

SOCCER CAPE BRETON UNDER 9 HANDBOOK - 2024



The Why

By starting with answering the question, “**Why the changes to soccer in Cape Breton**”, we can understand the true purpose of these league modifications and the advantages that will be seen. Once we have examined research surrounding talent development, talent identification, and children’s sporting motivations we can see flaws in the traditional model of how soccer is delivered for the earlier age groups. The *Canada Soccer Skill Centre and Dedicated Player Program Support Manual*¹ states that the traditional model of choosing a select number of players based on their performance levels at a specified time, organizing them into a team, and competing against other teams is flawed in the following ways:

- Does not accurately predict potential or future performance.
- Often turns away players who might have high potential but who are simply inexperienced at that moment relative to their peers.
- Early selection prior to physical maturation implies early exclusion of the majority and can discourage players who might otherwise become as good, or better, if given the time and chance to develop.
- Characteristics that define “talented” athletes in early age are not the characteristics that define elite athletes later in their career.

With this knowledge and awareness, the concept of open rosters, which is a feature of the SCB Grassroots League, is a way to lessen the effects of these flaws. This concept allows for players to be grouped according to criteria other than current ability and removes a fixed roster system. This concept is introduced in Canada Soccer’s Club Licensing Program² and has an impact on leagues, and clubs. Within the licensing requirements is the introduction of the Skill Centre Program.

A Skill Centre has the following goals¹:

1. To produce better players across Canada by increasing opportunity and access to better training and competition for more young players.
2. Produce clear training guidelines for clubs so that they can deliver the best possible environment for young players in their region.
3. Keep more young players involved in the game for longer by providing them with an enjoyable experience within the game.

¹ https://www.canadasoccer.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Canada-Soccer-Skill-Centre-Program-Manual_EN-updated.pdf

² <https://www.canadasoccer.com/play-landing/club-licensing-program/>

The Skill Centre Program principles¹ that affect how SCB's league operates are the following:

- Contact time with a ball will be high
- Training will resemble the game
- Training will be fun for everyone

The above principles and goals are being adopted in SCB's approach to grassroots soccer. SCB is committed to having enjoyable, inclusive, and child-centered programming so children can participate in soccer safely and develop to their own potential.

Game Night Format

- SCB will schedule one game night a week, where the one club will host 2 or more teams that evening and will play a mini game vs. most, if not all, of the other teams that evening. So for example, if there are 3 teams at one location:
 - will only require one field (recommend that U9 fields are created using cones.)
 - Team A will play Team B in a 25 min mini game.
 - After the first mini game, Team B will play Team C in a 25 min mini game.
 - After the second mini game, Team A will play Team C in a 25 min mini game.
- If we have 4 teams at one location:
 - will require two fields (recommend that U9 fields are created using cones.)
 - teams to play each other in a 20 min mini game.
- 5 or more teams, we will let you know what the format will be if we run into this situation

Skills Centre Training

Clubs should be holding at least one skills centre development session at least once a week for their players.

Soccer Cape Breton's Technical Director will provide a Skill Centre curriculum before the summer kick-off with a 20-session selection of activities for each club. SCB will also provide a membership of top grassroots platform scoreboardsoccer.com as a resource tool.

As well, the SCB Technical Director will arrange visits to each club (on their request) as early as possible to help get the coaches up to speed on best practices and qualify them for the area that is relevant to their own club.

For any player who wants more developmental training, SCB will be hosting additional skill centres. More information on our skill centres can be found on our Facebook page and our website.

This handbook addressed modified game laws for U9 mini games. For the complete league administration policies and procedures, please read the SCB 2024 League Handbook.

Modified Laws of the Game for U9

LAW 1 - FIELD OF PLAY

- Dimensions
 - U9: 35 meters long x 25 meters wide
 - The field shall be rectangular in shape.
- Field Markings: Lines may be marked but we encourage using cones so any large enough suitable green space can be used, as well as not to have several lines for different age groups on the same location. Cones will be used every 5 meters. If two or more fields are placed beside each other, then each field will be marked with different coloured cones. The centre cones should be different so players and team officials can easily recognize them and know where the imaginary centre line will be located.
- Penalty Area: A penalty area will not apply and therefore will not be marked.
- Goals: 5 feet tall x 8 feet wide. Portable nets are allowed but must be secured to the ground while being used.

LAW 2 - THE BALL

- The ball will be a size four (4).
- The game ball will be provided by the home team.

LAW 3 - THE NUMBER OF PLAYERS

- The game will be played by two teams, each consisting of a min of 5 players, one whom shall be designated as a keeper. A team needs a minimum of 4 players to start and continue the game. Should a team be short a player or two, the opponent may “loan” a player for the match or adjust their number of players on the field to equal their opponent.
- Teams have the option to use the “4 Up 1 Up”, “Swap GKs”, and “Mix ‘Em Up” during any game.
 - 4 Up 1 Up – When a team is losing by four (4) or more goals, that team can add an extra player onto the field.
 - Swap GKs – Swap goalkeepers if the run of play is not allowing for goalkeepers to develop.
 - Mix ‘Em Up – Mix all players together from both teams if mismatched and the game is becoming lopsided.
- We strongly encourage the teams do use one of the options if the game becomes unbalanced in favour of one of the teams.

