



COACHING TOOLKIT



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INTRO TO THE TOOLKIT

PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is a practical guide created to support coaches in using Switch the Pitch on-field Team Challenges effectively during training sessions. It is meant to equip coaches to better manage diversity, inclusion, integration, and anti-racism within their teams.

The toolkit includes detailed instructions on conducting the StP Team Challenges, engaging coaches and players in challenging and enlightening discussions, and tips on managing mitigation strategies for dealing with discrimination and escalation.

By seamlessly incorporating the resources from the toolkit into practice sessions, coaches can tailor their training, ensuring that it is not only football-focused but also grounded in cultural competency all with no further help from an external facilitator.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides step-by-step guidance on how to implement different challenges and here are some key tips on how to use this toolkit effectively.





PRE-CHALLENGE PLANNING

Start by thoroughly reading the toolkit to understand the specific goals of each challenge. Pay special attention to the debriefing tips and Team Challenge's overviews to ensure being well-prepared to guide the players through it.

Each tool or Team Challenge is meant to address certain learnings. Identify these beforehand to ensure discussions can be effectively guided and stay on track during the session. While the toolkit offers a structured approach, it is important to remain flexible. Adapt the content and delivery to suit the needs of each team and the specific context in which they are training in. This might involve adjusting the duration of Team Challenges rephrasing questions or providing additional examples that resonate with the players.

STP TEAM CHALLENGES

These team challenges are designed to integrate StP principles into the daily practice routines of youth football teams. Review the instructions for each challenge to effectively tailor them to each team's schedule. If unsure of how to effectively implement the StP team challenges into day-to-day practice, refer to the examples provided in the "Integrating StP into Practice" chapter. The sections in that chapter offer practical guidance and scenarios that demonstrate how to seamlessly incorporate the StP Team challenges into regular training sessions.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS AND DEBRIEFING ROUNDS

These prompts are questions or scenarios that encourage players to reflect on and discuss issues related to each Team Challenge. Introduce them during the StP Team challenges. Encourage every player to participate by sharing their thoughts and experiences.

After completing a Team Challenge, hold a debriefing round to reflect on what was learned. Use the debriefing tips provided in the toolkit to guide the conversation. These can be done as a group discussion where players share their thoughts on what they learned, and how it applies to their experiences on the team.



HOW-TO: TACKLING DISCRIMINATION

The "How-To: Tackling Discrimination" chapter provides practical strategies and actionable steps for addressing discrimination within the team and when playing against others. The interventions provided in this chapter are not solely for responding to incidents but can also serve as preventive and proactive measures.

To use it daily, coaches can integrate these strategies into regular team interactions, ensuring that all players are aware of how to confront, and challenge discriminatory behavior consistently. Regularly reviewing the plan with players helps them understand how they can also best support their teammates and sets a standard for promoting accountability and a fairer game. While coaches are the primary authorities, sharing these strategies with the team enables players to support the coach in keeping everyone aligned.

FOLLOW-UP AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Regularly revisit the toolkit to reinforce the lessons and assess progress. Continuous learning and reinforcement are essential to making lasting changes in team culture. Revisiting the toolkit ensures that its principles remain central to the team's values.

By keeping the above tips in mind, this toolkit can support managing diversity, inclusion, integration, and antiracism in youth teams in a way that is impactful, inclusive, and conducive to meaningful change in the football community.

TRIGGER WARNINGS

Reproduction of racism can be (re-)traumatizing for participants. It is essential to clearly communicate the setting, severity and depth of exercises or discussion topics to all participants before starting.

Issue a trigger warning to all participants about the reproduction of racism that will be part of the session. Allow all potential participants to withdraw from participation if they believe participation might be harmful to them in any way. Ideally, this is done with plenty of lead time (e.g. days before, when inviting players to attend).



STP TEAM CHALLENGES

The StP Team Challenges are activities that were designed to educate, activate, and facilitate dialogue on the critical topics of managing diversity, inclusion, integration and antiracism. Through the implementation of these challenges players are encouraged to think critically about social issues and how they manifest themselves in their own lives and on the football field.

By participating in the StP Team Challenges, players learn to appreciate the diverse backgrounds and perspectives within their team. This fosters stronger team cohesion and builds cultural competence, helping players to support one another more effectively.

The StP Team Challenges are not just meant to impart knowledge but also to activate players' roles as leaders within their teams and communities. They also provide a platform for open dialogue, helping to break down barriers and build understanding.

Once coaches implement them during their training sessions, players will develop a deeper understanding of their own identities and those of their teammates, leading to a more inclusive team environment. The focus on supportive communication will enhance teamwork and the ability to engage in constructive, respectful discussions.

As players become more aware of diversity, inclusion, integration and antiracism, and their importance within football, the overall team dynamics are likely to improve, with greater mutual respect and cooperation.



CHALLENGE 1: Walking with our Identities

This challenge requires approximately 10 -15 minutes for the warm-ups, and 5 -10 minutes for debriefing with the team.

- **Duration**
15-30 minutes
- **Materials**
paper, markers, cones

CHALLENGE OVERVIEW

Players will be asked to reflect on and discuss, in small groups and with their whole team, different components of their identity.

While completing warm-up exercises, players will have the opportunity to choose categories based on prompts about their identities. After multiple distinct prompts, the coach will conclude the exercise with a discussion of identity.

There are many different elements that make up our identities, each of which may be at the foreground or in the background depending on the situation, circumstances, or environment we are in. In this challenge players will reflect on the different things that makes them “them” and seek to understand how culture plays a role in our identity formation.

KEY COACHING POINTS

Identity is complicated; who we are, and how we understand ourselves, is a combination of multiple factors.

Different aspects of someone’s identity stand out in different contexts, situations and at different times in our lives.

How everyone understands the role of identity in their lives varies. Regardless of starting point, it is important to consider how identity shapes the way we view ourselves, and how others view us.

COACH PREPARATION AND RESOURCES

Scaffolding - Building from less vulnerable to more vulnerable opportunities to share and speak.

Active listening – Don't only hear what players are saying but try to understand their point of view by mirroring, validating, and empathizing.

Openness - Model a willingness to be asked and answer questions about yourself and encourage the same in players.

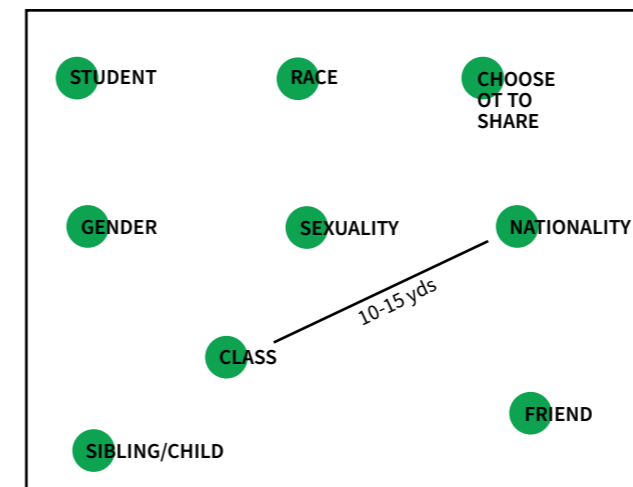
SETTING UP

Create “identity cards” to set-up on the field. The cards can be taped to cones or set up in some other way where they will be easy for players to see as they move around the space.

Potential identity cards: Race/Ethnicity, Nationality, Gender, and Choose not to share. Feel free to add or remove any other identities that are relevant to the team.

One identity card that is strongly recommended to always keep is Choose Not to Share. This challenge asks players to share personal information, so it is important they have the choice not to.

Spread the labeled cones out in the warm-up area.



Cones should be about 10-15 meters apart, so players are still within hearing distance. A sample of the set-up is shown below.

