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## TARPON FC – ACADEMY PROGRAM EXPLAINED

The Tarpon FC Academy program is designed to be a crossover bridge for players from Recreational Soccer to Competitive Soccer.

We offer four academies: U9 Girls, U9 Boys, U10 Girls and U10 Boys.

Our Academy program will provide training to players that are interested in improving their soccer performance on the field and to lay the foundation to improve their individual skills as a player. The training is focused on the technical and tactical demands of the game held in a positive environment as it relates to each player.

### **Intent:**

The intent of this rule change is to allow for, and to facilitate the "Academy Format" for the Under 9 and Under 10 age group.

The "Academy Format" will allow Tarpon FC to form an academy program which will include all age appropriate players in a single group. Tarpon FC will then be able to change their game day rosters for each "team" on a weekly basis. All players will be registered with FYSA, GYSA, etc. under a single team code. The club will determine the number of game positions (teams) they would require based on the number of players registered (ie. 10 players - 1 team; 15-20 players - 2 teams; 20-30 players - 3 teams, etc.) The league will assign schedules on a typical home/away basis for the number of team slots requested. The teams will play based on an FYSA, GYSA, etc. "Event Roster" and appropriate player passes. No standings or scores will be posted by the league. Groupings will be based on Geographical alignment ONLY, to the extent possible - no divisional alignments and no "superior" groups will be formed or allowed for Under 9's or Under 10's.

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of facilitating the Academy format is to allow the affiliate clubs to focus on player development, with no emphasis on results or scores. This is in agreement with the direction from FYSA, USYSA, GYSA, etc.

Further expansion of the Academy Format may be expected in other age groups, in upcoming seasons, in a staged progressive manner.

## **1. Philosophy of the Academy Format**

### **1.1 Why the need for Change?**

Over the past few years, soccer professionals worldwide have expressed the need for a new emphasis in training philosophy with younger players. This is also a major area of needed improvement identified by US Soccer, as they have evaluated US players and the training programs providing players to the US National Team system. Simply put, the structured competitive soccer system in place today has resulted in a priority of winning over development. Competitiveness and a desire to win ARE important, fundamental aspects of the game, but 6 to 11 year olds need to learn how to play the game correctly before win/loss records become the only criteria for success. A foundation in training the basic skills of the game early on is needed.

### **1.2 Specific problems with the current format.**

The current competitive soccer system provides many excellent opportunities for players, but also leads to certain potential problems – especially in younger players. Some of the areas of concern which have led to the implementation of the Academy approach around the county, and worldwide, are listed below.

1. Player retention – players leave the game at early ages due to lack of success, lack of enjoyment, and stress induced by coaches and parents.
2. Tactics over Technique – Many young teams spend too much time learning tactical aspects of the game, which can lead to quick wins without players learning needed skills for the future.
3. Positions & Team play – Players are “pigeon holed” into specific positions early on, and are not challenged or allowed to try a variety of positions.
4. Results based soccer – Teams, players, clubs, and coaches are judged by wins vs. losses, and are rewarded accordingly. Parents want their players to play on “elite” teams, encouraging coaches and clubs to emphasize a winning record to recruit players. Coaches and trainers are judged based on record, division, tournament success etc. – not on improvement of individual players.
5. Fear of failure – Players at young ages are often afraid to attempt new things for fear of failure, giving up goals, losing the game, etc. Coaches are afraid to allow players to try new positions, or to play the “weaker” players especially in close games for fear of losing. Players are not encouraged to experiment, try new things, and be creative.

### **1.3 The “Academy” format defined.**

Simply put, an “Academy” is a group of players placed within one group within an age group at a club, instead of being placed on individual teams. There are no “A” or “B” or 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> teams, etc. and players are kept in the larger player pool and are moved back and forth according to progress and development throughout the year.

Clubs within our league will have Academies of varying sizes. Some clubs may only field enough players to make up one team (i.e. 8-10 players), while others may have 40 or 50 players grouped together based only on age and gender. Individual trainers and clubs will have differing styles and philosophies with regard to how they will train their Academy players, but all should share a common approach – with an emphasis on player development.

An integral component to the Academy format is a removal of Standings and Records of teams. This should remove the incentive for clubs or coaches from playing games just to win, and encourage allowing players to learn the game without the fear of failure.

