



Naomh Pol PLAYER PATHWAY



- This player pathway is a systematic approach adapted by Naomh Pol GAA club to maximise player potential and increase the enjoyment of all our players
- The purpose of this player pathway initiative is to help guide coaches, manager, mentor and parents who play an active role in the development of our young gaelic footballers
- It provides a framework for the development of skills, fundamental movement, physical focus and game specific capacities that coaches can follow stage by stage
- The intention is to provide coaches with guidelines and recommendations in the form of a repeatable, staged framework, in order to give our young players the best opportunity to reach their full potential at whatever level they may play
- As players grow, develop and learn at different rates throughout their lives, it must be noted this is only a general guide to bear in mind when working with our players



INTRODUCTION

There are 5 key stages in the player pathway which have detailed player characteristics and describe the practical elements that must be coached during these ages. The 5 stages are:

STAGE	AGE	EMPHASIS
Learning to master the ball	4-6 years	Should be about fun and participation with key emphasis on physical literacy and fundamental movement skills with the ball
Learning to use the ball well	7-9 years	Major skills learning phase where all the basic skills in football & hurling are learned. Emphasis on the fundamental movements.
Learning to play together	10-12 years	Emphasis on understanding how to play and work together as a team
Learning about positions	13-15 years	The principles of play and applying good game sense increase
Learning to perform	16-18 years	Combining all aspects of performance including decision making, higher physical demands of the game and coping with competition

It provides a framework for the development of skills, physical focus and game sense that coaches can follow stage by stage. This pathway should not be viewed as a rigid framework but as a guide to optimise player development.



Technical... skills of Gaelic Football

A. Gaining Possession:

Non Possession – Defence

To help coaches plan their programme these may be sub divided into four components:

1. Receiving Skills:

- a. Catching:-
- b. Low, Bounce (Half-Volley), Tummy, Head-High, Overhead, One-Handed
- b. The Lift:

Crouch (Stationary and Rolling)

Jab Lift, Chip & Assist

3. Defending Skills:

- a. Tackling:
 - Side – Near Hand Tackle
 - Front – ‘The Fencer Tackle’
- b. Blocking – From the Feet & The Dive Block
- c. Interceptions
- d. Man To Man Marking
- e. Marking Space
- f. 3 D’s - Delay, Deny & Dispossess

B. Exploiting Possession:

Possession - Attack

2. Playing Skills: Possession Skills, Passing, Breaking Ball

a. Kicking:

Ground – Short & Long

Volleying & Half Volleying

Punt – Drive (Front of in step)

Hook (Inside of in step) - Swerve (Outside of in step)

Drop, Overhead, Tap-on

b. Handling –Hand/Fist Pass

c. Travelling Skills:

The Solo – Hand To Toe & The Bounce

d. Evasion Skills:

Dodging, Side-Step, Feint and Side Step, Swerve, The Roll, Ball Feints (Hand and Feet)

e. Scoring Skills:

Direct – Feet, Fist - Deflected – Hands ETC. - Free Kicks & Penalties

4. Non Playing Skills:

- a. Spatial Awareness: Scanning: On/Off The Ball
- b. Running Off The Ball: Calling The Play
- c. Marshalling Your Defence



THE FAMILY OF GAMES

The reason we play games is to get players to work together as a team and understand what to do, how to do it and when to do it. A game provides increased opportunities for players to make decisions and solve problems. The traditional method of teaching skills and developing players was through drills. The drawback of this approach was that when the skill was learned it then had to be transferred to the game situation.

GAME	EMPHASIS
CHASING GAME	These games involve tagging and chasing where players perform skills, such as fleeing and dodging. These games are particularly appropriate for warm up activities
TARGET GAMES	The simplest form of a game which challenges players to use the technique previously learnt is to aim into or at a target. Players have lots of time to perform the task without any distraction from other players. There is a low level of decision making.
COURT GAMES	Divided court games require players to pass ball over an obstacle like a net or zone to a receiver. The level of decision making has increased but is limited. The use of other skills essential for team work such as communication, anticipation and spatial awareness become more apparent.
FIELD GAMES	These are games which require one team to act as the strikers/kickers and the opposition become the fielders retrieving the ball. The fielding team tries to limit the runs or scores by the striking/kicking team and at the same time try to get the opposition players out. Greater decisions have to be made in relation to where, when and how to move or play the ball and good spatial awareness is more important.
PART INVASION	These games require players to complete a task with limited or direct opposition. Such games encourage awareness of time and space but also help develop characteristics of team play e.g. support play and communication. Part invasion games allow players to develop positional sense and decision making with limited pressure from opposition.
FULL INVASION	The core objective here is to move into an opponents territory in order to score. To achieve this, players must maintain possession of the ball, create & use space and attack a 'goal'. The key element with invasion games is the number of players involved. The less space a player has, the less time he/she has, the more skill is required.



