



# **TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

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**OAKVILLE SOCCER CLUB**

*June 2011*



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# INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to Oakville Soccer Club's new Technical Plan! Developed under the leadership of Technical Director Jason de Vos, this plan outlines the framework on which OSC will fulfill its mandate to advance every player that enrolls in its programs.

Fundamentally, Oakville Soccer Club focuses on two core deliverables – actively developing young players and giving every player a positive, enjoyable playing experience where they can develop. This plan focuses on how the club can meet the first part of this challenge – actively developing young players to be in a position to be the best they can be.

The entire plan is based on the core principles of Long Term Player Development (LTPD) – the modern and widely accepted framework for the development of athletes and players in all sports at both a competitive and recreational level. Canadian soccer's LTPD Plan was developed by the Canadian Soccer Association in 2007 and is called Wellness to World Cup. (You can download the full document at [www.canadasoccer.com](http://www.canadasoccer.com) or by clicking [here](#).) It is on the framework outlined in this plan that OSC's Technical Plan is based.

In line with the club's new Five-Year Strategic Plan (2011-15), this plan is the key document that outlines the technical execution of goals and strategic intent in the core areas of player development, coach development and referee development. Each of these areas are co-dependent on each other and equally important. In reading the plan, you'll see that they are fundamentally intertwined, hence the reason to outline their planning under a common Technical Development Plan right here.

This plan takes a bold, new approach to the development of our players, coaches and referees. It plots out the pathway that players, coaches and referees can follow at the club to develop to be the best they can be. It explains where OSC's investment in technical development will be focused to be most impactful on technical advancement. Importantly, it ensures that technical development does not compromise people's enjoyment of the game and continued life-long participation, regardless of their level of ability.

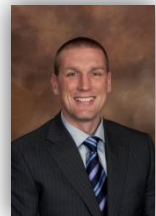
Please take the time to familiarize yourself with this plan. It will answer many questions you may have regarding the underlying philosophy in OSC's technical program design and implementation. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact our Technical Director Jason de Vos or any of his technical staff at the club.

Yours sincerely,

PAUL VARIAN  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Oakville Soccer Club



JASON DE VOS  
Technical Director  
Oakville Soccer Club





# PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

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## **Five-Year Strategic Goals In Player Development**

The OSC Five-Year Strategic Plan has set ambitious goals in the area of Player Development, with the overall vision of having at least four players from the club in the senior national team squads competing at the Women's World Cup in 2019, and/or the Men's World Cup in Qatar in 2022. Although we as a club do not have direct control over this vision, it acts as a lightning rod around which to harness the development of all our players, and inspire them to be the best they can be. Of course, underpinning this vision are many goals and targets that will build the base of the pyramid to support this lofty vision.

Fundamentally, this means achieving the following by the end of 2015:

- 1. Establish and implement a player development plan, in line with the CSA's Long Term Player Development (LTPD) framework, that outlines the development of all OSC players, from House League to Rep level.**
  - a. Conduct a full review of the implementation and effectiveness of the player development plan in line with identified success indicators.*
  - b. Conduct full review of partnerships in terms of effectiveness in driving player development.*
  
- 2. Lobby for the establishment of a competition structure in Ontario that supports optimal player development, in particular for age group U14-18.**
  - a. Ensure that all competitions and leagues that OSC competes in support LTPD.*
  
- 3. Maximize accessibility of players to OSC's development programs, particularly at the 9-13 year old age groups.**
  - a. Ensure that all talent in the club is properly assessed by the age of 13.*
  - b. Ensure that no child cannot be developed to be the best they can be for financial reasons alone.*
  
- 4. Develop OSC's top talent to be successful at the provincial/national level and to be exposed to opportunities to play the game professionally.**
  - a. Have six (6) junior players from Oakville in the junior national squads (U20 and below) by 2015.*
  - b. Have a minimum of 20 university soccer scholarships (US/Canada) per year offered to players leaving Oakville youth programs.*

These goals will be achieved through implementation of the player development pathway that follows.



## **Oakville Soccer Club Player Development Pathway**

Within the context of LTPD principles, Oakville Soccer Club's core technical focus is built with an understanding of a number of important fundamental realities about the club:

- 1) OSC has the largest independent club-based player base in the country, that is heavily youth oriented<sup>1</sup>:
  - a. 88% of the club's outdoor player base are U18
  - b. 71% of the club's outdoor player base are U13
  - c. 52% of the club's outdoor player base fall in the *FUNDamentals* or *Train To Train* LTPD stages
  - d. 26% of the club's outdoor player base fall in the Train To Train LTPD category alone
- 2) OSC is not currently geared to the advanced development of truly elite players, as defined in LTPD, nor does it have the revenue base to do so effectively
- 3) Almost 83% of parents enroll their child at the club for the child to make friends, pursue an active lifestyle, or because the child enjoys the game<sup>2</sup>.
- 4) As a community organization, the club has civic responsibilities to the Town of Oakville in return for significant access to and usage of the municipality's recreational soccer fields and facilities.

All of these factors indicate that, whilst OSC can facilitate the development of a player through an identified development pathway, it must focus more specifically on certain elements of that pathway, and work with external partners in others. The club cannot, and should not, attempt to program an entire player development pathway directly under its own roof. Such an attempt stretches the club's resources so thin that it does not create the best pathway for the player.



As such, this plan outlines a player pathway where OSC plays an active, invested role in early developmental stages. It then actively removes itself from elite adult player development initiatives and focuses on passing young talented players at this level to organizations that focus on this, and are equipped to do it well.

At adult level, the club then focuses its resources on providing fun-focused recreational soccer programs that provide life-long participation in the game for everyone. This way, OSC's top talent is developed as best as possible, whilst ensuring the needs of the majority of its players (who are not elite-focused) are not compromised.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on data from 2010 summer outdoor season (ie. not inclusive of indoor fall/winter participant base)

<sup>2</sup> Derived from club user survey of over 1,400 respondents, February 2011

OSC's player development pathway consists of five phases focused primarily around youth age groups and in line with appropriate LTPD development stages.

