



SHELLHARBOUR CITY FC

Club Philosophy & Coaching Framework

2026



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Club Philosophy

Shellharbour City FC is a grassroots football club that prioritises:

1. Engagement
2. Enjoyment
3. Long-term Player Development

Protecting player development is the club's highest priority. Without fun, passion, and enjoyment, players struggle to engage with the technical, tactical, and physical aspects of the game. Establishing a positive foundation is essential for long-term development and growth.

Winning matches are secondary to creating an environment where players:

- Enjoy coming to training
- Feel confident and comfortable with the ball
- Are encouraged to express themselves
- Are appropriately challenged to grow
- Develop positive social connections

When enjoyment and engagement are present, performance outcomes naturally follow.



Research-Informed Foundations of the Club Philosophy

Shellharbour City FC's philosophy and training module structure are informed by empirical research in athlete development, motor learning, and sport psychology. This body of research consistently supports approaches that prioritise engagement, enjoyment, and appropriate challenge as foundations for long-term development, growth, and continued participation, particularly within grassroots and youth sport environments.

Engagement and Enjoyment as Foundations for Development

Enjoyment and engagement are among the strongest predictors of long-term participation, skill development, and performance progression.

Key findings from literature indicate that:

- Players who enjoy training are more likely to remain involved in the sport for longer periods
- Early dropout is strongly associated with excessive pressure, boredom, and controlling environments

Studies examining youth sport motivation highlight that autonomy, competence, and enjoyment are central drivers of sustained involvement. When these needs are met, players are more likely to engage fully, take appropriate risks, and persist even with challenges or obstacles.

This evidence supports the club's position that:

Without fun and passion, development cannot be sustained.



The Risks of Over-Coaching

Research into coaching behaviour and learning environments consistently warns against over-coaching, particularly at younger ages.

Over-coaching is seen as:

- Excessive instructions
- Constant corrections
- Rigid structure
- Reduced player decision-making/restrictions on creativity
- Aggressive tone or demeanour
- Creating shame and disappointment around mistakes

Players learn most effectively when they are allowed to make mistakes, reflect, and explore within an environment that provides encouragement and appropriate feedback. Environments dominated by constant instruction can limit creativity, confidence, and game understanding.

When guided discovery and game-based learning happens:

- Players retain skills more effectively when learning is implicit rather than directive
- Decision-making improves when players are not micromanaged
- Confidence increases when mistakes are treated as a normal part of learning

Practical Implication for the Club

Taken together, this body of research supports Shellharbour City FC's commitment to:

- protecting enjoyment and engagement
- avoiding over-coaching and excessive control
- promoting learning through play and game-based environments
- prioritising long-term development over short-term results



Training Design Philosophy

All training sessions across the club are designed around:

- **Simplicity**
- **Repetition**
- **Familiarity**
- **Engagement**

Sessions are intentionally kept simple and clear, recognising that the club relies on volunteer coaches with varying levels of experience and outside commitments. Training is not designed to be over-complicated or overwhelming.

This program is not about micromanaging sessions. Instead, it provides:

- shared guidelines
- a common structure
- and a consistent football language

Coaches are encouraged to apply flexibility within these guidelines and adapt sessions to suit their players and context.

Whole-Club Alignment

Training across the club is designed to look similar at every age group.

- U6s and U16s work within the same framework
- The difference is complexity, intensity, and decision-making speed
- Not the training principles themselves



This approach:

- supports smooth progression between age groups
- reinforces club identity
- and creates familiarity for both players and coaches



Club Playing Principles

All training sessions across all age groups are built around four core playing principles. These principles form the foundation of session design and on-field behaviour.

1. Retain Possession

- Dribbling and shielding
 - Lots of touches on the ball
 - Short passes and ball circulation
 - Patience under pressure
 - Composure in possession
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2. Create Space

- Supporting angles
 - Spreading out
 - Finding space to receive the ball
 - Width and depth
 - Movement off the ball
 - Rotations
 - Overloads
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3. Attack With Intent

- Freedom to dribble and shoot
- Forward passes
- Touch forward

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- Receiving on the back foot
 - Penetration
 - Decision-making
 - Creative freedom
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4. Defend Together

- Getting goal-side
 - Helping teammates
 - Pressing cues
 - Defensive transitions
 - Unit defending
 - Compactness
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Age-Appropriate Training Anchors

The following training anchors guide how the four principles are delivered at different stages of development. The principles remain consistent across the club; the delivery and expectations change with age.

U5s–U9s

“Love the ball & build comfort”

This stage focuses on enjoyment, confidence, and early skill exposure.

- Each player has a ball as often as possible
- Free dribbling and running
- Kicking the ball with freedom
- Minimal structure and organisation
- Minimal lines and waiting
- Minimal coaching intervention

As players progress toward U8s–U9s, gentle structure is introduced:

- Ball mastery activities
- Dribbling to solve problems
- Simple passing and shooting
- Aiming passes and shots
- Introduction to longer passes and lifting the ball

The priority remains enjoyment, repetition, and confidence with the ball.



U10s–U15s

“Skill acquisition years”

This age range represents the club’s core skill acquisition phase. Training is designed to maximise repetition of fundamental skills in game-like formats.

Key focuses include:

- Repetition of core technical skills
- In-possession skills as a priority
- Striking the ball with increasing proficiency and different techniques:
 - Short passes
 - Long passes
 - Shooting
- Introduction and refinement of 1v1 skills:
 - Feints
 - Changes of direction
- First touch and receiving
- Running with the ball at speed
- Carrying the ball into space

U16s–U18s

“Decision-making under pressure and the bigger picture”

At this stage, training emphasises speed of decision-making, tactical awareness, and collective responsibility.