Learning to Master the Ball

NURSERY

4 – 6 YEARS OF AGE

PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS

- Children of this age are self-centred and co-operation is largely absent
- At this age many still think that the ball is their own 'toy', so they will try to run with the ball and score rather than pass.
- They will respond to partner work and skills practice for a short time. This helps introduce them to team work and cooperation.
- These children will only watch the ball. They cannot and will not look for space to run into.
- They usually enjoy being asked questions and this should give the coach plenty of opportunities to check for understanding
- When their team is not in possession they find it difficult to understand defending a goal. To them they are merely chasing a ball
- They respond best to target games and races (Hitting and throwing, running)



Learning to Master the Ball

	PHYSICAL FOCUS	GAME SPECIFIC
FOOTBALL	ABC & RJTs	
<p>Handling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Throw Bowling Ball Two handed Bounce catch One hand bounce - Body Catch - Pick Up stationary & moving <p>Kicking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Kick - Dribble - Punt Kick(Two Hands) (Hard foot) <p>Travelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knee tap solo 	<p>Agility</p> <p>e.g chasing games, dodging, e.g shadow running</p> <p>Balance</p> <p>e.g Animal walking e.g Hop in & out of hoops</p> <p>Co-ordination</p> <p>e.g Skipping e.g Bean Bag Toss e.g pass through the ladder</p> <p>Running</p> <p>Good Technique Forward, Backward, sideward's e.g Marching e.g Stopping</p> <p>Jumping</p> <p>e.g Takeoff & Landing Jump Jacks</p> <p>Throwing</p> <p>e.g Target Roll</p>	<p>Target Games</p> <p>e.g Skittles Through the gate Tower ball</p> <p>Court Games</p> <p>e.g Over the river Hurling tennis</p> <p>Part – Invasion</p> <p>Getting through the traffic 4v4 (two zones)No Goalie Up North Down South (Ball each scoring)</p>

Level 1 Skills challenge

Solo /5

Body Catch /5

Reach Catch /5

Pick Up (Stationary)

Left /5

Right /5

Hand Pass

Left /5

Right /5

Ground Kick (technique)

Left /5

Right /5

Punt Kick (technique)

Left /5

Right /5

Total Score /55

At the age of 9 we hope our players would be at the mastering stage of each of these fundamental skills.

Running

Hopping

Skipping

Jumping

Dodging

Side Stepping

Landing

Balancing

Catching

Throwing

Kicking

Bouncing

Striking

Total Score

/13



Learning to Use the Ball Well

7 – 9 YEARS OF AGE

PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS

- They will begin to look up when in possession and start choosing options [e.g. passing rather than shooting]
- They will have difficulty tackling opponents but will kick the ball away from them and attempt to block any shots
- They have a tendency to stand back in hurling so encourage them to get close to the opponents
- Use questions to challenge and introduce decision making
- Players will beg for a game at every opportunity, yet their technique is best improved through individual, paired and small group work. This is an ideal time to use the 'Whole-Part-Whole' approach to some sessions where the coach starts with a game, stops it after ten minutes, works on one technique for a short period then restarts the game
- Coaches need to focus on positive feedback, this is the age where drop-outs occur if children think they are not good.
- At this age players will now try to win the game not only by scoring but also by attempting to deny the opposition the opportunity to score
- They will also begin to understand the need to change the direction of a run or a pass to be more effective and they will begin to grasp the idea that a player may need support from behind and to the side as well as in front.
- Coaches should continue to run small-sided games and conditioned games, one of the better games is called 'Over the River' and tennis
- At this age players must also get used to attacking the ball [i.e. running and not stopping] and breaking tackles
- First critical period for speed development.



Learning to Use the Ball Well

	PHYSICAL FOCUS	GAME SPECIFIC
FOOTBALL	ABC & RJTs	
<p>Handling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Body Catch - Low catch - High catch - Fist pass - Hand pass Crouch lift (stationary ball) <p>Kicking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Punt Kick(Front foot) Left & Right Hook Kick(One Hand) - Pick up-foot <p>Travelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High bounce - Toe tap(stationary) - Soft foot - Roll <p>Tackle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Near hand tackle - Shadowing - Frontal Tackle - Block Down 	<p>Agility e.g zig zag relay</p> <p>Balance e.g One leg hopping e.g hop land on other leg</p> <p>Coordination</p> <p>Running - Good Technique e.g On the spot e.g Relay races e.g Hurdle running e.g Stopping</p> <p>Jumping e.g leap frog e.g Donkey kicks</p> <p>Throwing e.g Dodge ball</p> <p>Conditioning Partner Resistance e.g Tug of war e.g Push & Pull partner e.g The Bridge Whole body exercises Introduce basic Flexibility</p>	<p>Target Games e.g Skittles Through the gate Tower ball</p> <p>Court Games e.g Over the river Scout Ball Cúchulainn</p> <p>Fields Games e.g Rounders Four hitters</p> <p>Part-Invasion e.g 4v4 (zoned) No Goalie e.g line game</p> <p>Full-Invasion e.g 4v4 (two touch) e.g 5v5 (Wide man)</p>

