



Welcome to Billings West High Boys Soccer

A GUIDE FOR PLAYERS AND PARENTS

- Introduction
- Tryouts
- Season and Play Time
- Letters and Awards
- Expected Behavior
- Nutrition
- Captains
- Parent's Role
- Risks
- Training
- Travel
- The Mental Game
- Style of Play
- Academics

Luke Ashmore, head coach

Cell - (406) 697-9538

Email - ashmore.luke@gmail.com, or ashmorer@billingssschools.org (email is preferred method of contact)

Introduction

Hello everyone! Welcome to West High Boys' Soccer. I'm incredibly excited

about the upcoming season, and I'm looking forward to the hard work needed for a successful year. I coach because of my love for the game of soccer, and I'm grateful that I'm able to coach at West High--the same school I graduated from. I have a deep appreciation for this program. I owe many friendships and fond memories to my four years as a West High student-athlete.

This is a competitive program, and it's also one with a rich history and success. I will work to continue to elevate this program, and I'll make sure the team has fun playing the beautiful game to the highest level we can as a team and overall program.

Tryouts

While we work on how to play and on team building, each player is being evaluated on his level of play, intensity, communication, and where he could best be used on the team. By the end of tryouts, we are able to tell players if they are on varsity, JV or if we feel they should be pursuing other activities. Usually there are more players trying out than there are spots on the roster. No special preference is given to returning players or to club players. You will be judged on fitness levels and how you play. **To make the team, seniors are expected to be able to make a strong contribution.**

Students are allowed to try out late if there is a valid reason (transfer student or prior arrangement with the coach). If they show they can contribute to the program, efforts will be made to include them on the team. As a coach, I need to be made aware of late tryouts **one week** (absolute minimum) before the season's tryout start date.

Tryout and Preseason Non-Negotiables:

*** Before trying out, players must have a current physical, concussion disclosure, and signed student handbook on file at the activities office. Trust me -- the earlier these are turned in, the better.**

*** Players trying out for the team must attend each session made available to them during our two days of tryouts. If a player requires a postponed tryout, I need to know week(s) in advance.**

*** The high school season is too short to adequately condition players.
PLAYERS MUST BE IN SHAPE WHEN PRACTICES START.**

*** Players must have fees paid and signed acknowledgement (from parent and player) of the team handbook before being allowed to participate in regular practices.**

*** Players must have 8 practices completed before they are allowed to play in a match.**

Tryout Decision Making & Process:

As previously mentioned, it's typical that we have more players trying out than spots available on our combined varsity and junior varsity rosters (max. 40 players). An unfortunate side of soccer can feel rather harsh to inexperienced or new players: **cuts can be unavoidable in competitive teams**. My coaching staff and I do not take decision making in this realm lightly, and our goal is to give them next steps to improve and make the team the following season. If a player doesn't make the team, they will have a 1-on-1 evaluation with a coach, where they're given time and space to ask questions, vent frustration, and be given next steps.

During these conversations/evaluations, players will most likely be speaking with the head coach. In certain scenarios, our program's assistant coach may feel leading this conversation will be more beneficial to the player. In this scenario, this player is more than welcome to schedule another evaluation and discussion with the head coach, if desired.

So, how does our coaching staff make decisions regarding team personnel? We do so by looking at two categories I remind the boys of throughout summer activities: **fitness and fundamental skills**.

We use three tests to evaluate a player's fitness level during tryouts: Cooper Test (maximal running test), Pacer Test (aerobic capacity test), and a simple agility test. Players should be able to comfortably achieve six laps during the Cooper Test (1.5 miles) and reach level 10-0 during the Pacer. The agility test we used is timed, and our primary goal with this test is to ensure a player has no issues with changing direction at speed.

To evaluate fundamental skills, players will complete technical drills and compete in small-sided & 11v11 scrimmages. At this level, players should be able to consistently play 2-touch soccer, use their non-dominant foot, and have a consistent first touch.

If cuts are necessary during tryouts, our program prioritizes fitness to make the first round of cuts. This ensures players who work hard during the off season (even if they're less technically proficient) are given an advantage over those players who didn't focus on fitness work. At the end of the day, our program is looking for players with positive habits above everything else.

Season and Play Time

Practices start in mid August. The regular season is 14 games and runs from late August to late October. Most games are at Amend Park, with crosstown fixtures being played on their turf field (ex. West vs Senior). There are bus trips to Bozeman, Belgrade, and Great Falls. Postseason competition is at the end of October and our Awards Banquet is in November.

This is **competitive** soccer and **play time is based on what is needed on the field**, not how long a player has been with the program nor what class they are in. Some players may not see much play time. **Discipline problems, substandard work ethic, or poor attitude will jeopardize play time**. Players can always ask what they need to improve to earn more play time.

