



# THE FIRST TIME

## SOCCKER COACH



**CHECKLIST AND TIPS FOR A FUN SEASON**

*by Coach Mike Sullivan*



# LET'S GET STARTED!

Welcome and THANK YOU for volunteering your time to having a POSITIVE IMPACT on a bunch of young player's lives for the next season of recreation youth soccer! Below is a quick check list to getting started. If you would like more tips and insight on these topics, please read further into this helpful handbook on their correlating pages.

*"All the best of luck to you First Time Coach!"*  
*-Coach Mike Sullivan*

## FIRST TIME SOCCER COACH CHECKLIST

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# CONTACTING YOUR PLAYERS

Let's start with your roster and contact phone numbers and emails. Keep in mind, most likely your new players have no idea that they have been placed on your team and are eagerly awaiting to hear from anyone from your league to know for sure they will be playing this season. It's best to start those personal phone calls right away. Some coaches prefer to start with the given email list and send out their greetings via email. This approach is ok too especially if you're the shy type, but (in my experience) your players would rather hear from their COACH and how excited you are they are on your team.

While many of your phone calls can yield you a bunch of people NOT answering their phones these days, emails make a great follow through after a personal call. Email addresses can be input wrong from the league by mistake for a number of reasons. When filling in a player application, typos can occur or parent's hand writing can be confusing to whomever is doing the inputting. Just one misspelled letter, number or symbol and now you have yourself a miscommunication waiting to happen.

During this initial get-to-know process, you'll also find that there may be multiple email addresses for separate parents. You'll have to keep track of these and keep your parent email list up to date for future team emails and team parent messages to your parents.

Keep your phone message pretty simple as you will be making possibly 10-14 phone calls. Something like, "Hi there (sample family). This is Coach (your full name), and I wanted to let you know that your son/daughter (their name) was placed on my team for this season of soccer. I will be sending out an email follow up to let you know just when and where our first parent-player meet and greet will be, so please be on the look out in your email box this evening. If you do not receive it, please call me back at this phone number (your ph#) as soon as possible please. Thank you!"

## **SETTING UP YOUR PRACTICE DAYS AND TIMES**

Your league division director will be your best contact on just where and how you can register your team's practice location(s) and time(s). Just keep in mind that YOU are the coach volunteering YOUR time to coach a group of kids for the benefit of the parents who have chosen not to or were unable to do the job that YOU volunteered to do. So, YOU pick the time and days when you are available to do that job. Most league's will back you up in this. If your time(s) or practice location(s) do not work for any set of parents, they can contact the league to be placed on another team possibly or you could encourage them to speak with the other parents to arrange a carpool possibly.

### **ROOKIE MISTAKE ALERT!**

When it comes to setting your practice times and locations, do not make the rookie mistake of changing your availability or location to make it more convenient for one set of parents. You will NEVER get all parents to agree amongst themselves and you most likely be saddled with something you cannot commit to.

## **SETTING UP YOUR FIRST MEET AND GREET**

So, we have contacted all your players and arranged for your practice location, days and times. Next, we'll have to introduce ourselves to your team and parents. I would imagine all coaches have their own way of running a first night meeting, but I myself come prepared with notes on a few topics as described below:

- 1) Introduction - Include who am I and why did I volunteer my time to coach their kids. Past experience I have (played in high school, currently play in an adult league, etc). Why I am excited to coach this season.
- 2) Expectations - It is very important to set the "tone" from the beginning. A few things you should expect from your team and parents. There should be NO negative talk amongst your players to one another whenever they are together. Only POSITIVE encouragement will be tolerated on your team. You will find that this creates a comfortable atmosphere among your players where they are free to be themselves and learn.

From the parents, you expect their patience and timeliness. You are NOT the cheap babysitter assigned to their child all season.

3) League Mandates - Whatever league protocols are being implemented that you need to communicate to your parents; concussion protocols, mandated equipment, etc.

4) Injuries - Small injuries are common for a contact sport like soccer. Most small injuries are small bumps, scratches. Most of these situations are remedied with a standard first aid kit found at stores. You want to make sure you are aware of any serious or potentially serious medical conditions that may need addressing so you are aware of; bee stings, epileptic seizures, asthma, allergies to nuts, etc.

5) Important Team Info - Picture date, time and location. First game of the season and the expected last game of the season. Expected season expenses (team banner, team party, etc).

## **ASSIGNING A TEAM PARENT**

Having a little extra help here and there is always a welcomed addition to the team especially for the first time coach. The team parent role can be assigned just about any ole way the coach wants, but you will find usually that there is someone that has experience in this role and wouldn't mind doing it again. The team parent duty shouldn't really take more than handing them a few duties which I have outlined below:

- 1) Give them a copy of your current parent email list that they might need to send out a few emails throughout the season should you ask them to.
- 2) Make a snack parent list and make sure that each game is covered. I usually make mine go alphabetically and try to divide up the games with one parent bringing cool drinks and the other bringing the snack bags.
- 3) Have them initiate the team banner order and start the collecting of funds.
- 4) Set the end of season party location, date and time.
- 5) Have them download a FREE copy of the "First Time Team Parent" Handbook available on our website!

You may want to assign the job of bringing the team banner to the games to another parent also. They would have one job all season; to make sure the team banner is set up before the game and taken down after each game of the season.

## **COLLECTING PLAYER INFORMATION**

Should your league require you to have your parents fill in a player form or have you have a copy of that form at all times wherever the team may go, I would recommend putting all those forms in a 1/2" binder. This binder would be with you at all practices and games. Should you not be able to attend a game, you can pass this binder off to a substitute coach just in case any emergency arises. After which you would need to retrieve your team binder once you are back to normal practices and games.