### 1) Intro And Fun (U4-U7)<sup>3</sup>

In this initial, entry-level stage, young children are introduced to the game and subjected to limited in-depth technical development or instruction. The focus at this stage is to enroll young players in the program and ensure that they enjoy soccer and want to continue to play. Players participate through the club's House League, with a focus on fun (rather than winning), expression with the ball and playing with others. Mini Kickers, Micro Soccer and Mini Soccer are the game formats employed at this level.<sup>4</sup> Coaches at these age groups are selected for their ability to work with very young children, foster fun and teach the basics of the game. At this early stage, no child is formally assessed in terms of their development potential or ability.



### 2) Teach Them To Play (U8-U12)<sup>5</sup>

These age groups are core development years and are very important in a child's ability to develop to their full potential. It is when they must learn the core skills of the game they will need to develop to higher competitive levels. As such, and given these are the most populated age groups in the club's player demographic, OSC targets a significant amount of its technical resources towards these age groups.



At these age groups, a great emphasis is placed on learning the basic core skills of the game – passing, receiving, dribbling, shooting, ball mastery, etc. The emphasis is still kept firmly off winning and losing in games and heavily on individual player development in supportive, learning environments. For the large part, Mini Soccer is employed as game format at this stage. All players in the club are assessed at least once by the club's technical staff before they reach the age of 10 to ensure that top talent is not overlooked and given the opportunity to be developed if the player and parents desire.

At age groups U8 to U10, emerging talent is identified and offered coaching appropriate to their ability through an Advanced Development Program. The club's competitive/Rep program then commences at U11, albeit in a non-intensive way. At this stage, some players may not continue with active development and choose to play recreationally. These players are supported

<sup>3</sup> This phase is in line with *Active Start* and early *FUNDamentals* stages of LTPD

<sup>4</sup> Please see OSC's House League Manual for further details on these game formats

<sup>5</sup> This phase is in line with late *FUNDamentals* and *Learn To Train* stages of LTPD



through youth recreational soccer through OSC's House League and remain as important to the club as players who may have potential to play competitively.

To ensure late emerging talent is not lost, the House League is divided into Red and White divisions. The Red division continues to focus on development, with practice sessions accompanying the House League match schedule. Late emerging talent may move onto a path towards more competitive soccer if appropriate and desired. The White division focuses purely on recreational fun and ensures all kids have a place to play that suits their ability and interest levels.

### 3) Teach Them To Compete (U13-U16)<sup>6</sup>

As the club's young players head into adolescent years, the development focus advances to introduce competitive elements of the sport and more structured competitive match play. Whilst the emphasis remains on skills development, players in these years are building on the core skills that are already in place and learning more in depth components of the game, including teamwork and tactics. Off-pitch physical



conditioning, nutrition and lifestyle management are also introduced to establish a full, all-encompassing training curriculum that competitive players are accustomed to. An established competitive/Rep program is maintained, with the adoption of an overall squad approach and player promotion within the group dictated to by player development.

At this stage, many players may move to play recreationally, either voluntarily (as is an unavoidable trend in all sports through adolescent years) or through selection, as the intensity of training and competition intensifies and players are actively streamlined. Some late developers may move into the pathway from recreational soccer. However, by the end of this development phase (U16), the vast majority of players will be effectively in recreational or recreationally competitive programs.

### 4) Elite Player Development (age 17-18)<sup>7</sup>

This phase represents an extremely small group of players who have the potential to further their soccer careers at a higher level of development than is offered by Oakville Soccer Club<sup>8</sup>.



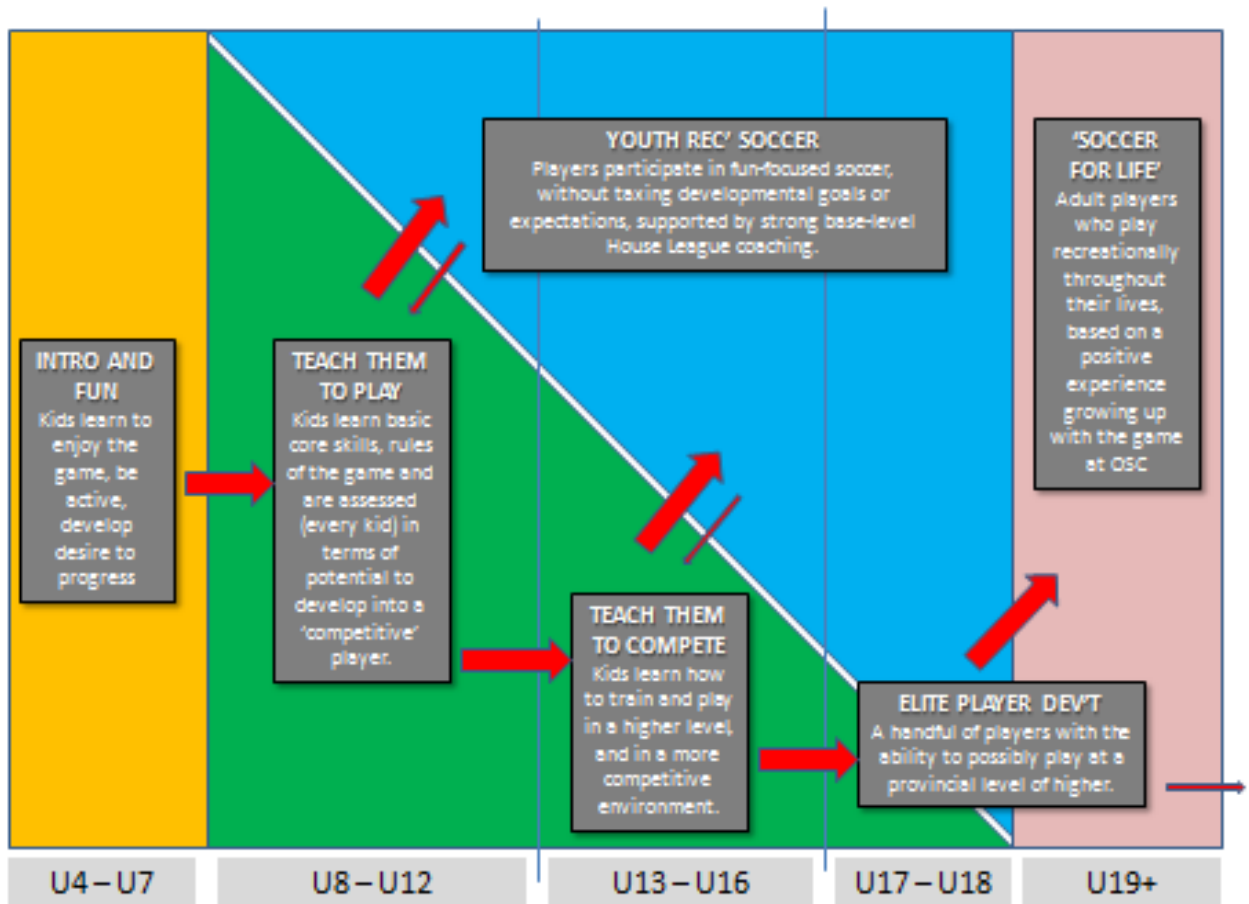
<sup>6</sup> This phase is in line with late *Learn To Train* and *Train To Train* stages of LTPD

