



## Lucan Sarsfields GAA Club

### Coaching Philosophy Handbook

“At Lucan Sarsfields, our goal is to nurture confident, adaptable players who are empowered to think for themselves, work together, and contribute positively to the club and the wider community both on and off the field. We create a supportive environment to develop skillful, two-sided players through fun, game-based coaching that builds decision making, teamwork, and athletic ability. Guided by our core values of fun, respect, inclusiveness and integrity we promote a long-term player and coach pathway that inspires lifelong involvement in our club.”



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## 1. Club Coaching Pathway

The Lucan Sarsfields coaching pathway provides structure and consistency across all age groups. It ensures that every player receives age-appropriate coaching aligned with long-term development goals.

U8–U10: Focus on fun, fundamental movement skills, basic technical abilities, and simple decision-making. Players learn through games and creative challenges.

U11–U12: Increased technical development, both-sided skills, and introduction to scanning and support play. Sessions remain games-based but slightly more structured.

U13–U15: Players begin to understand tactical principles, positional roles, and more complex decision-making. Athletic development becomes more formal.

U16–Minor: Preparation for competitive performance with emphasis on fitness, resilience, and tactical understanding. Players refine both-sided skills under pressure.

Adult Level: High-performance coaching centered on match preparation, advanced decision-making, leadership, and long-term contribution to the club.



## 2. Player Pathway Overview

The player pathway supports development across technical, tactical, physical, psychological, and social dimensions. It emphasises long-term growth rather than short-term results.

The pathway helps coaches plan for progression, ensuring that players develop foundations before advancing to more complex skills.

Players move through stages based on readiness, confidence, and capability, not solely on age.

Clear communication between coaches ensures continuity when players transition between age groups, maintaining consistency in coaching quality and expectations.

This structured pathway promotes retention, development, and enjoyment while preparing players for adult-level competition

Goalkeeping needs to be considered as a specialist position with unique technical, tactical, physical, and psychological demands. Effective goalkeeper development must be planned, progressive, and aligned with long-term player development.

### Early Exposure Without Early Lock-In (Nursery – U10)

Goalkeeping is introduced in a positive and exploratory way. All players are encouraged to try the position.

### Rotation at Younger Ages (Up to U10)

Rotation is a core principle of the Lucan pathway. Goalkeeping duties are shared across the squad in both training and matches, with mistakes viewed as learning opportunities.

### Position-Specific Coaching (From U11+)

From U11 onwards, players who show interest and readiness receive position-specific goalkeeper coaching. Goalkeepers continue to train with their team, while specialist sessions complement team training.

### Decision-Making & Communication & Club Values

Modern goalkeepers are active participants in possession and leadership. Equal emphasis is placed on footwork and striking, decision-making under pressure, and clear communication to organise the defence and support team structure.

Goalkeeper development at Lucan Sarsfields reflects our core values of Fun, Respect, Inclusiveness, and Integrity. This ensures goalkeepers develop not only technical ability, but confidence, leadership, and a strong connection to club culture.



### 3. Skill Development

Developing skillful players is a cornerstone of our coaching model. We focus not only on technical skill acquisition but also on helping players become equally strong on both sides—left and right, dominant and non-dominant.

Players who can kick, handpass, strike, block, hook, and solo off both sides become significantly more effective, unpredictable, and tactically flexible. This makes them more adaptable to different positions and in-game situations.

Coaches embed both-sided development into every session. Rather than isolating weaker-side work into separate drills, we integrate it naturally into games, challenges, and skill-based activities.

Progression is key: players start with slow, controlled practice before increasing pressure, speed, and decision-making elements. Feedback is specific and constructive, aimed at improving confidence rather than highlighting mistakes.

The goal is to ensure that by the time players reach the youth and adult levels, they are fully capable of making quick decisions and executing skills under pressure with either side.

#### Objective

Develop technically proficient players who can perform all core skills confidently on both sides. Developing two-sided players is essential for long-term success.

#### Why It Matters

Two-sided players are adaptable, unpredictable, and capable of making better decisions under pressure.

#### Coaching Guidelines

- Integrate both-sided work into every session (e.g., left/right striking, kicking, handpassing catching).
- Prioritise, accuracy and control over volume.
- Use progressive challenges to maintain engagement.
- Give players time to master techniques — reward effort and progress, not just success.
- Encourage self-assessment and reflection.

#### Key Principles:

- Build two-sided skills into every training session. **50% of your training should be kicking & striking**
- Encourage players to use their weaker side in games, not just drills.
- Use constraints (e.g., weaker-side scoring) to promote development.
- Reinforce correct technique and celebrate progress.



## Executing the skills & Scanning

Head-up play is central to developing intelligent players who can read the game, recognise space, and make fast, effective decisions. Players who scan the pitch early and often can anticipate rather than react.

