



# Cobh GAA

## Preparing for the future now

### Young Gaelic Player Pathway

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the player pathway initiative is to help coaches, managers, teachers and parents who play an active role in the development of young gaelic footballers and hurlers.

It should be noted that these are guidelines and recommendations for coaches, mentors, teachers and parents that may be used with a degree of flexibility. They are not written in stone as players grow, develop and learn at different rates through their lives. This is a general guide to bear in mind when working with players.

This document is intended to give young players the best opportunity to succeed at whatever level they may play and reach their full potential “doing the right thing, at the right time and in the right way”. It provides a framework for the development of skills, physical focus and game sense capacities that coaches can follow stage by stage.

# Young Gaelic Players Pathway

The five key stages in the pathway are:

Stage	Approximate Age	Emphasis
Learning to master the ball	4 – 6 years	Should be about fun and participation with key emphasis on physical literacy and core movement skills with the ball.
Learning to use the ball well	7 – 9 years	Major skills learning phase where all the basic skills in football and hurling are learned
Learning to play together	10 – 12 years	Emphasis on understanding how to play and work together as a team
Learning about positions	13 – 15 years	The principles of play and applying good game sense
Learning to perform	16 – 18 years	Combining all aspects of performance including decision making, higher physical demands of the game and coping with competition

# Learning to master the ball 4 – 6 years

## Player characteristics

- Children of this age are self-centred and co-operation is largely absent
- At this age many still think that the ball is their own ‘toy’, so they will try to run with the ball and score rather than pass
- They will respond to partner work and skills practise for a short time. This helps introduce them to team work and co-operation.
- These children will only watch the ball. They cannot and will not look for space to run into.
- They usually enjoy being asked questions and this should give the coach plenty of opportunities to check for understanding.
- When their team is not in possession they find it difficult to understand defending a goal. To them they are merely chasing a ball.
- They respond best to target games and races (hitting, throwing and running).

**Learning to master the ball**

**4 – 6 year olds**

Skills Emphasis		Physical Focus	Game Specific
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>Football</b>	<b>ABC &amp; RJTs</b>	
<p><b>Handling</b> Correct hurley size</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grip ( hurley hand)</li> <li>- Swing – elbow up</li> <li>- Ready, lock, lift, positions</li> <li>- Pick up (catching hand, one hand)</li> </ul> <p><b>Sending &amp; Receiving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One hand dribble</li> <li>- Two handed dribble</li> <li>- Ground strike                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tyre</li> <li>Ball</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Ground stop</li> <li>- Run and strike stationary ground ball</li> </ul>	<p><b>Handling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Throw                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowling ball</li> <li>Two handed bounce catch</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Body catch</li> <li>- Pick up stationary &amp; moving</li> </ul> <p><b>Kicking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ground kick</li> <li>- Dribble</li> <li>- Punt kick ( two hands) (hard foot)</li> </ul> <p><b>Travelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knee tap solo</li> </ul>	<p><b>Agility</b> For example: Chasing games, Dodging, Shadow running</p> <p><b>Balance</b> For example: Animal walking, Hop in &amp; out of hoops</p> <p><b>Co-ordination</b> For example: Skipping, Bean bag toss, Pass through the ladder</p> <p><b>Running</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good technique                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forward</li> <li>Backward</li> <li>Sideward's</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>For example Marching, Stopping</p> <p><b>Jumping</b> For example: Takeoff &amp; landing, Jumping jacks</p> <p><b>Throwing</b> For example: Target roll</p>	<p><b>Target Games</b> The simplest form of a game which challenges players to use the techniques previously learnt is to aim into or at a target. Players have lots of time to perform the task without any distraction from other players. There is a low level of decision making. For example: Skittles, Through the gate, Tower ball</p> <p><b>Court Games</b> Court games require players to pass the ball over an obstacle like a net or zone to a receiver. The level of decision making has increased but is limited. For example: Over the river, Hurling tennis</p> <p><b>Part-Invasion</b> These games require players to complete a task with limited or direct opposition. For example: Getting through the traffic, 4 v 4 (two zones, no goalie), Up north down south.</p>