<sup>7</sup> This phase is in line with the *Train To Compete* stage of LTPD

<sup>8</sup> Note that OSC's Technical Development Plan does not contain any phase relating to Stage 6 of LTPD (*Train To Win*). This is because the club does not operate technical programming to the level of advancement to merit such programming. The plan envisages this Stage being carried out through partner high performance and elite player development organizations, which the Club's top talent graduates to.



A few exceptional players may already have departed to join a professional soccer club's Academy program. However, those that remain represent the top youth talent at OSC and the club's technical responsibility now switches to establishing the best pathway for the player's ongoing career elsewhere. The players are actively showcased to NCAA and CIS universities with a view to acquiring scholarships that are in the best educational and developmental interests of the player. Players are also actively worked into provincial and national team development programs.



Coaching at this stage moves to competitive game play, tactical awareness and continued lifestyle management. Coaches at this stage of development are well connected to higher level player development organizations, including scholarship-issuing universities and professional and semi-professional soccer clubs in North America and overseas. Their ability to partner with these organizations and promote OSC's top talent to them is a core competency that helps determine their selection as coaches at this level.



## 5) Soccer For Life (age 18+)<sup>9</sup>

At this phase, Oakville Soccer Club's investment in the technical development of its players is almost complete. Those that have the potential to develop further and into high levels of the game should, at this stage of their development, have already progressed out of the club. But that by no means suggests that there is no place for everyone else!



The overwhelming majority of players in this category will still want to play in a recreation or recreationally competitive environment. In this phase, hundreds of adult players participate in and enjoy soccer at the club in adult House Leagues, both indoor and outdoor throughout the year. The club's role moves from technical development to recreational program provider. This ensures that people enjoy a lifelong soccer experience and that every player is included, no matter what their age or circumstance.

## **Guiding Principles In Technical Program Design**

Specific program and policy detail in relation to the House League and competitive/Rep programs through which the bulk of OSC's player development is delivered is contained in separate Policy Manuals relating to these programs. For the purposes of this Technical Development Plan, it is appropriate however to highlight some important principles that are enshrined in the design of all technical programming geared towards player development.

### **1) Genuinely player-centric program design**

Decisions on technical investment are made in the best interests of the development of the player. The results of a game, success of a team, or winning of trophies and on-pitch accolades for OSC are secondary in importance to this overriding principle of advancing every player.

### **2) Coach development and support**

The success of player development programs is contingent on the development of a best-in-class coaching faculty at the club, at all levels and age groups. The next section of this Technical Development Plan provides more detail on how OSC aims to achieve this important goal of exceptional, club-wide coaching and coaching support.

### **3) Consistent and routine player assessment**

Routine assessment of players is structurally built into all program design and coaching requirements. In addition, enhanced web-based player assessment tools will be employed to provide assessments that are consistent in design, easy to understand, and offer the opportunity for parent feedback, qualification and dialogue. It is a mandatory goal for the

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<sup>9</sup> This phase is in line with the *Active For Life* stage of LTPD



technical department to assess every player at the club, regardless of ability or level of play, by the time they turn ten years old.

#### **4) In-depth scouting and talent identification**

OSC's technical development philosophy takes a vertical approach to player assessment at key developmental age groups, to assess all players, regardless of whether they are playing House League or Rep soccer. Head Coaches for each age group at Rep level up to U18 are responsible for ensuring ALL players in their respective age groups are properly scouted, assessed and developed and that the all coaches coaching their age group are properly supported, developed, assessed and managed. In taking a vertical age group driven approach to scouting, rather than a horizontal program-driven approach, no player is overlooked and every player can be advanced.

#### **5) Program accessibility**

As a not-for-profit, community-driven organization, Oakville Soccer Club is striving to ensure that all players can access the level of development that matches their potential. To maximize accessibility, the club is establishing the vertical scouting system outlined above to ensure no talent is overlooked. OSC is also expanding its Financial Assistance Program to ensure that financial barriers that may exist for some players to access the club's programs are brought down. Whilst extra fees must exist for programs that extend over and above a regular playing season, the club subsidizes fees where appropriate in order to make its full program base as affordable as possible. It is OSC's goal to ensure that by 2015 no child's soccer development at the club is compromised for financial reasons.