### Importance of Scanning

- Improves decision-making under pressure
- Reduces turnovers
- Helps players identify space and support runners
- Enables faster ball movement and better teamwork

### Head-Up Football

- Soloing with eyes up instead of down
- Scanning before receiving a pass (check shoulder)
- Identifying overlap, runners, or switch options
- Passing early and accurately based on what is seen

### Head-Up Hurling/Camogie

- Catching and gathering while already scanning ahead
- Carrying the ball in a way that maintains vision
- Looking before rising or striking
- Striking early to space or teammates

### Coaching Methods

- Build scanning prompts into drills (call colours, numbers, gates)
- Create small-sided games that reward head-up decisions
- Encourage players to identify options before moving
- Start scanning work slowly, then increase speed and pressure



***Coach Tip: Every activity is a chance to challenge the weaker side — make it a habit, not a separate drill.***

## 4. Games-Based Coaching Approach

A games-based approach places learning within realistic, engaging, and dynamic scenarios. This method improves skill retention, decision-making, and enjoyment by allowing players to learn through active problem-solving.

Small-sided games increase touches, involvement, and opportunities to practice skills under pressure. They simulate real match situations far more effectively than isolated drills.

Games are used not only to teach technical skills but also to improve spatial awareness, communication, support play, and scanning. Coaches manipulate constraints—space, numbers, rules—to target specific outcomes.

Sessions typically follow a structure of game–skill–game, where the initial game identifies areas for improvement, the skill segment refines technique, and the final game allows players to apply what they learned.

This approach develops intelligent, adaptable players who can transfer skills seamlessly into competitive matches.

### Objective

Use modified games to develop skills, decision-making, and teamwork.

### Why It Matters

Games-based learning increases engagement, contextual skill application, and enjoyment.

### Coaching Guidelines

- Design sessions with small-sided games to increase touches and involvement.
- Encourage players to make decisions within the game.
- Focus on learning through play rather than repetitive drills.
- Adapt games to challenge different skill levels within the same session.



***Coach Tip: Games are the classroom; players are the learners.***

## 5. Team Play & Decision-Making

Decision-making is one of the most critical components of successful performance in Gaelic games. Players must read the game, anticipate actions, and choose the best option under pressure.

Scanning and head-up play are central to good decision-making. Players who look before receiving, identify options early, and understand space can execute skills more effectively.

Coaches develop scanning habits through activities that require players to call out colours, numbers, or targets before receiving the ball. Overload and underload games (such as 3v2 or 4v3) force players to recognise space and make quicker decisions.

Head-up play is encouraged through rules that reward scanning behaviours—such as finding free players, passing to space, or identifying mismatches. These habits help players become smarter, more composed, and more confident on the ball.

Ultimately, strong decision-makers elevate team performance, reduce turnovers, and increase scoring opportunities.

### Objective

Develop players who understand tactics, teamwork, and can make effective decisions under pressure.

### Why It Matters

Players who make smart decisions are more valuable and adaptable during matches.

### On/Off-Pitch Behaviours

#### On the Pitch

Communicates with teammates

Makes smart passes and movement

Listens and adapts during games

#### Off the Pitch

Supports fellow players in training

Shows understanding of tactics verbally

Reflects on performance with coach feedback



**Coach Tip: Teach decision-making, not just skill execution.**

## 6. Athletic & Physical Development

Athletic development is essential for building strong, capable, and resilient players. At Lucan Sarsfields, we emphasise long-term physical development that supports skill execution and reduces injury risk.

Players develop foundational movement skills: running mechanics, balance, coordination, jumping, landing, agility, and basic strength. These elements provide the physical base for sport-specific skills.

Coaches introduce athletic components progressively and appropriately for each age group. Younger ages focus on fun movement activities, while older groups engage in more structured strength and conditioning work.

Athletic development sessions are varied and enjoyable, helping players build confidence in their physical abilities while preparing them for the demands of competitive play.

**Movement quality is prioritised overload or intensity to ensure long-term success.**

### Objective

Develop all-round athleticism: speed, agility, balance, coordination, and strength.

### Why It Matters

Better athleticism improves performance, reduces injury risk, and enables players to execute skills more effectively.

### Coaching Guidelines

- Include exercises for running, jumping, throwing, and balance.
- Focus on movement skills rather than sport-specific drills only.
- Ensure progressive overload to gradually challenge players.
- Prioritise correct technique to build a long-term foundation.



***Coach Tip: Athletic skills are the engine — technical skills are the wheels.***



## 7. Enjoyment, Inclusion & Player Retention

Player retention is a key objective for the club. We want players to stay engaged, motivated, and connected to the club for as long as possible—ideally into adulthood.

Enjoyment is the greatest contributor to retention. Coaches design sessions that are fun, challenging, and rewarding, where players experience success and learn through play.

An inclusive environment ensures that all players—regardless of ability—have meaningful opportunities to participate and grow. Inclusion drives confidence, teamwork, and long-term participation.

Players who feel valued, supported, and encouraged are significantly more likely to remain active members of the club.

Parents and coaches work together to create a positive environment that reduces pressure, builds camaraderie, and promotes healthy competition.

### Objective

Create a fun, inclusive environment where all players feel welcome and motivated.

### Why It Matters

Players who enjoy training and feel included are more likely to continue, improve, and contribute positively to the club culture.

