

# THE 'HOW TO' GUIDE TO RUNNING AN ADULT SOCCER TEAM

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The Sacramento Adult Soccer League is an excellent forum to play men's soccer. Any successful league requires individuals who make the difference in managing the teams that compete in SASL. However, being a manager is not easy and requires certain persons who are courageous to undertake this endeavor and persons who are durable in order to ride the highs and the lows of managing. My purpose here is to provide some insights in what I believe it takes to be successful in managing a team in SASL.

## Some Characteristics of a Team Manager

### 1) **Be an entrepreneur.**

Managing a soccer team is similar, but in a much lesser degree, to setting up a business. Both require someone with the vision and drive to create something and have it succeed. The limit of your success in managing is dependent on your resourcefulness and perseverance.

### 2) **Be committed and persevere.**

As a manager you will experience the ups and downs of running a team. Your team may not be performing as well as expected, or there may be team conflict between your individual players. However, it is important that you hang in there since your players depend on it and you will be the better for it. Just as there are lows over the course of the season, the highs for you and the team will be just as many with feelings of achievement in winning games or just having a whole lot of fun in the effort.

### 3) **Being diplomatic.**

Your success as a manager depends on your ability to interact with your players, other team managers, league officials, and the referees. You may need to be the "baby-sitter" when it comes to appeasing certain player's wishes, but not to the detriment of the team. You may be required, frequently, to call certain players to remind them of game times or field locations, even though that information is readily available to them. Regarding the other managers, league officials, and referees, you may need to be flexible in regards to your demands and points of view. You do not want to foster a reputation as being someone difficult to deal with, or having your team labeled "trouble-makers". Otherwise, your stay in any league will be short lived and that adverse reputation can linger.

### 4) **Be responsible.**

As a team manager you have responsibilities to your team and the league. You, or a team representative, are required to attend all league meetings where important agenda items are discussed and voted on. You are responsible for disseminating the important league information to your team. You are responsible for having your team ready to play on Sunday as a courtesy to the other teams who do show up. You are responsible for the actions of your team prior to, during, and after the game. If you have a jerk on your team who is constantly looking for trouble, refund him the money and show him the door because believe me the rest of the team will benefit. You are responsible for setting up and maintaining the fields when required. It is important to note that failing in these responsibilities, only impact the individual men on your team who look to you as the manager.

5) **Have a philosophy.**

As a team manager, you need to establish a philosophy or goal as to what you hope to achieve and stick with it. If your aim is to hoist the league champion trophy over your head, your approach should be to get the best players that will allow you to meet that philosophy. If your desire is to exercise and have a social outlet without the pressure of winning it all, you will need players who also like that more relaxed style. It will be important that all the players you select buy into that same philosophy or else there will be team disunity. It is also important that once you establish that team philosophy at the beginning of the season, you stick to it or you will see lose the interest among your players as the season progresses.

6) **Most importantly have fun.**

Unlike being a business owner, soccer is not a job. Playing soccer is something you like to do and not something you are required to do. Try to enjoy the experience of getting away from the burdens of everyday life while kicking a soccer ball, scoring a goal or blocking a shot. As manager you don't want to bring those everyday burdens on to the field come Sunday. It will reflect on your team and how you and your team interact with other teams and the referees.

## **My Three Prong Approach to Selecting Team Players**

Your experience as team manager is most impacted by the decisions you make in selecting your players. I believe there are three things to consider when selecting a player:

1) **Is he a team player?**

Look for players who get along and play along. If your goal is to get everyone on the team involved, you may not want to select a person who demands the full 90 minutes and who constantly has the ball glued to his foot. In addition, you do not want a player who is highly critical of everything and everyone but is totally blind to his own short-comings. Look for players that will add to your team's positive experience.

## **2) Is he committed to play?**

You do not want to add a player to your team and wonder if he is ever going to show up to justify that important spot on your roster? It does your team no good to have a certain number of players sign up but always barely have enough guys for game time. Select players that will not let you down when they are most needed. This is not to say that you should set an unrealistic goal that your players need to make all of the games. However, you need to have players who are reliable in meeting your requirements set for availability so as not to be a detriment to the team's success.

## **3) Is he a right fit for the team philosophy (very competitive versus recreational).**

If your goal is to "go for the gold," then you may not want to select players who are experimenting with soccer for the first time. Likewise, if your aim is to get away from the hustle and bustle of a work week with a relaxing game of soccer with some friends, then you do not want to select "Rambo in soccer shorts." You want to select players who are going to mesh with the rest of the team and your own philosophy.

## **My approach to running a team**

### **1) Delegate, Delegate, Delegate**

One person cannot do it all on their own and they are not expected to. Burnout is a primary reason managers stop managing. To run a team right, you need to attend all manager meetings, collect all the fees, get your players registered, forward all important information to your team, select the players, maintain the fields when required, coordinate practice or practice games if so desired, set starting lineups and make substitutions, make sure your players show up for games which may require several calls, etc., etc., etc. Why torture yourself? On our team we have an administrator who attends the meetings and communicates important information to the team, an accountant who handles all the money and registration, a field captain who sets the lineups and makes the substitutions and game plans, and finally the team liaison who sets up practice games and scout for players to fill the roster. In addition to delegating certain responsibilities, you can rotate persons to handle those responsibilities. In the long run, this will secure the longevity of your role as manager and will allow you the enjoyment of playing soccer without your focus constantly on managing.

### **2) Communicate at the very beginning the team philosophy and stick to it**

I have already touched on this topic but it bears repeating. Make sure the players you select buy into the team's philosophy. Otherwise, you will experience factions within the team that ultimately will undo the team.

### **3) Get the money first**

Unless you feel an overriding desire, do not front any player the money. First of all it is not fair for the rest of the team who pays. Secondly, those players who do not pay may not be as committed since it is no money out of their pocket. Finally, it is a hassle being a debt collector and can ruin friendships.

#### **4) Establish means of communications**

Communicate most of the important league and team information via the email. Once you hit send on your computer the information goes out to all of your players at once. This should eliminate those “I didn’t get the message.” It will be important to get email addresses from all players as soon as possible. Another means of communicating is by cell phone where players can call you if they need information or they are unable to make the game due to some unforeseen event. There is nothing worse than being 5 minutes from game time and trying to locate your goalkeeper.

#### **5) Determine how many players are to be selected**

Though this seems like a simple task, it is very important. You want a certain number of players where you are comfortable in knowing you’ll have enough players for each game without having to forfeit. In addition, you want enough players so that there are a sufficient number of substitutes for those really hot days. However, you do not want too many players where there will be a lot of long faces on the sidelines during game.

#### **6) Establish ground rules**

As discussed above, set the criteria where players are selected only if they confirm they can make it to a certain number of games, for example 70% of the games. Also, require all players to call you the Saturday prior to game time if they are not able to make the following Sunday’s game. Demand that all players understand that they are not immune from being substituted; otherwise team dissension will creep in. Demand that no back-talking to the referees will be allowed.

#### **7) Enjoy being a manager**

Select a team name and team colors. Ponder if your team formation should be 4-4-2 or 4-3-3. Set up other activities other than soccer, such as which hang-out should the team hit after the game.

Though at times it can be demanding (depending on your level of delegation), managing your own soccer team will always be very rewarding (no matter what your level of success).

For a final thought, you will not be alone if you decide to try your hand at managing a men’s soccer team. There are resources available to you to assist you along the way, such as the league

website, other team managers who have years of experience, and SASL whose board members want to see you succeed. If you are interested in managing a team, please let us know.