SUBSTITUTIONS

- It is recommended that changes occur during any stoppage, but changes during gameplay (on the fly) are also permitted. If changing at a stoppage, let the referee/game leader know so they can hold up the restart until the substitutions are completed.
- Equal playing time for ALL players is highly encouraged regardless of current or perceived ability. Rotating substitutions is a good strategy to maintain equal playing time.

LAW 4 - THE PLAYER'S EQUIPMENT

- Players must wear shin guards to prevent injury.
- Players will all wear the same jersey colour. Goalkeepers should be easy to distinguish from players.

LAW 5 - THE REFEREE / OFFICIAL

- Community clubs should provide person who will act as the referee/game leader on the field for U9. Their task is to stop the play, correct and educate the players on the infringements of the laws of the game, and restart play appropriately. Should the club be unable to provide this person, then one of the coaches shall step in to fill this role.

LAW 7 - DURATION OF THE MATCH

- This will depend on the number of teams at the game day location.
 - If there are two or three teams scheduled at the same location, then teams will play each other for a period of 25 mins.
 - If there are four or more teams scheduled at the same location, then teams will play 3 mini games of 20 mins each.
 - There will be 10 mins allotted between games.

LAW 8 - THE START AND RESTART OF PLAY

- A kick-off will be taken from the centre of the field for:
 - At the start of the game
 - After a goal is scored.
- Players of the opposing team must be five (5) meters away.
- A goal may not be scored directly from any kick-off.
- Kick-off may be taken as a pass-in or dribble-in.
- Drop balls will be used as a restart when play is stopped and the restart is not defined elsewhere in these rules.

LAW 9 – BALL IN AND OUT OF PLAY

- The ball is out of play when:
 - it has wholly passed over the goal line or touchline on the ground or in the air
 - play has been stopped by the referee

- The ball is in play at all other times when it touches a match official and when it rebounds off a goalpost, crossbar or corner flagpost (if used) and remains on the field of play. A goal may not be scored directly from any kick-off.
- When the goalkeeper collects the ball while in play, the players on the opposing team shall retreat to their half of the field and remain there until the goalkeeper puts the ball on the ground and either passes-in or dribbles in the ball. Drop kicking/punting the ball is not permitted.

LAW 10 – METHOD OF SCORING

- A goal is scored when the whole of the ball passes over the goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar, provided that no offence has been committed by the team scoring the goal.
- If the goalkeeper throws the ball directly into the opponents' goal, a goal kick is awarded.
- If a referee/game leader signals a goal before the ball has passed wholly over the goal line, play is restarted with a dropped ball.
- Scores are not recorded for any official purposes.

LAW 11 – OFFSIDE

- There is no offside.

LAW 12 - FOULS AND MISCONDUCT

- The referee/game leader should call the following offenses if a player commits these actions against an opponent and deems the action careless or reckless:
 - Charges
 - Jumps at
 - Kicks or attempts to kick
 - Pushes
 - Strikes or attempts to strike
 - Tackles or challenges
 - Trips or attempt to trip
- An indirect free kick is awarded, and the player is educated as to what foul occurred.
- If a player uses excessive force for any of the offenses above, or spits at another player, then stop play, address the issue with the offending player's head coach, and have the player substituted off the field. Restart with an indirect free kick.
- Players of the opposing team must be five (5) meters away for play to be restarted.
- Restarts from fouls can be taken as a dribble-in or pass-in once the ball has been stopped and returned to the spot of the infraction.

LAW 13 – FREE KICKS

- All free kicks can be taken as a dribble-in or pass-in once the ball has been stopped and returned to the spot of the infraction. Opponents must be five (5) yards from the ball until the ball is touched and put into play. This included kicks for penal fouls, a corner kick, or kick-offs.

LAW 14 - PENALTY KICK

- There are NO penalty kicks.

LAW 15 – THE THROW-IN

- No throw-in. Restarts from when the ball fully crosses the sideline will be taken as a dribble-in or pass-in from where the ball exited the field of play. Goals may not be scored from the player restarting the game from a dribble/pass-in as this restart is treated the same as a throw-in and is considered an indirect restart of the game. For a goal to be scored from a dribble/pass-in, the ball will need to be touched by another player on the field before entering the goal.

LAW 16 – THE GOAL KICK

- A goal kick is awarded when the ball fully crosses the end line and was last touched by a member of the attacking team.
- Goal kicks can be taken as a dribble-in or pass-in, starting from a location within 5m of the goal net.
- A goal may not be scored directly from a goal kick.
- Players of the opposing team must be in their own half of the field/at or behind the imaginary centre line.