In order to participate in any given match, players must be in attendance during the practice immediately prior to the game. Practices before a match day are planned to be less physical, but the discussions of tactics and specific details shared are vital to our success. Of course, if a player has an illness or another commitment, and they communicate this with the coach prior to their absence – they're in the clear.

The role of the junior varsity team is to develop players for varsity. Again, play is dependent on who can contribute on the field. There will be some players who primarily practice with the varsity but play on the JV team. On occasion, JV players will dress out for varsity games. A player may only play in as many halves (whether varsity or JV) as there are on the varsity schedule. At the end of the JV season, a few JV players will be invited to practice with the varsity to help prepare for playoff matches.

Letters and Awards

To earn a varsity letter (there are no letters for JV players):

- ~Did not receive an MIP.
- ~Did not receive a warranted red card for violent or unsportsmanlike play.
- ~Contributed to the squad's overall success (coach's discretion)

Team awards: categories chosen by coaches, voting by players and coaches

- ~Please note: All-State and All-Conference awards are selections made at the state coaching meeting based on level of play during the season. Each coach nominates players from their team and other teams but may not vote for his/her players, this selection is made by the other Eastern Division coaches.

Expected Behavior

Good sportsmanship is the hallmark of a classy program. You are a representative of your team and your school. During games you are expected to compete aggressively, but stay within the spirit and the rules.

Acceptable behavior during games includes:

- ~Use appropriate language (no swearing, cussing, or otherwise foul language/gestures)
- ~Speak respectfully to the referee (no arguing or debating calls)
- ~Control yourself within the game (includes temper, actions, and words)
- ~Always use sportsmanship (well-mannered in victory, congratulatory in defeat)
- ~Respect your opponents
- ~Respect the game

Acceptable behavior for practices includes:

- ~Use appropriate language (no swearing, cussing, or otherwise foul language/gestures)
- ~Be **on time** with all necessary equipment (yes, **shin guards are required**)
- ~Work hard, be focused, and be part of the team
- ~Missing practice is not acceptable except for illness, academic difficulties, or

family obligations

~**Injured players are expected to be at practice**

~Players are responsible for their own fitness and skills and need to work on them after or before practice if necessary

Acceptable behavior in other areas includes:

~Uniforms must be treated with respect and returned at end of season

~Clean up after yourself and be polite at all times

~On road trips, you will be on your best behavior (i.e. treating the bus and its driver respectfully, keeping manners in mind)

~Support your teammates with positive comments and help as needed

~There is to be absolutely **NO HAZING**

~Attend ALL team functions unless otherwise cleared with the coach

~Help new players to feel they are part of the team

~You are responsible for managing your time, rest, and nutrition so that you can perform at your best

~Refrain from using social media when talking about opponents, referees, games, or our team. There is a fine line between fun banter and inappropriate conduct.

Failure to adhere to the above expectations of behavior will result in disciplinary measures that will be decided based on the severity of the offense. Disciplinary measures will never include a physical punishment such as running, push ups, etc.; if there are problems with a student-athlete, his play time at matches and practices will be in jeopardy. In cases of recurrent or flagrant offenses, parents will be involved. Severe infractions will lead to loss of play time and possible dismissal from the team. **Good behavior is just as important as winning games.**

You are not to put your eligibility at risk. You must keep up with your studies and not go to parties where there are alcohol or drugs. Please familiarize yourself with SD2's policies regarding substance use; DO NOT violate it.

If you feel a player is putting himself at risk, it is your duty to take action: talk with the player, one of the captains, or one of the coaches. MIP's are seen as a serious violation of team rules. If you receive an MIP you may forfeit your letter, team awards, and nomination for All-State depending on circumstances.

Nutrition

Nutrition and hydration are incredibly important as an athlete. **STAY HYDRATED.** Stay away from soda pop and caffeinated drinks during the season. Make sure to eat healthily, including lots of carbohydrates (pasta, bread, potatoes, rice) and protein. Be sure to learn what foods your body tolerates before games and tournaments. It is often hard to get what you like on road trips. Bring along your own foods and drinks that agree with you.

Captains

Captains will be selected by the coaches, with input from the players. The captains have extra responsibility and are expected to lead in a manner appropriate to team guidelines. They provide leadership both **on** and **off** the field. They are responsible for making adjustments on the field during games, setting the tone for the team during practices, and taking charge of boosting team morale. It is an honor to be selected as a captain! The role of captain can be revoked if behavior issues occur. There is no set number for how many captains can be on a team; if beneficial to the team, captains will be added, or players can be relieved of captaincy.

Parent's Role

Parents are a key part of the West High program. They support the team by cheering at games, holding team dinners, decorating lockers, fund raising, arranging meals for trips, preparing the field, taking photographs, and helping at the Awards Banquet. I encourage all parents to help the team in some way.

