



# Why Play - Practice - Play?

## U.S. SOCCER GRASSROOTS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

At the grassroots level, children learn and develop to their full potential through game-like experiences in an enjoyable environment which supports individual growth.

When children arrive at practice they have little desire to stand in lines, run laps, perform drills, or be lectured; they simply want to have fun, connect with their teammates, and learn through engaging and enjoyable activities. Therefore, it is important for coaches to keep these factors in mind when creating and designing their practice environments

### HOW PLAYERS LEARN:

- By doing what they like, intrinsic motivation is the driver for learning.
- By limiting the transfer gap between the training and the game.
- By participating in activities that allow players to read and decide how to perceive a situation.
- To be creative by looking for solutions within an activity or game.
- To reflect on experiences and choose how to use those experiences in the future.
- To be independent critical thinkers and develop into independent/social and responsible/accountable adults.

At the Grassroots level, the U.S. Soccer Coach Education Department is committed to an evidenced-based approach to coaching education and player development. Evidence-Based Coaching focuses on integrating three key components;

1. The best available research on player development.
2. Coaching expertise and curriculum development.
3. An appreciation of the needs and values of the individual learner (i.e. player).

With that, in an attempt to create a developmentally appropriate practice environment, U.S. Soccer has adopted a three-stage practice plan model (Play-Practice-Play). This approach aligns with the best available research on athlete development pathways and is designed with the intent of maximizing player enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and skill development.

## Summary

In closing, the key ingredients of an effective grassroots practice environment is one that has a careful balance between 'deliberate play', a variety of learning activities, and regular game opportunities. These three components, when combined, create an effective practice environment that maximizes player enjoyment and development.