LEVEL 2 FOOTBALL SKILLS

- Ground Kick (Right Side)

Standing Position, take full swing
and kick ball 13 metres between 2
posts

/3

- Ground Kick (left side)

Standing position, take full swing
And kick ball 13 metres between 2
Posts

/3

- Punt kick (Right side)

Standing position, take full swing
And kick ball 13 metres between 2
Posts

/3

- Punt kick (Left side)

Standing position, take full swing

And kick ball 13 metres between 2

Posts /3

- Pick up (Left & Right)

3 times left /3

3 times right /3

Catching (Body & High)

3 times body /3

3 times high /3

Kicking for point (left & Right)

10 metres

3 times left /3

3 times right /3

Total Score /30



Learning to Play Together

10-12 Years of Age

PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS

- Players will now compete with greater intensity against each other
- At this age players will now try to win the game not only by scoring but also by attempting to deny the opposition the opportunity to score
- They will also begin to understand the need to change the direction of a run or a pass to be more effective and they will begin to grasp the idea that a player may need support from behind and to the side as well as in front.
- Coaches should continue to run small-sided games and condition them to solve problems
- During training, these players must always feel part of the session. Coaches must be ready to pay as much attention to them as to other established players and always work to improve their skills [e.g. one-to-one coaching may be needed].
- Coaches must be quick to address the problem of one or two players dominating play and preventing others from developing their skills during games.
- Many players at this age fail to recognise the need to attack the ball and prefer to wait for the ball. If this is allowed to persist, that player will find it increasingly difficult to change his/her instincts.
- Training needs to be moderately increased at this stage
- Players are now ready to develop general strength through own body weight and core exercises



Learning to Play Together

	PHYSICAL FOCUS	GAME SPECIFIC
FOOTBALL		
<p>Handling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High Catch - Hand passing (using both hands) <p>Kicking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Punt Kick left & Right - Punt Kick outside foot - Crouch lift moving ball - Toe lift - Hook Kick left & Right <p>Travelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solo Run left & Right - Low bounce - Dummy solo <p>Tackle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Near hand tackle - Shadowing - Shouldering - Frontal Tackle - Block Down 	<p>Speed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further development of speed in warm ups (Efforts less than 6 secs) - e.g quickness and change of direction and reaction sprints 	<p>Court Games</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g Over the river Hit the corners <p>Fields Games</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g Crazy kicks Batter bonanza <p>Part-Invasion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g 4v1 (Goid) e.g Pass and Attack <p>Full-Invasion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g 4v4 (Split ends) e.g 5v5
	<p>Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce Core strength e.g twist with partner - Own body strength exercises e.g Pull ups press ups etc.... - Introduce plyometric training e.g bounding and hopping 	
	<p>Stamina</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Endurance related activities: e.g - Relay running - Small sided games & Ball drills - Circuit training with the ball 	
	<p>Flexibility/Co-ordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction Dynamic Stretching & Mobility exercises - Warm up & Cool down concept 	

Level 3 skills challenge

- Solo (right side)

Combination run of 2 solos /3

- Solo (left side)

Combination run of 2 solos /3

- Tackling

Near hand challenging /3

Shadow tackle /3

Total Score /12



Learning about Positions

13-15 Years of Age

PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS

- While players in this stage may have the same chronological age they may differ significantly in terms of biological age ie one may be more physically developed than another.
- The onset of puberty usually occurs during the early stages of this cycle. Aerobic and strength programmes should be individualised or grouped according to their (P.H.V) N.B Only trained coaches to undertake this training
- Broad base skills and sport specific skills
- Advanced technical skill development Skill developed under pressure
- Fitness with the ball in skills drills
- Gain an understanding of the principles of attack and defence through grids and small sided games
- Players can be introduced to moderate anaerobic and strength training through ball work
- Players should be introduced to psychological training through games that promote concentration and better decision making