#### **6) Structured, routine parent communication**

As a routine component of program design, all coaches will be required to establish a structured schedule for parent communication through a program lifecycle. The opportunity for parents to offer feedback, ask questions and understand the rationale and motives that drive certain technical decision-making is core to the overall success of the club's Technical Development Plan, and satisfaction in its users. Included in this communication plan is a constant open line of communication to the Technical Director, through a Parent Advisory Group, that is open for any parent to join at any time, for any period of time they choose.

#### **7) Building of long-term partnerships that put the player first**

Supporting the principle of a genuinely player-centric culture, OSC will develop mutually-beneficial partnerships with other soccer organizations in order to enhance the development experience of it players. This may mean alliances with specialist sports science and sports medicine providers, specialist coaching services and guest coaching clinics. It also means strong partnerships with reputable, scholarship-granting NCAA and CIS universities that can further elite players' development after they leave OSC's youth development system. OSC will also partner with Toronto FC and other professional and semi-professional soccer organizations in order to offer the best continued developmental opportunities for its top talent.



# COACH DEVELOPMENT

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Oakville Soccer Club recognizes that the single most important driver of a successful execution of a player development plan is a first-class coaching team. Indeed, in a system that is the size and scope of Oakville's, it is the only way to ensure a strong, rewarding soccer experience for all players. As an integral part of its Technical Development Plan, OSC is investing heavily in the development of the best coaching faculty possible to advance every player from early House League to advanced, elite level.



In its Five-Year Strategic Plan, OSC has set an overall vision to have the highest percentage of qualified coaches compared to any other club in Canada. Whilst qualifications do not always mean a high quality coach, we feel it is an excellent benchmark through which to drive coaching excellence at all levels at the club. Further to this vision, OSC has set four strategic goals in relation to coach development, to be implemented by the end of 2015.

These strategic goals are:

- 1. Drive Oakville Soccer Club as a centre-of-excellence in coach development in Canada.**
  - a. *OSC has established the strongest in-house Club coach development program in Canada (as endorsed by the CSA).*
  - b. *Develop OSC's web-based coach support and development program to be the best in Canadian soccer.*
- 2. Establish the highest possible level of coaching standards across OSC's entire House League program base.**
  - a. *Ensure all OSC coaches meet the base standard of coaching standard set by the club.*
- 3. Drive coaching excellence in OSC Rep teams.**
  - a. *Ensure all Rep A head coaches have a minimum National A coaching qualification.*
  - b. *Ensure all Rep B & C head coaches have a minimum Provincial B coaching qualification.*
  - c. *Ensure all coaches (Rep and House League) are assessed under the new system at least twice a year on a routine basis.*
- 4. Provide opportunities for OSC's top coaching talent to develop to be the best they can be.**
  - a. *Ensure at least eight (8) coaches have progressed to the National or Provincial set-up by 2015.*



These goals are extremely ambitious. OSC has a coaching compliment of approximately 900 coaches. However, many of these individuals are (by their own admission) unqualified and limited in terms of experience both in coaching and in the game of soccer itself. Many are admirable, honest volunteers who put their hand up to coach in order to ensure the children get a chance to play. We feel it is incumbent on the club to repay this tremendous community spirit with proper training, support and guidance to ensure that all of the club's programs, from House League to senior Rep level, are of a consistently high quality. After all, the coach is at the very centre of the soccer experience for both the player and the parent.



Accordingly, OSC's emphasis in the area of the coach development will be to institute a long-term, all-encompassing up skilling program for the club's entire coaching faculty. This will manifest itself in a number of ways, but will cement Oakville Soccer Club as the dominant centre-of-excellence for grass root level coach development in Canada. Through this ambitious coach training and development program, the club will provide heightened support and structure to allow coaches to coach more effectively, and also

tougher standards to ensure that those who coach here are the best available.

This new coach development program has two components that will be outlined in this plan:

- 1) Coach education & training
- 2) Staff coaching structure & support

## **Coach Education & Training**

As a core backbone to OSC's coach development plan, all club coaches will be provided with a degree of coaching instruction. This will range from a custom-written base-level coach course that all coaches will be required to take, through to the club's sponsorship of its top coaches acquiring advanced coaching levels right up to National A. As such, the coach education program can be divided into the following key components.

### **Formal Training and Coaching Levels**

#### **1. OSC Introduction To Coaching Course**

A base level coaching course will be developed by OSC technical staff that all coaches at the club must take as a minimum coaching standard for the club. The course provides basic instruction for the coaching of youth soccer, focusing heavily on LTPD principles, basic drills and coaching techniques, child and parent communication and the core role of a coach. Geared for new or



inexperienced coaches who may be coaching young children in House League, the course will be provided free of charge to all OSC participating coaches.

## 2. Community Level Coaching Levels

All coaches will be encouraged to progress and attain levels 1-3 in community coaching awards. The club will host coaching courses annually for these levels and cover the costs for coaches to participate<sup>10</sup>.



## 3. Advanced Coaching Levels (Pre-B And Above)

Increasingly high coaching standards will be imposed on coaches wishing to coach in OSC's Rep program. As such, the club will encourage and cover the costs<sup>11</sup> for its coaches to progress to advanced levels of coaching qualification. The club will work with the Ontario Soccer Association and Canadian Soccer Association to ensure the availability of coaching courses to enable coaches to attain these levels.

## Coach Mentoring & Other Support

### A. Mentoring

Through the coaching staff structure outlined below, OSC will create a mentoring system whereby coaches at a certain level work directly with those above and below them to further their development. Rep coaches will work directly with their age group counterparts as a coaching group, rather than in independent silos. Moreover, aspiring coaches from the House League will be given the opportunity to assist in Rep training sessions and gain experience from the Rep coaching train, as part of their development.

