

# FAST TRACKING & PLAYER DEVELOPMENT



Having children compete and practice in the correct environment is instrumental in their development as young people and as soccer players. The elements that have to be considered in that environment are **Social/Emotional, Psychological, Physical and Technical**.



Ensuring that children are appropriately challenged in each of the four areas identified above is crucial to their enjoyment and progression in the game. The challenge that Clubs, Technical Directors, Coaches and Administrators have is making sure that each and every child is in the correct environment based on their needs and abilities in all four corners of development. To add to the challenge, children develop at differing rates and times; this puts an added burden on organizations to do the correct thing on this crucially important aspect of a child's holistic development.

This resource has been created by The Ontario Soccer Association for Clubs, Academies, Coaches, parents and players. The information contained in this resource will help all parties involved in Ontario grassroots soccer to make educated decisions when considering the age/stage that a young player should train and compete at.

What is wrong with a player dominating at their own age group? Why can't we challenge the player and their skill set without putting them in a new environment that may not be socially as good for their development first and foremost, let alone then considering the physical, technical and tactical implications.  
Rob Gayle—Canada U-20 Head Coach

When the conditions are right, taking part in sport can support the development of the whole person; when they are not, it can lead to higher dropout rates and negative behaviours.



# REASONS TO CONSIDER COMPETING WITH OLDER CHILDREN



## Intellectually Gifted

If the children his/her same age may not provide the mental stimulation she/he needs to be satisfied with the interaction.



## Technically advanced

Children who have been involved in the sport from an early age may show signs of advanced technical ability. Technically they may be more appropriately challenged by playing with older children.



## Emotionally and Socially Advanced

Children with a high social intelligence are able to manage complex interactions well. A socially mature child will be well accepted by older children and may enjoy activities that are typically associated with older children.



## Physically/Athletically Developed

Children who have advanced physicality may be able to compete with older children who have similar physical attributes. This includes being developed in the areas of speed, agility, balance and coordina-



It's important to remember that children must have advanced qualities in all areas mentioned above to feel comfortable and successful in the new environment with older children. Simply being skilled in one or two areas and then being placed in an inappropriately challenging environment will not lead to further social, psychological or technical development for the child.

## IN THE CORRECT ENVIRONMENT?

Children in the wrong environment will not have as much fun, be less successful, not develop as well and ultimately may quit the sport altogether. Therefore, it is vital that the assessment and evaluation of young people is treated with the importance it deserves as the consequences can be severe .

There are times when children should practice and compete with and against older children. The assessment of the children's abilities to be successful and continue to develop should be treated very seriously and continually monitored.

"You don't coach soccer. You coach Elizabeth that wants to play soccer. I'm sure you know soccer well, but do you know Elizabeth well?"



# REASONS NOT TO COMPETE WITH OLDER CHILDREN

- Parental pressure on the organization/coach to play their child up.** Parents or guardians putting pressure on coaches/clubs to play the child at an older age group as they believe increased competition will aid development. Clubs will allow this to happen in fear of losing a registration fee.
- Avoiding small sided soccer to get to the “real” adult game quicker.** The inaccurate thinking that small sided soccer is of no benefit and the quicker a child plays 11v11 the better they will become.
- Organizations/coaches using it as a carrot to recruit players.** In a drive to increase club registration enticing players by offering to play them at older age groups. The unknowing parent believes this is a good situation for their child.
- To stroke a parents ego, that their child is “special”.** By having their child play with older players inflates the parents ego as they believe they have a special child.
- To accelerate the development process.** By fast tracking through the development stages, the parents incorrectly think that the child will become a better player quicker. Soccer is a late specialization sport and there is no way to fast track. Many years must be spent practicing and playing within the correct development stages.

## FORMATS OF PLAY



The formats of play as shown here have been designed to allow for maximum Technical, Physical, Social and Psychological development of the young players during competition. If a player was to pass

on a format of play they could be missing out on an important phase of their individual development. The varied benefits of small sided games are well documented.

### PHYSICALLY AHEAD

COGNITIVELY  
AVERAGE OR  
BEHIND

POSSIBLY  
APPROPRIATE TO  
PLAY UP

MOST LIKELY  
APPROPRIATE TO  
PLAY UP

COGNITIVELY  
AHEAD

NOT  
APPROPRIATE TO  
PLAY UP

UNLIKELY  
APPROPRIATE TO  
PLAY UP

PHYSICALLY AVERAGE OR  
BEHIND

Use this matrix to help you determine whether or not it is best for your child to play up

For more information on small sided games, please contact:  
[grassroots@soccer.on.ca](mailto:grassroots@soccer.on.ca)



# CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PARENTS AND THE COACH

Playing with older players can put additional physical stress on the young player. The game is quicker and more physical than they are accustomed to and the young player has to physically do more to be a part of the new team.

The psychological stress put on the young player as he or she strives to “keep up” with the older players, who may be more accomplished as the group they just left, can be mentally taxing for them.

The player, who has been moved up to play with older players, loses the status they once had. In the original team he/she would have been the team leader, the “go to” guy, would have been successful and got lots of play time. In the older team they will likely become just one of the players and lose the status that they once had. This can negatively affect the child’s confidence, self-esteem and enjoyment.

A child, who misses on a format of play designed specifically for that developmental stage, will forgo the opportunity to develop technically and tactically from experiences that are more frequent in the smaller game format. For example a u8 player who plays at u9 will miss playing at 5v5 and jump directly to 7v7. The added physical challenge, due to the increased field size along with the added cognitive challenge, means more decisions are to be made. This may be too much for the child to successfully handle and add to their stress and frustration.

## PROCESS

If a Coach or Technical Director identifies a grassroots player who he/she feels has advanced skills and qualities, and thinks they should be considered to play with an older age group, the following must take place.

