

# FIVE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT PLAY-PRACTICE-PLAY

As the U.S. Soccer Grassroots initiatives continue to come online through the launch of the in-person and online Grassroots coaching courses, a critical concept that all Grassroots coaches will learn about is *Play-Practice-Play*. Researched and developed by technical leaders across the domestic Grassroots landscape, *Play-Practice-Play* is the optimal manner to structure a practice session for youth players, as it utilizes best practices for the learning and application of game-like scenarios.

Here are five things you should know about this important component of U.S. Soccer's Grassroots initiatives:

## WHAT IS PLAY-PRACTICE-PLAY?

*Play-Practice-Play* is a Grassroots developed philosophy designed around a player-centered approach to coaching. Taking a player centered approach places the needs and motivations of the player at the forefront of a coach's approach to coaching his or her players. The concept of *Play-Practice-Play* is to allow young players to experience the game and game-like situations as much as possible. This approach differs from traditional practices that may have children standing in lines, running laps and participating in drills that don't resemble the game of soccer.

**STAGE 1: PLAY** When players arrive to practice, the first responsibility of the coach is to create an environment that is safe, engaging and fun. In the first *Play* phase, players engage in small-sided games with the primary focus on having fun. It is important that these pickup-style games are led by the players and facilitated by the coaches. During this first *Play* stage, players have the opportunity to experience the game while the coach observes and guides them towards developing their own solutions rather than being directed what to do.

**STAGE 2: PRACTICE** In the second phase of *Play-Practice-Play*, children are engaged in different forms of targeted learning activities to further guide their opportunities to develop. The goal of the *Practice* phase is to create an environment filled with opportunities for players to experience and learn about the goal of the training session through repetition.

*Practice* activities should be of appropriate challenge (striking a balance between success and failure), resemble the game, involve the players making decisions and allow for creative problem solving. The role of the coach during this phase is to guide players while using teaching actions. While it is during this phase that targeted learning takes place, there should always be an emphasis on keeping the atmosphere fun and enjoyable for the players.

**STAGE 3: PLAY AGAIN!** The final stage of *Play-Practice-Play* is the game. This phase offers players the opportunity and freedom to play, without interruption, in an environment that mirrors the actual game. The focus of the final *Play* phase is to encourage players to express themselves and demonstrate what they learned during the *Practice* phase. A coach should observe and guide using minimal dialogue if possible. By silently observing the application of the *Practice* phase in the final *Play* phase, the coach is able to check each player's understanding and ability to execute the goal of the training session.

**WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION** Through U.S. Soccer's Grassroots Licensing Courses, prospective coaches have the opportunity to learn more about the *Play-Practice-Play* methodology. These opportunities include gaining access to already created *Play Practice Play* training sessions. Click [here](#) to access U.S. Soccer's free Introduction to Grassroots Coaching Education Module and start your journey towards becoming a licensed coach!