# Learning to use the ball well 7 - 9 years

## Player characteristics

- They will begin to look up when in possession and start choosing options [ e.g. passing rather than shooting]
- They will have difficulty tackling opponents but will hit the ball away from them and attempt to block any shots.
- They have a tendency to stand back in hurling so encourage them to get close to the opponents.
- Use questions to challenge and introduce decision making.
- Players will beg for a game at every opportunity, yet their technique is best improved through individual, paired and small group work. This is an ideal time to use the 'Whole-Part-Whole' approach to some sessions where the coach starts a game, stops it after ten minutes, works on one technique for a short period then restarts the game.
- Coaches need to focus on positive feedback, this is the age where drop-outs occur if children think they are no good
- At this age players will try to win the game not only by scoring but also by attempting to deny the opposition the opportunity to score.
- They will also begin to understand the need to change the direction of a run or a pass to be more effective and they will begin to grasp the idea that a player may need support from behind and to the side as well as in front.
- Coaches should continue to run small-sided games and conditioned games, one of the better games is called 'Over the River' and tennis.
- At this age players must also get used to attacking the ball [ i.e. running and not stopping] and breaking tackles.
- First critical period of speed development

Skills Emphasis		Physical Focus	Game Specific
Hurling	Football	ABC & RJTs	
<p><b>Handling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Claw catch</li> <li>- Cupped catch</li> </ul> <p><b>Sending &amp; Receiving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ground striking ( a moving ball) left &amp; right</li> <li>- Ground doubling (same direction/opposite direction)</li> <li>- Striking from the hand (stationary)</li> <li>- Jab lift (stationary ball)</li> </ul> <p><b>Travelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bean bag balancing</li> <li>- Ball balancing</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ground flick (backhand)</li> <li>- Ground clash</li> <li>- Hooking</li> <li>- Frontal &amp; Ground block (Hurley to hurley)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Handling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Body catch</li> <li>- Low catch</li> <li>- High catch</li> <li>- Fist pass</li> <li>- Hand pass</li> <li>- Crouch lift (stationary ball)</li> </ul> <p><b>Kicking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Punt kick (hard foot) left &amp; right</li> <li>- Hook kick (one hand)</li> <li>- Pick up-foot</li> <li>-</li> </ul> <p><b>Travelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High bounce</li> <li>- Toe tap (stationary)</li> <li>- Soft foot</li> <li>- Roll</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Near hand tackle</li> <li>- Shadowing</li> <li>- Frontal tackle</li> <li>- Block down</li> </ul>	<p><b>Agility</b> For example: Zig zag relay</p> <p><b>Balance</b> For example: One leg hopping, Hop and land on other leg</p> <p><b>Co-ordination</b></p> <p><b>Running</b> - Good technique For example: On the spot, Relay races, Hurdle running, Stopping</p> <p><b>Jumping</b> For example: Leap frog, Donkey kicks</p> <p><b>Throwing</b> For example: Dodge ball</p> <p><b>Conditioning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partner Resistance For example: Tug of war, Push &amp; Pull partner. The bridge</li> <li>- Whole body exercises</li> <li>- Introduce basic flexibility</li> </ul>	<p><b>Target Games</b> The simplest form of a game which challenges players to use the techniques previously learnt is to aim into or at a target. Players have lots of time to perform the task without any distraction from other players. There is a low level of decision making. For example: Skittles, Through the gate, Tower ball</p> <p><b>Court Games</b> Court games require players to pass the ball over an obstacle like a net or zone to a receiver. The level of decision making has increased but is limited. The use of other skills essential for team work such as communication, anticipation and spatial awareness become more important. For example: Over the river, Scout ball, Cúchulainn</p> <p><b>Field Games</b> These are games which require one team to act as the strikers/kickers and the opposition become the fielders retrieving the ball. Greater decisions have to be made in relation to where, when and how to move or play the ball and good spatial awareness is more important. For example: Rounders, four hitters.</p> <p><b>Part-Invasion</b> These games require players to complete a task with limited or direct opposition. For example: Getting through the traffic, 4 v 4 (zoned, no goalie), Line game.</p> <p><b>Full-Invasion</b> The core objective in invasion games is to move into an opponent's territory in order to score. To achieve this objective the players must maintain possession of the ball, create and use space and attack a 'goal'. For example: 4 v 4 (two touch), 5 v 5 (wide man).</p>

