



## SALISBURY ROVERS FC MATCH DAY PRACTICE



Youth football is a kids' sport and match days should be fun! A time to make friends, try new things and learn about the beautiful game. If we step back and let the kids play their game, we can really help their learning and enjoyment. Watching your child's league match should feel no different to watching a match at our club sessions.

We do things differently at Salisbury Rovers so we think it's important to explain what a match day might look like in one of our teams.

### **ARRIVAL**

Kids generally arrive 30 minutes before kick off with water bottles and shin pads. Coaches may arrange an arrival activity. It could be as simple as a kickabout and it's great if this is led by the children.

Coaches always appreciate help - a hand with goals, water bottles etc, so don't be shy, just ask if you'd like to get involved!

### **OUR APPROACH TO MATCH DAYS: 'IT'S THEIR GAME, LET THEM PLAY!'**

Our approach to match days is distinct. We aim to ensure football is:

- age-appropriate. The FA Youth Review changed youth football to distinguish it from the adult game. We do not impose adult expectations on children's play.
- encouraging and empowering. We support player ownership and decision-making.
- development not results focused. Results will not tell you how a child is developing.
- competitive. High-scoring, one-sided games are not competitive and do not aid the development for either team.

We constantly access advice from professional coaches and we know that child development is a complex issue. The skills involved in football are various: from motor skills, to social skills, to technical skills and game intelligence. There is no short-cut to development and progress is specific to the child. Therefore, our coaching sessions are carefully planned to encourage individual development at an age and child-appropriate level across all the [FA's Four Corners](#).

Many professional coaches agree that psychological skills ('football thinking', individual decision-making, and a 'growth mindset') are critical to development and we think match days are a great time to help promote them using age-appropriate questions. This approach may take time and patience but it has been shown to aid development as well as increasing players' sense of ownership and enjoyment. We would love to talk to you about it if you have questions! There is also a lot of information on our [website](#).

Our aim is always to encourage creativity by allowing kids to play their game their way without worrying about making 'mistakes'. The best way for kids to learn is to play and we aim to create a safe learning space for them to do this. There is no need to rush learning.

Because we want the kids to run their games, we don't direct play in matches – i.e. make decisions for them. We observe, support and use guided discovery. But you won't hear coaches shouting to kids to tell them where to stand, where to run, how to pass, etc. There is no evidence that directing play helps long-term development. It is a short-term fix.

Our team managers are all FA Licensed Coaches and they all have their own unique styles but this coaching philosophy is shared by all and it is fundamental to what we do.

## **PRE-MATCH TALK/HALF-TIME TALK**

Before the match, and at half-time, kids will gather with their coach to discuss the game in an age-appropriate way. Remember, there is always time for a hug and words of support from parents/carers. Parents should always feel part of the team supporting their child.

Parents are welcome to watch team discussions but should leave the conduct of them to the coach and kids. We welcome questions, so just let the manager or Welfare Officer know if you would like some time to talk.

In discussions, a tactics board may be used, especially for the older teams (u10s and u11s). Older children will choose their team layout and discuss this with their coach. Position play is very basic at this age (as an introduction to the game) and it will be appropriate to team size, age-group and the individual (e.g. 7v7 at u10 and 9v9 at u11). Positions will be rotated. Position play is **not** appropriate for 6 and 7 year olds.

Children will be given lots of time to come up with their own ideas. Coaches will use guided discovery to prompt thinking about certain aspects of the game (i.e. ask age-appropriate questions to encourage player development – e.g. how can we move the ball up the pitch quickly?). The children will discuss what is going well and what could be 'even better if' they changed something etc. The children will be encouraged to draw their own conclusions.

## **DURING THE MATCH**

Coaches will ensure equal playing time.

Coaches may say very little during the match depending on the needs of the children. They will generally offer encouragement, recognising that different children need different levels of support. They will also ensure that the social and personal needs of all their players are met. Coaches may identify good practice **after** it has occurred by saying things like, 'you tried really hard to win the ball then' or 'you found space with that run', 'great goal, save' etc.

However, coaches will not direct play/decision-making. This means they will not make directive comments like 'spread out', 'space', 'push up', 'tackle him', 'track back', 'pass to Ben', 'mark up', 'cover the front post' etc. Instead, the coach may ask questions to aid individual learning at half-time or before another match as appropriate. Our concern is individual development not the score. We ask that parents support this approach. Please do not coach from the sidelines.

## **RESPECT**

We want to ensure that match days remain child-friendly (we may share sweets or cakes with the other team) and that the competition remains on the pitch between the kids. So we have a [Parents' Code](#) which confirms: "remember that excessive shouting can put children under too much pressure and spoil their enjoyment. Please don't coach your child (or others) during a match – leave that to the coach. Children need to learn to make their own decisions, right or wrong, and to learn from their own mistakes. Children's play should not be directed from the sidelines." It sets out clearly the action to be taken on breach of the code.

Any concerns about match day conduct should be raised directly with the Club Welfare Officer (Debbie Sayers) who will aim to make occasional match day visits. In between times, please contact Debbie at [Salsiburyroversfc@outlook.com](mailto:Salsiburyroversfc@outlook.com) or on 07543654971.