These FREE tools are available for download at [www.ActionHeroBanners.com](http://www.ActionHeroBanners.com), under the "Toolbox" tab.

- 1) Quick Contact Sheet - List of 'textable' phone numbers for quick messages or carpools.
- 2) Player Questionnaires - Will help you get to know your players and work on a common goal together.
- 3) Player and Parent Codes of Conduct - Will help you establish a personal responsibility atmosphere.

## **ROOKIE MISTAKE ALERT!**

Team Uniforms - When you finally get those new uniforms in, don't be too quick to hand them out to players. It is very common before your first game that their may be roster changes. It is best to distribute your player uniforms the night before your first game, and remember to take note of which player numbers go to which player for your game rosters!

## **PLANNING A PRACTICE**

It makes little difference which age division you are coaching when it comes to planning out your practices. In a nutshell, you will be planning to appropriately teach to the level of their soccer intellect. In the very young ages, just keeping their attention on your practice session may be an accomplishment in itself.

At all age groups, try to remember to laugh. These kids comes up with some very creative and funny things along the way. You having a good sense of humor makes you relateable and fun to be around too.

A few aspects to keep in mind to planning a fun and effective practice:

**1) Teach In Progressions**

- Start with a simple skill (ex: how to pass a ball correctly)
- Next implement a small passing game (slow pace)
- Increase the speed or complexity (faster pace)
- Remind them to PRACTICE what they have just learned in their scrimmage time.

**2) Don't Fill In The Gaps With 'Take A Lap'**

- Try to come to the field with a practice plan. The kids DO pick up on the signs that coach did not have a plan for today and become quickly bored and lose interest in participating.

**3) Every Practice Try To Challenge Them**

- Every practice should have elements of challenging them physically, mentally, building confidence and communication while always remaining as FUN as possible.

**4) Ask At The End Of Practice "Did You Have Fun Today?"**

- This is kind of like the coach double-checking their work.

Your average practice times per age group:

Groups (U4-U6) 45min practice, one practice per week is common.

Groups (U8-U10) 60min practice(s), one to two practices per week are common.

Groups (U12-U18) 75min - 90min practices, two practices per week are commonly expected.

There are many social media platforms to draw ideas from for planning practices too. YouTube, Instagram and Facebook to name a few have a plethora of videos and special groups to join and ask the advice of other coaches from around the globe. Your league may even have their own library to learn from also (remember to ask your director). I myself, try to find ideas from coaches I personally admire about their style of coaching. Usually the ones that have a good sense of humor, are relateable to all ages, clear instruction and do not try to over complicate the game. I like lesson plans that spark creativity, challenge their skill and focus and working together as a team. Keep in mind that this is RECREATION soccer and not competitive (club) soccer. What you might see demonstrated on a video may not work for all of your players skill-wise. Learn to adapt to this, slow it down or make it less complex if possible for the beginner players. As long as it stays fun, your players should stay engaged long enough to keep trying. If it looks too complicated or difficult, they may disengage and go home feeling like "Soccer is HARD".



## HELPFUL GAME DAY TOOLS

So the big day is finally here... the team's FIRST game! This should be an exciting day for everyone so relax, take a deep breath and know that you will survive this. It is best to remind all of your parent's that EVERYONE should be on their best behavior. Only POSITIVE comments and cheers towards the field. Parents should also refrain from shouting out coaching instructions as well.

Coach, a note on referees... please keep in mind that the referees are usually very young and volunteers too. They will not change their calls because they are being bullied by a brash coach. Just play on. This is a LEARNING environment for EVERYONE. Believe me when I say this, the kids AND parents will mimic any negative behavior YOU display. Stay POSITIVE coach. Remember, you are coaching KIDS today, not a SPORT.

These FREE tools are available for download at [www.ActionHeroBanners.com](http://www.ActionHeroBanners.com), under the "Toolbox" tab.

- 1) Game Day Roster - A league requirement for each league game played.
- 2) Game Plans - Will help you organize your team player positions and subs for the game.
- 3) Cheer Cards - A parent tool to help them cheer on your players by first name while reminding them of proper sideline behavior.

## CONGRATULATIONS!

Before you know it, the end of your first season as coach will come to a finish. There are many topics here that I could have expanded in much greater detail, but that would be taking out some of the "magic of discovery" in your first season as coach. This is a new journey for you. Maybe you'll tough it out this ONE season, or maybe you'll realize along the way that you really ENJOY coaching like I do and alot of my fellow coaches too. This is a small handbook that touches on the basics of getting started in your first season. By the time you finish your first 1-2 games this season, I'm sure you will start feeling your coaching wings and will breath a little easier. There will be ups and downs EVERY season (just like in life) and just like what we are teaching our players, correct? "When the going gets tough, the TOUGH get going!" Don't be afraid to reach out to other coaches or your league's director of coaches for a little advice from time to time too. At the end of the day, we are ALL on the SAME TEAM in coaching kids.



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By the way, if mostly ALL of your team is still showing up to your practices and having fun as your season is coming to an end, you are doing something right. You have kids that are most likely looking forward to another season ahead of them thanks in part to you. If you feel that you have built a little confidence in each of your players and they have learned at least one new skill this past season, maybe even had a team win here and there...

Congratulations COACH on a successful and fun season of rec soccer.  
Stay humble. Laugh often. And Always Have Fun!