HOW TO FRAME IT

- Today we are going to warm-up a little differently. In addition to our regular dynamic warm-up, we will reflect on certain components or elements of our identities.
- Every team is composed of a unique set of individuals, and it is important that we consider that each of us is a complex person with varied backgrounds and lived experiences.
- The more we know about each other and ourselves, the stronger we will be together and the more confident we will be as individuals
- Many of these diversity dimensions are social constructs, which means that their definitions are somewhat fluid and can change over time and within different geographic or social settings. For example, race is interpreted differently in Germany, the US or South Africa. Use your own context to interpret your “identity card” and be open to a degree of ambiguity.

ASK

- Why is it important that we reflect on what makes up our identities?

ENCOURAGE

- Encourage players to be thoughtful and as honest as they can be with their choices while remaining comfortable.
- Reiterate that they can opt out of any given prompt by visiting the Choose not to share station.
- Remind players to look around after each question to see what others on their team answered. own context to interpret your “identity card” and be open to a degree of ambiguity.



WARM-UP AND PROMPTS

Give players a different dynamic stretch to do every few minutes. In addition to the stretch, read one of the prompts aloud.

After each prompt is read, the players will complete the assigned dynamic warm-up movement as they move towards whichever “identity station” they feel applies most to the prompt.

QUESTION PROMPTS

- Which of these identity categories is “most significant” when you think about your identity and who you are (what makes you, you)?
- Which of these identity categories is “least significant” at this point in your life?
- Which of these identity categories is hardest for you to talk about with others?
- Which of these identity categories do you wish you thought about more, or do you think will become more important when you get older?
- Which of these identity categories raises the most confusion or questions for you?
- Which of these identity categories do you wish other people took more time to think about?

DEBRIEF

At each station after answering a prompt, have players stretch and debrief.

Once they get to the station, players will complete a deeper static stretch (ideally, same muscle group as dynamic warm-up) while sharing with teammates at the station.

While at each station, facilitate a short conversation for players that want to share-out because they responded the way they did.

After a short discussion (around 1-3 minutes) give the next prompt.

STATION PROMPTS

- Why did you choose this identity marker for the question?
- Any comments or questions?

CLOSING AND DEBRIEF

This challenge is designed to get players to think more about their identities and discover some of the ways that their identities affect their experience on and off the field. Through reflections after each prompt and a group debrief, players will have the opportunity to explore their identities and experiences.

LIST OF DEBRIEF QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How did you feel during this activity?
- In what ways did a specific identity marker come up in the discussion? Why do you think that is?
- Why is it important that we all consider the role our identities play in who we are?

ADDITIONAL BONUS QUESTIONS

- Did one identity play a more significant role for some of us than for others? Why is that?
- Why have some of us thought less about our identities and their roles in shaping who we are?
- What does it mean to have a healthy understanding of our diverse identities?
- How does increased awareness of who we are as individuals help make us a better team?

Note: Football deeply influences and reflects various forms of identity, from the personal to the national level. It fosters national pride, unites communities, and serves as a symbol of cultural, political, and regional identities. Football clubs are often central to local identity and engage with race, ethnicity, and religion issues, serving as a platform for inclusion and the fight against discrimination.

Overall, football is a powerful medium for expressing and shaping personal, cultural, and political identities. It is important for youth coaches to understand the concept of identity because it helps them support the personal and social development of their players. By recognizing the diverse backgrounds, and individual experiences of young athletes, coaches can create an inclusive and supportive environment. This understanding allows coaches to build stronger relationships with their players, foster a sense of belonging, and help them develop confidence both on and off the field. Acknowledging identity helps coaches address issues like stereotypes and cultural differences, promoting a positive and respectful team culture.



CHALLENGE 2:

Over the river

This challenge requires three rounds of play for 5 -7 minutes each plus time for set-up, transitions, and debrief

→ **Duration**

30 minutes

→ **Materials**

footballs, timer, cones, pinnies

CHALLENGE OVERVIEW

This challenge takes a classic football activity – Over the River – and focuses on the experience of the outnumbered defenders to spark a conversation on how to be an ally. Through a series of progressions and questions, players will consider ways they practice positive allyship in football and in their everyday lives.

Over the River typically focuses on possessing the ball in a small area and defending effectively when numbers are down. Communication is key all around. From a football perspective, there are many versions of Over the River; feel free to use the version that best fits the team.

For this challenge, primarily focused on the experience of the defenders. As a coach, home in on how players provide support to their teammates and how effective communication plays a role in that support. These actions are essential to successfully defending in this drill and are also essential to being a positive ally out in the world.

KEY COACHING POINTS

Allyship in the world looks and feels a lot like being a good teammate.

Practicing supportive communication is a way of showing your teammates you are there for them.

There are many ways to show up consistently as an ally, as well as a teammate that others can count on.

COACH PREPARATION AND RESOURCES

Presence - Model an open posture and make eye contact, without sunglasses if possible.

Debriefing - Use reflection strategies to discuss, tease out, and reinforce lessons learned in a challenge.

Energy – Be positive and enthusiastic to be together with the team.

SETTING UP

To complete the challenge effectively requires some basic possession skills; it is most fun when teams can keep the game moving. Consider teaching the rules first in a practice session prior to layering on the allyship challenge.

Drill Setup:

Split the playing space up into three zones, with the middle zone being narrower than the two wide zones. The wide zones should be a size that challenges the team to possess the ball against 1-2 defenders. This middle zone is “the river.”

This challenge is best with more than 10 players, and ideally has 15.

Split the players into 3 teams of even numbers (if possible) and assign each team to a zone to start. Teams 1 and 2 are on the outside zones, Team 3 starts in the river.

In this challenge version, we recommend that the defending team remains defending for the whole round.

HOW TO FRAME IT

- The team is going to play Over the River and specifically focus on defending. Many teams already know this game!
- In this version, each team will play defense for the entire round, trying to prevent the attacking teams from earning points by passing through or over the river. Every team will play defense at least once.
- In between each round, teams will have time to discuss strategy and improvements from the prior round.
- After all the rounds are done, there will be a discussion

ASK

- Today’s challenge is all about being an ally. Being an ally is a lot like being a great teammate. What are some examples of this comparison?
 - o For this game, what do you need to do to be a good teammate?
 - o What does it mean to you to be an ally?

ENCOURAGE

- Players should focus on how the defenders, who are outnumbered, can support one another to win the ball, and how this relates to allyship



ROUND 1- PLAY

- Coach plays the ball into Team 1 which tries to possess it in their zone.
- As soon as Team 1 receives the ball, Team 3 sends just one player from the river into Team 1's zone to try to win the ball.
- The attacking team's goal is to complete 5 consecutive passes and then successfully complete a pass over or through the river without any members of Team 3 touching it. Team 3 players in the river can try to block the ball but may not leave the river.
- If the Team 3 defender successfully disrupts the play by winning the ball or kicking it out of bounds, or if the ball goes out of play, that play is over. The coach plays a new ball into Team 2 and play starts again, with Team 3 sending a new defender into Team 2's zone.
- If the pass to Team 2 is completed, Team 1 gets one point. Team 3 immediately sends a new defender into Team 2's zone to try to win the ball.
- Play continues until time is up, recommended 3-5 minutes.
- After all teams have played defense one time, the round ends.

ROUND 2- PLAY

- The coach announces that in Round 2, the defending team can send in two defenders.
- The coach gives all teams one minute to discuss their strategy before play begins. Encourage players to discuss how to incorporate the second defender on defense, and how to better support one another to use the space in attack.
- Repeat all the same rules and rotation as in Round 1.
- The coach should encourage communication between defenders and players waiting in the river.

SCORING

- Points are scored by the attacking teams when they get 5 passes in a row AND successfully cross the ball over the river.
- Teams keep track of their own points.
- The coach should note the total score for Round 1 compared to Round 2, to bring into the debrief.

QUESTION

- Why might the scores look different in Round 1 compared to Round 2?

CLOSING AND DEBRIEF

This challenge is designed to create explicit parallels between the role of the supporting defenders and being an ally. The focus areas of the debrief should be to draw the link between supporting on the field and being an ally off the field, emphasizing communication and consistency. If comfortable with adding another layer, explore the difference between the supporting role of the second defender compared to players supporting the ball on the attacking side. In this case, the attacking side has multiple privileges: more players, the opportunity to earn points, and starting with the ball.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR DEBRIEF

Option 1:

- Keep the teams together in their zones to discuss each question in small groups.
- Do three rounds of discussion, inviting 1-2 teams to pick a spokesperson to share out something they discussed after each round.
- If there are multiple coaches, either assign them to a group or have them walk around and check-in if there is a lull.