Learning about Positions

	PHYSICAL FOCUS	GAME SPECIFIC
FOOTBALL		
<p>Handling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ball feint - First pass for distance - Overhead tap on - Catching at speed High: Reach: Low Half volley <p>Kicking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Punt kick to moving target - Long Kick pass - Scoring from angles - Assisted Chip lift - Penalty Kick <p>Travelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swerve - Change of pace with the ball <p>Tackle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Near hand tackle - Delay opponent & Shadowing - Frontal Tackle - Dive Block - Hand off 	<p>Speed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi directional (Efforts less than 20 secs) - Quick footwork and agility - Acceleration and deceleration e.g go go stop - Game related reaction exercises - Relay racing e.g crazy ball drills 	<p>Part-Invasion Zone games e.g wide man e.g zone to zone</p> <p>Full-Invasion Back v Forwards 15 v 15 Possession Games One rule games e.g Give and Go 4 seconds 2 touch</p>
	<p>Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Body weight Circuit training Upper body ,legs, and back - Develop Core strength e.g plank - Learn correct weight lifting techniques e.g squat, Clean, snatch, N.B Only qualified coaches to undertake this training - Introduce free weights and medicine balls N.B For upper age range group only Plyometric e.g multi directional jumps 	
	<p>Stamina</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 v 1 games - Drills incorporating the ball 	
	<p>Flexibility/Co-ordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain flexibility exercise - Dynamic Warm up 	





Learning to Perform

16-18 Years of Age

PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS

- During this phase players begin to reach their physical peak and those slow developers begin to catch up with their peers
- Encourage ideals of self-awareness and self-help within players
- At this stage a Functional Movement Screening (conducted by a physio) should be carried out on each player and the results along with their Critical Success Factors(CSFs) identified by each player in their Self-Assessment Profile should form the basis of their Personal Development Plan (PDP).
- As a result of the above each player should have a PDP, a component of which should be an individualised conditioning programme developed and delivered by a S&C Coach. Each player should be committed to their programme as they will have had an input into it through their Self-Assessment Profile.
- Advanced technical skill development Skill developed under pressure
- Understand the principles of game plays, tactics, and game sense
- Accept that the team is paramount and their role within the team structure
- Encourage positive lifestyle and build concepts of team ship and leadership
- Instill concepts of mental toughness and calmness under pressure(winning behaviours)
- Encourage flexibility and fine-tune the generic skills to play in a variety of positions
- Players should be encouraged to embrace positive life-skills i.e. time-management and to take control of their own athletic development.



Learning to Perform

	PHYSICAL FOCUS	GAME SPECIFIC
FOOTBALL		
Game Plays <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to use a sweeper - How to deal with a sweeper - Man marking - Zone marking Kicking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kicking for possession/diagonal ball - Kicking for scores - Cutting in to score - Free kicks/penalties Ball Retention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting the ball player - Breaking the tackle - Getting out of traffic - Change the direction of play Tackle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Near hand tackle - Group tackling - Frontal Tackle - Checking - Blocking ball 	<p>Speed (based on test results profile)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi directional (Efforts less than 20 secs) - Quick footwork and agility - Planting the foot(the 3 step movement) - Running mechanics & technique - Strength work to improve speed <p>Strength (based on test results profile)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FM Assessment to establish core strength and technique - Core programme for those still not ready for weights - Individual programme for those with core strength & good technique - Perfect technique & control N.B Only qualified coaches to undertake this training <p>Stamina (based on test results profile)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small-sided games - Drills incorporating the ball <p>Flexibility/Co-ordination (based on test results)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain flexibility exercise - Dynamic Warm up 	<p>Intense Small-sided (3secs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Across the line - Total football - Break-Ball & Kick - 4 Goal option <p>15 A SIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Back v Forwards - 15 v 15 - Deploying a sweeper - Defending the zones - Deploying the big man - Various Conditions





Season Planning for different age groups

Age	U.6/8's	U.10's	U.12's	U.14's	U.16's	Minors
Technical: Skill Development	General Sport Skills	Learn Sport Skills	All Sport Skills should be developed.	Sport skills incorporated into games.	Skills developed under match conditions.	
Tactical: Activities	Simple attacking & defending principals	Simple attacking & defending principals	Simple attacking & defending principals	Develop game plays in match situations	Develop game plays in match situations	
Games						
Physical: Aerobic Seed Endurance Speed Strength	Play daily activities involving lots of running, jumping, handling, kicking and hitting	Play 4/5 different sports. Develop speed through relay races.	Play 4/5 different sports. Develop speed through relay races.	Develop strength through body weights	Introduce weight training through brush shafts and light weights	Use weights to develop strength
Mental	Learn fair play – when to take turns etc.	Introduce visualisation	Introduce imagery skills	Introduce mental training skills	Introduce mental training skills	training skills