### B. Online Support

The club will build significant information support for all its coaches through the introduction of online resources that will assist coach development and deliver quality training sessions. Accessible through the club's website, a variety of tools, drills, tips and advice will be made available for OSC coaches to access anytime, anywhere. An online coach's forum will also allow the club's coaches to exchange ideas, communicate and form a strong, cohesive working team. This resource will be provided free-of-charge for the exclusive use of OSC coaches.

<sup>10</sup> Costs are covered in return for a minimum coaching commitment from the coach to OSC.

<sup>11</sup> Costs are covered in return for a minimum coaching commitment from the coach to OSC.



## **Staff Coach Structure And Support**

In order to implement and properly resource the coach education, training and support outlined above, OSC invests heavily in a professional coaching structure that ensures clear accountability and coach support to each and every coach at the club. These positions are the only coaching positions that are remunerated by the club. The remainder of the club's coaches are voluntary positions and the club supports these great volunteers through investment in their development as coaches and realization of their coaching ambition.



OSC's staff coaching compliment includes the following key elements:

### **1) Technical Director**

The club's Technical Director leads the overall mandate of OSC to develop every player, coach and referee involved in its programs. A senior leadership role, this position reports to the Chief Administrative Officer and ensures that the club's investment in technical development is in line with the core goals and objectives laid out in the its five-year Strategic Plan. The Technical Director establishes and promotes the club's overall Technical Development Plan and drives overall communication to parents, coaches, player and referees on the development philosophy of the club. Due to the size and scope of OSC programs, this role is not primarily an on-pitch coaching role. Instead, the Technical Director is responsible for leading the development of some 900 club coaches and 300 referees, in order to effect the development of the club's entire player base. The Technical Director also works with external stakeholders, including Peel Halton Soccer Association, the Ontario Soccer Association and other League bodies to ensure OSC's players are optimally developed when they play and train outside of the club.

### **2) Coach Development Manager**

Reporting to the Technical Director, the Coach Development Manager will have full responsibility for the development of OSC's entire coaching faculty, from new, inexperienced coaches, up to advanced coaches who may be salaried by the club. This fulltime appointment will work with the network of Head Coaches and Staff Coaches to establish coach development needs across the club's entire program base and establish the coaching courses and other developmental solutions to advance each and every coach at the club. It is through this strategic approach to coach development that the overall quality of OSC's programs, particularly its House League, will improve, as will the development of its players. Fundamentally, the Coach Development Manager is responsible for:

- a. Fully assessing the coaching capabilities of the club, and gaps therein<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This is managed in close consultation with the Head Coaches and Staff Coaches



- b. Establishing a base level 'Introduction to Coaching at OSC' coaching course for all coaches to undertake
- c. Coordinating the hosting of formal community coaching courses on a regular basis
- d. Establishing a system of coach assessment implemented through Head Coaches and Staff Coaches
- e. Monitoring the overall development of coaching capital at the club, and reporting to the Technical Director
- f. Assisting on-pitch in coach development or coach mentoring where necessary and needed

### 3) Age Group Head Coaches – U11-U18

One Head Coach will be appointed to each age group for each gender from U11 to U18. Part-time positions, but remunerated staff of OSC, these 16 positions report directly to the Technical Director and are the equivalent of approximately four fulltime equivalent employees. Aside from directly coaching the Rep A team, each Head Coach is responsible for the development of both the players and coaches within their respective age groups. This creates vertical lines of accountability for each of the age groups' players and coaches to Head Coaches, which are in turn a line of reporting and communication to the Technical Director. Fundamentally, these positions are responsible for:

- a. On-field coaching of the Rep A team
- b. Direct management and development of the age group's entire Rep coaching staff (Rep A-C), including mentoring and one-on-one support with regard to ongoing coach education, etc.
- c. Identification of coach development needs and skills gaps in House League within their age group
- d. Development of House League coaching talent and promotion/integration with Rep coaching staff as appropriate<sup>13</sup>
- e. Coordination of coaching courses and other coach development solutions in tandem with the Coach Development Manager within given age group
- f. Reporting on player and coach development progress within given age group to the Technical Director

