

SOCCER TRYOUT SECRETS

by Coach Steve Parker



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Soccer Tryout Secrets!

The cuts can be tough; you have to make a decision between a quick, striker or a reliable defender and a player with a little finesse and more playmaking. Tryouts are one of the most difficult times being a coach – you have to decide the athletic futures of some of the players that are coming out for your team.

Further, what makes this decision so demanding is that the players you select now are going to be the players that make up your team for the course of the season. This is for all of the marbles. You may not get a chance to change your roster until next season.

That's why it is important to do it properly now!

Soccer Tryout Secrets is designed to help take some of the gamble and guesswork out of selecting players for your team. I mean, you never really know how a player is going to turn out in the end, but you can make a good assumption based on what you see in your tryout camp.

To help you along in the selection of your team, I have provided the following resources:

- A strategy on choosing the right players for your team and the characteristics that make great team players.
- A **Selection Matrix** that is going to help you decide which players have to go and which players to keep. It also gives you an opportunity to provide players who are on the cusp, a little coaching direction to help them over the top.
- In the spirit of **Soccer Drills and Practice Plan**, I have included a few different practice plans that you can use for your tryout camps.

Coaching isn't easy – especially at tryout time. You have to end up crushing a few dreams while making others come true. This plan is going to aid you in making the best overall decision for your team.

Best of Luck!

Building Your Team

OK, how many players? This is subjective in many cases, but I can offer you a few ideas on coming up with the numbers on your team.

- How many players came out to tryouts
- How many goalies will you carry, and will they play 'out' when not playing goal?
- How many players do you want on your roster that are 'projects' and you are building for future years?
- Is your team reliable in making practices and games?

Taking into account all of these questions, I would suggest that a good sized team is between 17 and 20 players. If you have too many, then everybody is always splitting playing time (which no one really likes), and if you have too few players, then you risk not having enough to play. Players aren't always the most reliable, and other things like vacations, homework, and other occasions get in the way of soccer – leaving you short handed.

Documenting the tryouts

Many teams have attempted to equalize the playing field and have adopted a strict 'documentation' process for the coaches to follow. This attempts to ensure that everyone gets a fair shake on the field during the tryouts, and forces the coaches to be accountable. Why did you make the choice to cut one player and keep another?

It will all be down in the documentation. That's why I have come up with the **Selection Matrix** – it provides a great opportunity for you to evaluate the players that have come out for tryouts – and it provides you with the necessary documentation to make sure you are selecting the right players.

The Team Selection Matrix

I have put together a system that allows the coach to make fact-based decisions on their team. Here's how this system works:

- List all of the tryout players from top to bottom on the Matrix
- Decide on the 3 or 5 most important selection criteria for your team (I have examples below)

- Apply a different weighting to the selection criteria, based on what you think are the most important traits.
- Each criteria is scored between one and 10. These scores are multiplied by the weighting percentage.
- The scores after the weighting will be added together to come up with a final tally that is used to choose the team.

You may come up with different selection criteria on your own, but here are three areas you can start with:

- Player skills and positions
- Attitude and coachability
- Athleticism and potential

Players and their positions

In soccer, you will have your skill players and your role players and you are going to have to decide which ones are going to make up your team. You will also need to figure out who are your quick scorers and which players are going to be the best and most able defenders.

Sometimes a player has a great shot but they aren't very accurate, when other times a player makes dynamic plays and accurate shots, but has a hard time getting open because they aren't the quickest player. Once you decide the type of team you want, you can bring in the players that you want – according to what they bring the team.

I have also included a short piece on what you might want to look for in each position player on your team. This is just a guideline and may not apply to your coaching philosophy.

Forwards / Strikers:

You will need to have a good combination of speed and skill in the forward ranks as these are the players that you will rely on a great deal to score. The strikers are the primary offensive players and usually stay on the offensive side of the field.

Since they are put in a position to score a lot, they typically need two things: kicking accuracy, passing skills and they need to be able to finish off around the net. Speed is probably one of the most important attributes of this player as they need to run down the field to streak past defenders with or without the ball.