Option 2:

- Bring the whole group back into one circle and invite 2-3 players to answer each question, encouraging players who have not spoken to join in.

LIST OF DEBRIEF QUESTIONS TO ASK

Discussion Round 1:

- In the first round, how did it feel to be defending alone?
- How did it change when you had a teammate in the second round?
- In which round were you more tired? More confident? More successful?

- Coaching Point: In most cases, having an ally not just in the background but right there with you – just like having a teammate – changes the game. This is especially important when it feels like the odds are stacked against you and the game is not designed for you to win.

Discussion Round 2:

- When you were defending together in Round 2, what were some things you could do to support your teammate?
- What could you do when you were waiting in the river to help your teammates in the box?
- Did you ever feel yourself let your effort drop? If so, how did that affect your teammates?
- Coaching point: Whether we are in the game or behind the scenes trying to support, we can use our voices to let our teammates know we are there. And when we show up, we cannot just show up for a minute but commit to be in it together the whole time.

Discussion Round 3:

- When have you been an ally to someone outside of the football field?
- How did you show up?
- How did you communicate your support?

ADDITIONAL BONUS QUESTIONS

- Did you feel a difference between trying to support the ball as an attacking player versus as a second defender?
- In which position did you feel more ownership, like your actions could make a big difference?
- Was there ever a moment where you felt like you could hide and just stay out of the play? When was that and why did you feel that way?
- Was there a time you worked harder? When was that and what motivated you?



CHALLENGE 3:

Card it!

CHALLENGE OVERVIEW

This challenge supports players in recognizing different forms of racism and discrimination and, crucially, in practicing how to react when they occur in football contexts. The focus is not on finding the “perfect” response, but on identifying **appropriate first steps**, understanding responsibility, and connecting individual actions to wider team and institutional responses.

Using movement and football-related metaphors, players explore the difference between overt and covert discrimination, intent and impact, and individual versus systemic cases. The challenge links directly to the **Reaction Plan** and builds bridges to the themes of **responsibility, empowerment, and allyship** introduced elsewhere in the curriculum.

SET-UP

Create a large open space (indoor or outdoor) where players can move freely. Place five large cards or markers around the space. Each card represents a possible **first reaction** to a discriminatory situation:

- Immediate intervention
- Pause and support the targeted person
- Collective signal: No Racism
- Document and report
- Address later with adults / coaches / officials or the club

Explain that none of these options are automatically “right” or “wrong.” The goal is to decide which response makes the most sense **as a first step**, depending on the situation.

Issue a trigger warning specifically for this exercise because of the very explicit reproduction of racism.

INTRODUCTION: THE “NO RACISM” GESTURE

Before starting the scenarios, introduce the official FIFA “No Racism” gesture, where players cross their arms in front of their chest.

Explain that this gesture is designed as a clear, visible signal that racism or discrimination has occurred. It allows players to show solidarity and stop play without needing to explain themselves in the moment. The gesture is especially important when words feel difficult, unsafe, or overwhelming.

Make clear that the gesture does not solve the situation on its own. Instead, it acts as a trigger: it signals that something needs attention and that adults, referees, or team leaders must step in. Emphasise that using the gesture is a collective act and that players should never be left alone to deal with discrimination.

Briefly practice the gesture together so everyone feels confident using it.

HOW THE CHALLENGE WORKS

The facilitator reads out one scenario at a time. After each scenario, players move to the card that represents what they believe should happen first. Players are encouraged to trust their instincts; speaking is not required at this stage.

Once everyone has chosen a position, the facilitator opens a short discussion, inviting players to explain their choice and listen to others. Differences of opinion are expected and welcomed.

SCENARIOS

Use a broad mix of scenarios that reflect the realities of European youth football. Adjust language and complexity according to age group.

Examples include:

- A teammate makes repeated jokes about another player’s accent and says they are “just trying to be funny.”
- An opposing player tells someone they don’t belong on the pitch because of their skin colour.
- Parents on the sideline shout stereotypes about a team made up mostly of migrant players.
- A referee ignores racist language and tells players to “focus on the game.”
- A coach consistently benches one player while giving others more chances, without explanation.
- A player is mocked for wearing old or damaged boots and is told they “don’t look like a real footballer.”
- A girl playing in a mixed team is repeatedly told to “play softer” or “let the boys decide.”
- A player with limited language skills is excluded from team discussions and instructions.
- A teammate shares a racist meme in the team group chat after training.
- A young player freezes or starts crying after being insulted and cannot continue playing.
- A captain laughs along when discriminatory comments are made.
- A player is targeted not only because of race, but also because they are younger, new to the country, or from a low-income family.

As scenarios progress, intentionally move from clear, overt cases to more subtle or systemic ones, helping players understand that harm is not always loud or obvious.



REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After movement, guide reflection with questions such as:

- Why did you choose this response as the first step?
- Who is most affected in this situation?
- Whose responsibility is it to act here?
- How does intent differ from impact in this example?
- Would the response change if the player was younger, female, undocumented, or economically marginalized?

Highlight that **doing nothing is also a decision**, and that silence often protects existing power structures.

EMPOWERMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

Close the challenge by reinforcing two key messages.

First, players who are targeted by discrimination are **never expected to handle it alone**. Empowerment means having options, support, and protection — not pressure to speak or react in a certain way.

Second, players and adults with more power or privilege have **greater responsibility** to intervene, speak up, and use available structures. Allyship is an action, not just a feeling.

Invite players to reflect silently or share one realistic action they could take if something similar happened in their own football environment.





CHALLENGE 4: Captain's Scrimmage

This challenge requires players to act as a coach during a scrimmage, with additional time at the end to debrief.

→ **Duration**

45 minutes

→ **Materials**

footballs, small goals, cones, big goals, pinnies

CHALLENGE OVERVIEW

We all have our own leadership style, and it is important that all players on the team have regular opportunities to develop their style and practice effective communication. In this challenge – which could be repeated on a regular basis throughout the season – players will be asked to “coach” their teammates through a small-sided scrimmage.

When introducing this challenge to the team, let them know that it is a scrimmage in which different players will have an opportunity to act as coach. While two teams are scrimmaging, “coaches” will be selected from the third team that is resting. The purpose of this challenge is to remind the team that all players are responsible for leading, and leading requires positive communication.

KEY COACHING POINTS

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective communication is essential to good leadership, no matter the leadership style. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective communication means communication that is relevant, informative, and positive. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “How we say it” is just as important as “what we say.” |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

COACH PREPARATION AND RESOURCES

Rules and Agreements - Mutually agreed upon ways of being together.

Scaffolding - Building from less vulnerable to more vulnerable opportunities to share and speak.

Presence - Model an open posture and make eye contact, without sunglasses if possible.

SET-UP

Set-up a field for a small-sided scrimmage, ideally a 5v5 or 6v6 game.

Preface the scrimmage with a discussion on best coaching practices.

Give players some key strategies used as a coach and bring advice that may be useful to them during this challenge.

Example: Project their voice, provide clear directions, be concise, etc.

HOW TO FRAME IT

- Leadership is a skill that must be practiced.
- Effective leaders are not the loudest or most intimidating – rather, effective leaders are excellent communicators in positive, constructive, and empathetic ways.
- The point of this activity is to think about what leadership feels, looks, and sounds like in action.

ASK

- What are some effective ways of giving constructive feedback that you have observed or experienced?
- When are we most likely to listen to feedback we get from others? When are we least likely to listen?

ENCOURAGE

- Think about how it feels when you make a mistake on the field and how your coach reacts – how do you feel when the coach encourages you? Correct your mistake? Pulls you off the field? Yells?
- No matter what is happening in the game, stay positive.