# Learning to play together 10 - 12 years

## Player characteristics

- Players will compete with greater intensity against each other
- At this age players will try to win the game not only by scoring but also by attempting to deny the opposition the opportunity to score.
- They will begin to understand the need to change the direction of a run or a pass to be more effective and they will begin to grasp the idea that a player may need support from behind and to the side as well as in front.
- Coaches should continue to run small-sided games and condition them to solve problems.
- During training, these players must always feel part of the session. Coaches must be ready to pay as much attention to them as to other established players and always work to improve their skills [ one-to-one coaching may be needed].
- Coaches must be quick to address the problem of one or two players dominating play and preventing others from developing their skills during games.
- Many players at this age fail to recognise the need to attack the ball and prefer to wait for the ball. If this is allowed to persist, that player will find it increasingly difficult to change his/her instincts.
- Training needs to be moderately increased at this stage.
- Players are now ready to develop general strength through their own body weight and core exercises.

Skills Emphasis		Physical Focus	Game Specific
Hurling	Football		
<p><b>Handling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overhead catch (use hurley to protect)</li> <li>- Hand passing (using both hands)</li> <li>- Switch pass</li> <li>- Low catch</li> </ul> <p><b>Sending &amp; Receiving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Striking on the run</li> <li>- <i>Short stick left &amp; right</i></li> <li>- Striking off hurley</li> <li>- First touch control</li> <li>- Jab lift (moving ball)</li> <li>- Roll lift (moving ball)</li> <li>- Lift &amp; strike</li> <li>- Batting high ball</li> <li>- Sideline cuts</li> </ul> <p><b>Travelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Soloing at speed</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shouldering</li> <li>- Hooking on the move</li> <li>- Blocking (ground &amp; air)</li> <li>- Doubling in the air</li> </ul>	<p><b>Handling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High catch</li> <li>- Hand passing (using both hands)</li> </ul> <p><b>Kicking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Punt kick left &amp; right</li> <li>- Punt kick outside foot</li> <li>- Crouch lift moving ball</li> <li>- Toe lift</li> <li>- Hook kick left &amp; right</li> </ul> <p><b>Travelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Solo run left &amp; right</li> <li>- Low bounce</li> <li>- Dummy solo</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Near hand tackle</li> <li>- Shadowing</li> <li>- Shouldering</li> <li>- Frontal tackle</li> <li>- Block down</li> </ul>	<p><b>Speed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Further development of speed in warm ups (Efforts less than 6 secs) For example: Quickness and change of direction and reaction sprints.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strength</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce core strength. For example: Twist with partner.</li> <li>- Own body strength exercises. E.g. Pull ups, press ups, etc..</li> <li>- Introduce plyometric training, E.g. Bounding and hopping.</li> </ul> <p><b>Stamina</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Endurance related activities. Eg. Relay running</li> <li>- Small sided games &amp; ball drills</li> <li>- Circuit training with the ball</li> </ul> <p><b>Flexibility / Co-ordination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce dynamic stretching &amp; mobility exercises</li> <li>- Warm up &amp; cool down concept</li> </ul>	<p><b>Court Games</b></p> <p>Court games require players to pass the ball over an obstacle like a net or zone to a receiver. The level of decision making has increased but is limited. The use of other skills essential for team work such as communication, anticipation and spatial awareness become more important. For example: Over the river, Hit the corners</p> <p><b>Field Games</b></p> <p>These are games which require one team to act as the strickers/kickers and the opposition become the fielders retrieving the ball. The fielding team tries to limit the runs or scores by the striking/kicking team and at the same time try to get the opposition player out. Greater decisions have to be made in relation to where, when and how to move or play the ball and good spatial awareness is more important. E.g. Crazy kicks, Batter bonanza.</p> <p><b>Part-Invasion</b></p> <p>These games require players to complete a task with limited or direct opposition. Such games encourage awareness of time and space but also help develop characteristics of team play, e.g. support play and communication. Part-invasion games allow players develop positional sense and decision making with limited pressure from the opposition. E.g. 4 v 1 (Goid), Pass &amp; Attack.</p> <p><b>Full-Invasion</b></p> <p>The core objective in invasion games is to move into an opponent's territory in order to score. To achieve this objective the players must maintain possession of the ball, create and use space and attack a 'goal'. For example: 4 v 4 (two touch), 5 v 5 (wide man).</p>



