



Bunaíodh 1884.

Round Tower GAA Club Player Pathway



Introduction

The purpose of this Player Pathway initiative is to help guide coaches, managers, mentors, and parents who play an active role in the development of our young Gaelic Footballers & Hurlers.

It should be noted that these are guidelines and recommendations for coaches, managers, mentors, 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 our players.

It is intended, at its most basic form, to give our 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".

This Player Pathway is a systematic approach adopted by Naomh Olaf GAA Club to maximise player potential and increase the enjoyment of all our players. It provides a framework for the development of skills, fundamental movement, physical focus, and game specific capacities that coaches can follow stage by stage.

There are 5 key stages in the pathway which have detailed player characteristics and describe the practical elements that must be coached during these ages.

The 5 stages are:

Stage	Age	Emphasis
Learning to Master the Ball	4-7 year olds Towers Óg	Should be about fun and participation with key emphasis on physical literacy and fundamental movement skills with the ball.
Learning to Use the Ball Well	7-9 year olds U8-U10 Teams	Major skills learning phase where all the basic skills in football & hurling are learned. Emphasis on the fundamental movements.
Learning to Play Together	10-12 year olds U11-U13 Teams	Emphasis on understanding how to play and work together as a team.
Learning about Positions	13-15 year olds U14-U16 Teams	The principles of play and applying good game sense increase.
Learning to Perform	16-18+ year olds Minor - Adult Teams	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 Old)

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 practice for a short time. This helps introduce them to teamwork 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 & running).

Learning to Master the Ball 4-6 Year Olds - Towers Óg

Skill Emphasis		Fundamental Movement	Game Specific
Hurling	Football	ABC & RTJ	
<p>Handling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correct hurley size - Identification of the 'Strong' hand - Grip & Swing - Ready & Lock <p>Positions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hand position for Dribble <p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dribble <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Stop/Block <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Strike 	<p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Throw - Two Handed Bounce - One Handed Bounce <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Body Catch - Pick Up (stationary & moving) <p>Travelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knee Tap Solo 	<p>Agility</p> <p>Back to Back, Follow the Leader, Hopscotch, Lateral Jumps</p> <p>Balance</p> <p>Hop in & out of hoops, Bunny hops, 1 legged balanced & hop</p> <p>Co-ordination</p> <p>Skipping, Ladder Work, Bean Bag Toss</p> <p>Running</p> <p>With the Hurley/Football Forward, Backward, Sideways (multiple change of direction), High Knees & Heels</p> <p>Jumping</p> <p>Jump & Land then change direction, Jumping Jacks, Squat Jumps, Jump & Turn</p> <p>Throwing</p> <p>Target Roll, Skittles, Bowling</p>	<p>Target Games</p> <p>The simplest form of a game which challenges players to use the technique previously learn is to aim or target. Players have lots of time to perform the task without any distraction from other players. There is a low level of decision making. EG. Skittles, Through the Gate, Tower Ball.</p> <p>Court Games</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. EG. Over the River, Hurling Tennis.</p> <p>Part Invasion</p> <p>These games require players to complete a task with limited or direct opposition. EG. Getting through the Traffic, 4V4 (2 zones), No Goalie, Up North Down South.</p>

Learning to Use the Ball Well (7-9 Years Old)

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 kick the ball away from them and attempt to clock any shots.
- They tend 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 with 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 dropouts occur if children think they are no good.
- At this age players will now try to win the game not only by scoring but also 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'.
- At this age players must also get used to attacking the ball (ie. Running and not stopping) and breaking tackles.
- First critical period for speed development.