### Coaching Guidelines

- Celebrate effort and progress, not just outcomes.
- Ensure all players are engaged and included in drills and games.
- Adapt sessions for different skill levels and abilities.
- Promote team spirit, friendship, and support among players.



***Coach Tip: If they're smiling, they're learning.***



## 8. Player Transition Policy

### Purpose

This policy ensures players are supported, retained, and developed during key transition stages. It prioritises long-term development, enjoyment, and wellbeing over short-term performance and recognises that transitions are high-risk periods for player dropout.

### Key Transition Points

Dropout in GAA and team sports most commonly occurs at:

- U12 → U13 (child to youth transition)
- Minor → Adult
- School → Adult life

### Guiding Principles

- Players progress based on readiness, confidence, and capability, not age alone
- Development is non-linear, particularly during adolescence
- Late developers must be retained and supported
- Transitions should be planned, gradual, and well communicated
- The player experience must remain positive, inclusive, and enjoyable

### Transition Supports

The club will:

- Provide additional support at key age changes through meetings with coaches, players, and parents
- Ensure clear communication between outgoing and incoming coaches
- Introduce gradual exposure to adult environments at appropriate stages, particularly at Minor level
- Maintain inclusive squad structures to support late developers
- Conduct squad and player reviews every six months at all age grades

### Roles & Responsibilities

Coaches: Support players through transitions, share development information, and prioritise confidence and inclusion.

Club: Oversee transition planning, support coaches, and monitor retention.

Parents/Guardians: Support players and encourage continued participation.

### Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Coaching Committee to ensure alignment with player needs and best practice.

## 9. Coaching Culture & Standards

### Objective

Create a unified, high-standard coaching culture across the club.

### Why It Matters

Consistency ensures players experience quality coaching at every level and fosters a positive club reputation.

### Coaching Guidelines

- Lead by example: Model respect, integrity, and preparation.
- Be consistent: Follow the club framework and player pathway.
- Communicate & collaborate: Share ideas and support fellow coaches.
- Reflect & improve: Seek feedback and review performance after sessions.
- Respect & responsibility: Maintain professional conduct on and off the pitch.



***Coach Tip: We coach the person first, the player second.***



## 10. Core Values & Behaviours

Lucan Sarsfields' coaching framework is built on a foundation of core values that guide behaviour both on and off the pitch. These values serve as the compass for coaches, parents, and players, ensuring that every interaction contributes positively to the club culture.

Players show respect by listening, collaborating, and treating teammates, coaches, and referees with courtesy. Respect extends beyond the pitch into personal conduct, communication, and representing the club with pride.

### Respect

#### On the Pitch

Shake hands

Listen to coaches/teammates

Respect referees

#### Off the Pitch

Speak courteously to all members

Represent club positively online

Own actions and words

Integrity means doing the right thing—even when nobody is watching. Players are encouraged to be honest in decision-making, take responsibility for their actions, and uphold fair play in all situations.

### Integrity

#### On the Pitch

Play by rules

Work hard

Accept victory humbly

#### Off the Pitch

Be accountable for actions

Follow through on commitments

Model honesty for younger players

Fun is central to learning and engagement. When players enjoy what they are doing, they develop faster and build stronger connections with teammates. Sessions should include creativity, laughter, and positive energy.

### Fun

#### On the Pitch

Energetic, positive training

Creative games

#### Off the Pitch

Encourage social interaction & friendship

Celebrate progress and milestones

Every player matters. We design activities that allow everyone to participate meaningfully and challenge themselves appropriately. Inclusiveness ensures retention and long-term involvement in the club.



## Inclusiveness

### On the Pitch

Equal game time

Rotate positions

Adapt drills

### Off the Pitch

All members feel welcome

Encourage diversity in leadership

Promote equality across teams

Coaches and players work together in a culture where effort is encouraged, mistakes are seen as learning opportunities, and wellbeing is prioritised. This environment builds resilience and confidence.

## Supportive Environment

### On the Pitch

Positive feedback

Celebrate effort

Encourage risk-taking

### Off the Pitch

Check in on wellbeing

Support players during setbacks

Build respectful communication



***Coach Tip: Our club values are lived through everyday actions.***



## 11. Summary

At Lucan Sarsfields, we don't just coach players — we develop people, teammates, and future leaders, our coaching philosophy is built upon the belief that every player—regardless of age, ability, or background—deserves an environment that supports their long-term development as both athletes and people.

We prioritise the holistic growth of each player by ensuring that coaching remains player-centred, process-driven, and aligned with the long-term success of the club. The philosophy encourages coaches to consider development over immediate success, focusing on building adaptable, creative, and confident players with the skills and mindset to thrive in all game scenarios.

This philosophy is not static; it evolves as our club grows. Coaches regularly reflect on their practice, collaborate with one another, and engage with ongoing education to maintain a high standard across all teams.

Above all else, our philosophy aims to inspire lifelong engagement in Gaelic games—whether as players, coaches, referees, volunteers, or supporters—strengthening our community and sustaining the legacy of Lucan Sarsfields.