

LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB

SPRING INTRAMURAL PROGRAM



PROGRAM MANUAL FOR THE 5 AND 6 YEAR OLD DIVISIONS

ATOMS DIVISION	-- 5 year old boys
BANTAMS DIVISION	-- 6 year old boys
NEUTRONS DIVISION	-- 5 year old girls
MICRONS DIVISION	-- 6 year old girls

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OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

The Spring Intramural Program's Youngest Divisions are designed for 5 and-6 year old players. The program is run in a way to allow the players to enjoy the game of soccer without the pressure of winning and losing. Each of our four Youngest Divisions (Atoms, Bantams, Neutrons and Microns), will have a Beginners Group and an Advanced Group.

The PRIMARY objective of the Spring Intramural Program (as well as all of our programs) is to: **PROVIDE EACH AND EVERY YOUNGSTER WITH A FUN FILLED EXPERIENCE IN A SOCCER ENVIRONMENT.** It is VERY important that they have a fun filled time or they will be turned off to the game forever.

Children at these ages learn mostly through experience. It is the job of the Program Directors, coaches and referees to create an environment for the players to experience the game in the most enjoyable way possible. Long lectures and demanding, boring practice drills MUST be avoided.

During games, in order to maximize participation, players are placed on small teams of four players. Games are played with each team playing with **four field players and no goalie** on the field. The exact number of players could vary, depending on how many players show up at a particular time period. Games could be played 3 vs. 3 or 5 vs. 5 if necessary. Small sided games maximize player involvement since the players won't have to "share" the ball (the object of their attention) with so many other people. In a full sided 11 vs. 11 game, a total of 22 players have to compete for the ball. By playing games 4 vs. 4, only 8 players compete for the ball. **The lower the number of players in a game, the more involved each player will be.**

Players are NOT placed on permanent "set" teams at these young age groups for two reasons: a) the players at this age do not always show up each week, 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 use a "**pickup game**" atmosphere where teams are randomly chosen each week. With the small sided games, the players are more involved in the action and have a lot more FUN. With the players not on permanent teams, the parents keep the winning, losing and competitiveness in perspective and the players have more FUN. With coaches not coaching the same set of players each week, there is a more relaxed atmosphere where they can teach the game without the worry of winning or losing. Again, all of this allows the players to have more FUN.

It is important that we realize these are 5 and 6 year olds. They do **not** care about being great soccer players, they do **not** care to be told how to play the game, they do **not** care 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 most important for coaches to have a **genuine interest in the kids** and show an abundance of **enthusiasm**. It is important that coaches learn to be good listeners since kids love to brag about their accomplishments. By listening to them and showing approval, we raise their self esteem. For coaches at this level, an in depth knowledge of the game is **not** critical.

To sum all this up, in a game played several years ago, kids on both teams asked me what the final score of the game was. I told the players on the blue team they won 7-4 and then I told the players on the red team they won 8-6. 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 also have a lot of fun in our program.

THE ROLE OF THE PARENT / COACH

At the start of each session, the Program Directors will call the players, coaches and referees together. Coaches should be sure to come up at that time and stand to the side of the Program Directors so that the coaches can easily hear what the players will be doing. The Program Directors will BRIEFLY discuss what skill the players will be focusing on and what activities the players will be doing.

Some players will arrive several minutes early. The coaches and referees should place the early arrivals into pairs, kicking a ball back and forth. Alternatively, a player could kick a ball around with one of the coaches or referees. Be sure to encourage players to pass the ball and receive the ball with both their **right foot and their left foot**. Help players become two footed players at the earliest age possible.

After the Program Directors have discussed the first activity that will be done, the coaches and referees should help get the players organized as quickly as possible. For the most part, the sessions will follow those described in the document labeled "*LMSC Intramural Clinics*." Coaches are asked to read this document before the start of the season and then review the appropriate practice session before each weekend. The sessions are labeled "Session 1," "Session 2," etc. The Program Directors will attempt to follow the sessions in the document as much as possible throughout the season.