Key focuses include:

- Scanning before receiving
- Playing forward when possible

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- Managing transition moments
 - Defending together:
 - Nearest press
 - Cover and balance
 - Compactness when defending
 - Role clarity within team structure
 - Introduction of set pieces

Players are encouraged to understand not only their individual role, but how their actions influence the team as a whole.



Coaching Support

Shellharbour City FC recognises and appreciates the time, energy, and commitment of its volunteer coaches. Without volunteer coaches, the club does not function.

Shellharbour City FC does not want to micromanage coaches, criticise, add pressure, prescribe every detail of sessions, or remove individual coaching style.

Coach Behaviour & Expectations

At Shellharbour City FC, how we coach is just as important as what we coach.

Coaches play a key role in shaping the learning environment, player confidence, and overall enjoyment of the game. The club expects behaviours that support development, respect, and positive experiences for all players.

Coaches are expected to:

- Create a positive, inclusive, and safe environment
 - Encourage effort, bravery, and learning from mistakes
 - Treat all players with respect, regardless of ability
 - Promote enjoyment and engagement at every session
 - Reinforce club training principles using simple, clear language
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Coaches should aim to:

- Use questions more than constant instructions
- Allow players time to solve problems
- Correct players briefly and clearly, without overloading
- Coach moments, not every action
- Let the game be the main teacher

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- Normalise mistakes and teach that they are an essential part of learning
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Sideline & Matchday Behaviour

On matchday, coaches are expected to:

- Remain calm and composed
- Encourage players rather than direct every decision
- Avoid constant instructions from the sideline
- Reinforce effort, teamwork, and resilience
- Respect referees, opposition, and fellow coaches

Coaches are role models for players and parents. Sideline behaviour sets the tone for the entire team and parents.

What Coaches Are Not Expected to Do

Coaches are not expected to:

- Have all the answers
- Be technical experts
- Design sessions from scratch every week
- Win every game
- Control every moment of play
- Respond or engage in with every parent's complaint



Age Group Coaching Tips

U5s–U9s

What's normal:

- Short attention spans
- High energy
- Chaotic play
- Players chasing the ball

Coaching tips:

- Keep instructions very short
- Let players play as much as possible
- Celebrate effort and enthusiasm
- Avoid stopping sessions too often
- Focus on fun and confidence

If players are smiling and engaged, the session is successful.

U10s–U15s

What's normal:

- Large differences in ability
- Emotional reactions to mistakes
- Increased competitiveness
- Desire to improve

Coaching tips:

- Be patient with inconsistency

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- Encourage players to try new skills
 - Rotate players through different roles
 - Focus on decision-making, not perfection
 - Reinforce learning rather than outcomes

Development during this stage is rarely linear.

U16s–U18s

What's normal:

- Increased pressure and expectations
- Emotional highs and lows
- Greater focus on roles and results
- Physical and mental fatigue
- Off the field issues and pressures

Coaching tips:

- Treat players with growing autonomy
- Encourage leadership and accountability
- Provide clarity without over-coaching
- Balance competitiveness with support
- Emphasise collective responsibility
- Connect and build a relationship with the players

This stage supports players' transition toward senior football and adulthood.



Support Structures

Role of the Technical Director

The Technical Director's role is to support, guide, and assist coaches.

The Technical Director will be regularly present at training sessions, observing and engaging with sessions where appropriate. This may include:

- Supporting the delivery of a drill or activity
- Offering brief, informal feedback to a coach
- Working directly with players when helpful
- Clarifying the purpose or progression of an activity

This involvement is intended to be practical and supportive, and should never be viewed as criticism or formal assessment.

Support from the Technical Director may also include:

- **Live, in-person demonstration of training activities and drills**
 - Demonstrations may occur during scheduled training sessions
 - The purpose is to model organisation, session flow, and coach language
- **Weekly training guidance and outlines**
 - A short PDF will be shared when weekly themes or activities change from the previous week
 - These PDFs are intended as guidelines, not scripts
- **Ongoing availability for discussion and clarification**
 - Coaches are encouraged to ask questions
 - Activities, themes, and principles can be discussed and adapted where needed

The aim is to reduce uncertainty and help coaches feel confident in session delivery.



How Coaches Can Use This Support

Coaches are encouraged to:

- Observe demonstrations and adapt activities to their team
- Use weekly PDFs as reference points, not rigid instructions
- Ask questions about session purpose, constraints, or progressions
- Discuss challenges or adjustments openly

Flexibility within the framework is encouraged, provided sessions remain aligned with the club's training principles and age-group anchors. Coaches are encouraged to communicate with the Technical Director, recognising that while support will be proactive, clear and ongoing communication is essential given the large number of teams across the club.



Parents & Communication

Clear and consistent communication with parents is essential to protecting both players and coaches.

Key Messages to Parents

The club supports coaches in communicating that:

- Player development is prioritised over results
 - Enjoyment and engagement come first
 - Mistakes are a normal part of learning
 - All players are encouraged to develop
 - Playing time and roles may vary week to week
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Role of Parents

Parents are encouraged to:

- Support effort and enjoyment
 - Avoid coaching from the sideline
 - Respect referees and opposition
 - Trust the development process
 - Communicate concerns respectfully
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Managing Parent Concerns

If concerns arise, coaches should:

- Remain calm and respectful

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- Listen without becoming defensive
 - Reinforce the club philosophy
 - Avoid discussing issues in front of players
 - Escalate concerns to the Grievance Officer, Technical Director or committee when needed

Coaches are not expected to manage difficult situations alone.