

# OBGC House Soccer Guide to Game Coaching

## Overview

The coach should be thinking of the regular season games as a forum for evaluating tactical and strategic play. The regular season is the time for putting players into different positions and different situations to help you and the players evaluate how they can best help the team.

Since all teams make the playoffs and the standings really just seed the initial round of the playoffs, you as the coach should feel free to test and measure. Just remember that we still want to teach the players solid tactics and strategy; don't use this freedom as license to play out extreme or high-risk scenarios. For example, playing without a keeper or without defenders for the game isn't helpful in teaching the players about the position(s).

During the playoffs, the balance will shift towards picking the best configurations and approaches that you've evaluated throughout the season – both from games and practices.

## Job One

During the game, your primary job as the coach is to put your players in the proper positions, clearly convey their responsibilities and ensure that every player on your team plays at least half the game. During the regular season, you should also add in that you want to try and get every player on your team to play about the same amount of time each game.

You should get a clipboard with blank paper on it (or one of those fancier boards with the soccer field on it and a marker) so that you can keep track of who is playing in what positions and what substitutions have been made. It is not a trivial task to keep track of player time in a game like soccer where there are irregular substitutions.

Once you decide on substitutions that are coming up, make sure you communicate with your players so that they understand where they are going on the field and who they are replacing.

You should also make sure you are wearing a watch or other device (e.g. smartphone) that can keep track of the game time. You want to do this so that you can understand if/when you need to adjust your approach based on time remaining and because you need it to make sure you are substituting to ensure balanced play time. You may also ask the referee for a "time check" as they are keeping the official time.

Also, please remember that it's your job to keep track of dominant players – which means you need to track who scores your goals. Once a player hits two goals, they must be considered dominant. See the rules document for more details.

## Job Two

The second job a coach has during the game is to take notes about what's happening in the game so that future practices can help address recurring issues you are seeing during the game. You can try and make some corrections at the game, but it's more likely that you need to reinforce better behaviors in the practices. You often need to show the players the better behavior rather than just tell them. And like all learning, it comes through repetition.

There are some common issues that you might see in games that you'll want to work on:

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- Players are getting one-on-one situations and are unable to beat the defender → Need help learning how to beat defenders consistently
- Players are often out of position (being on the wrong side – left/right and forward/back are very common) → Work constraints in practice scrimmages that don't allow that poor positioning
- Players can't get goal kicks out of the box or it goes straight to the opponent → Work on improving power kicking technique as well as smart strategy for clearing
- Players are not spacing well; they are clumping or bunching → Work on constrained scrimmages where players must stay in certain zones; forcing them to stay spaced
- Players are dribbling when they should pass; passing when they should shoot; etc. → Work on using the signals the defense gives you as to the proper decision-making
- Players are losing the ball on throw-ins due to technical faults → Work on throw-ins while standing still until your team can demonstrate zero free turnovers
- Players are creating lots of opportunities but aren't scoring → Work on finishing activities

Note: This is just a small set of issues you'll see on the field. Figure out the top 2 things hurting your team play and focus on those things in the next week or two of practice. You can capture all the things you are seeing, but don't try and correct everything at once – it won't work. See the age group specific guides on suggestions for practices for more detail on how to run effective practices.

## Job Three

The last job of the “big three” for a coach is to provide positive support and motivation for the players on your team. Your team will derive its energy – either positive or negative – based upon what you do. If you have body language and/or words that indicates the “game is over”, then you better understand your players will start believing that as well. Likewise, if you stay positive and encourage them to “keep their heads up” and “play to final whistle”, they'll believe they can win. It's your job to find those sparks of goodness out there (even when the play isn't going according to plan) and fan them into a positive flame.

## Everything Else

If you work hard at doing jobs one, two and three, you will be a successful coach. Everything else is just gravy.

This includes trying to make on the field adjustments by calling out to the players. Prefer good preparation before the game to direction during the game. Trying to make near-real-time adjustments to players who may or may not hear you properly is very rarely necessary. Remember the players are playing the game; you are helping them as a guide.