SKILLS CLINIC SESSIONS

The first 25 - 30 minutes of each session will be devoted to teaching players a particular skill. During this time, the coaches and referees will help teach the players the basic skills of the game. Each coach and referee should work with about three to five players during the skills session. Each player should work with his or her own size 3 soccer ball. While we encourage players to bring their own ball, LMSC will have a large supply of extra soccer balls at the field each week so that players who did not bring a ball will have a ball to use during the skills clinic sessions.

Coaches and referees are to help the players understand how to properly perform the skill being worked on. Coaches and referees need to remember that the best way for players to develop soccer skills is for them to **do the skill over and over, using proper form**. The more touches they make on the ball (with proper technique), the quicker they will learn to properly perform the skill. One important consideration for the coaches and referees is that players should learn to perform all skills both **left footed and right footed**. Players need to learn to be "two footed players" at the youngest age possible.

During the first few weeks of the season, all of the players will work together in one big group, under the direction of the Program Directors. The skills clinics will run for 25-30 minutes. Later in the season, the Program Directors will quickly divide the players into groups of 8 and put each group on their own field. The coaches and referees will then be in charge of working with their group of players, still working on the specific skill that the Program Directors discussed earlier. One reason for quickly separating players onto separate fields is so that coaches can learn to work with a small group of players and coach a particular skill. Coaches need to remember that in the older divisions in LMSC, players are divided into teams of 12 or 14 players for the season with each team headed up by one or more coaches. The coaches will be responsible for running their own practices once a week during the season. By dividing players into groups of 8 at the start of a session, the coaches will have a chance to get used to working with a small group of young players.

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 clinics on passing, there should be a **1 to 2 ball per player ratio**. The objective of the skills clinic is to keep the players involved at all times. They should make as many touches on the ball as possible. **Players should NEVER be standing idle in a long line.**

COACHING IN THE 4 VS. 4 GAMES

After 25 - 30 minutes of skills work, the Program Directors will organize the players into groups of eight players to play small sided games. Each group of eight players will be assigned to a different field. The games will be played 4 vs. 4. The referees will get four blue pinnies and give four of the players a blue pinnie to wear for the game so that there will be four red players playing against four blue players.

We do NOT use goalies in these age groups. The concept of goalies will be introduced in our seven year old divisions.

During the games, the coaches should focus on several items. The most important item is the **SAFETY** of the players. It is important to make sure that the players are playing in a safe manner, not trying to hurt any of the other players and not putting themselves in danger. When needed, the coaches and referees should stop the game and briefly discuss any safety issues with ALL of the players.

Another important coaching item is to make sure that the players are having **FUN**. This is the main reason that they come to the fields each week. Be sure the players are having a fun time and please be sure to never underestimate the importance of this.

A third important objective of the 4 vs. 4 games is to help the players learn the basic rules of the game. The coaches and players should only focus on the main rules of the game. At these ages, many of them will not even understand why there are sidelines and endlines. In fact, beginner players will not even know why there are goals on the field. Be sure to briefly explain that the objective of the game is to kick the ball into the opponent's goal and keep the ball out of your own goal. Believe it or not, some players will not even know that at the beginning of the season.

One aspect of soccer that does NOT need to be dealt with much at these young ages is teamwork. At these ages, players will not consider passing the ball. In fact, they will even sometimes take the ball away from a teammate if the teammate is dribbling the ball too slow. This is not a problem, players will learn to start understanding the concepts of teammates and teamwork when they reach 7 or 8 years of age.

During games, coaches should encourage players to attempt the skills they worked on during the skills clinics. Players should always be encouraged to dribble the ball and try to beat opponents on the dribble. While they will often fail at this, coaches and parents need to remember that players will only learn to succeed at this if they are allowed (encouraged) to try and beat opponents on the dribble. Do not worry if players lose the ball and the other team scores as a result. The score is not important. What is important is that players be allowed to work on their skills, try things with the ball and not be afraid to make mistakes. Remember that players will have the most fun if they are encouraged to possess the ball.

One big mistake made by novice coaches is to yell things like "kick it down field" or "boot it away." This does not develop skills. Soccer is a lot like basketball. Players should be encouraged to dribble the ball, pass the ball or shoot the ball. They should never simply kick the ball out of bounds or kick the ball down the field without a purpose.

One of the biggest problems in youth sports is "**over-coaching**" by overeager adults. 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 will not be able to understand what the coach is yelling.

