



# Wellness to World Cup

Presented by BMO

## Long-Term Player Development

As coaches, teachers, administrators and parents, we need to look at the big picture for Canadian soccer. We want to develop "star" players who can play on the big stage, but we also want to encourage recreational players who can benefit from the health aspects of soccer and give back to the game for years to come as coaches, officials, and administrators.

Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) is the Canadian Soccer Association's pathway to success on both fronts. LTPD is a player-centred approach that provides guidelines for correct training, competition, and recovery based on scientific principles of human development and athlete training, combined with the knowledge of expert coaches.

Player-centred means we respect the developmental needs of our players first and foremost. We ensure that our young players have fun while they learn so they want to continue playing. It also means we provide challenging opportunities for special talents so they can develop their abilities and pursue excellence. All of these needs are addressed in the seven stages of LTPD.

To learn more about Wellness to World Cup presented by BMO visit: [www.CanadaSoccer.com](http://www.CanadaSoccer.com). To learn more about LTAD visit: [www.canadiansportforlife.ca](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca).



### STAGE 1: ACTIVE START

At this stage, players should participate in stimulating practices and games that develop basic technical skills in a FUN atmosphere. The emphasis should be movement exercises and games that promote a feel for the ball while teaching basic principles of play within a fun but structured setting. Informal games can be set up at the end of practices or as part of a jamboree mixing exercising and games. Play equal time and try all team positions, including goalkeeper, and equal time should be allotted to practices and games.



U4-U6 Female and Male

**GOAL:** Encourage child activity and develop basic motor skills.

**TECHNICAL:** Introduce individual skills. Dribbling with all parts of the foot, combined with simple techniques for changing direction (turns, drag backs). Basic shooting where players experience success and the thrill of a goal!

**TACTICAL:** No tactical instructions. Emphasis on the individual.

**PHYSICAL:** Provide a fun setting and simple mode of play that develops basic movement skills in running, jumping, kicking, throwing and catching.

**MENTAL:** Fun and passion for play. Experience success and build confidence by receiving positive recognition.

**LIFESTYLE:** Enjoy a variety of sports and physical activities.

**PERSONAL:** Positive attitude and self-esteem.

**GOALKEEPING:** No goalkeepers at this age. All players should learn the basic techniques of ball handling at different heights (not high balls) and throwing with one and two hands on the ground and in the air. Footwork is introduced including side-skip to get in line with the ball. Introduce diving from a kneeling position.

### STAGE 2: FUNDAMENTALS

At this stage, players should participate in stimulating practices and games that develop basic technical skills in a FUN atmosphere. The emphasis should be movement exercises and games that promote a feel for the ball while teaching basic principles of play within a fun but structured setting. Mini game formats are used, ranging from 3v3 to 5v5, and a basic league schedule can be created but no standings should be kept. All players should play equal time and try all team positions, including goalkeeper, and equal time should be allotted to practices and games.



U6-U8 Female/U6-U9 Male

**GOAL:** Technique development through fun. Emphasize skills and ABCs, not tactics.

**TECHNICAL:** Continue to develop dribbling, and introduce dribbling with sole, inside and outside of foot. Continue to introduce and develop techniques for turning and changing direction, including more advanced techniques such as inside and outside hooks, even stepovers and scissors. Develop short passing with side foot and laces, and develop concept of passing to feet. Introduce receiving with inside and outside of foot and instep, and introduce "crossing" and shooting while dribbling.

**TACTICAL:** Basic game concepts and rules. Introduction to team cooperation through small-sided games, but emphasis is still primarily on the individual. Finding space is important.

**PHYSICAL:** Develop the ABCs of movement: agility, balance, coordination and speed. Speed training should focus on quickness and agility. Continue general development of running, jumping, kicking, throwing and catching. Develop flexibility and suppleness.

**MENTAL:** Basic game awareness and situations/formats to develop decision making. Experience success and receive positive recognition.

**LIFESTYLE:** Enjoy a variety of sports and physical activities.

**PERSONAL:** Positive attitude and self-esteem. Fair play and ethics. Promote group interaction skills.

**GOALKEEPING:** All players take turns in goal. Continue development of ball handling at all heights and above balls (simple service/no opposition). Introduce simple communication ("Keeper!" "Away!"). Continue with basic diving technique from a "Gorilla" stance. Develop correct body shape. Introduce the concept of the keeper as the rear defender (Sweeper/Keeper).

### STAGE 3: LEARNING TO TRAIN

This stage introduces players to disciplined training and begins to develop their understanding of principles of play alongside their skills practice. Repetitions are important to develop technical proficiency, but creating a fun and challenging environment is still paramount to stimulate learning and promote a love of the game. Game formats can range from 6v6 to 8v8 as players advance through this stage, and again a simple league schedule can be created, but no standings should be kept – the emphasis is still FUN. All players play equal time and try all team positions, including goalkeeping, and the training to competition ratio should be 2 to 3 training sessions for every game.