A far more effective and efficient use of your time is to coach adjustments to the players who are sitting with you on the bench. Spend more time helping them understand so that they can make better choices going forward.

## Get an Assistant Coach

Even if no one has officially registered as an assistant coach, get one or two of the parents to help you. Most people will help out when asked. During the game you can one assistant coach. You (as the coach), the assistant coach and the players are the only people allowed on the players' side of the field.

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The role of the head coach is to manage substitutions, understand game play situations and communicate with the players on the bench about the game.

The role of the assistant coach is to help a little with those activities, but primarily to free the coach up to focus on those items. The assistant coach will manage the players on the bench. They will ensure the players stay at least 5 feet away from the sideline. They will make sure there's no one playing with a ball on the players' sideline. They will help make sure the players' shoes are tied. They will help the goalkeeper get their gloves and different colored vest on. They will also help make sure the players remain well hydrated during the game.

## The other coach/team is not your enemy

You should introduce yourself to the other team's coach as soon as you can before the game (during warm-ups if possible).

Talk to the other coach during the game but be respectful of the attention of the other coach and the game play. Also, be calm in your discussions. There will be times that both coaches see the same event and have different interpretations. That's ok. What isn't ok is turning that into a confrontation. Sometimes you'll just have to agree to disagree.

Praise your players when they are doing something well and praise the other team's players/coach when they do something particularly well. If they execute a really effective set play, you can say so.

Remember that there are aspects in our rules that require the joint responsibility of both coaches. One specific example is game management when a large goal differential scenario comes into play. It is the joint responsibility of both coaches to ensure the game doesn't get out of hand.

We need the coaches to work together to make the game an enjoyable event for everyone.

## Scoring goals and being scored upon

Goal! It is one of the most exciting moments in a soccer game. It can also be one of the most disruptive moments to the psychology of your team; whether they have scored or the other team has scored. It's important you learn how to manage this well.

Whenever a goal is scored (for your team), it is inevitably the result of many players (including the goal scorer) on the team doing their job well. Most people won't be able to see it; but the great defensive clear that led to the great pass from the mid-fielder perfectly into space for the forward is probably a greater factor in scoring than the player who tapped the ball past the keeper.

Likewise, a goal being scored (against your team) is also almost always a series of defensive issues chained together that resulted in the opportunity.

Regardless of where the credit share lies on the offensive side and the challenges lie on the defensive side, try and treat goal scoring consistently in terms of application with your team.

Simple rule 1: When your team scores a goal, it was a team effort....They all helped to score!

Simple rule 2: When the other team scores a goal, it was a team effort....No single player allowed that goal...They must take collective responsibility. Everyone can do their job a little better.

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## What to bring to the game

You need your clipboard, a pen/pencil for keeping track of player substitutions and to communicate thoughts to your players, a small first aid kit with some ice packs, pinnies (for your goal keeper). You can bring a ball specifically to use as a game ball but most coaches will just select the best ball from amongst the players who bring their balls to the game for warming up.

## Pre-game

We have intentionally scheduled the games so that even with games occasionally going a little long, there should be plenty of time for the coaches and teams to warm up.

You and your team should have the goal to be at the game 30 minutes early. This is important for several reasons. First, it removes the stress of scrambling to get a team in place at the beginning of the game. Second, it gives you and the team ample time to warm up. Third, it makes sure you have some chance to get people to the game in the event you see you are at/below the minimum number of players.

There are lots of different pre-game activities. Find one that works for you and your team. Make sure that your pre-game activities have the attribute of warming up the players and getting them ready for game action. But don't make it strenuous – you don't want to have tired players going into the game.