It is very important that coaches **restrict** their coaching 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 must be kept to a minimum.

Instructional comments should be made **when play is stopped or a player is away from the ball**. These comments should be made 1 on 1 to the player and again have a positive, upbeat tone 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 of an attention span.

OTHER COACHING CONSIDERATIONS DURING THE GAMES

THE NUMBER OF PLAYERS ON THE FIELD - Ideally we want to play the games 4 vs. 4. LMSC has created the size of the fields based on these numbers. Games could be played 5 vs. 5, but this might get a bit crowded. Games could be played 3 vs. 3, but the players will quickly tire and need frequent rest stops. Ideally the Program Directors will place exactly eight players on each field. If the fields have more than that, the coaches should consider playing 4 vs. 4 with substitutes, rotating players on the field so that there are exactly four players on the field for each team.

PLAYER POSITIONS AND GAME TACTICS - Players at this age do not understand positions. It is OK to ask players to play a bit more defensive, but understand that as soon as the game begins, all players will immediately gravitate towards the ball. In fact, assume that all of the players will simply run up and down the field as the ball moves up and down the field, until they get tired. Again, do not expect them to play a specific position on the field.

Do not stress complicated tactics (positioning, teamwork, etc.) They are too young to comprehend this. Players who have been put in defensive positions are NOT to stay back by their team's goal. The players should be up with the offense when the team has the ball. Defenders should **never** be forced to stay back and simply guard the goal.

LOPSIDED SCORES - The coaches and referees will randomly divide the players into two teams of four. There will be occasions where one team is clearly stronger than the other and dominate the game. When this happens, call for a brief water break after awhile, then change the teams around before starting back up. Make one or two trades that will ensure that the game will resume on even teams. While we really should not be keeping score, if players do ask, tell them the game is starting over at 0 - 0.

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE GAME - Have each team **line up** in single file at midfield and **shake hands** with the opposing team while saying "good game" to each opponent. Be sure that all of the players display good sportsmanship. Learning proper sportsmanship is an important part of this program.

The referees should collect the blue pinnies. Coaches and referees should help players to find their soccer balls. The extra LMSC balls should be returned to the main meeting area where the players were initially organized, so that the next group of players on the field can use them.

COACHES ON THE FIELD - Coaches sometimes want to stand on the field to help coach their players. While their intention is good, they are merely getting in the way, obstructing players' views of the game and making things more crowded. Coaches should stand off by the sideline, out of the way. The fields are small enough that the players will be able to hear the coaches. Most importantly, coaches must **NEVER stand in front of the goal**. This causes a big disturbance in the play since attacking players find it difficult to see behind the coach and see the goal. All they see is a large adult, they can't see the goal, they can't see the part of the field behind the coach. They just see someone in the way.

CARING FOR INJURIES - If a child is injured, the referee should **IMMEDIATELY stop the game**. Coaches should remind the referee of this if he / she 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 unable to get up right away.

When a player is injured, the coach should try to **calm the player down**. Almost always, the player is frightened and unable to catch his breath. The coach should have the player **breathe slow and deep** to bring his/ her breathing back under control. The coach should comfort the child and try to relieve any fear or anxiety that he/she might have. The coach should remain calm, the player will see this and relax more.

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 be brought in to try to calm the player down. One of the coaches or referees should stand in a position to block the sun from the player.

In the unlikely event that a serious injury has occurred and the player's parents are not nearby, the Program Directors or Field Administrator should be notified. They will have a list of the players phone numbers in the unlikely event that a child is at the field without a parent. If the injury is serious, do NOT move the player off the field just to continue the game. Let him / her stay on the field as long as is necessary. If the injury is serious, keep the player on the field and call 911.

INTERACTING WITH THE PLAYERS - Coaches and referees are encouraged to take a few minutes to **talk** with each child when he/she is off the field. The conversations do not need to be about soccer. Try to get to know each player by name. Often times, a child just wants to talk about whatever is on his or her 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. **Listening** to the child is the key to helping the child. When talking to a child, try to address him / her by the first name. **Make them feel like they are someone important**, try to raise their self esteem. Anyone who has ever read a book on children will be familiar with the term **Self Esteem**. If the child feels good about himself or herself, experiences success and has a good time, then the coach (psychologist) has done his or her job.