### 4) Staff Coaches

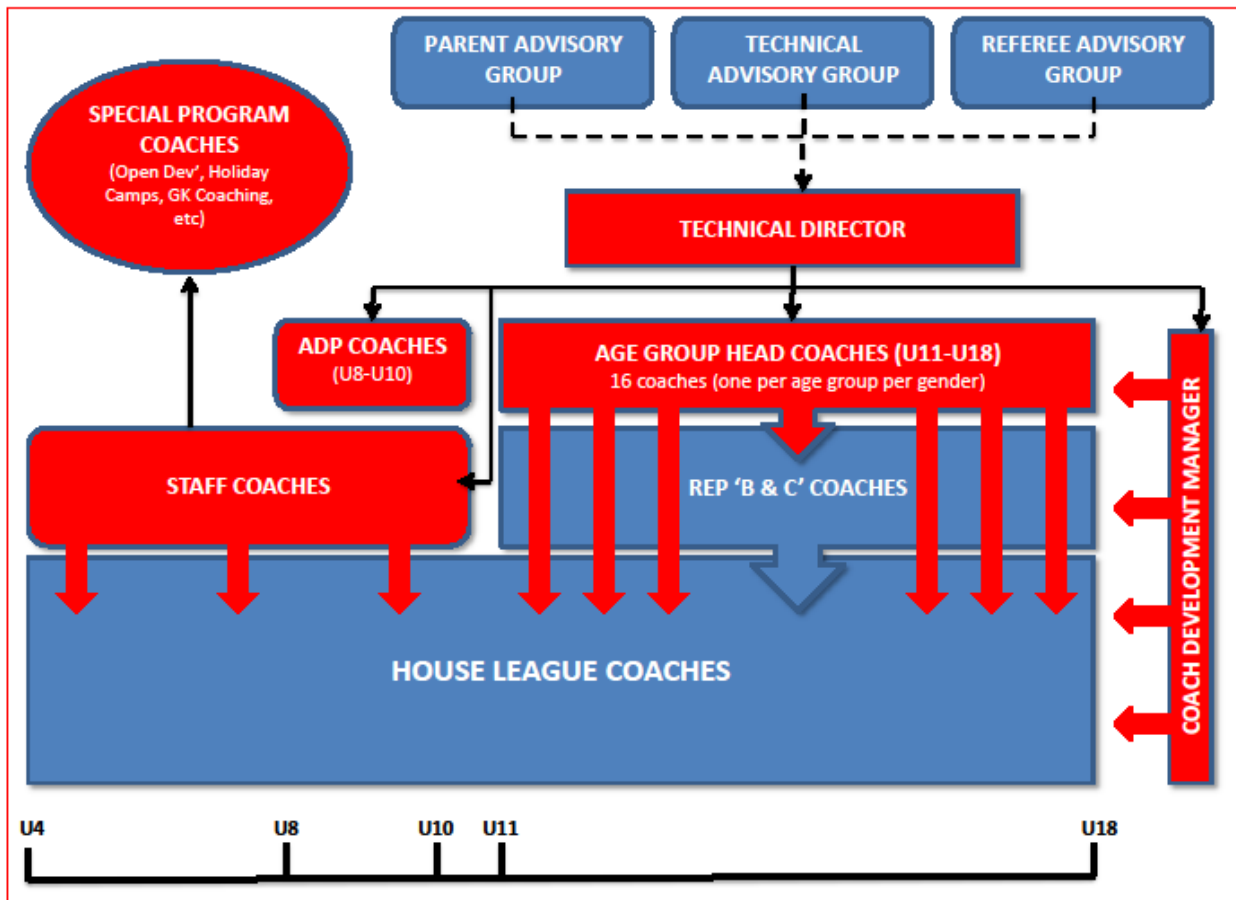
OSC employs full-time Staff Coaches with the primary responsibility for the club's House League programs from age groups U10 and below (one coach for each gender). Whilst the programs at these age groups are less technical in nature than at older age groups, they are large in player and coach volume and contain many coaches who are either new or inexperienced. As



<sup>13</sup> This is managed in conjunction with the Coach Development Manager



such, the Staff Coaches are responsible for coach development in these age groups in tandem with the Coach Development Manager. They also oversee the important task of talent identification and player assessment at age groups U7-U9. As such, they oversee the associated selection of players into White and Red House League, and the club's early Advanced Development Program (ADP)<sup>14</sup>. The club's Staff Coaches also assist in the delivery of a variety of OSC's value-added soccer programs, including its Open Development Program, March-Break & Summer Camps, and schools soccer programs.



## 5) Contract Coaching Staff

Some coaches are hired by OSC on contract to manage certain specific coaching programs where a certain level of coaching skill, experience or specialty is required. Such coaches include specialist goalkeeping coaches, summer camp coaches, strength & conditioning coaches and coaches for the club's Open Development and Advanced Development programs.

<sup>14</sup> A select program that takes children aged 7-9 who have been identified as demonstrating early talent in the game and offers them early advanced coaching, as a pre-cursor to the Rep' program at U11 on.

# REFEREE DEVELOPMENT

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Oakville Soccer Club recognizes that a key element of soccer development that is often overlooked by clubs is that of referee development. Soccer cannot be played in a structured fashion without officials and the club recognizes that it is in the interests of everyone to ensure that the technical development of this important stakeholder group is focused on heavily. As such, in 2010, OSC for the first time established referee development as a responsibility of the Technical Director and established it as one of the seven strategic priorities in its new five-year strategic plan.



Within its strategic plan, OSC has set lofty strategic goals for referee development with an overall vision of developing the most Provincial (Class 1) and Regional (Class 2) referees and reporting the highest referee retention rates of any club in Canada. Underpinning this ambition are five strategic goals, to be achieved by the end of 2015.

These strategic goals are:

- 1. Improve base level knowledge of the rules of the game in all OSC referees.**
  - a. Implement comprehensive fitness standards and knowledge of the game standards for all levels of officiating in concert with the CSA/OSA Referee Development initiatives.*
- 2. Increase the volume of referees developed at OSC to properly manage its projected program expansion.**
  - a. Increase the volume of referees to 500 (53.8% increase on 2011 base).*
- 3. Maximize the retention of OSC referees, particularly young developing referees.**
  - a. Achieve overall referee retention rate of 70% in 2015, actively targeting young referees.*
- 4. Minimize abuse and inappropriate behavior aimed at referees and match officials.**
  - a. Achieve reduction in referee abuse incidents by 40% on 2010 levels.*
- 5. Target the ongoing development and promotion/celebration of OSC's top refereeing talent.**
  - a. Develop a pool of 25% of the active referee base with the capability to referee at the Regional / Provincial level with a firm commitment to OSC.*
  - b. Actively promote the club's best referees to the OSC and soccer community at large.*



Fundamentally, these goals focus heavily on the key components of recruiting, developing and retaining referees, whilst identifying and promoting the club's top referee talent on and up through the system. As such, this is fundamentally in line with the philosophy the club exhibits in relation to the development of its players and coaches.

The bulk of this work is carried out through the club's Referee Development Manager and their associated staff reports, within the Technical Department. However, components of the Plan that relate to tackling inappropriate pitch-side behavior involve other components of the club, including the Marketing & Communications Department and the club's Discipline Committee.

## **Referee Recruitment and Retention**

### **Recruitment**

In recent years, Oakville Soccer Club has vastly improved its recruitment efforts and is now a leading recruiter of referees in Ontario. Based on existing attrition rates, the club must consistently recruit 200-250 referees per year in order to run its programs and associated projected growth. This is a substantial task, and will be achieved through the following:



- 1) Hosting of Multiple Entry-Level and Mini Soccer Referee Clinics
  - a. These courses are hosted from January to May, ahead of the summer outdoor season, at Oakville Soccer Club and delivered by both the OSC Referee Development Manager<sup>15</sup> and other qualified CSA instructors.
- 2) High School Recruitment Programs
  - a. OSC will continue to deliver referee recruitment presentations directly to youth audiences in high schools in the Oakville area.
- 3) Marketing Support
  - a. OSC will launch marketing & communications support programs to its own player base, encouraging players to try pursuing their soccer careers through refereeing.