Some popular pre-game activities include:

1. Making two lines just outside the box; Have the coach play a ball forward to one side and the player takes a shot on goal. Then, coach serves to the other side and continues alternating. Players switch lines after shooting. Just remember: you want the players to shoot on goal with a moving ball. Stationary shots aren't nearly as game relevant.
2. Form a big circle with your players. Depending on the number of players, have 1-3 players inside the circle identified as defenders. Outside circle players must pass the ball around while defenders try and establish possession. Once a defender gets the ball, they switch places with the player who lost the ball. Variations – have more than one ball in play. This is a good activity because it is game relevant and keeps players moving (the circle isn't static) without tiring them.
3. Practice crosses into the scoring area. Send 2-3 players to the two offensive corners (each with a ball). Identify some of your team players for defense. The rest play offense. The defenders should be outnumbered. Have the players in the corners alternate serving the balls into the box with the intent of finishing. A finish or a clearance ends that ball.

If you have specific things that you'd like your players to do in the game, now is the time to reinforce those things, building on what you've been working on in practice.

## A word on competition

Soccer is a competitive game. At the house soccer level, we want to encourage healthy competition. You should be coaching your players to give their best effort possible and to work as a team to try and win each game they play. You should coach your team to never give up, regardless of the score and play as hard as possible until the end of the game.

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When things get unhealthy is when the players define themselves by wins and losses and when the coach reinforces that model. Your team does not get better and the players don't get better when they are characterized as losers.

If you coach long enough, you will find that sometimes your team is "the hammer" and sometimes your team is "the nail". Help them understand how to get something out of the game even when they are at either extreme. The only real loss is when your team isn't learning something from the game on the field.

## Things not to do during the game

As the coach, your patience will be sorely tested at times. Your emotions will carry you at many points. We are all human and this will happen. But it's what we do in these trying times that sometimes teach the players the best lessons of all.

1. Don't undermine the authority of the Referee. Realize that referees will make errors. Take note of those errors and pass them along to the league so that we can get them corrected going forward.
2. Don't use foul language. Don't use any language other than English to speak to your players. Even if you/they are multi-lingual, it opens the door to misinterpretations.
3. Don't use anger as a coaching tool. Don't use exasperation or disappointed tones either. If you must say something, focus on the outcome you'd like to see enabled rather than what didn't happen.
4. Don't turn a difference of opinion into a conflict. We need to teach the players that adults handle differences in a calm and respectful manner. And that sometimes when we get angry, we extract ourselves from the situation to prevent conflict escalation.
5. Don't call out players (negatively) if at all possible. You can often accomplish what you are looking for by using general terminology. For example, "Back defenders please move forward" as opposed to "Johnny, what are you doing out of position again? Move up now!"
6. Don't go up and down the sidelines. You have your side of the field and the other coach has their side. Be respectful that they are trying to watch and manage the game also.
7. Don't go on the field. The only time a coach should be on the field is when the referee has stopped play and you need to assist an injured player. Your job at that point is to assess the health of the player and get them either back into play or off the field as quickly as possible.
8. Don't forfeit games. We are a house soccer league. The standings in the regular season really don't matter. No matter what you disagree with, play the game and move on.

## Post-game

The job isn't done just because the final whistle blows. There are several things a coach is responsible for after the game finishes.

1. Ensure an orderly and respectful post-game handshake line occurs as soon as possible after the game. You'll be tempted to pull the team together and celebrate a win or commiserate over a loss but the handshake line comes first. This includes you as the coach shaking the hand of the other team's coach. You are responsible for ensuring that all of your players participate respectfully in the handshake line and demonstrate good sportsmanship (win, lose or draw).

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2. Clear the main field as soon as possible after the game so that the next set of teams can begin their warm ups.
3. Gather your team (off the main field) and let them know what you saw in the game. Reinforce the positive things that happen and point out that going through the regular season is a process. You're learning; they're learning and together we'll all get better. Also, tell the parents when the next practice will be and remind them of a game during the week if there is one.
4. Engage your team players and spectators and remind them of the joint responsibility to make sure that both the player and spectator sidelines are cleaned of trash/food. Most teams have snacks after the games. We will be holding coaches accountable for the state of the sidelines after games. You should be holding the spectators and players accountable for cleaning up as well.

### Lastly

Have Fun! Coaching is an extremely rewarding way to show your love for soccer. Thank you for volunteering!