U8-U11 Female/U9-U12 Male

**GOAL:** Focus on technique and skill development and introduce tactics. Fun is still paramount.

**TECHNICAL:** Golden age of skills learning. Teach more advanced skills and movements. Practice skills in games to encourage decision making. Develop and refine dribbling. Continue to develop turns, drag backs, shielding, and hooks, as well as fakes such as stepovers and scissors. Refine short passing, develop passing with outside of foot and chips, and introduce medium and long passes. Introduce receiving with all parts of the body and shooting with volleys and half-volleys. Heading may be introduced towards the end of this stage.

**TACTICAL:** Continue small-sided games. Introduce attack and defense principles. Basic team play with 2 and 3 player combinations. Introduce positional awareness in a variety of positions. Teach basic set pieces (free kicks, correct throw-ins).

**PHYSICAL:** Continue to develop ABCs. Maintain flexibility and suppleness. Introduce warm-up. Continue to develop quickness and agility.

**MENTAL:** Introduce basic mental preparation with goal-setting, determination and concentration. Experience success and receive positive recognition.

**LIFESTYLE:** Enjoy a variety of sports and physical activities. Identify complementary sports.

**PERSONAL:** Fair play and ethics. Accept training structure and discipline. Promote group interaction skills. Internal motivation.

**GOALKEEPING:** Players still take turns in goal. Resist temptation to limit goalkeeping to a few. Continue developing ball handling, ball rolling and over-arm throws, footwork, goal kicks, drop kicks, moving back passes and punts. Introduce side-arm and javelin throw, deflecting. Introduce variety of dives. Introduce catching and deflecting crosses from a simple thrown service.

### STAGE 4: TRAINING TO TRAIN

At this stage, skill training demands and training loads are increased to develop and refine skills and tactics. Tactical awareness becomes an increasingly important facet of training, alongside mental toughness, concentration, and diligence. Elite soccer groups may express interest in recruiting talented young players, but coaches and parents should be careful to recognize and protect the long-term interests of each athlete. Game formats develop from 8v8 to 11v11 (although no 11v11 prior to 13 years of age) as players grow through this stage, and the season moves toward year-round play that includes appropriate rest and recovery periods.



U11-U15 Female/U12-U16 Male

**GOAL:** Increase training loads and soccer-specific skills and tactics. Begin to identify elite players.

**TECHNICAL:** Develop consistency in base skills. Continue to introduce advanced skills. Develop position-specific skills. Practice with increasingly complex and demanding games. Individualized training to address strengths and weaknesses.

**TACTICAL:** Increased emphasis on team play. Understand principles of play such as offensive width and depth, defending pressure, cover and balance. Positional awareness developed in small-sided games and full-sided competitive matches. Develop understanding of defense, midfield and forward units' tasks.

**PHYSICAL:** Regular musculoskeletal assessment to detect onset of PHV and monitor afterwards. Aerobic training after onset of PHV. Girls strength training at onset of menarche after PHV. Boys strength training 12-18 months after PHV. Emphasize flexibility during PHV. Soccer-specific conditioning - stamina, speed, strength, suppleness.

**MENTAL:** Introduce advanced skills: Self-talk, imagery, profiling and thought-stopping. Introduce training and competition diaries. Relaxation and anxiety control techniques.

**LIFESTYLE:** Understand nutrition for health and optimized performance. Manage rest and recovery and time management.

**PERSONAL:** Responsibility and self discipline. Positive communication and teamwork. Issues of peer groups, alcohol, drugs, school, family.

**GOALKEEPING:** Specialization phase, but should still play field. Refine ball handling at all heights plus shots and with crosses. Catch? Deflect? Top hand situations. Develop two-handed/one-handed punching of crossed balls. Refine throwing and diving techniques, footwork, goal kicks and punts. Develop drop kicks and moving back passes. Introduce side winder, fly kick and tackling.

### STAGE 5: TRAINING TO COMPETE

Players who are proficient in their soccer skills now train to refine their maturity in game play, so they can excel under the pressure of regional and international competition. They must be exposed to quality playing and training environments which extend their mental, physical, tactical and technical capabilities to the limit. Soccer is their primary sport, and they should play regularly in highly competitive matches at the select, semi-professional, professional and international level. The season is built on year-round play, though there must be a proper environment with appropriate ratio of training, competition, and rest throughout year.