### **Retention**

OSC's current retention rate is approximately 50%<sup>16</sup>. Whilst this is no higher than attrition rates across the Province, the club deems it unacceptably high and is committed to reducing it in order to relieve the constant pressure placed on its recruitment efforts year-on-year.

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<sup>15</sup> This position is a qualified OSA Referee Instructor

<sup>16</sup> Based on 2010 data

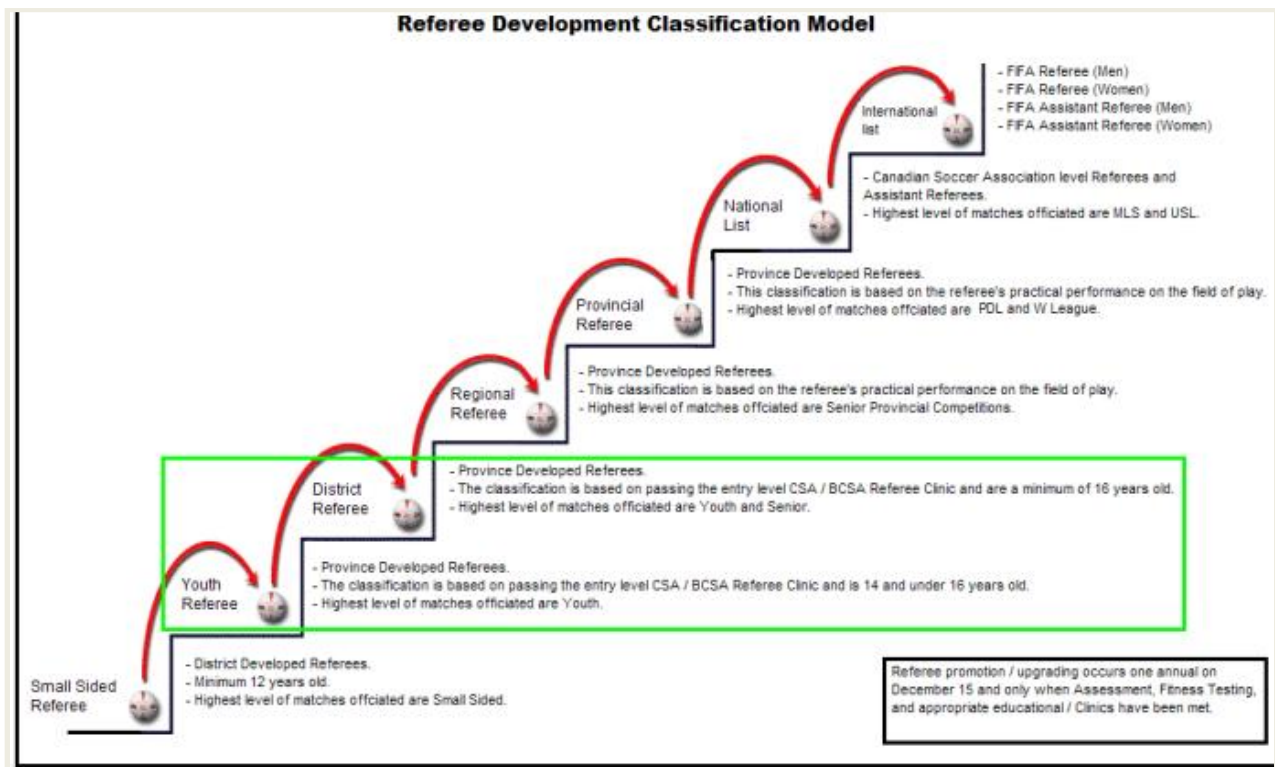
The main reasons cited by referees for not remaining involved are:

- Parent, coach and player abuse
- Lack of developmental support
- Lack of clear referee career pathways

To combat these challenges, the club is focusing its Referee Development Plan heavily on addressing these three issues, with the goal of boosting referee retention to at least 70% by the end of 2015. This means making the plan more than about recruitment and driving measures to provide the career path, developmental support and pitch side environment that makes refereeing an enjoyable experience.

## Development and Referee Advancement

Whilst Oakville Soccer Club does not develop referees outside of those officiating its own programs as community level, that does not mean the club should not be actively promoting its top refereeing talent to officiate at regional, provincial or even national and international level.



The club's direct responsibility in the referee development pathway outlined in the diagram above falls with the green box at entry level at youth and district level. As such, its role is very much centered on recruiting referees, particularly at youth level, giving them their initial developmental support and



officiating experience, and promoting top talent to higher development systems managed by the Ontario Soccer Association and Canadian Soccer Association.

The club's new ambition in elite referee development means it will be actively promoting its top talent more than it has in the past. However, the bulk of the club's active work will be in the early training and development of the many young, emerging referees officiating at community level.

This core developmental support for OSC referees will take the following forms:

**1. Establishment of base-level fitness requirements and testing**

Simple but important fitness tests will be conducted that every referee will be required to take and maintain year-on-year. This will ensure referees can keep up with play and provide a better standard of decision-making.

**2. Introduction of referee assessment and a referee rating system**

A simple rating system will be applied to all referees at the club. Individual referee rating is derived from assessment of referees by the club's Referee Development Manager, other senior referees, as well as form feedback collected from the coaches of the teams participating in the referee's games. Third party expert opinion will also be used where appropriate, for OSC's top refereeing talent that the club is attempting to promote to higher level of officiating.