Set-up players to participate in the scrimmage.

Split the players into three teams with equal numbers of players on each. Feel free to add neutral players if there are uneven numbers. Teams should have approximately 6 players.

Select two teams to scrimmage at a time.

There will be at least three rounds of play, lasting 5-10 minutes each, so each team has an opportunity to coach.

Explain the sideline coaching component.

While two teams are playing on the field, the team resting will be coaching.

The resting team will divide in half – three players coaching one team, and three players coaching the other.

On each coaching team, each coach will have a specific message to communicate to their team:

- Positive encouragement – “That was a great pass!”
- Tactical feedback – “Next time, try to make a run behind the defender!”
- Technical correction – “It would be awesome if you hit that pass with the outside of your foot!”

Emphasize the importance of positive coaching and feedback.

Have teams scrimmage and sideline coaches coach



Start the first round and allow the “coaches” to communicate with their individual team about their specific topics.

At the end of the round, rotate one team out and select new “coaches” from that resting team.

Repeat the process for each team, until every team has played each other.

OPTIONAL

- After each scrimmage round, bring the teams together with their “coaches” to debrief:
- What did they like about their “coaches”?
- How did their “coaches” make them feel?
- After players provide their feedback, the head coach can share additional feedback.

CLOSING AND DEBRIEF

This challenge is designed to introduce players to how coaches fill the role of effective leaders during a game or scrimmage by maintaining a positive composure, an attitude of encouragement, and provide constructive feedback regardless of what is going on in the game. Football matches are a “high stakes” experience for players, and it is a coach’s job to ensure a safe space for all those participating. Additionally, everybody can be a leader on or off the field, and hopefully this challenge gives players a taste of that.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR DEBRIEF

- First, have players stay in their scrimmage teams to discuss the debrief questions.
- Next, bring all teams together to a group debrief.

- Have a spokesperson from each team share back a few main points from their smaller discussion.

LIST OF DEBRIEF QUESTIONS TO ASK

To Players:

- How did you feel being coached by your peers?
- Think about how it feels when you make a mistake on the field and how your coach reacts to it. How do you feel when the coach...
- Encourages you?
- Correct your mistake?
- Pulls you off the field?
- Yells?
- What are some ways that coaches can make you feel empowered and safe both on and off the field?

To Player Coaches:

- How did you feel about coaching?
- Was it easy to stay positive during the scrimmage?
- Why is it helpful to practice being a leader?
- What skills can you take from this activity into your leadership, both on and off the field?

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES: FIND YOUR POWER & CROSSING BOUNDARIES GAME

You can also use the Games “Find Your Power” and “Crossing Boundaries from the STP Curriculum as additional challenges.





STP INTRO PRACTICE

Integrating the StP Team Challenges into regular practice sessions is key to maximizing the impact on both football skills and social development. This chapter addresses how to incorporate these challenges into regular practice, using planning templates, warm-up, and cool-down strategies, and weekly or seasonal planning.



SESSION PLANNING

To help effectively integrate the Team Challenges, here are a football theme-based session structure and a practice planning example:

FOOTBALL THEME-BASED SESSION STRUCTURE:

Attacking: Use StP Team Challenges that promote leadership and decision-making, such as the "Captain's Scrimmage." This challenge fits well during attacking drills, where players need to make quick decisions and communicate effectively.

Defending: Incorporate activities that emphasize teamwork and support, like "Over the River", which enhances defensive skills while teaching players about allyship and the importance of backing each other up.

Transition: Transition phases are ideal for integrating activities focused on quick thinking and adaptability. A Team Challenge like the "Card it" could be introduced here, using the moment of transition to discuss quick responses to injustice or bias both on and off the pitch.

PRACTICE SESSION EXAMPLE:

Warm-Up (10-15 minutes): Begin with a light physical activity that incorporates a StP Team Challenge discussion topic. For example, a discussion-based jog around the pitch where players talk about what leadership means to them.

Technical Drills (20-30 minutes): Follow drills that align with the practice session's football theme and integrate a second StP Team Challenge discussion topic. For example, while practicing passing drills, include a quick stop to discuss effective communication (linking back to allyship).

Main Activity (30-40 minutes): The core of the session should focus on a football skill complemented by a relevant StP Team Challenge. For instance, during a scrimmage focused on attacking, and implement the "Captain Scrimmage" to reinforce leadership and positive communication.

Cool-Down and Reflection (10-15 minutes): End the session with a cool-down that includes stretching and a reflection on the StP Team Challenge that was just played. Encourage the players to share their thoughts on how the lessons from the challenge can be applied both on and off the field.



WARM-UP AND COOL-DOWN

The StP Team Challenges can be effectively woven into warm-up and cool-down routines, making these often-overlooked parts of practice more engaging and purposeful.

1. WARM-UP INTEGRATION:

Physical and Mental Preparation: Start with a warm-up that not only gets players physically ready but also mentally prepared for the session's theme. For example, during a simple dribbling drill, ask players to think about how they can support a teammate in a difficult situation, linking to the allyship principle.

Discussion-Based Activities: Use the warm-up as a time to introduce the day's StP Team Challenge. As an example, gather the team for a brief discussion on the importance of leadership before starting the main drill, setting the tone for the session.

Dynamic Warm-Up with a Twist: Combine physical exercises with reflective prompts. For instance, while doing dynamic stretches, ask players to consider different leadership styles they have observed or experienced.

2. COOL-DOWN INTEGRATION:

Reflective Cool-Down: Use the cool-down period to reinforce the day's StP principle. While players are cooling down with light jogging or stretching, lead a discussion about the day's Team Challenge and its broader implications.

Journaling or Group Reflection: After the physical cool-down, provide players with a few minutes to journal their thoughts or participate in a group reflection. Encourage them to think about how they can apply what they learned in the session to their daily lives.

Closing Huddle: End with a huddle where each player shares one takeaway from the StP Team Challenge. This not only reinforces the lesson but also builds team cohesion.





WEEKLY AND SEASONAL PLANNING

To ensure that the StP Team Challenges contributes to balanced development throughout the season, it is important to integrate them thoughtfully into weekly and seasonal plans.

1. WEEKLY PLANNING:

Balanced Approach: Over a week, aim to cover a variety of principles. For example, focus on leadership on Monday, allyship on Wednesday, and preventing racism on Friday. This ensures that players develop their football skills and social awareness.

Theme Days: Dedicate specific days of the week to certain StP principles. For instance, "Leadership Mondays" could be focused on activities that promote leadership skills, while "Allyship Wednesdays" emphasize supporting teammates. Just make sure to inform the players on the discussion topics beforehand and issue a trigger warning if relevant.

Consistent Reflection: Incorporate regular reflection periods at the end of each week, where players can discuss how the week's activities have impacted their understanding of football and social issues.

2. SEASONAL PLANNING:

Long-Term Goals: Set seasonal goals that align with the StP principles. For example, aim to develop a powerful sense of team identity by the mid-season mark, using activities focused on identity and perspectives.

Progressive Integration: Gradually increases the complexity of the StP Team Challenges as the season progresses. Start with simpler concepts and build towards more challenging discussions and scenarios.

Culminating Project: Consider ending the season with a team project that embodies the StP principles, such as organizing a community event

or creating a team manifesto that reflects their commitment to allyship and inclusivity.

3. MONITORING AND ADJUSTING:

Regular Check-Ins: Throughout the season, check in with the players to gauge how the integration of StP is going. Are they finding the challenges engaging? Are they able to connect the lessons to their experiences on and off the pitch?

Flexibility: Be prepared to adjust the plan based on the team's needs and responses. If a particular principle resonates strongly, spend more time on it. Conversely, if players are struggling with a principle, break it down into more manageable parts.

By using these strategies to implement the StP Team Challenges into the practice sessions, the comprehensive approach ensures that the lessons learned on the pitch help to shape well-rounded individuals and a stronger team.

