

## Creating Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for Youth Soccer Players

In youth soccer, development doesn't happen by accident. While team training is essential, true growth happens when players understand *what* they are working on, *why* it matters, and *how* to improve. An **Individual Development Plan (IDP)** provides that roadmap.

An IDP is not about labeling players or comparing them to teammates. Instead, it's a **player-centered tool** that helps young athletes take ownership of their growth across the technical, tactical, physical, and mental sides of the game.

### What Is an Individual Development Plan?

An IDP is a short, focused plan that identifies:

- A small number of **development priorities**
- **Actions** the player can take in training and games
- **Measurable targets** to track progress over time

When done well, IDPs turn feedback into action and help players connect daily habits to long-term improvement.

### Why IDPs Matter in Youth Development

IDPs support the long-term development of players by:

- Encouraging **ownership and accountability**
- Providing **clear, achievable goals**
- Supporting **confidence and motivation**
- Helping players understand their **positional demands**
- Addressing potential **barriers to progress** early

Most importantly, IDPs shift the focus from results to **learning and growth**.

### Key Areas to Include in an IDP

A balanced IDP typically covers four pillars:

#### 1. Technical Development

Focus on skills the player needs most for their position (e.g., first touch, weak-foot passing, finishing, ball striking).

#### Example:

Improve weak-foot passing accuracy over short and medium distances.

#### 2. Tactical Understanding

Help players make better decisions by improving game awareness, positioning, and understanding of roles.

**Example:**

Recognize when to pass, dribble, or shoot in the final third.

**3. Physical Performance**

Age-appropriate physical goals that support soccer actions such as speed, agility, strength, or endurance.

**Example:**

Improve acceleration for 1v1 attacking situations.

**4. Mental & Psychological Growth**

Support resilience, focus, confidence, and emotional control—often the biggest difference-makers at higher levels.

**Example:**

Improve response after mistakes and transition quickly to the next action.

**Setting Effective Goals**

Strong IDPs use **clear, measurable goals**:

- Keep goals **simple and specific**
- Limit to **1–2 priorities per area**
- Focus on **behaviors**, not just outcomes
- Include a way to **measure progress**

This keeps players focused and avoids overloading.

**Giving Players Ownership**

IDPs work best when players are involved in the process. Coaches should guide, but players should help:

- Identify their strengths
- Reflect on challenges
- Choose actions they believe in

When players understand *why* a goal matters, motivation and engagement increase.

**Using the “5 W’s” as a Framework to Support IDPs**

Utilize the 5 W’s when observing performance: What happened? Who was involved? Where did it occur? When did it happen? Why did it happen? These questions help coaches and players connect match moments to development goals and design training with purpose and will enhance performance outcomes.

- **What** happened?
- **Who** was involved?

- **Where** did it occur?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?

Using these questions during games or film review helps coaches and players identify meaningful development goals and connect them directly to match situations.

### **Remember: Development Is Individual**

Every player develops at a different pace. IDPs should:

- Reflect the player's **age and stage**
- Support **psychological and social growth**
- Build on **strengths**, not just weaknesses
- Be reviewed and adjusted regularly

An IDP is not a contract—it's a living document that evolves with the player.

### **Final Thought**

Individual Development Plans help young players learn how to learn. By combining clear goals, player ownership, and thoughtful observation, IDPs create a positive, purposeful pathway for long-term soccer development—on and off the field.

When players know what they're working toward, every training session and match becomes an opportunity to grow.

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