### **1.4 How the Academy format can address the current problems.**

By grouping all players together by age and gender in one Academy program, coaches and trainers will have freedom to focus on training and development. The importance is placed on training, and not the success of individual ‘teams’.

The goal is for players to train as a group, with allowances for smaller group training within the larger Academy group. For games, players can be grouped based on a variety of criteria on a weekly basis; the lack of strict team rosters offers the clubs flexibility to change the team’s components without hindrance. For example, players may be grouped one week by ability level (more advanced together, and least advanced together), the next week by making more equal teams, or by having players play different positions on different weeks, etc.

Hopefully, with positive guidance from coaches and parents, players will be challenged to excel without being overly pushed to win. Coaches should set goals beyond the final score: improvement in passing, communication, beating players 1v1, etc. While these goals are harder to measure than a final score, they are the type of things that coaches should teach players and parents to look for.

1. Player retention – Without the reward/punishment of win loss records, clubs have more incentive to include a wider range of players in their programs. Players who are not currently as physically advanced can receive opportunities to train and improve. Enjoyment of the game should be stressed over final results. The club’s philosophy towards this program should be explained to parents and players, and coaches should ask for support in achieving their goals.
2. Technical over Tactical – Small sided games at younger age groups were implemented in order to simplify the Tactics of the game. Combined with no net

- gain for winning every game, coaches should have freedom to stress fundamental skills, even if shape or formation suffers.
3. Positions and Team Play – Players should have opportunities to attempt to learn a variety of positions. Today’s forward may be tomorrow’s defender or Goal Keeper. Players should not be labeled by position – at U9 there should be no forwards or midfielders – only soccer players.
  4. Goals based soccer – Developmental goals, not results should be prioritized. The individual improvement of each player should be the guide for success – not the final team record.
  5. Fear of Failure – Players are allowed to experiment and be creative. Players should not be discouraged from taking on defenders or trying new “moves”. If creativity is stifled now, they will most likely have a fear of ever trying anything new. If a player tries to take on a defender and causes a counter attack conceding a goal – they should be encouraged and applauded for trying, not reprimanded for the end result. With time, players will gain confidence along with their new skills and will learn decision making through success and failure.

## **1.5 Competition and Winning**

As stated before, competitiveness is an important component of the game of soccer. A desire to win is natural in all players, and should not be discouraged. Players of all ages want to win and are naturally competitive. They will know who won at the end of the game.

It is understood that coaches, players and teams will play to win. The hope is that this is not the ONLY focus. Teams should take pride in their own successes, not in the failure of their opponents. Coaches are encouraged to communicate with their opponents prior to matches to discuss their goals for the game, and how they can cooperate to help each other accomplish each team’s goals while maintaining a competitive environment – this will be further discussed later in this guide.

Coaches and clubs should at no time attempt to “stack” teams to win every game. Game rosters should be composed as best as possible to allow maximum playing time for all players, and to allow player movement in positions and amongst teams.

Coaches should set clearly defined goals for each player, each game and for the season – and should place as much emphasis on the achievement of those goals as on the net result of the games.

## **1.6 Schedule**

We will be playing in the United Soccer Association League (USA League) for the upcoming 2008-2009 Academy Soccer Season. There will be a Pre-Season Festival, a Year Ending Festival and potentially a FYSA Region Cup Festival. The proposed schedule for this year is as follows:

**Academy Pre-Season Festival** Sept. 06, 2008

**Game 01** Oct. 04, 2008

**Game 02** Oct. 11, 2008

**Game 03** Oct. 18, 2008

**Game 04** Nov. 01, 2008

**Game 05** Nov. 08, 2008

**Game 06** Nov. 15, 2008

**Game 07** Nov. 22, 2008

**Game 08** Dec. 06, 2008

**Game 09** Dec. 13, 2008

**Game 10** Dec. 20, 2008

**Game 11** Jan. 03, 2009

**Game 12** Jan. 10, 2009

**Game 13** Jan. 17, 2009

**Game 14** Jan. 24, 2009

**Academy Pre-Season Festival** Jan. 31, 2009

**FYSA Region Cup Festival** TBD