

Newcastle United Academy – Building on Creativity

Success in Soccer takes a look at English Premier League Club Newcastle United's Academy with the help of Director Alan Irvine.

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The Academy

The objective of Newcastle United's Academy is to develop players and their soccer-playing abilities to their fullest potential, so that these players might someday contribute to Newcastle United's success. This is made possible by guaranteeing the best training, education and management to the region's most promising players.

Organization

Newcastle United is among those teams that run an Academy for their youth players without actually having their own youth training facility. This means that the youth teams practice at different locations, in facilities rented from universities or from the city. However, they are in the process of building their own purpose-built Academy. Note: Newcastle has since completed their own youth training facility.

Teams

Like other teams operating within the English Academy System, Newcastle United's youth division consists of 10 teams:

- **Under 17 and Under 19-year-olds**

Each team has its own fulltime coach, as well as assistant coaches, fitness trainers and goalkeeper coaches. Players practice every day, when possible. League and Cup matches are played on weekends.

- **12- to 16-year-olds**

Each team has two part-time coaches. Players practice three times a week.

- **9- to 11-year-olds**

Each team has two part-time coaches. Players practice twice a week.

Personnel

The Academy's work is independent of the senior team. The Newcastle Academy is organized into five divisions:

- **Education and welfare:**

This division organizes, supports and evaluates players' academic and vocational training on a day-to-day basis for ages 9-19.

- **Scouting:**

In addition to a full-time division director, 16 coaches work for the club as part-time scouts. Scouting focuses mainly on the north of England, as well as Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland.

- **Medical:**

One doctor is in charge of two physiotherapists. One of the therapists is responsible for the treatment of 17- to 19-year-olds, with the other responsible for 9- to 16-year-olds.

- **Practice:**

This division is subdivided into four areas. The 19-year-olds (coach: Ken Wharton) and 17-year-olds (coach: Alan Irvine) each have one full-time coach. The Academy's Assistant Director is in charge of the 9- to 16-year-olds; each of those teams has two part-time coaches. The fourth area is goalkeeper training, under the supervision of a head coach. One goalkeeper coach is responsible for the 17- to 19-year-old goalkeepers, and three others work with the 9- to 16-year-olds.

- **Administration:**

This division handles the day-to-day running of the Academy, office staff and facilities.

Coaching philosophy

Basics

- The entire training program centers on the individual development of each player. The club's goal is to develop every player in the course of a season, not only in terms of the game, but academically and socially as well. Players should be creative and responsible, be capable of making decisions, and handle every situation intelligently. Victories on the soccer field are secondary.
- One important training concept is concentration, which is constantly in demand. Players should be able to concentrate on specific tasks, the duration and intensity of concentration depends on players' ages and must be carefully regulated.
- For the younger teams, training focuses on teaching soccer-specific techniques, especially passing and ball control. The objective is to be able to pass and control the ball (i.e. to receive the ball and move it along) in the tightest of spaces.
- The guidelines of the training program can be summed up with the words "quick, bright and skillful." Players should be fast, have excellent technique, and deal skillfully with any situation.

- For the younger teams, training focuses on teaching soccer-specific techniques, especially passing and ball control. The objective is to be able to pass and control the ball (i.e. to receive the ball and move it along) in the tightest of spaces.
- As players get older (starting with age 14), tactics training plays an increasingly important role. The tactics taught become more and more complex, starting with 1 v 1 and moving to 2 v. 2, 3 v. 3, etc. The short-range passing game (solid attack building from defense to midfield to attack) is considered the foundation of the entire game. Once players master the short-range passing game, it's much easier for them to learn all the other tactics.

Assessment and evaluation

- The Code of Conduct created by the FA Premier League for all Academies describes the rights and responsibilities of players, parents and clubs. All three parties agree to be bound by the rules of the Code, which governs social, academic and athletic conduct. In addition, Newcastle United has its own Code for the conduct of Academy members in practice and match play..
- Four times each year, players receive a Regular Report which contains evaluations of their fitness, character (social conduct), technique and tactical skill.
These Regular Reports are compiled from daily observations and the coach's assessments of performance in practice and match play.
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- Furthermore, each player also evaluates himself after each match using the same categories, recording their assessments in personal log-books. The log-books contain the following:
 - Rights and Responsibilities (the club's Code of Conduct)
 - Evaluations
 - Player Welfare (medical information, match preparation, diet tips).

Regular Report

The coach evaluates:

- ball control
- passing
- dribbling

- sprinting with the ball
- feinting technique and repertoire
- game overview
- heading
- shooting
- defensive play
- both-footed play
- awareness/concentration
- decision-making ability
- attitude
- teamwork

Players are assessed using the following categories:

- excellent
- good
- average
- needs improvement

Playing philosophy

Guidelines

- Newcastle United's senior coaching staff do not set any preferred playing style and the youth division is independent of the professional division in this respect. The main focus is on developing creativity.
- The playing philosophy is based on the short-range passing game. The objective is to build a solid attack, from the defense to midfield, midfield to attack.
- Players should play a variety of positions; this increases their tactical flexibility.

9- to 11-year-olds

- Players between the ages of nine and 11 play 8 v. 8 on a small field (40 x 60 yards) and small goals.

- Usually they use a 3:2:2 or 2:3:2 system, with the system being adjusted to suit the players involved.
- Players learn to choose their running paths so that when their team has the ball, they cover the entire width and length of the field.
- Players should be agile, be willing to run a lot, and have fun playing. Tactical rules must not be allowed to restrict players' flexibility.

12- to 16-year-olds

- Players between the ages of 12 and 16 play 11 v. 11 on a normal pitch.
- Attack building focuses on solid short-range passing, from the defense to midfield, midfield to attack.
- Players should also continue to use the entire width and length of the field.
- In defensive play, players focus on switching from attack to defense when they lose the ball and restricting the area around the ball by moving with it as a unit.

Every tactic is based on solid ball control, even under opposition, time and accuracy pressure.

17- to 19-year-olds

- Players between the ages of 17 and 19 train every day. Players play competitive matches against other Academies.

Continuing to build on basic tactics, players continue to expand their knowledge and development of team tactical behavior.