JUVENILE COACHING POLICY

St Sylvester's GAA Club has a large number of juvenile teams in football, hurling and ladies football. The most important section of our club is the juvenile section and it is vital that we as coaches ensure there is an accepted coaching policy in all codes. While the juvenile level is laying the foundations for St Sylvester's to become more successful at adult level, the club is committed to enabling all players to reach their full potential both on and off the field of play. The club recognizes that its future strength depends on recruiting, developing and retaining as many under age players as possible, regardless of playing ability. The most important persons in achieving these goals are the Coaches and Mentors as they are the face of the club to the players, parents and other clubs. A dedicated, committed, knowledgeable and friendly Coach can portray the club and the GAA in a positive light.

The club is committed to ensuring that Coaches also reach their full potential and as such this coaching policy provides guidelines to help coaches develop and make progress with their teams and it is imperative that these guidelines are adhered to.

All Coaches and Mentors will be selected and appointed annually by a sub-committee of the Juvenile section. This committee will be comprised of the Juvenile Chairman, the Club Coach, and representatives from CCC1 and CCC2.

1. Qualifications

All mentors, who are appointed annually as above, must be fully paid up members of the club, must be qualified at foundation level and be committed to implementing the "Code of Best Practice for Youth Sport" guidelines to their teams.

Particular attention is given to instilling the highest levels of discipline and fair play in players, mentors and parents/supporters alike and as such the club has issued Codes of Conduct to Mentors and Players. These Codes are compulsory and must be read and signed by all Mentors and Players on an annual basis. Any breaches of the Codes of Conduct will be referred to the clubs Disciplinary Committee. Abuse of players, mentors or officials will not be tolerated and will be promptly dealt with by the club disciplinary committee. Mentors must also implement the "Pathway for players" document into their sessions and abide by the club's mission statement.

The club is committed to giving all mentors the tools to develop their skills and as such asks that all Coaches and Mentors attend the workshops and coaching courses provided by the G.P.O and then to implement any new coaching methods to their training. Ideally a high percentage of Mentors will then progress to Level 1. All juvenile teams must have a representative at juvenile meetings.

2. 1 Ball / sliotar per two children

It is obvious that if children are to improve their football/hurling game, they need as much practice with the ball as possible. The more ball/sliotar contacts our players get in training, the more improvement there will be in their handling and overall skills.

It is recommended that for each player to improve their skill level, they need a minimum of 200 ball/sliotar contacts per session. To achieve this figure, you need a minimum of one ball per two children.

3. Structure of a session

While children love playing games, they will not continue to improve if they come to training and the ball is just thrown in for a match.
It is beneficial to allow the children a few minutes of each session for creative practice, where they are encouraged to practice a particular skill in whatever way they choose. Modified games, such as 2v2 or 3v3 etc, scoring or possession games, are a great way of improving a player's performance.

The basic structures of a session which must be followed are:

- Warm-up
- Skill drills
- Modified/conditioned games
- Full match

4. Fun games at start of session

The importance of children having fun at training cannot be overstated. Children get bored very quickly if not having fun and they will be far more likely to come back to training if they are having fun.

All training sessions should be fun and one of the easiest ways to have fun is with the warm-up game. Fun games are a perfect way to start a training session and should involve as much movement jumping/changing direction and pace etc as possible.

Fun games like tag-ball, call the number, bulldog, tig, catch the tails, stuck in the mud etc are also beneficial for the following reasons:

- They are all about fun so the children love them
- The movements involved in these games mimic exactly the movements involved in match situations.

5. Emphasis on Skills

The vast majority of top senior inter-county teams use the ball for at least 80% of all their sessions throughout the year. This percentage should be even higher for juvenile teams, where the physical aspect of the game is far less relevant especially for teams in CCC1, however as teams move up the through the age groups there is more requirement for physical development..

Juvenile players are neither physically or psychologically matured yet and 'running' them without a ball/sliotar is far from enjoyable. As we saw in point 2, children need 200 ball contacts per session and taking into account children can work as hard in a drill using the ball, there is no need for purely fitness training.

