



## US Soccer “D” License Assessment: Raising Coaching Standards

The following information is designed to help state-level coaching school instructors better serve US Soccer “D” license candidates. The “D” license serves as the gateway course to the national coaching schools and for many is the first exposure to purposeful practice planning.

The “D” license challenges candidates to 1) observe soccer; 2) identify what can be improved; and 3) plan remedial training activities. While in reality there is no one “correct” way to coach, the “D” license assessment is structured around a four-step progression and emphasizes learning through play and coaching within the flow of the game. At its core, the “D” license seeks to move coaching towards a more player-centered mindset.

### **The Context of the Assigned Soccer Problems**

Each “D” license candidate is assigned two “soccer problems” for which they should plan separate four-step training sessions. Soccer problems relate to technical or tactical/structural issues observed from play.

It is often very important for the instructor to help the candidates define what aspect of the game they are actually trying to improve. For example, an assigned problem such as “Playing in the attacking half” can be filtered down to ideas such as, “possession” or “creating scoring chances.”

It can also be very insightful for the instructor to help the candidates create a context for their specific problems. For example, discussing why the actions of the defense might influence the tactics of the attacking team; or why the score and time impact the tactical approach.

The first two steps of the “D” license progression address the techniques related to the soccer problem, while the final steps address the decision-making and tactical application of technique within a 6v6 game.

Once the soccer problem has been clearly defined, the candidates should plan their four-step training sessions. The four steps are outlined below.

### **Assessing Step 1: Technical Repetition**

The purpose of coaching in Step 1 is simply to train technique. The skill(s) selected should relate to the assigned soccer problem.

The key coach-assessment issues are: Repetition (low ratio of balls to players); Relevance (the movements and activities should make soccer sense); and Information (the key technical details should be highlighted).

The activities can be drill-based or game-based and competition can be an effective motivational tool. When individual defending is the chosen skill, live opposition is necessary at Step 1; otherwise, the activities should be unopposed.

### **Assessing Step 2: The Small-Sided Games**

The purpose of Step 2 is to train “skill:” technique under pressure. The activities should be small-sided games in numbers up to 4v4 and competition should be a factor. There should be natural transitions between attacking and defending.

The coaching should address the application of technique, not the organization of the activities. The activities should be coach-independent so that, in a real training session, multiple games can take place at the same time

### **Assessing Step 3: The Expanded Small-Sided Game**

The purpose of Step 3 is to begin to train the tactical issues underlying the soccer problem. These activities should utilize larger playing numbers through 6v6 and can be functional (positional) or non-functional, as best fits the problem.

On one level the third step is a conceptual stage given that, for example, “support” in attack and defense and “finishing” are generic non-functional issues that all players should train to improve.

On a second level, Step 3 should also provide some transfer of learning into Step 4, which demands coaching in the 6v6 game. With these dual purposes in mind, there often becomes a functional element to Step 3 where players can begin to develop ideas about their roles at the back, middle or front of the team.

Underlying all soccer tactics are the basic principles of play. So whether Step 3 is arranged as a conceptual game, such as 4v4+1 to six goals, or a functional activity, such as 5v5 with deep offside lines to encourage front to back spacing, the principles of play will always guide the decision-making of the players.

Step 3 games begin to identify the “activity organizer” from the soccer “coach” and, ultimately, the State Pass from the National Pass.

When assessing coaching in Step 3, the following common issues can help determine the quality of the training activity and the level (State or National) of the coach.

- Does the information deal with activity management or soccer development?
- Does the activity target the soccer problem?
- Does the field size and shape correspond to the number of players?
- If relevant to the problem, are the players organized into a playing shape?
- If relevant, does the coach address defensive balance?
- Does the coach encourage changes in playing rhythm?
- If relevant, is there an offside line?
- Are reasonable conditions imposed on the game?
- Does the coaching or the conditions help the players recognize tactical cues?
- Does the coach provide information in the flow of the game?
- Does the coach use “Cueing” to instruct?
- How often does the coach “freeze” the activity?
- Is the coaching information “breakdown-specific” or based on helping players understand the principles of play?
- Are there multiple levels to the activities that help to challenge the players?
- Is the coaching positive or negative/sarcastic?
- Is the coach a cheerleader?
- Where does the coach position him/herself?

#### **Assessing Step 4: Coaching in the 6v6 Game**

The purpose of Step 4 is to assess the coach’s ability to address technical application and the principles of play within the 6v6 game. The coaching should primarily come through cueing. While freezing the game is not prohibited, it should not be the predominant means of providing information. Flow is very important.

The best coaching will address...

- The basic structural (positional) organization of the players
- The specific soccer problem as it relates to the 6v6 game
- The general application of the principles of play
- The rhythm of play
- Team balance in attack and defense
- Transition between attack and defense