# Learning about positions 13 - 15 years

## Player characteristics

- While players in this stage may have the same chronological age they may differ significantly in terms of biological age [ i.e. one may be more physically developed than another].
- The onset of puberty usually occurs during the early stages of this cycle. Aerobic and strength programmes should be individualised or grouped according to their Peak Height Velocity (PHV). N.B. Only trained coaches to undertake this training.
- Broad base skills and sport specific skills.
- Advanced technical skill development/skills developed under pressure.
- Fitness with the ball in skills drills.
- Gain an understanding of the principles of attack and defence through grids and small sided games.
- Players can be introduced to psychological training through games that promote concentration and better decision making.

Learning about positions

13 - 15 year olds

Skills Emphasis		Physical Focus	Game Specific
Hurling	Football		
<p><b>Handling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High catch (protect from front &amp; behind)</li> <li>- Hand pass off the hurley</li> <li>- Chest catch</li> </ul> <p><b>Sending &amp; Receiving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jab lift at pace</li> <li>- Striking on the run (moving away from the target)</li> <li>- Striking on the run (high &amp; low)</li> <li>- Doubling ball in the air</li> <li>- Shooting for scores</li> </ul> <p><b>Travelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Soloing (changing direction)</li> <li>- Tap &amp; move</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frontal block (hurley to ball)</li> <li>- Low block</li> <li>- Ground tussle</li> <li>- Flick off the hurley</li> </ul>	<p><b>Handling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ball feint</li> <li>- Fist pass for distance</li> <li>- Overhead tap on</li> <li>- Catching at speed</li> <li>    High catch</li> <li>    Reach catch</li> <li>    Low catch</li> <li>    Half volley catch</li> </ul> <p><b>Kicking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Punt kick to moving target</li> <li>- Long kick pass</li> <li>- Scoring from angles</li> <li>- Assisted chip lift</li> <li>- Penalty kick</li> </ul> <p><b>Travelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Swerve</li> <li>- Change of pace with the ball</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Near hand tackle</li> <li>- Delay opponent &amp; shadowing</li> <li>- Frontal tackle</li> <li>- Dive block</li> <li>- Hand off</li> </ul>	<p><b>Speed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multi-directional (efforts less than 20 secs in response to hand signals)</li> <li>- Quick footwork and agility</li> <li>- Acceleration and deceleration. E.g. Go go stop</li> <li>- Games related reaction exercises</li> <li>- Relay racing. E.g. Crazy ball drills.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strength</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Body weight circuit training</li> <li>- Develop core strength. E.g. Plank</li> <li>- Learn correct weight lifting techniques. E.g. Squat, clean, snatch.</li> </ul> <p><b>N.B.</b> Only qualified coaches to undertake this training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce free weights and medicine balls. <b>N.B.</b> For upper age range group only</li> <li>- Plyometric. E.g. Multi directional jumps.</li> </ul> <p><b>Stamina</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 v 1 games</li> <li>- Drills incorporating the ball</li> </ul> <p><b>Flexibility / Co-ordination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintain flexibility exercise</li> <li>- Dynamic warm up</li> </ul>	<p><b>Part-Invasion</b></p> <p>These games require players to complete a task with limited or direct opposition.. E.g. Wide man, Zone to zone</p> <p><b>Full-Invasion</b></p> <p>The key element with invasion games is the number of players involved. The less space a player has, the less time he/she has, the more skill is required. E.g. Backs v Forwards, 15 v 15.</p> <p><b>Possession Games</b></p> <p>Concept games designed to correct a failing in general team play or one rule games as they are known. E.g. Give and Go, 4 second rule, 2 touch, Head up, First touch.</p>