At games, there is to be NO yelling at referees. Players are taught to focus on playing and not to argue with calls. Parents need to set an example for them. If you see other parents getting upset during the heat of a game, help them to stay calm.

Also, **my coaching staff has a 24 hour rule**. We will not talk about the game with any parent for twenty-four hours after the game has ended. This will ensure cooler heads will prevail. In addition, **I require that this conversation be prefaced with an email detailing the exact reason(s) for the meeting**. Please contact me via email explaining what you would like to discuss. This will also apply to the JV team; if a parent wants to discuss anything about the game with the assistant coach, I must be included in the email and further conversation, if needed.

During games **do not** coach your son by giving tactical direction, instead tell him to try harder or that mistakes don't matter. Cheer for all players by name after they have done something well on the field. ("John, good pass!" "Mike, nice shot!" "Julian, great idea!" "Steve, super run!" "Jim, great tackle!")

Players are required to be positive with each other. This is an important part of being on a team. If parents are negative on the sideline or at home, it will seep into the team and damage morale. Focus on the positive. If you must make a negative comment, please send me an email, but if I deem this comment to be especially unproductive or blatantly mean spirited, **I will not respond**. I will always respond to constructive criticism that is well thought out, respectful, and provides actionable steps for improvement.

If your son is frustrated with his role on the team or how the team is performing, allow him to vent and then ask him if he understands why, and what he is doing to change things. If he doesn't know, encourage him to talk with the coaches rather than simply reinforcing his concerns. **At this age, players need to be able to accept their role and take responsibility for their own improvement (e.g. training seriously, earning game time, etc.)**. If he cannot resolve things on his own, please contact me. Game days and

practices are not good times to discuss emotional issues. Call or email me to set up an appointment. I will be happy to review what your son could be doing to improve or to address problems he is having with teammates or coaches. **Tactics and play time are coaching decisions and not a proper subject for such a discussion.**

If a parent's concerns warrant in-person meetings, I'm happy to schedule a time to do so. School District 2 prefers student-athletes to be present during coach/parent meetings, so that is our team standard. If for any reason, a parent would prefer to not have their son present at a meeting, **the reason provided must be viable.**

Risks

Soccer is a contact sport. While every effort is made to keep players under control and teach them proper technique, injuries are still part of the game. Players can get hurt by running into other players, the goal, or by stepping wrong. Common soccer injuries can include ankle sprains, broken legs, knee injuries, and head injuries among other things. We will provide first aid at practices and games. Coaches do not provide medical care. For minor injuries, players are encouraged to see the trainer at school. For more serious injuries, they should seek appropriate medical care. **Let me know if your son has any medical problems.**

Concussions are of particular concern. Coaches will watch for any potential concussions during practice and games. However, if you have any suspicion that your son may have sustained one, let me know. There are very stringent regulations if a concussion, or head injury, has occurred and may require a physician's note to return to playing. Please be aware that these regulations are in place to protect your child's health and future.

Early in the season, heat exhaustion is a real danger. We will encourage players to stay hydrated and teach them to recognize if they are overheating. Be sure they are hydrating and getting adequate rest at home. If they have conditions that require medications, be sure those medications are in their bags (players with asthma should have an inhaler with them.)

The school district carries only minimal accident insurance to cover treatment of injuries. Do not rely on it. You are strongly encouraged to have your own coverage.

Training: A Competitive Approach

During the length of a typical high school season, each of our teams spend roughly **18 hours** playing matches against other teams. And during this same period of time, we will train for roughly **100 hours** (and this will be exceeded with quality performances during playoffs). This is to say, a player's improvement over the course of a season is due to the hours spent training more than the minutes they play during matches.

With this in mind, players need to approach their day-to-day training and habits seriously. If a player is unhappy with their role on the team or their play time (and this is

not due to behavior or academic issues), our coaching staff is most likely concerned by their approach to training. Players should practice like they want to play in matches – with intensity, focus, and a desire to outwork the opposition (in training, this means they should view their teammates as healthy competition). Players who embody this approach can make leaps and bounds in terms of improvement, while players who take a more relaxed approach to their training may struggle to be as effective as they'd like.

As our coaching staff prepares lineups for matches, a question we often ask is “How did *player X* train this week?” If there are concerns about their approach, oftentimes they will not be included in the starting lineup and see their role minimized in the overall match plan. During these moments, a player should use this as motivation to improve and ask their coaches questions. Our coaches are more than happy to help a player reach their goals within our team and beyond (that's *why* we coach).