CUSTOMIZING STP TEAM CHALLENGES

While the StP Team Challenges were created with specific objectives in mind, it is important to tailor them to the unique needs and the team's dynamics. Here are some tips on how to customize the Team Challenges:

AGE AND SKILL LEVEL

- **Younger Players:** Simplify instructions and focus more on the fundamental principles rather than in-depth discussions. For example, during the "Card it" challenge, focus on general concepts of fairness and respect rather than the nuances of distinct types of discrimination.
- **Advanced Players:** Incorporate more complex scenarios and encourage deeper discussions. Encourage players to think critically about the broader implications of the issues discussed in the challenges.

TEAM DYNAMICS

- **New Teams:** If the team is still getting to know each other, focus on challenges that promote communication and trust, such as the "Captain's Scrimmage."
- **Established Teams:** For teams that are more familiar with each other, Team Challenges like "Walking with our Identities" can be used to deepen relationships and understanding among players.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

- **Local Adaptations:** Consider the players' cultural backgrounds and how certain Team Challenges might resonate differently with them. It might be needed to adjust the scenarios in "Card it" to reflect the specific challenges players might face in their communities.
- **Inclusivity:** Ensure that all players feel represented and included in the Team Challenges. For instance, when discussing identity, be sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of the players and create an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing.

TIME CONSTRAINTS

- **Short Sessions:** If there's only limited time, focus on the core elements of each Team Challenge. For example, in "Over the River," prioritize the defending drill and a brief discussion on allyship.
- **Extended Sessions:** Use the full breadth of the Team Challenge, including warm-up, execution, reflection, and a detailed discussion. It is also possible to combine multiple challenges to cover broader principles in one session.

By understanding the customization of these challenges, they can best be implemented during the team's routine practice sessions. This approach ensures that the StP Team Challenges are not just drills, but powerful tools for developing both football and social skills among young players.



MONITORING AND ASSESSING PROGRESS

Effective monitoring and assessment are crucial for ensuring that players are not only improving their football skills but also growing in the areas emphasized by StP. This chapter provides practical tools and strategies to track, evaluate, and refine players' progress throughout the season.





TRACKING TOOLS

To make it easier to monitor player progress, we have included recommendations to help capture key insights from each practice session and track player development over time.

TRACKING SHEETS

- **Daily and Weekly Logs:** Use log sheets to record observations during and after each practice session. Note specific behaviors related to the StP principles, such as instances of leadership, communication, allyship, understanding and responding to discrimination.
- **Player Reflection Journals:** Encourage players to maintain their own journals where they can reflect on their experiences with StP. These reflections can provide valuable insights into their personal growth and areas where they might need additional support.
- **Team Progress Charts:** Display a visual chart in a team space where collective progress on key principles (leadership, communication, allyship and understanding and responding to discrimination) can be tracked. This not only motivates players but also reinforces their importance.

DIGITAL TOOLS

- **Mobile:** Record observations during practice. Use the camera, the phone's notes, or the voice recording feature, which can be particularly useful for capturing real-time feedback.
- **Online Portfolios:** Set up online portfolios for each player where assessments can be stored, reflections, and any other relevant materials. This is especially helpful for tracking long-term progress and sharing insights with players and their parents.
- **Shared Team Documents:** Create shared documents where both coaches and players can collaborate. This might include shared notes on team goals, feedback from StP Team Challenges, or reflections on the team's progress.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Clear, objective criteria are essential for evaluating how well players are applying the lessons from StP Team Challenges. These criteria are based on the StP principles from each Team Challenge and will help measure both football skills and the personal development goals central to the learnings

PLAYER SELF-ASSESSMENTS

- **Reflection Prompts:** Encourage players to assess their own performance using reflection prompts. For instance, after a practice session focused on allyship, players might reflect on how well they supported a teammate and what they could improve.
- **Peer Feedback:** Incorporate peer assessments where players provide feedback to each other based on StP principles. This fosters a sense of accountability and encourages them to observe and learn from one another.

FEEDBACK LOOPS

Regular feedback is key to ensuring that players are continuously learning and developing. Creating effective feedback loops helps refine the coaching approach, tailor future practices, and select the most appropriate StP Team Challenges for the team.

INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK SESSIONS

- **One-on-One Check-Ins:** Schedule regular one-on-one sessions with players to discuss their progress. Use the tracking tools and assessment criteria to guide these conversations, providing specific examples of what they are doing well and areas for improvement.
- **Actionable Feedback:** Focus on providing actionable feedback that players can immediately apply. For example, if a player struggles with leadership, suggest specific actions they can take in the next session to improve, such as leading a drill or offering encouragement to a teammate.

TEAM FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

- **Group Debriefs:** After each StP Team Challenge, hold a team debrief where it gets discussed what went well and what could be improved. This not only reinforces the lessons but also allows players to learn from each other's experiences.
- **Mid-Season and End-of-Season Reviews:** Conduct team reviews at key points during the season to evaluate collective progress. These reviews can help adjust the approach and ensure that the StP Team Challenges are meeting the team's developmental needs.

ADJUSTING FUTURE PRACTICES

- **Tailoring the StP Team Challenges:** Use the insights gained from the assessments to tailor future implementation of StP Team Challenges into practice. If a particular area needs more focus, prioritize challenges that address those needs.
- **Evolving Goals:** As the team progresses, the goals evolve to keep the implementation challenging and relevant. For example, if the team has mastered their communication skills, introduce more complex scenarios that require advanced problem-solving and teamwork.





HOW-TO: TACKLING DISCRIMI NATION

Even with the best preparation, there may be times when scenarios that are difficult to manage alone are encountered. Whether it is a serious conflict between players, an incident, or a situation where one feels out of their depth, it is important to know where to turn for help.

WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

Discrimination is when someone is treated unfairly or differently because of who they are, such as their ethnicity, age, religion, or where they come from. It means not giving everyone the same chances or respect just because they are different than oneself in some way. It is like leaving someone out or being unfair to them because of something they cannot change.



LANGUAGE, POWER & PRIVILEGE (WORKING WITH RATHER PRIVILEGED PLAYERS)

This module supports coaches in working intentionally with players and participants who hold **relative privilege** within football contexts (e.g. coaches, team leaders, white players, local players, older or more experienced players). The focus is on responsibility, awareness, and action — not guilt.

It aims to help participants:

- Recognize how language reinforces power and privilege
- Understand their role in shaping team culture
- Learn how to actively interrupt discrimination and exclusion

This module is especially relevant for those who are less likely to be directly targeted by racism or discrimination, but who play a decisive role in whether such behavior is tolerated or challenged.

Key Learning Points

- Privilege often feels invisible to those who have it
- Intent does not cancel impact
- Silence is a form of participation

In football environments, players with privilege often set the tone for humor, communication, and norms, are believed more quickly by referees or coaches and face fewer consequences for mistakes or behavior. Recognizing this power is the first step toward using it responsibly.

Language as a Tool of Power

Everyday phrases such as:

- “It was just a joke”
- “Don’t be so sensitive”
- “That’s just football culture”

...often function to shut down dialogue, protect the status quo or shift responsibility away from harm. Coaches should help privileged players understand that language can either protect systems of exclusion or challenge them.

Coaches’ Reflection

Ask yourself — and invite players to reflect:

- Whose voices carry the most weight on our team?
- Who can speak without consequences?
- Who is expected to adapt, explain, or stay quiet?
- Frame reflection as leadership development, not accusation.

Practical Strategies for Coaches

- Name harmful language clearly and calmly
- Avoid centering intent over impact
- Publicly reinforce players who speak up
- Normalize accountability as part of team standards

EMPOWERMENT (WORKING WITH RATHER MARGINALIZED PLAYERS)

This module centers players and participants who are **more likely to experience discrimination**, such as players of color, migrants, refugees, low-income players, girls, young children, or players with limited language access.

The goal is not to place responsibility on marginalized players to “fix” discrimination, but to:

- Strengthen agency and self-trust
- Build collective support
- Create safer conditions for expression and action

Empowerment is about expanding options — not forcing responses.

Core Message for Coaches to Communicate to Players

Coaches should consistently reinforce the following messages to marginalized youth players:

- What you experience is real.
- You are not overreacting.
- You are not alone.
- You get to choose how you respond.
- Adults on this team are responsible for your safety.