Learning to Use the Ball Well 7-9 Year Olds

Skill Emphasis		Fundamental Movement	Game Specific
Hurling	Football	ABC & RTJ	
<p>Handling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correct hurley size - Identification of the 'Strong' hand - Grip & Swing - Ready & Lock <p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dribble <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Strike (left & right) - Ground Doubling (left & right) - Striking from the hand (left & right) <p>Contesting Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hooking - Should to shoulder clash <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Block - Ground Frontal Block - Jab/Roll Lift - Catch 	<p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One Handed Bounce - Solo Run <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Handpass (closed fist) - Ground Kick - Punt Kick <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Body Catch - Overhead Catch - Low Catch - Pick Up <p>Contesting Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blockdown - Near Hand Tackle - Shadowing 	<p>Agility</p> <p>Back to Back, Follow the Leader, Hopscotch, Lateral Jumps</p> <p>Balance</p> <p>Hop in & out of hoops, Bunny hops, 1 legged balanced & hop</p> <p>Co-ordination</p> <p>Skipping, Ladder Work</p> <p>Running</p> <p>With the Hurley/Football Forward, Backward, Sideways (multiple change of direction), High Knees & Heels</p> <p>Jumping</p> <p>Jump & Land then change direction, Jumping Jacks, Squat Jumps, Jump & Turn</p> <p>Throwing</p> <p>Target Roll, Skittles, Bowling Dodgeball</p> <p>Conditioning</p> <p>Introduce basic flexibility Whole body exercises</p>	<p>Target Games</p> <p>The simplest form of a game which challenges players to use the technique previously learn is to aim or target. Players have lots of time to perform the task without any distraction from other players. There is a low level of decision making. EG. Skittles, Through the Gate, Tower Ball.</p> <p>Court Games</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. EG. Over the River, Hurling Tennis.</p> <p>Field Games</p> <p>These are games which require 1 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 EG. Rounders.</p> <p>Part & Full Invasion</p> <p>These games require players to complete a task with limited or direct opposition, where the objective is to move into opponents territory and score. EG. Getting through the traffic, 4V4 (2 zones), 4V4 (2 touch), No Goaling, Up North Down South, 5V5 (wide man)</p>

Learning to Play Together (10-12 Years Old)

Player Characteristics

- Players will compete with greater intensity against each other.
- At this age players will now 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 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 the front.
- Coaches should continue to run small-sided games and condition the players to solve problems in a game-based environment.
- 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 (e.g. 1-1 coaching may be needed).
- Coaches must be quick to address the problem of 1 or 2 players dominating play and preventing others from developing their skills during games. Modifying rules can help here.
- Many players at this age fail to realise 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 their 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.

Learning to Play Together 10-12 Year Olds

Skill Emphasis	Physical Focus	Game Specific
Hurling		
<p>Handling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correct hurley size - Identification of the 'Strong' hand - Grip & Swing - Ready & Lock <p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dribble - Soloing at speed <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Strike (left & right) - Doubling (left & right) - Lift & Strike (left & right) - Striking off the hurley on the run (left & right) - Strike on the run from the hand (left & right) - Handpass (both hands) <p>Contesting Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hooking (stationary & on the move) - Shoulder to shoulder clash & shouldering - Blockdown - Doubling in the air <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roll & Jab lift - Catch (overhead, chest & low) - Ground frontal block - First touch control 	<p>Speed</p> <p>Further development of speed in warm-ups (efforts less than 6 secs). EG. Quickness, change of direction & reaction sprints.</p> <p>Strength</p> <p>Introduce core strength. EG. Twist with a partner. Own body strength exercises. EG. Push ups, squats, lunges. Introduce plyometric training. EG. Bounding & hopping</p> <p>Stamina</p> <p>Endurance related activities. EG. Relay running, small sided games & ball drills, circuit training with the ball.</p> <p>Flexibility / Co-ordination</p> <p>Introduce dynamic stretching & mobility exercises, warm up & cool down concept</p>	<p>Court Games</p> <p>Court games require players to pass a ball over an obstacle like a net or a zone to a receiver. The level of decision making has increased but is limited. EG. Over the river, Hit the corners.</p> <p>Field Games</p> <p>These are games which require 1 team to act as the strikers/kickers and the opposition become the fielders retrieving the ball. The fielding team tries to limit the runs or scores of the striking/kicking team and at the same time try to get the opposition players 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. EG. Rounders.</p> <p>Part Invasion</p> <p>Such games encourage awareness of time and space but also develop characteristics of team play (support & communication). They also allow players to develop positional sense and decision making with limited pressure from opposition. EG. 4V1 (good) Pass & Attack.</p> <p>Full Invasion</p> <p>The core objective here to to move into an opponents territory in order to score. To achieve this, players must maintain possession of the ball, create & use space and attack a 'goal'.</p>