6. Working with beginners

St Sylvester's GAA Club is always actively looking to increase the number of juvenile members involved with the club. Children of all ages are encouraged to come along and are tempted with the prospects of making new friends, being part of a club and learning the skills of a new game. Obviously a lot of these children won't already have the basic skills and it is our responsibility as coaches to encourage these children and work extra hard to help them to develop these skills.

Even though this takes extra time and effort from coaches, is it fair of us to say "he/she is no good…" etc and to just by-pass them?

7. Have clear targets/goals for sessions/season and review regularly
How are you supposed to know what you're doing and how you're progressing etc without setting any objectives/goals?

You need to have specific targets. If you don't know where you're going, how are you going to get there? All aims and objectives should be:

S.M.A.R.T.

Specific: goals should be very specific. For example, it is our goal to ensure that all of our players can kick a ball accurately over 20 metres with both feet.

Measurable: objectives, such as the one mentioned above, should be measured frequently.

Action related: Aims must be relative to the skills/games. For example, St Sylvester's U12 hurling team are going to spend 10 minutes of every session doing shooting practice.

Realistic: Obviously aims must be realistic. There is no point in expecting the children to be able to kick over 45's with both feet…as it is not realistic.

Timescale: Set a date by which you hope to achieve your goals. For example, by March we want every player to be able to solo with both feet.

It is very important and helpful for you as coaches to set targets for yourselves and your team as it will give you something to aim for.

All mentors should keep records of training attendances and players' participation in games as it can be referred to if problems arise concerning team selection etc.

8. Football/Hurling left and right side to be developed in every session
It should go without saying that every young player should be constantly encouraged to use their left and right hand/foot in football and be able to strike off their left side as much as their right side and vice versa in hurling.

This should happen in every session, not just the odd one.

Is it the player's fault that they can't use both sides? No - unfortunately it is the fault of the coach. In all drills, skill, games, shooting practice etc, players must develop their left and right sides.

9. Team Selection
Mentors must base team selections on commitment to training and discipline. Talented players from other codes (soccer, rugby etc) who don't attend training should not be selected ahead of committed club players. Also teams competing in championships and feile na nGael must not draft in players from other codes to strengthen their teams. (i.e. off-season soccer players). Instead they should bring up younger players to give them experience for next year. This must be agreed in advance with mentors and parents of the younger players and courtesy calls made to all. Ideally they should train together in the weeks before the competition. Please note that players must train and play in their own age group before they can be subbed up to an older team.

N.B. Players should be made available to play for teams one age above e.g. u12 to u13. However this should not happen at the expense of a player already part of that particular team. Mentors must play players from their team before using underage players. Players will only be permitted to play one year above their existing year. Any exceptions to any of the above must be approved by the juvenile chairman. Any movement of players between age groups must be approved by the player's parents.

10. Development Squads

Names of suitable players are to be forwarded to the juvenile chairman, G.P.O and coaching development officer for approval before being sent for trials. Talented committed players with excellent discipline are ideal and should be given preference. Players who are not training and playing in their own age group in the club will not be considered for selection.

11. Skills Testing

If players are training and playing games in the club two or three times every week there should be an improvement in their level of skill and performance.
Players will have to be competent in the basic skills appropriate to their own age group. Mentors will regularly skills test their teams and keep a record of each players progress. Players may also be tested on these skills at any time by the G.P.O.

These skills tests should also be a method of encouraging our players to pick up a ball/sliotar and to practice at home.

12. Winning is not everything (or the only thing!)

In St Sylvester's GAA Club juvenile section, player participation, enjoyment, development and retention are the most important things. All mentors must be committed to long term player development and must not adopt a short term win at all cost attitude.

13. New Mentors

All selection of new mentors must be agreed by the juvenile chairman, vice chairman and secretary. It is recommended that the juvenile chairman is involved as early as possible in the selection process.