Repeating these messages over time — not just after incidents — is essential for trust.

Practical Empowerment Tools for Players

The following tools can be **explicitly taught, practiced, and revisited** with players. Coaches should frame them as options, not expectations.

1. The Choice Framework (Give Players Language for Options)

In order to help players understand they always have more than one option, teach and practice these responses:

- **Name it:** “That’s not okay.” / “That’s racist.”
- **Remove yourself:** Walking away, switching position, asking for a substitution
- **Seek support:** Going to a teammate, captain, or coach
- **Delay:** “I don’t want to talk about this right now.”
- **Document:** Remembering details or telling an adult later

Coaching Tip:

Rehearse these options during calm moments so players don’t have to invent responses under stress.

2. Safety Signals (Non-Verbal Support Requests)

Some players cannot or do not want to speak in the moment. Create **pre-agreed signals**, such as:

- Eye contact with the coach
- Hand on wrist / chest
- Standing near a specific cone or bench area



3. Building a Personal Support Map

Help players identify:

- One teammate they trust
- One adult they can go to
- One space where they feel safe

4. Boundary-Setting Language (Short & Age-Appropriate)

Teach simple phrases players can use if they choose:

- “Stop.”
- “Don’t talk to me like that.”
- “That’s disrespectful.”
- “I’m here to play football.”

For younger players, role-play these phrases during warm-ups or cooldowns.

5. Normalizing Emotional Responses

Explicitly tell players:

- Anger, sadness, fear, and confusion are normal reactions to discrimination
- Crying, freezing, or staying silent are not failures

Avoid:

- “Be strong.”
- “Ignore it.”
- “Focus on the game.”

These phrases often invalidate players’ experiences.

Coach Responsibilities

- Never force sharing or disclosing
- Believe players the first time
- Act visibly and consistently
- Follow up privately after incidents
- Communicate next steps clearly

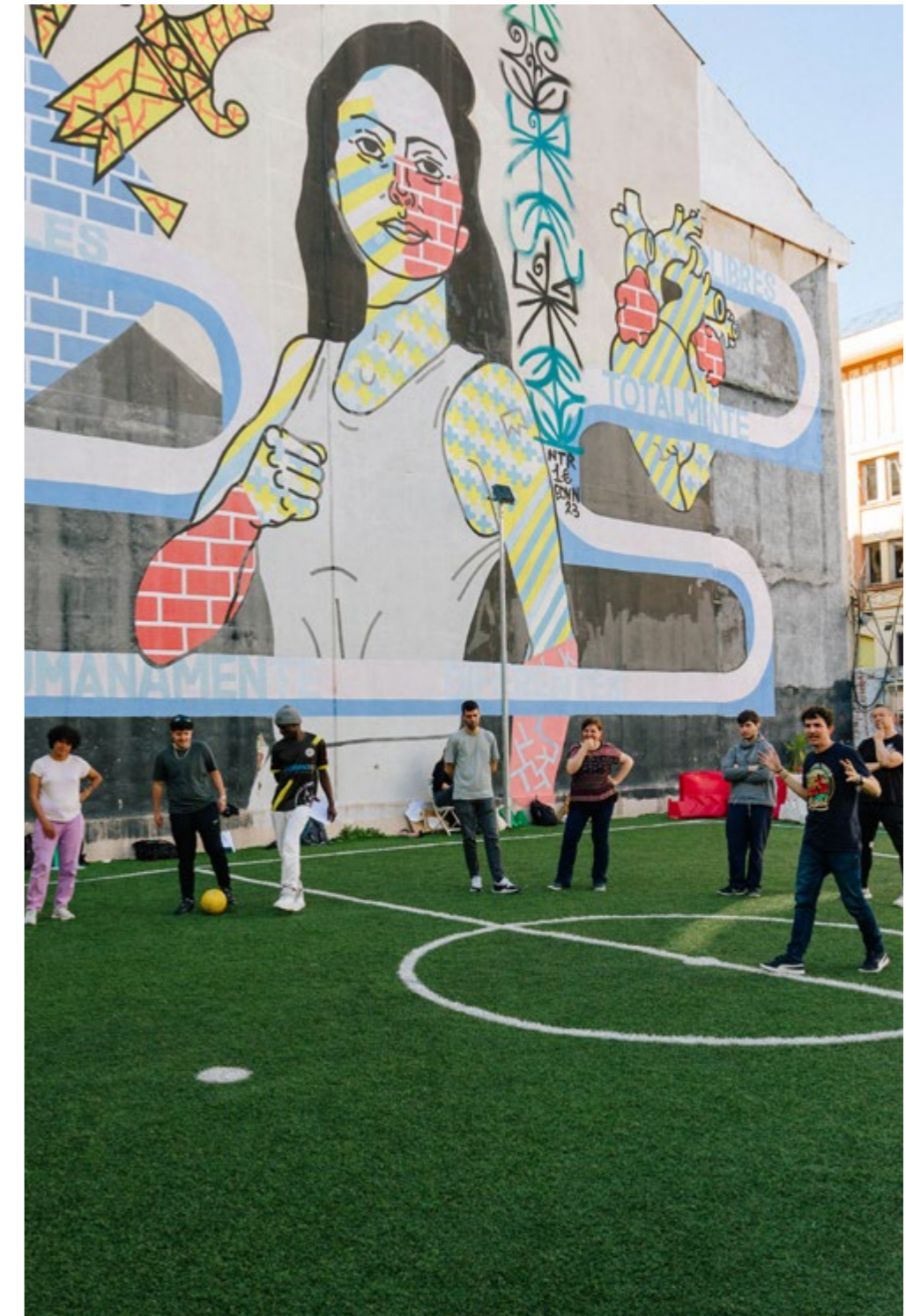
Empowerment grows when players see that **adults will intervene**, not just listen.

Closing Reflection

Empowerment is not about asking marginalized players to endure harm better. It is about:

- Reducing isolation
- Increasing choice
- Making protection visible

When coaches take responsibility for safety and accountability, players gain the freedom to focus on what they came for: playing football with dignity and joy.





REACTION PLAN

Immediate response is crucial when witnessing any form of discriminatory behavior. Taking immediate steps ensures everyone's safety. This proactive approach supports the healthy development of individuals' self-esteem and ensures a safe environment for all participants.

Intervention is necessary whenever inappropriate, violent, or harassing behavior is observed during practice or competition. This responsibility extends to all individuals present, including players, coaches, officials, fans, referees, and others.

When facing discrimination, intervene right away and instruct the person responsible to stop. This might involve pausing the game, separating the involved parties, and addressing the issue calmly and directly. Focus on the victim's well-being by removing them from the situation, reassuring them that they are not to blame. In situations involving multiple perpetrators, it may be necessary to seek additional support for a more effective intervention.

After the situation has been stabilized, document what happened. Record details such as who was involved, what was said or done, and how the situation was resolved. This documentation can be important if further action is needed.

It is important to avoid passive attitudes, bystander inaction, or silence, as these can give the impression that discriminatory behavior is tolerated.

Refer to the Laminatable 1-Page Reaction Plan in the appendix. This document guides you through the immediate steps you and your team can take when confronted with racist aggression. You can fill in the blanks (contact names, etc.), print and laminate this and carry it along to all games and practices.

IDENTIFYING ESCALATION POINTS

When coaching youth football, it is important to recognize when a situation requires escalation beyond immediate control or expertise. Knowing when and how to escalate an issue is crucial for maintaining a safe and supportive environment for all players.