**3. Regular referee education seminars and feedback forums**

These sessions can range from classroom style meetings to online discussion chat room exclusive to OSC's referees. More structured education sessions will include:

- a. Laws Of The Game updates (and regular testing)
- b. Guest speakers (advanced referees, international speakers)

**4. Web-based referee support**

Linked to the OSC website, a dedicated web-based education and support centre will provide the club's referees with a variety of online training options, including rules interpretation, case studies, video analysis, etc through a dedicated online resource bank. Exclusive to and only accessible by OSC referees, the online centre will be a similar resource to that being introduced to the club's coaching faculty.



## **Referee Support and Abuse Minimization**

Pitch side abuse from parents, coaches and players is the single largest challenge faced in the area of referee development. Whilst the culture of abuse of officials is a global one in soccer, this does not excuse it. Oakville Soccer Club is committed to taking the steps necessary to make its sidelines the best behaved in the country and conducive to referee development.

Whilst the work needed to achieve this is significant and long-term in nature, success in this area will do more to achieve goals and targets in referee development than any other program delivered.

OSC's approach to improving sideline behavior and abuse of officials is three-pronged, focusing on the areas of communication education and discipline.

### **1) Communication**

A long term marketing and communications plan will be developed by the club explaining and promoting good sideline behavior and the positive impact it has on the players, coaches, spectators and referees. The campaign will also clearly outline the club's discipline measures that will enforce policy in this area, and also those in place by the Town of Oakville in relation to its R-Zone policy. These messages will be delivered constantly throughout the year, but particularly at key program launch events such as Coaches Kick-Off and Parent Orientation Days.

### **2) Education**

The club's commitment to improved education in this area focuses on the implementation of a program called Respect In Soccer. A behavioral education course, Respect In Soccer is an online tutorial that explains good and bad behavior in soccer and how to manage it. The course is short (a few hours to complete) and easy-to-follow, with modules designed for both coaches and parents. In other sports (particularly hockey) the program has been very successful in changing inappropriate behavior at sport events across the country. This program is being introduced across Ontario soccer at large and will be introduced at OSC in 2011. The club will be taking steps over time to make the successful completion of the course, and presentation of an associated accreditation number, mandatory for all coaches and parents to participate in the club's soccer programs.



### **3) Discipline**

For those who choose to persist with inappropriate behavior at OSC games, in spite of the communication and education measures outlined above, the club will be introducing stricter discipline measures to maintain a supportive playing environment. These measures will be extended to parents/spectators at games, and not limited to coaches and players, as they have been in the past.

# COMPETITION DEVELOPMENT & REFORM

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A key component of any technical plan is that of competition. Training that is age and ability appropriate is core. However, for any player to truly learn the game of soccer, they must be exposed to competition, be it through tournament format or league play. The design and intensity of this competition is, however, hugely important if it is to be an aid to player development, rather than a hindrance.



Many organizations do not consider competition design in technical development plans, not because they do not recognize its importance, but because it is often too difficult to change due to its complexity, and the sheer volume of stakeholders commonly involved. That said, Oakville Soccer Club deems it essential to address reform to the current Ontario competition system as part of its Technical Development Plan, if the Plan is to be truly effective in developing its players to be the best they can be.

Consequently, the matter of competition reform is committed to as a strategic objective under the Player Development section of its Five-Year Strategic Plan<sup>17</sup>.

## The Current System

Currently, the competition system in Ontario does not support the principles of Long Term Player Development (LTPD). This is largely due to the promotion and relegation system that promotes a 'win to all costs' approach to competition in coaches, parents and clubs at large. While it is appropriate to introduce increased competitiveness in games at more advanced levels and mature age groups, it is detrimental to player development at young ages, when players are still learning the game, are at different levels of physical development, and do not have the soccer skills to compete aggressively.

Competition at key development age groups (U13 and below) should be focused more on developing players skills and offering them a supportive environment to express themselves and test these skills in game play. Under the current system, children who are more advanced at an early age in terms of size, speed and strength are picked first and actively poached by teams in their bid to win at all costs. Players who may potentially become better players when all players are fully grown are overlooked - a winning score line for a team in a given game is put ahead of the development of the players.

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<sup>17</sup> As listed under the Player Development strategic goals on P4 of this document.



## Advocating For a Player-Centric Competition System

In order to fully support the implementation of LTPD principles in the development of its players, Oakville Soccer Club will actively advocate for changes to the Ontario competition system to remedy the issues raised above. This means communicating and working with other clubs to build consensus on key components of competition reform and actively working positively with the Ontario Soccer Association and its Districts to drive necessary change.

### The key elements of competition reform that OSC advocates for include:

- Removal of promotion / relegation from all youth leagues
- Voluntary hierarchy in player allocation to rep teams
  - ie. the coach can pick players for Rep A,B,C teams on a week-to-week basis, based on their development
- Reduction in league fees and/or inclusion in District/OSA registration fees
- Clarity on which leagues/competitions fit into OSA player development pathways, and where
  - Competitions are clearly identified as instruments for provincial and national player identification and development (or clearly indicated to be recreational Active For Life)



# CONCLUSIONS

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This plan outlines the core philosophies and technical goals that will drive the design and investment in OSC's technical programs moving forward. It does not, however, delve into technical program detail. This detail includes specific information on how the club's various technical programs will operate, such as fee information, training schedules/curricula, player assessment processes, etc.

This program detail is developed by the technical department under the leadership of the Technical Director and on advice from the Advisory Groups (Technical, Parent and Referee) that have been established to assist in these matters. As the programs evolve and continuously improve, so these details will change. Consequently, they will be communicated directly to program users on a seasonal basis. The goals that the programs are aiming to achieve, however, will not change and are as outlined in this plan.

This plan has been devised to clearly outline fundamentally how the club develops its players, coaches and referees. It shows where the club invests heavily, and where it does not. It shows what technical areas the club considers core business, and what it does not. We hope that in reading it, the club's stakeholders have a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of its technical investment and that it can form the backbone of achieving the considerable ambition laid out in its Strategic Plan.