# Learning to perform 16 - 18 years

## Player characteristics

- During this phase players begin to reach their physical peak and those slow developers begin to catch up with their peers.
- Encourage ideals of self-awareness and self-help within players.
- At this stage a Functional Movement Screening (conducted by a physio) should be carried out on each player and the results along with their Critical Success Factors (CSFs) identified by each player in their Self-Assessment Profile should form the basis of their Personal Development Plan (PDP).
- As a result of the above each player should have a PDP, a component of which should be an individualised conditioning programme developed and delivered by a S&C coach. Each player should be committed to their programme, as they will have had an input into it through their Self-Assessment Profile.
- Advanced technical skill development/Skills developed under pressure.
- Understand the principles of game play, tactics, and game sense.
- Accept that the team is paramount and accept their role within the team structure.
- Encourage positive lifestyle and build concepts of teamship and leadership.
- Instil concepts of mental toughness and calmness under pressure (winning behaviours).
- Encourage flexibility and fine-tune the generic skills to play in a variety of positions.
- Players should be encouraged to embrace positive life-skills i.e. time-management and to take control of their own athletic development.

**Learning to perform**

**16 – 18 year olds**

Skills Emphasis		Physical Focus	Game Specific
Hurling	Football		
<p><b>Ball Winning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Catching (protect from front &amp; behind) High catch, Low catch, Half-volley catch</li> <li>- First touch off the hurley, low-high control</li> <li>- Dribble – keep possession</li> </ul> <p><b>Sending &amp; Receiving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lift &amp; strike, left &amp; right</li> <li>- Strike, front foot &amp; back foot</li> <li>- Feint &amp; strike</li> <li>- Striking over the shoulder moving away from the target</li> <li>- Overhead doubling</li> <li>- Batting</li> <li>- Overhead kill (ball falls into your body)</li> <li>- Overhead block to the feet</li> <li>- Overhead flick (direct the ball in your path)</li> </ul> <p><b>Travelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making room (with &amp; without the ball)</li> <li>- Take opponent &amp; protecting the body with the hurley</li> <li>- Dummy hand pass</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackle</b> Shouldering, recover and flick &amp; hook</p>	<p><b>Game plays</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How to use a sweeper</li> <li>- How to deal with a sweeper</li> <li>- Man marking</li> <li>- Zone marking</li> </ul> <p><b>Kicking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kicking for possession / diagonal ball</li> <li>- Kicking for scores</li> <li>- Free kicks / penalties</li> </ul> <p><b>Ball Retention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supporting the ball player</li> <li>- Breaking the tackle</li> <li>- Getting out of traffic</li> <li>- Change the direction of play</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Near hand tackle</li> <li>- Group tackling</li> <li>- Frontal tackle</li> <li>- Checking</li> <li>- Blocking ball</li> </ul>	<p><b>Speed</b> (based on test results profile)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multi-directional (efforts less than 20 secs in response to hand signals)</li> <li>- Quick footwork and agility</li> <li>- Planting the foot (the 3 step movement)</li> <li>- Running mechanics &amp; technique</li> <li>- Strength work to improve speed</li> </ul> <p><b>Strength</b> (based on test results profile)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Functional Movement (FM) assessment to establish core strength and technique</li> <li>- Core programme for those still not ready for weights</li> <li>- Individual programme for those with core strength &amp; good technique</li> <li>- Perfect technique &amp; control. <b>N.B.</b> Only qualified coaches to undertake this training</li> </ul> <p><b>Stamina</b> (based on test results profile)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Small-sided games</li> <li>- Drills incorporating the ball</li> </ul> <p><b>Flexibility / Co-ordination</b> (based on test results profile)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintain flexibility exercise</li> <li>- Dynamic warm up</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intense Small-sided (3 secs)</b> Intense small-sided games are extremely beneficial for players. As well as getting involved in the game more often, players learn more quickly and make more decisions during the course of these games. And as the ball is never far away, greater concentration is required. E.g. Across the line, Total football, Break-ball &amp; kick, 4 goal option.</p> <p><b>15 aside</b> 15 aside games are helping rehearse for the match day scenarios. E.g. Backs v Forwards, 15 v 15 (Deploying a sweeper, defending zones, deploying the big man, various conditions)</p>

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