LAW 17 – THE CORNER KICK

- A corner kick is awarded when the ball fully crosses the end line and was last touched by a member of the defending player.
- The ball is to be placed within one (1) meter of the corner marking of the field (either cone or where the sideline and end line connect).
- Player taking the corner kick may dribble-in or pass-in to restart the game.
- Goals cannot be scored straight from a corner kick.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Team roster: Minimum of 8 players, maximum of 10 players.
- Team Officials: There must be two team officials on the bench at all times. The head coach must be an adult (19 years of age or older).
- Players should have fair and equal playing time in each game as possible.

FAQ's and Myth Busting

BREAKING TEAMS UP WILL HAVE A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON KIDS

SCB is not breaking teams up with these modifications. Soccer is an individual game played in a team environment. Research suggests that forming groups of players for matches based on mixed ability raises the standard of all players and reduces achievement gaps (Ability Grouping in New Zealand High Schools: Are Practices Evidence-Based? – Hornby and Witte 2014).

Combining this with social relationships being the primary grouping criteria will lead to positive effects on retention and enjoyment.

KIDS CAN'T CREATE TEAM COHESION AND TEAMS CAN'T WORK ON TACTICAL WORK

Tactical work should not be the priority of coaching in these foundational age groups. Love of the game, technique, skill, and teaching principles of the game need to take priority over tactics. This model of play will allow kids to play with different players from time to time, but it will allow for a large group of players to develop a bond in a club environment. This will help develop a club culture and identity and will reduce the negative long-term effects of tiering players early and placing them on teams.

THIS METHOD OF COMPETITION “WATER’S DOWN” THE QUALITY OF AGE GROUPS BECAUSE ALL THE WEAK PLAYERS ARE MIXED WITH THE STRONG PLAYERS

Previously, “weaker” players may not have been given the time to develop, or train in the best environment possible. Often when a coach or club labels a player “weak” from an early age, that label sticks with them for many years and thus creates a bias. Research shows that by streaming or tiering kids from an early age increases the achievement gap and this gap becomes incredibly difficult to narrow as time goes on. The other consideration is that if we are going to operate in an environment where “as many as possible, for as long as possible, in the best environment as possible” takes place, we need to keep the player pool deep and large to have viable and competitive leagues by U13 and onwards.

COMPETITION IS THE “CORNERSTONE” OF DEVELOPMENT AND BY ELIMINATING COMPETITION OUR KIDS WON'T DEVELOP OR LEARN HOW TO WIN OR LOSE

Children compete, adults compare. Children naturally compete and balance teams when there is no adult interference in sport. In addition, there is no evidence that shows competition is the key factor in development. When do people need to learn how to win and lose? LTPD suggests

that Stage 4: Training to Train (U11-15 Female and U12-16 Male) is when this should become a part of the “Mental” corner of development³.

THESE MODIFICATIONS ARE A WASTE OF TIME FOR TALENTED PLAYERS. WHERE IS THE VALUE FOR COMPETITIVE U9 PLAYERS?

All players will flourish in these game formats. “Competitive” and “talented” are not words to be used when describing children. These are adult words from an adult model forced upon children.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THESE MODIFICATIONS ON THE PLAYERS?

Through these modifications, SCB has been able to give children an age and stage appropriate playing environment that allows expression, creativity, and development to flourish. We are also allowing clubs to be flexible in how they develop players and encouraging them to put the needs of each child first.

IN THIS MODEL THE BEST KIDS IN THE AGE GROUP DON'T GET BETTER.

This model allows for players of all abilities to be challenged to a level that they want. If a player is more developmentally advanced than their peers, they can be moved into an older age group, across gender, or into another group of players from the same club. If there are players who are not as developmentally advanced, this model allows for them to move to a younger age group or find groups of players who may be at their relative level. This is often best done in consultation with the players’ parents and explaining the benefits of these initiatives to long-term development and enjoyment of soccer. There are many benefits to the mental, physical, social, emotional, technical, and tactical development when a child is left in their own age group whether they are developmentally advanced or developmentally behind.

All the research around talent identification suggests it is nearly impossible to predict future elite performance prior to puberty. If we believe that the best seven-year-old will become a professional or international player because they are the best seven-year-old then this suggests some fundamental problems with our environment, system, and culture. We will be turning away many players who, if given the time to develop, could become as good or better than the current best seven-year-old.

YOU WOULDN'T PUT A AAA HOCKEY PLAYER WITH A HOUSE LEAGUE HOCKEY PLAYER.

SCB, and hopefully our community clubs, are not going to put players in matches or environments that are potentially going to harm a child physically, mentally, emotionally, or socially. For this reason, we have open rosters where clubs can move individual players, or entire groups of players in their club to form a new group/team or field to ensure the players have meaningful competition for them.

³ Wellness to World Cup – Long-Term Player Development – Canadian Soccer Association