Forwards don't have a great need for overwhelming defensive skills, but the ability to make steal is an intangible that would be helpful while they are in the offensive zone.

Midfielders:

Midfielders do exactly as their name suggests. They patrol the middle of the field – moving slightly forward to aid in the transition to offense and dropping back to provide assistance on defence.

These players need to have a good sense of where the play is going. They also need to be able to think and react quickly when needing to pass the ball up to their forwards. They receive passes from the defenders and then they move the ball up to the forwards. Passing skills are essential (especially long passing skills).

Midfielder with good defensive skills are excellent additions to a team, as they are helpful in both the offensive and defensive sides of the ball. Preventing the ball from getting into the defensive zone would be helpful for any soccer team, and the midfield can be the first line of defense.

Defenders (Stoppers):

Defenders are huge in soccer. Without good defenders you risk leaving your goaltender to act as his own defender in many cases. The best attributes for defenders are the ability to clear the ball quickly and to stay in good position.

Tackling skills, powerful kicks and the ability to get the ball out of the defensive end is crucial for the defender.

Goaltenders:

Many people coaching the game of soccer will tell you that without a good keeper you are going to suffer as a team. A good defense is only going to go so far – you need to have a skilled player in the net – especially with the size of the net being what it is in soccer.

Sheer athleticism is probably one of the best attributes of any goal keeper. They must be willing to risk themselves in any way to try and keep the ball out of the net, so fearlessness is another admirable attribute.

But, the skills of most goalies come down to a few things: Ability to move the ball up to midfielders and forwards on goal kicks and throws, the ability to anticipate where the ball is going to go once it is off the foot of the offensive player and it is important for them to be able to play the angles when shooters are approaching the net.

Note: In my selection Matrix, I have weighted players and skills as 60%

Attitude and coachability

If I am the coach this is one area that I place a great deal of importance on. While you can have a player with average skill and a great attitude – and they can improve their skills with practice, the player with good skill and a bad attitude is hard to change. That's why I might lean towards players with good attitudes.

A good attitude sets an example for the rest of the players on the team. The best players usually have the best attitudes. It is that simple.

Since soccer is a team sport, everyone needs to be working together when they are on the field. If you have a few players who think they are above the team, or they don't need to put out the same effort as other players on the team, they can affect an entire lineup.

You can select players who have a questionable attitude in the hopes that the others with a good attitude will sway them. You can also keep a close eye on these players so that they don't become a distraction to the other players. A big attitude problem isn't something I would take on my team.

The players with good attitudes are great motivators for the players that do have the better skills and they can be valuable in pushing those players to greater heights.

When I am putting together my roster and I have the final positions to fill, I fill it based on attitude over skill every time. Attitude and coachability get a **30%** on my Selection Matrix.

Athleticism and potential

This can be hard for some coaches to gauge, but I think it is important. All you have to do is think of the players that can pick the top corner of the net from midfield, but has the speed of a Giant tortoise. Or, you might have a player that has excellent ball control skills, but when it comes to taking a shot, they can't hit the net if it was wide open. Each of these players has his or her own potential and you have to decide if you can tap into it.

Athleticism is an important tool in determining the quality of a player. Some players have skill, but very little overall athleticism. You are going to have to do a balancing act – in my experience, there is more potential in players with excellent athleticism and lower skills than with skill and little athleticism.

Potential is a funny thing. But, identifying it can be a gold mine for a coach. Uncovered talent is all over the place, but some players need a little more coaching than others.

Every coach wants to find that diamond in the rough – so-to-speak. Especially if it is your job to find the next big star for the local U-17 or U-18 team. So, put some stock in potential and see if you can cultivate a new player or two every year.

I place **10%** on athleticism and potential in the selection criteria.

Making your selections

Well, after the three main areas that we have talked about, you could add some more of your own to make the process more specific. But, this will get you started.

Now, following is an example of how the **Selection Matrix** works. You may alter it and adjust it, but I find that this works for me. I have included one sample matrix, and then a blank matrix that you can use for your next try out.