- A discussion with the team coach to establish a history on the player and a consistency in their performance and behaviour. If this discussion proves to be positive and an agreement is made that the young player should be considered to play with an older age group, then;
- A discussion with the player and his or her parents or guardian takes place. This formal discussion should inform the player and parents/guardian of the information that is contained within this document and the challenges that the young player may face when playing with older players.
- It's important that no pressure is put on the young player to play with the older group. The player must be allowed to stay with their own age group if that is their choice
- The evaluation process as laid out in the evaluation forms must be followed.
- Signatures from Technical Director, parents, player and district association must be on the form.
- District associations are to keep copies of all evaluation forms.



### Interesting Fact

Average age of male world cup winners is 27 years.  
Female world cup winners, average age is 26 years.



## Fast Tracking/Player evaluation form for u9 – u11 players wishing to play at an older age group

This evaluation form has been designed to help Technical Directors or Club Head Coaches make decisions on players who wish to play at an older age group. **Please be aware this evaluation is only valid for one (1) playing season.**

**Identification Key: 1 = Below Average. 2 = Average. 3 = Good. 4 = Excels**

The individual player must regularly demonstrate the ability to **Excel** in **ALL** 4 sections

Revision Date: January 27th, 2016

Player's Name	
Player's Date of Birth	
Player's Club	
District Association	
Technical Director/Club Head Coach	

Psychological/ Mental			1	2	3	4
Self Confidence	Safe and positive environment	Player is willing to express themselves more. Not afraid to make mistakes				
Competitiveness	Displaying desire to be successful	Player displays the desire to be successful in practice activities and small-sided games				
Concentration	An ability to stay on task	Player shows a good attention span and has the ability to stay on task for longer periods				
Commitment	Apply themselves at practice and completing activities	Player is happily attending the majority of practices and games. Shows ability to complete activities and exercises during practice				
Self-Control	In control of emotions	While in stressful situations, player shows they can control their emotions				
Determination	Displays a determination to complete tasks	Does not give up easily, displays a determination to complete tasks				
Enjoyment	Shows a Love for the game	The player shows an enjoyment and love for the game of soccer				
Motivation	Fun, rewarding, successful activities	Player is motivated, Player shows they are having fun, being challenged and is successful at activities. Because of this success they are willing to attempt more difficult tasks				

Physical			1	2	3	4
Agility	Moving in quick controlled, movements	Jumping, hopping, skipping, twisting, bounding				
Balance	Right and left foot	Demonstrate balance in a variety of positions, one foot, crouched, on toes, etc.				
Coordination	In small-sided games	Shows ability to twist and turn, change direction keeping movements with body under control				
Stamina	In small-sided games	Shows endurance and Stamina in small sided game situations				
Strength	In 1v1 and small sided games	Shows strength on the ball and to not get physically pushed off the ball				
Speed	Multi directional	Player can move at speed in different directions with and without the ball				
Acceleration	In small sided games	Show a quick change of speed				
Reaction	Activities and SSGs	Player is able to react to different situations at speed				
Basic Motor Skills	Moving in quick, controlled, smooth movements	Player shows that they can move at speed with controlled smooth movements				
Perception/ Awareness	In small sided games	Players are aware of what is happening around them in a game situation				

Social/Emotional			1	2	3	4
Listening	Listen to instruction	Player shows ability to listen to details.				
Cooperation	With coach and teammates	Player is able to cooperate at a basic level with other players and coaches				
Communication	Verbal communication	Player is able to communicate with team mates and offer encouragement to others				
Sharing	Sharing the ball and ideas	Player understands that passing can help them be successful				
Problem-solving	Working out mistakes	Player displays a basic understanding of working through their mistakes and can correct them				
Decision-making	Game decisions	Has the ability to work out simple game-related decisions.				
Empathy	Assisting others in games	Assist's others with their problems in games and activities				
Patience	Patience with themselves and others	Demonstrates patience with themselves and teammates as they work through mastering techniques and skills				
Respect/Discipline	At Practice and in games	Player shows respect for other players' equipment and space.				
Fair Play/Honesty	Playing within the LOTG	Players understand The Laws Of The Game				

Technical			1	2	3	4
Dribbling	Right foot and left foot under pressure	Player is now able to dribble at an opponent and can show a change of speed and direction with their head up				
Shooting	Right foot and left foot	Player is able to use both feet over short distances. Shots are accurate and on target				
Running	Right foot and left Foot	Player can run with the ball using both feet in different directions and are able to vary their speed with head/eyes up				
Turning	Right foot and left foot	Using both feet, Player is able to perform turns with the inside and outside of their feet with their head/eyes up				
Receiving	Right foot and left foot. Introduce thigh and chest	Player can control the ball with the inside and outside of both feet, their thigh and chest.				
Ball Control	Ball mastery	Player can handle the ball in reduced spaces with team mate and opponents in close vicinity				
Shielding the ball	Using body to protect the ball	Player shows the ability to protect the ball under pressure and can use their body to protect them self's and the ball				
Crossing	Right and left foot, various surfaces	Player shows different techniques to be able to deliver crosses in game situations				
Finishing	Scoring from close range	The player shows good understanding of different ways to finish in front of goal and can make the correct decision when placed in to goal scoring situations.				
1v1 Defending	Defending as an individual	Player understands and can shows correct defending technique in 1v1 situations				

**For a player to excel they must accumulate a minimum of 80% in all areas, and cannot receive a below average score in any section.**

Additional Comments by the Technical Director/Club Head Coach:

Recommendation/Decision for the player:

Next Assessment Date:

Signature of Club Technical Director/Club Head Coach .....Date.....

Name and Signature of Parent .....Date.....

Name and Signature of Player .....Date.....

Signature of District Technical Director/Representative .....Date.....