ABOUT THE REFEREES - It must be reemphasized that the referee's primary 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 and up). **Coaches And Parents Are Not To Yell At The Referees**. The referees ONLY take orders from the Program Directors and the Site Administrator. Referees should work WITH the coaches but are not to take orders from the coaches or the spectators. All coaches should remember that their children might someday want to work as a referee in the program. How would you want your son or daughter to be treated by other adults?

Every effort will be made to provide the necessary amount of referees each week. In the event that there is a **shortage of referees**, coaches will need to double as referees.

Referees will be expected to help work with the players during the skills clinics. During the games, they are to help teach the players the basic rules of the game by **briefly** explain all calls that they made in order to help educate the players. They should briefly explain why they just blew the whistle.

UNCOOPERATIVE PARENTS - Coaches and referees should notify the Program Directors or the Site Administrator about any parents who are too vocal, interfering with the game or being bothersome to other people. This is especially important if the adults are intimidating the players. If a problem with a parent should persist, the Club Directors will remove the child of that parent from the program.

COACHING EDUCATION - There are two different national soccer organizations that offer coaching courses to help youth soccer coaches become better coaches.

The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) and the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) both offer different level coaching courses. Some coaching courses are geared toward novice parent coaches who are coaching very young players. Many higher level courses are geared for travel team coaches, high school coaches, college coaches, etc.

LMSC FULLY reimburses the registration cost of any coaching course which an LMSC coach successfully completes. The club will send an e-mail to coaches about coaching courses or other educational opportunities that may arise during the year. LMSC also reimburses the full amount of registration for any coaching clinic that an LMSC coach attends.

THE PROGRAM DIRECTORS AND THE SITE ADMINISTRATOR

LMSC hires several Program Directors to oversee the younger divisions of the Spring Intramural Program. These people report directly to the LMSC Directors. There will also be a Site Administrator who will be responsible for helping make sure the everything runs smoothly at a specific field.

FIELD SETUP - Our Field Crew will be responsible to set up the fields. This means that goals are setup properly, fields are properly lined and all trash and obstacles are removed from the field. The Site Administrator needs to be at the field at least thirty minutes early to ensure that the fields have been setup properly and to ensure that equipment is at the field and properly organized.

EQUIPMENT - The Site Administrator will be responsible for ensuring that the following items are at the field, on time, each Sunday:

- **Size 3 soccer balls** (enough for the skills clinics). Players are encouraged to bring a ball each week, but LMSC will have plenty of extra balls for the other players to work with.
- **Blue pinnies**, a minimum of one for every two players will be needed.
- **Whistles** (for referees who forget to bring one).
- **Pump** for players to use if their ball is not fully inflated.
- **Referee Sign In Sheet** - The Site Administrator must be sure that the referees check off which sessions they work each week so that they can be paid for their work at the end of the season.
- **LMSC Jerseys** (for those who have not yet received their jersey). Remember that some players will not show up for the first few weeks of the season. Also, each division will have quite a few players sign up after the season has started.
- **Player List** so we can check off who has received their jersey at the start of the season. This list should also have phone numbers for the players in the rare case where a player is at the field unattended.
- **Bottled Water** for sale. This is important since some players may have forgotten to bring their own water to the field.
- **Field Permit** from the Township. This is needed in the event that someone from the township comes to the field and wants to see that we have a permit to use the field.
- **Registration Forms** for players who wish to sign up on site at the field.
- **Shin guards** and size 3 LMSC soccer balls to sell to players.
- **Participation Trophies** (given out at the end of the season).

SUPERVISION OF REFEREES - One of the Program Directors will be responsible for communicating with the level 1 referees during the week, ensuring that there are enough referees for each session the following weekend. This person will need to know how many referees are needed at each session. The number of referees needed will be different for each session and these numbers will change as the season progresses.

INTERACTION WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS - The Site Administrator will need to deal with any issues relating to the neighborhood, police, etc. Parents of the players will need to be reminded several times that the police will ticket cars parked illegally. This has occurred every season and every year that our programs have run. Any problems with neighbors complaining about noise, trespassing or whatever needs to be brought to the attention of the LMSC President as soon as possible.