Note: The key to making the **Selection Matrix** work is if you are honest about a player's skills. Don't count anyone out unless they are really not up to par in the three skill areas. Some players may surprise you – others may not. But they all deserve the same chance. **You do want the best team, don't you?**

Tryout Matrix

Player Name	Pos.	Positional skill score 1 to 10	Positional skill weighted (x60%)	Attitude Coachable 1 to 10	A and C weighted (x30%)	Athleticism and Potential 1 to 10	A and P weighted (x10%)	Total Score (all weighted scores)	Decision	Comments
Steve Jones	G	6	3.6	8	2.4	3	.3	6.3	Yes	Great attitude, can work on being in shape
Arlan Braun	RD	4	2.4	5	1.5	8	.8	4.7	No	Great tackling, but weak kicker
Dustin Shivers	MF	9	5.4	4	1.2	6	.6	7.2	Yes	We can work on his attitude
Hugh Baker	LD	3	1.8	9	2.7	9	.9	5.4		Diamond in the rough?
Vito Fanucci	STR	8	4.8	8	2.4	6	.6	7.8	Yes	Could be our star player
Warren Arnett	RD	5	3.0	6	1.8	6	.6	5.4	Yes	He can kick it a mile, but that's it
Robin Thornton	G	9	5.4	2	.6	6	.6	6.6	Yes	Poor attitude – can it change?

Player Name	Pos.	Positional skill score 1 to 10	Positional skill weighted (x60%)	Attitude Coachable 1 to 10	A and C weighted (x30%)	Athleticism and Potential 1 to 10	A and P weighted (x10%)	Total Score	Decision	Comments

Tryout Practice Plans

Here are three basic tryout practice plans that you can use for your soccer tryouts. These plans are based on the drills included in **Soccer Drills and Practice Plans**:

Tryout Practice Plan #1

0 to :10 - Ball control, dribbling, shooting on keepers

:10 to :15 - Stretching

:15 to :20 – Warm up jog around the field

:20 to :35 – Passing Relay – Good passing is essential

:35 to :40 – Water break

:40 to :50 – Body part control, Fighting Roosters – Ball control is important

:50 to 1:10 – Target shooting (2nd and 3rd) – shooting and scoring drills

1:10 to 1:20 – Conditioning

1:20 to 1:30 – Two on twos – See if there are any great combinations

1:30 to 1:45 – Finger Game – Who can stay in the longest

1:45 to 2:00 – Cool down and end of tryout practice talk

Tryout Practice Plan #2

0 to :10 - Ball control, dribbling, shooting on keepers

:10 to :15 - Stretching

:15 to :20 – Warm up lap around the field

:20 to :35 – 3 on 2 Keep away – Passing and ball control skills

:35 to :40 – Water break

:40 to :50 – Target Shooting (2nd and 3rd) – Good shooters score goals

:50 to 1:10 – Passing Relay – Your best players will be on the winning teams

1:10 to 1:20 – Scrimmage

1:20 to 1:30 – Conditioning

1:30 to 1:45 – Tactical scenarios

1:45 to 2:00 – Cool down and end of tryout practice talk

Tryout Practice Plan #3

0 to :10 - Ball control, dribbling, shooting on keepers

:10 to :15 - Stretching

:15 to :20 – Warm up jog around the field

:20 to :35 – Rotating passing square - This will be a good drill to find out those who can pass and play on the run.

:35 to :40 – Water break

:40 to :50 – Tactical scenarios practice – You can use this to find out who has a ‘head’ for the game.

:50 to 1:10 – Passing circle (3rd) – Quick passing and keeping your head up – good attributes in a player.

1:10 to 1:20 – Target Shooting (3rd) – Get the goalie some work and find your good shooters

1:20 to 1:30 – 3 step passing – Reception control and pass are crucial soccer skills.

1:30 to 1:45 – One touch, one bounce – Make it a contest to see who can last the longest

1:45 to 1:55 – Equalizer – Players will need to follow the rules of this game, and you will see which players rise to the top.

1:55 to 2:00 – Coach wrap up and cool down