WHEN TO ESCALATE:

- **Risk of Harm:** If a situation poses an immediate threat to the safety or well-being of any player, it is crucial to escalate immediately. This could involve incidents of physical violence, severe bullying, or any behavior that puts someone at risk of serious emotional or psychological harm.
- **Unresolved Conflicts:** When conflicts between players, or between players and coaches, persist despite best efforts to mediate or resolve them, it is a sign that additional support may be needed. Escalation might involve bringing in higher-level club officials, administrators, or external mediators to address the issue.
- **Ongoing Problematic Behavior:** If a pattern of problematic behavior that continues over time is noticed, such as repeated incidents of racism, exclusion, or disruptive conduct, it is important to escalate the matter to ensure it is addressed systematically. This helps prevent the normalization of harmful behaviors and protects the team's integrity.
- **Serious Incidents:** In cases where an incident involves discrimination, harassment, or any form of abuse, escalation to higher authorities within the club or even external organizations may be necessary. This includes informing the relevant safeguarding officers and law enforcement, who can then take appropriate disciplinary action.

ESCALATION POINTS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Escalation is only part of the solution. Effective mitigation strategies are essential to address and prevent discrimination from recurring. These strategies align with the core principles of the Switch the Pitch Team Challenges: Leadership, Communication, Allyship and Understanding and Responding to Discrimination.

In high-pressure situations, it is crucial for coaches to have clear escalation points and robust mitigation strategies to ensure player safety, maintain team cohesion, and uphold the team's standards of respect. Below are detailed escalation points and strategies that can be employed to address and mitigate such incidents effectively:



IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Recognizing the Situation:

- **Action:** The moment a situation involving discriminatory behavior is identified, take immediate action. This could mean stopping a drill, pausing a match, or addressing the issue on the spot.
- **Mitigation:** Coaches and assistant coaches should train themselves to recognize early signs of discriminatory behavior, ensuring a prompt and effective response.

Intervention and Support:

- **Action:** Address the situation directly, ensuring the affected player feels supported and safe. Speak to the players involved calmly but firmly, making it clear that such behavior is unacceptable.
- **Mitigation:** Develop a protocol for immediate intervention, which could include a brief team huddle to reinforce team values or a temporary removal of the affected player from the situation for emotional support.

Team Communication:

- **Action:** Communicate with the entire team about what happened and why it is important to uphold the team's standards of respect and inclusion. Use this as a teaching moment to reinforce positive behavior.
- **Mitigation:** Keep an open dialogue with the team, encouraging players to express their thoughts and feelings, and reinforcing the importance of a supportive team culture.

POST-INCIDENT INTERVENTIONS

Documentation and Reporting:

- **Action:** Document the incident as soon as possible, noting all relevant details. If necessary, report the situation to the appropriate authorities.
- **Mitigation:** Create a standard reporting template that makes it easier to capture the necessary information quickly and accurately. The report should capture the incident with as much detail as possible, using the victims' own words and presenting their perspective. If the victim prefers, their name can be left out to maintain anonymity for as long as they need, to ensure their protection.

Emotional and Psychological Support:

- **Action:** Offer emotional support to the affected player(s), the team, and their families. This could involve one-on-one conversations, referrals to counseling services, or group discussions to process the incident.
- **Mitigation:** Establish relationships with local mental health professionals or community organizations that can provide additional support when needed.

Team Debrief:

- **Action:** Hold a team meeting to discuss the incident openly, allowing players to share their perspectives in a supportive environment. Reiterate the team's commitment to a safe and inclusive space.
- **Mitigation:** Use structured debriefing sessions to help the team process the incident, ensuring that all players understand the impact of the behavior and the importance of unity.

ESTABLISHING CLEAR POLICIES:

Zero-Tolerance Policies:

- **Action:** Ensure the team and the broader organization have clear, zero-tolerance policies for racism, discrimination, and any form of harassment. These should outline specific consequences for violations.
- **Mitigation:** Work with league or club officials to draft and communicate these policies widely, ensuring all players, coaches, and parents are aware of the rules.

Educational Programs:

- **Action:** Seek external support to help implement ongoing educational programs for players, coaches, and parents about diversity, inclusion, integration, and antiracism.
- **Mitigation:** Partner with experts to deliver workshops or seminars that help everyone involved understand the importance of these issues and how to contribute positively.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT:

Parental and Spectator Education:

- **Action:** Engage with parents and spectators to ensure they understand the team's commitment to diversity, inclusion, integration and antiracism, and the importance of their role in maintaining a positive environment. This could include signing a code of conduct or attending informational sessions.
- **Mitigation:** Provide clear guidelines for parents and spectators and encourage open communication if they observe any concerning behavior.

ONGOING MONITORING AND SUPPORT:

Regular Check-Ins:

- **Action:** Conduct regular check-ins with players to monitor the team environment and address any ongoing concerns related to inclusivity.
- **Mitigation:** Develop a routine for these check-ins, ensuring they are conducted in a way that allows players to speak openly and honestly.

Mentorship Programs:

- **Action:** Establish mentorship programs within the team, pairing younger players with more experienced ones to promote a culture of support and inclusion.
- **Mitigation:** Select mentors carefully, ensuring they embody the principles wanted to instill in the team and are equipped to provide guidance on these sensitive topics.

ESCALATION PATHWAYS

Identifying Escalation Points:

- **Action:** Clearly define the points at which an incident should be escalated beyond the coach's control. This could involve notifying league officials, school administrators, or even law enforcement in extreme cases.
- **Mitigation:** Get familiarized with the escalation pathways available within the organization, and ensure all relevant parties know their roles in these situations.



MITIGATION STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE

- **Preparation and Training:** Regularly review these strategies with all coaching staff and players. This ensures everyone is prepared to act appropriately if an incident occurs.
- **Clear Communication:** Maintain transparency with all stakeholders, including players, and parents, about the team’s approach to handling situations involving discrimination.
- **Proactive Engagement:** Do not wait for incidents to occur—take proactive steps to build an inclusive and respectful team culture, minimizing the chances of such issues arising in the first place.
- **Long-Term Monitoring:** After an incident, continue to monitor the situation and follow up with all involved parties to ensure that the issue is resolved and that no further problems arise.

By applying these general strategies and principles, coaches can effectively manage and help prevent challenging situations, ensuring a more positive environment for all players.

FINDING HELP FOR MITIGATION/MEDIATION

Finding support for mitigation, or mediation is crucial for coaches addressing discrimination in youth football because it provides them with strategies and resources to handle issues effectively from an external and impartial perspective.

- **Leverage Support Networks:** Reach out to the club or organization’s leadership for guidance. Many organizations have protocols in place for handling conflicts and can provide resources such as mediators or conflict resolution specialists.
- **Professional Mediation:** In some cases, professional mediation might be necessary. Seek out local organizations that offer anti-discrimination/inclusion or integration services,

particularly those that specialize in sports or youth programs. Such local organizations can be the biggest asset to consult and asking for external support.

- **Mental Health Resources:** If the situation has caused significant emotional distress, consider connecting the affected parties with mental health professionals. Many communities offer counseling services specifically tailored to young athletes.

BUILDING A LONG-TERM PLAN

- **Prevention Strategies:** Work with the team, the organization, and the families to develop a long-term plan for preventing similar issues in the future. This might include additional training on conflict resolution or revisiting the team’s code of conduct.
- **Continuous Learning:** Encourage ongoing education for all coaches and their teams on topics like identity, bias, and integration. Staying informed helps being better prepared to handle complex scenarios as they arise.

Utilizing these resources and knowing where to turn for help, allows coaches to confidently navigate the challenges that come with coaching in today’s diverse and dynamic environments.

HOW TO APPLY THIS IN PRACTICE

Discrimination in youth football does not follow a single script. It happens in many forms and contexts — during matches, in training, online, within teams, and from adults.

CORE PRINCIPLES (ALWAYS APPLY)

- Player safety comes first
- Believe those affected
- Act visibly, not silently
- Do not leave players alone with the problem
- Always follow up

SCENARIO-BASED GUIDANCE

Scenario 1: Racist or Xenophobic Insult from an Opponent

Example: An opposing player tells one of your players to “go back to your country.”

Coach Response:

- Stop play if possible or involve the referee
- Clearly signal that the behavior is unacceptable
- Check in briefly with the affected player

Afterwards:

- Document what happened (who, what, when)
- Report the incident to club/league structures
- Speak privately with the player: listen, affirm, explain next steps

Avoid: Minimizing or telling the player to ignore it

Scenario 2: Discrimination Within Your Own Team

Example: Teammates mock a player’s accent or background and call it a joke.