Players should also focus on their individual training regimen to improve. During the off season, a player should devote time to personal fitness, technical improvement, and studying the game. While it may be more difficult to find this time for individual work during the season, players who do so give themselves an advantage. Players practice or play a match each day Monday through Saturday, so carving out a little time around this schedule is often a great idea. Whether that's spending an additional half our at the practice field to work on finishing or spending time each week to review match film, this extra effort can go a long way, and it is noticed by our coaching staff.

Travel

When traveling to participate in games players will be expected to alert any teachers whose class they may miss. There is an “Advanced Make-Up Slip” that will need to be handed to the coach PRIOR to getting on the bus. This is extremely important because the boys are STUDENT-athletes, with “student” coming first. If for any reason a player chooses to return from a game with a parent instead of on the bus, there is a “BPS Alternative Travel Request” form that needs to be signed by the coach and the principal. It also needs to be turned in BEFORE the trip, not after we are already at our destination. There will be NO EXCEPTIONS to these rules, as it is a School District 2 policy.

If a parent would like to travel back to Billings with their son, they're welcome to do so after an away game. In this scenario, please check in with me (with the student athlete present), so I can make a note and ensure a player is with their parent or guardian.

Our team may have overnight stays during the season. During these trips, player behavior is incredibly important. Players who exhibit bad behavior or exhibit poor decision making put their play time at risk during these away games, and if an offense is particularly worrying, parents may be called to remove their son from the team environment until the issue can be addressed back home.

The Mental Game

Soccer is a game you play with your head. Not only does your state of mind affect how you play but the more you know what to do, the better you will play. We help each player understand his strengths and teach him how to analyze the game. We will work on visualization, mental toughness, and adapting play to meet the demands of the game. As coaches, we can do very little to help the players once they are on the field of play, so decision-making and preparation are imperative to a successful team. Players are encouraged to watch high level games, especially European games, to help understand roles, tactics, and positional play. As a coach, I actively encourage these student-athletes to discuss top-flight soccer with me. I appreciate these moments of discussion, and I believe it is beneficial for young players to apply a high level of soccer philosophy to their own game.

Style of Play

The concept of attacking soccer is something I want to see within this program. While hard to discuss in detail within this document, I want to address what I will need from players if they want to succeed in this system. At the varsity level, players will need to have a very strong technical base. This includes their first touch, passing ability, and quick decision making. **These aspects of a player's game need to be consistent.** In addition to the more technical side of one's game, every player needs to be fit and prepared to run in this system. I will require more off-the-ball running than other coaches because my soccer philosophy demands this to create space and opportunities. I personally believe that playing an attacking-style is the way the game should be played, but ultimately, executing this system will depend on the team's ability to do so. **Tactics will be altered in order to stay competitive.**

JV players should be focused on elevating their skill set for eventual varsity play. During this period in a player's high school career, I need to see players developing their control, passing skills, on-field awareness, maturity, and mental strength.

One of the largest components to this system's success will be communication. Players will need to be in constant communication with each other on the field. If there are moments where West High players cannot be heard on the field, this is antithetical to the team's demands. Off the field communication is just as important. During practices and other team activities, players are expected to speak with other players, teachers, and coaches with respect. Also, players will need to ask questions. Everyone from seniors to freshmen can learn more about the game. Do not be afraid to ask coaches or other players for opinions or advice.

Academics

As we approach the 2022 fall season, please note the following updates for student-athlete academic performance:

- Moving forward, there will be no 6-week grade checks (or suspensions due to grade checks in this case)
- This is not an excuse for student-athletes to be negligent of their academic performance; this change will alter how our program approaches the discussion and repercussions of poor academic performance with players
- Please familiarize yourself with the following plan for maintaining academic standards within the program
 - Coaches will monitor players' grades throughout the season
 - Once student-athletes have settled into the semester, they are expected to be passing each of their classes
 - On the first instance a player is failing a class, they will be notified by their coach, and they will need to provide a plan for improvement (i.e. reasons behind poor academic performance, actionable steps to improve the grade, and timeline for doing so)
 - If a player continues to fall short of this academic standard, or they aren't putting in the necessary work to improve a grade, coaches will use their role within the team to reinforce academic requirements (e.g. not starting matches, lessened play time, possible game suspension etc.)
- Academic performance is always the most important piece for student-athletes; players should be communicating with their teachers and coaches when it comes to grades and maintaining academic standards (as a coach, I'm always happy to help where I can and provide a student-athlete more time to work on homework if it conflicts with our training schedule)

Preparing for College Soccer

Many of our program's student-athletes have made their way to college soccer programs. While technical ability and tactical understanding open doors to these opportunities, college programs are also looking for maturity, accountability, relational skills, and **academic excellence**. If a player sets a goal to play college soccer, there are a set of eligibility standards they must meet during their high school careers. For more information, student-athletes and their parents or guardians should speak with their school counselor on collegiate requirements.