carry out this policy fairly and openly. His or her role is critical in the early years at the club as individual managers and even parents may have other priorities. The interests of the child's footballing development are paramount and should be the basis of all our decisions.

Under 6

This age group will train together on the Astroturf at Charters. We aim to allocate one qualified coach to every 10 children but we cannot guarantee to achieve this target. They will work together and in small groups to acquire some of the basic skills and disciplines of the game. They will also play 4v4 and 5v5 games to develop playing in game situations. The aim is to ensure the children enjoy their first experience of football. No matches will be played against other clubs. Players are not registered to any league or competition.

Under 7

This age group will have a large intake from the start of the season to add to the returning Under 6s. The Under 6 squads may form the basis of the streaming at Under 7 but in essence streaming has to start again. Again there will be no games against other clubs until after Christmas, when they will play 7-a-side in the East Berks friendly league. Managers, coaches should stream the children into squads from around beginning of November. Children should be moved between teams every 6 weeks based on progress, ability and potential. Players are registered to the East Berks

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league within an age group thereby allowing movement between teams of the same club. Results of games at this level are irrelevant – it is the children’s development that is the sole consideration. **(Coaches must constantly remind themselves and the parents of this)**

Under 8

With two seasons completed there will be fewer new children joining each year from now on. Depending on the numbers of new joiners it may be necessary to hold pre-season trials. They will be playing friendly matches within the East Berks league from the start of the season. Again it must be stressed that the children will develop at different rates. Managers & coaches need to review the teams every 6/8 weeks although there unlikely to be wholesale changes at this stage. Players are registered to the East Berks league within an age group facilitating movement between teams of the same club. While results are still unimportant at this level by now the children understand the difference between winning and losing and why it has happened.

Under 9

From 2004-2005 this age group will play in ‘Development Sections’. There will no prizes for winning a section and there will be automatic promotion and relegation at Christmas in effect creating two ‘mini’ seasons. This mid season change is a good time to review streaming and check that boys are in the teams appropriate to their level of ability. There will also be a knock out cup and players will be cup tied to one team for that competition. For the first time there are consequences for winning or losing matches.

The ability to move players between teams is more restrictive with formal transfers required before players can change teams. This is an important age group as the following season the boys will be playing competitive league football. Also this is an age where growing pains can affect boys seemingly more than in other age groups. (Coaches need to be aware of this)

This is the youngest age group from which players can be invited to join under contract Academies run by professional clubs. (In previous seasons boys have left Ascot to go to Reading, QPR, Wimbledon and others.) If parents do elect to sign for an Academy then the boy is not permitted by the Academy to also play for Ascot United. To learn more about Academies Click on “Club Info”, then “Academies”

Under 10

Players will be by now in the team appropriate to their level of ability. Similarly the teams are streamed by East Berks into their appropriate division. All matches in cup and league are now competitive. **(This age group is one of the most vulnerable to injury as the boy’s muscles & bones are growing.)** As with the Under 9s movement between teams is restricted by the league’s transfer policy.

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Under 11

This is the last season of small sided games & children are also in their final year of primary school. There will be little movement of players between the teams now but preparations must start for the challenge of 11 a side football in the Under 12 age group. There need for coaching sessions specifically aimed at introducing the 11 a side game.

Under 12

A challenging age group. The first season of 11-a-side football and it is steep learning curve for all involved. Teaching children of this age about the offside law is an experience in itself! The 11-a-side game is totally different to small-sided games. All of the games rules now come into play and boys' attitudes also change as they start secondary school. There is a real need for pre-season training and for managers to know at an early stage which boys will be returning to the club.

The process starts all over again for streaming, as teams and squads will need to be combined with new boys coming in. Hopefully with streaming from an early age group most boys will know each other and the transition to larger squads of 15 or more should be reasonably straightforward. However some boys may well feel they have been "demoted" and there are real sensitivities involved with some 7 a side teams having broken up entirely. Streaming should now have played a vital part and things do not change much from this age group forward.

Under 13 Onwards

The teams now tend to be independent of each other and the concept of an age group which is so important in the early years at the club has less significance from now on.

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