Coach Response:

- Interrupt immediately
- Name the behavior clearly
- Set a firm boundary

Follow-Up:

- Address impact with the team
- Speak separately with harmed players and those responsible
- Reinforce team standards and consequences

Scenario 3: Racism from Parents or Spectators

Example: Adults shout racist comments from the sidelines.

Coach Response:

- Stop play and involve officials
- Remove players from the situation if needed
- Do not ask players to confront adults

Afterwards:

- Report the incident
- Ask club leadership to address spectators
- Communicate zero-tolerance policies clearly



Scenario 4: Referee Minimizes the Incident

Example:

A referee says, “I didn’t hear it” or “Just play on.”

Coach Response:

- Calmly restate the concern
- Ask for the incident to be recorded if it happens again
- Support the player regardless of the referee’s reaction

Afterwards:

- File a report with the club or league

Scenario 5: Online Racism (Team Chats or Social Media)

Example: A player receives racist messages in a team group chat.

Coach Response:

- Preserve evidence (screenshots)
- Remove harmful content if appropriate
- Address the issue offline, not publicly

Follow-Up:

- Apply club disciplinary measures
- Support the affected player
- Set clear digital conduct expectations

Scenario 6: Player Freezes, Cries, or Withdraws

Example:

A player shuts down emotionally after an incident.

Coach Response:

- Remove pressure to speak or perform
- Provide privacy and space
- Check in later, one-on-one

Key Message: “There is no right reaction. We will handle this.”





AFTERCARE & REFLECTION

- Check in days later, not only immediately
- Communicate outcomes transparently (within limits)
- Reflect on what could be prevented next time

ALIGNMENT WITH UEFA & NATIONAL FEDERATION REPORTING PATHWAYS

Discrimination incidents should never end at the touchline. In European youth football, coaches play a crucial role in ensuring that cases are documented, reported, and followed up through the appropriate structures. This does not require legal expertise, but it does require clarity, consistency, and persistence.

Across Europe, reporting pathways are organised in similar ways, even if the exact forms or contacts differ by country. When an incident occurs during a match or training, the first step is to ensure that it is properly documented. This usually means asking the referee to note the incident in the official match report and recording the basic facts yourself: who was involved, what happened, when and where it occurred, and who witnessed it. Clear, factual documentation is often the foundation for any further action.

The next step is escalation within the club. Coaches should inform club leadership as soon as possible, such as youth coordinators, safeguarding officers, or designated board members. Submitting a short written report helps ensure that responsibility does not remain with one individual and that the case enters the club's formal processes.

From there, incidents should be reported through national federation structures. Most federations provide official reporting channels, safeguarding contacts, or integrity units that handle discrimination and abuse. Clubs usually lead this step, but coaches' documentation and testimony are often essential. Where evidence exists — such as screenshots of online abuse or witness statements — it should be preserved and shared through these channels.

UEFA frameworks emphasise zero tolerance for racism and discrimination, the responsibility of clubs to act, and the protection of minors. Coaches are not expected to contact UEFA directly. However, serious or repeated incidents may be escalated by clubs or national federations to UEFA, especially in cross-border competitions or severe cases. In practice, this means that coaches' early actions and reports often determine whether cases are taken seriously at higher levels.



Online and digital discrimination should be treated with the same seriousness as incidents on the pitch. Racist messages in team chats or on social media should be documented, reported internally, and passed on through federation or league reporting mechanisms. Many national bodies work in coordination with UEFA and external partners to address online hate speech.

When incidents involve threats, repeated targeting, or visible emotional distress of minors, safeguarding procedures must take priority. Coaches should activate their club's safeguarding protocols immediately and involve designated safeguarding officers. In some contexts, mandatory reporting obligations may apply, and clubs should guide coaches through these steps.

Coaches do not need to know every regulation or pathway in detail. Their responsibility is to act when something happens, to document it carefully, to escalate it through the right structures, and to follow up. These actions ensure that discrimination is addressed within national and UEFA-aligned systems, rather than being ignored or absorbed into everyday football culture.

FINAL NOTE FOR COACHES

Players do not expect perfect responses. What they remember is whether you acted, whether you protected them, and whether you followed up. Consistent, visible action — combined with proper reporting — builds trust, accountability, and safer football environments for everyone.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS

Switch the Pitch is implemented by a consortium of football and social-impact partners across Europe. Through local pilots, partners tested the curriculum with coaches and young people, shared practical feedback, and helped adapt content to different cultural and football contexts. Their collaboration ensures STP is inclusive, relevant, and scalable across grassroots and professional settings.

Role of Project Partners in Switch the Pitch

The Switch the Pitch (STP) programme is implemented through a consortium of experienced football and social-impact organisations that play a central role in piloting, contextualising, and strengthening the curriculum across diverse European settings. Project partners are responsible for testing the STP coach education curriculum in real-world environments, working directly with coaches, young players, and communities affected by discrimination, exclusion, and social marginalisation.

Through local pilot delivery, partners provide critical feedback on the relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of the curriculum content, ensuring that learning activities are age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and practically applicable across grassroots and professional contexts. Partners also contribute to peer learning and knowledge exchange, sharing insights from their respective national and organisational contexts to inform curriculum adaptation and improvement.

In addition, partners support the European scaling of STP by embedding the curriculum within their existing networks, promoting inclusive practices in football, and contributing to dissemination, learning events, and final reporting. Their combined expertise ensures that STP reflects lived realities on the ground while aligning with European policy priorities on inclusion, anti-racism, and social cohesion through sport.

Soccer Without Borders

The origins of Switch the Pitch (StP) in the U.S. were developed together with Soccer Without Borders, an international non-profit organisation that has spent two decades using soccer as a vehicle for positive social change for youth, including refugees and migrants. Built on a model that combines sport, education and community support, SWB operates free, year-round programmes in multiple countries across North America, Central America and East Africa. The organisation's activities aim to promote education and ease inclusion for young people affected by displacement.

Balon Mundial

Balon Mundial is an Italian non-profit sports association that uses football as a tool for social inclusion and the fight against discrimination. Based in Turin, the organisation works primarily with refugee and migrant communities through intercultural tournaments and grassroots football initiatives. Balon Mundial promotes participation, mutual understanding, and empowerment,

with a strong focus on inclusion, equality, and community cohesion.

Dragones de Lavapiés

Dragones de Lavapiés is a community-based football organisation located in the multicultural Lavapiés neighbourhood of Madrid. The organisation promotes social inclusion, solidarity, and respect through football, working closely with schools, families, and local actors. Its programmes aim to strengthen social cohesion and provide young people from diverse backgrounds with opportunities for personal and collective development.

FARE – Football Against Racism in Europe

Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) is a pan-European network dedicated to combating discrimination and promoting equality and inclusion in football. FARE collaborates with civil society organisations, football stakeholders, and institutions to challenge racism, support anti-discrimination initiatives, and advocate for inclusive policies and practices across Europe.

Latvian Football Federation

The Latvian Football Federation (LFF) is the official governing body of football in Latvia. It is responsible for organising national competitions, managing league structures, and overseeing Latvia's national football teams. As a member of FIFA and UEFA, the LFF plays a central role in developing football at grassroots and elite levels while promoting integrity, participation, and good governance in the sport.

Breaking Grounds – Social Change through Sport

Breaking Grounds is an Austrian organisation that uses sport, particularly football, as a vehicle for social change, inclusion, and youth empowerment. Through participatory sport-based programmes, the organisation supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, fostering self-confidence, leadership skills, and social cohesion.

RheinFlanke

RheinFlanke is a Germany-based organisation using sport as a tool for social inclusion and equal opportunity. Working with children and young people facing social and educational barriers, RheinFlanke delivers sport-based education, mentoring, and skills-development programmes to support integration, personal growth, and long-term employability.

IMPRINT

Football for Unity 2.0
Switch the Pitch | Coaching Toolkit

Publisher

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Publication Date

February 2026



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