END OF THE SEASON - On the last day of the season, the Site Administrator will:

- Collect all equipment (goals, balls, white shirts) and return it to the designated storage location.
- Give out the end of the season trophies. If a family knows that they will not be able to attend the last day of the season, they can still pick up a trophy by going to Main Line Trophies, Conestoga Road in Rosemont. Our extra trophies will be returned to the store by the Tuesday after the season is over. Parents of the players can then pick up a trophy at their convenience during normal business hours.

RAINOUT CANCELLATIONS - The LMSC Officers will decide if a particular Sunday needs to be canceled due to rain. In the event of a cancellation, the club will place a message on the LMSC web page (www.lmsc.net) indicating whether games are on or not for that particular day. This message will be posted on the LMSC web site no later than 11:00 AM.

LMSC will also attempt to e-mail the players about rainouts, but this is not always possible. Players will be specifically directed to check the LMSC web page in the morning.

In the event of a rainout, the Site Administrator should have someone go to the field to notify anyone who does show up. A sign may be placed at the entrance to the field if desired. These basic instructions will be passed along to the players at the start of the season.

BEYOND THE SPRING INTRAMURAL PROGRAM

THE FALL INTRAMURAL PROGRAM - In the fall, our six year old divisions (boys Bantams and girls Microns) switch over to the “set teams” format where players are assigned to teams of 10-12 players for the season. Teams play a regular schedule against the other teams in their division. Each team will have its own head coach (plus an assistant coach when available). The Fall Intramural Program is setup as follows:

	<u>BOYS DIVISIONS</u>	<u>GIRLS DIVISIONS</u>	
4 year olds	Pee-Wees Division	Pee-Wees Division	4 v 4, no goalies (games on Sundays)
5 year olds	Atoms Division	Neutrons Division	4 v 4, no goalies (games on Saturdays)
6 year olds	Bantams Division	Microns Division	two games of 4 v 4 with no goalies
7 year olds	Juniors Division	Quasars Division	two games of 5 v 5 with goalies
8 & 9 year olds	Intermediates Division	Protons Division	two games of 5 v 5 with goalies
10 & 11 year olds	Seniors Division	Electrons Division	one game of 8 v 8
12 - 14 year olds	Majors Division	Cosmos Division	one game of 11 v 11

There is also a Special Needs Division for youngsters with physical, mental and emotional differences which prevent them from playing in the other divisions we offer.

Teams in all age groups (except the Pee-Wees, Atoms and Neutrons) have one game per week (mostly on Saturdays) and one practice a week (held on a weeknight or Sunday afternoon).

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 our more talented and enthusiastic players for the LMSC Travel Team Program. Our travel teams compete against many other clubs from areas such as Downingtown, West Chester, Media, Philadelphia, etc.

LMSC will have up to four boys teams and up to four girls teams in every age group from Under 9 up through Under 15. Boys teams play in the Delco League, girls teams play in the Philadelphia Area Girls Soccer League (PAGS). U-9 through U-12 teams play 8 v 8, U-13 and older play full 11 vs. 11 soccer.

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 Team Program provides more experienced coaches, better competition and a more extensive soccer experience for the both boys and girls.

UNDER 8 DEVELOPMENTAL TRAVEL TEAM ACADEMY - This program is designed to give our Under 8 age players a chance to work under the supervision of the LMSC coaching staff before they reach travel team age. The program is geared for our more athletic and competitive players who hope to migrate to the LMSC Travel Team Program the following year.

In late May and early June, LMSC will hold tryouts for a Boys Developmental Under 8 travel team and a Girls Developmental Under 8 travel team. Players must be exactly 7 years old on July 31 of that year to be eligible for the Under 8 Developmental Travel Team Academy, no exceptions.

The Boys Developmental Team and the Girls Developmental Team each practice in the fall season and play games against each other using the same format as our 6 - 9 year old intramural programs. In the winter, the teams play in indoor leagues and have an occasional indoor practice.

The Under 8 Developmental Travel Team Academy gives our most talented players a chance to develop their skills and prepare for the actual Travel Team Program which will start with the following fall season.