U15-U19 Female/U16-U20 Male

**GOAL:** Develop players for elite competition.

**TECHNICAL:** Consistency and proficiency in core skills. Continue to develop advanced skills. Individual skills emerge as 'personal style'. Skills training happens at high intensity under competitive conditions.

**TACTICAL:** Advanced team systems and strategies. Linkage between players and team units. Effective use of set pieces. Awareness of opponents' tactics, strengths and weaknesses. Ability to adapt to opponents and tactical changes. Refinement and enhancement of attacking and defending principles.

**PHYSICAL:** Conditioning specific to positions, individuals, and soccer skills. Further develop flexibility, agility, aerobic and anaerobic endurance, core strength and stability. Prevention and care of injuries. Tapering and peaking for optimal performances. Individualization of physical training. Testing is crucial to monitor progress.

**MENTAL:** Pre-competition self-talk, imagery, thought-stopping, goal setting, mental toughness, anxiety control and relaxation. Techniques to re-focus. Maintaining mental skills under pressure and fatigue. Performance analysis to identify mental weaknesses.

**LIFESTYLE:** Advanced diet, nutrition and hydration. Understand periodized training plans. Balancing training and lifestyle needs.

**PERSONAL:** Responsibility and self discipline. Planning for career/sport options. Scholarships and compensation schemes. Integration of soccer, career and life goals.

**GOALKEEPING:** Most players including keepers now in specialized positions. Continue refining and perfecting all techniques, including ball handling, diving, footwork, deflecting and punching, diving, and kicking. Greater emphasis on the leadership role regarding communication/positioning/directing players, particularly defenders, in tactical requirements.

### STAGE 6: TRAINING TO WIN

Players are training and competing at the highest level of national and international competition, from professional league play to international tournaments. The majority, if not all, of the player's physical, technical, tactical, and psychological qualities are now fully established. The focus of training shifts to optimization of performance, and players should compete regularly in high-pressure games to develop consistency. The season is built on year-round play, though there must be an appropriate ratio of training, competition, and rest throughout year.



U18+ Female/U19+ Male

**GOAL:** Maximizing all player capacities - skills, tactics, mentality, physical attributes.

**TECHNICAL:** Complete refinement of soccer-specific skills to ensure automatic performance under pressure. Training skills to prepare for competition are second nature.

**TACTICAL:** High confidence and competency in decision making, leadership and game analysis. Ability to adjust game plan and adapt playing strategies to suit changing game conditions. Clear understanding of team shape and player roles within system. Importance and organization of set pieces for attack/defence. Game management skills (ie. field conditions, time of game, score in game etc.)

**PHYSICAL:** Maximization of physical capacities for optimal performance. Individual fitness programs for maintenance and improvement. Training, rest and recovery are closely monitored. Periodization is essential.

**MENTAL:** Pre-practice and pre-competition routines are automatic. Firm confidence in independent decision making. Increased sense of responsibility, accountability, discipline and leadership. Competitive mentality and will to win.

**LIFESTYLE:** Diet, nutrition and hydration plans/methods are fully understood. Self-monitoring is firmly established. Balance between training, competition and life outside of sport is well managed.

**PERSONAL:** Full integration of soccer, career and life goals.

**GOALKEEPING:** Goalkeepers are entirely specialists. Most skills are in a maintenance or remedial mode and "perfecting" mode. The leadership/tactical role of the Sweeper/Keeper is paramount. The interaction between GKs and field players is critical to the success of the team. These should be steadily tested/refined in training and game situations with the highest level of competition and pressure.

### STAGE 7: ACTIVE FOR LIFE

At any stage in the LTPD model, regardless of their level of ability, players may decide to play soccer as a purely recreational sport so they can continue to enjoy the game and maintain lifelong wellness. They might be youth players who decide not to pursue high performance, or they might be top players from senior clubs, colleges, universities, and semi-professional teams who enjoy competition but do not intend to play at the international level. They might also be complete newcomers to the game who discover an interest in soccer in late adolescence or adult life. The recruitment and retention of players, coaches, referees and administrators is key to the ongoing development of both grassroots and elite soccer in Canada.



Any age Female and Male

**GOAL:** Foster lifelong activity, while also encouraging players to pursue roles in coaching, officiating, and administration.

**TECHNICAL:** Maintain existing skills and learn new skills as desired.

**TACTICAL:** Basic tactics are sufficient to enjoy the game at a recreational level. More advanced are required for competitive level.

**PHYSICAL:** Follow age-appropriate guidelines for endurance, strength and flexibility to maintain active lifestyle.

**MENTAL:** Focus on having fun, in addition to stress release and fitness discipline.

**LIFESTYLE:** Soccer activity is part of a larger orientation toward wellness and community involvement.

**PERSONAL:** Social activity and contact. Giving back to the soccer community through supporting roles -