Learning to Play Together 10-12 Year Olds

Skill Emphasis	Physical Focus	Game Specific
Football		
<p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bounce / Hop - Solo - Side step / feint <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Handpass (closed fist)(left & right) - Punt kick (left & right) - Hook kick (left & right) <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick up (left & right) - Catch (overhead, body & low) <p>Contesting Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shoulder to shoulder clash - Blockdown - Shadowing - Near hand tackle - Frontal tackle 	<p>Speed</p> <p>Further development of speed in warm-ups (efforts less than 6 secs). EG. Quickness, change of direction & reaction sprints.</p> <p>Strength</p> <p>Introduce core strength. EG. Twist with a partner. Own body strength exercises. EG. Push ups, squats, lunges. Introduce plyometric training. EG. Bounding & hopping</p> <p>Stamina</p> <p>Endurance related activities. EG. Relay running, small sided games & ball drills, circuit training with the ball.</p> <p>Flexibility / Co-ordination</p> <p>Introduce dynamic stretching & mobility exercises, warm up & cool down concept</p>	<p>Court Games</p> <p>Court games require players to pass a ball over an obstacle like a net or a zone to a receiver. The level of decision making has increased but is limited. EG. Over the river, Hit the corners.</p> <p>Field Games</p> <p>These are games which require 1 team to act as the strikers/kickers and the opposition become the fielders retrieving the ball. The fielding team tries to limit the runs or scores of the striking/kicking team and at the same time try to get the opposition players 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. EG. Rounders.</p> <p>Part Invasion</p> <p>Such games encourage awareness of time and space but also develop characteristics of team play (support & communication). They also allow players to develop positional sense and decision making with limited pressure from opposition. EG. 4V1 (good) Pass & Attack.</p> <p>Full Invasion</p> <p>The core objective here to to move into an opponents territory in order to score. To achieve this, players must maintain possession of the ball, create & use space and attack a 'goal'.</p>

Learning about Positions (13-15 Years Old)

Player Characteristics

- While players in this stage may have the same chronological age, they may differ significantly in terms of biological age, i.e. 1 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 development/skills developed under pressure.
- Fitness with the ball in skills and drills.
- Gain an understanding of the principles of attack and defence through grids and small-sided games.
- Players can be introduced to moderate anaerobic and strength training through ball work.
- Players should be introduced to psychological training through games that promote concentration and better decision making.

Learning about Positions 13-15 Year Olds

Skill Emphasis	Physical Focus	Game Specific
Hurling		
<p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tap & move - Soloing at speed with changes of direction <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground strike on the run (left & right) - Shooting for scores (left & right) - Lift & Strike (left & right) - Batting & Doubling (left & right) - Striking off the hurley on the run (left & right) - Strike on the run from the hand (left & right) - Handpass (both hands) <p>Contesting Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hooking (stationary & on the move) - Shoulder to shoulder clash & shouldering - Blockdown - Doubling in the air - Flicking the ball off the hurley - Ground tussle <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roll & Jab lift at pace - Catch (Body & low) - High catch (protect from behind & front) - Ground frontal block - First touch control 	<p>Speed</p> <p>Multi-directional (efforts less than 20 secs in response to hand signals). Quick footwork, change of direction, agility & reaction sprints.</p> <p>Strength</p> <p>Bodyweight circuit training (upper & lower body, trunk). Develop core strength (the plank). Learning correct weightlifting techniques (squats, snatch, lunge etc.) Introduce light free weights and medicine balls</p> <p>Stamina</p> <p>3v1 games. Drills incorporating the ball.</p> <p>Flexibility / Co-ordination</p> <p>Maintain flexibility exercises Dynamic warm-up</p>	<p>Part Invasion</p> <p>Such games encourage awareness of time and space but also develop characteristics of team play (support & communication). They also allow players to develop positional sense and decision making with limited pressure from opposition. EG. Wide man & Zone to zone.</p> <p>Full Invasion</p> <p>The key element with invasion games is the number of players involved. The less space a player has, the less time they have on the ball and the more skill is required. EG. Back & Forwards, 15V15, Modified & Conditioned games.</p> <p>Possession Games</p> <p>Concept games designed to correct a failing in general team play or one rule games to develop a weakness in general play. EG. Give & go, 4 second rule, 2 touch, 1 hop 1 solo, Heads up, First touch.</p>

Learning about Positions 13-15 Year Olds

Skill Emphasis	Physical Focus	Game Specific
Football		
<p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bounce / Hop - Solo - Side step / feint - Change of pace with the ball <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Handpass (closed fist)(left & right) - Punt kick (left & right) to moving target - Hook kick (left & right) to moving target - Scoring from angles - Free kicks & penalties <p>Contesting Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dive block - Blockdown - Shadowing - Near hand tackle - Hand off - Frontal tackle <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick up (left & right) - Catch (overhead, body & low) 	<p>Speed</p> <p>Multi-directional (efforts less than 20 secs in response to hand signals). Quick footwork, change of direction, agility & reaction sprints.</p> <p>Strength</p> <p>Bodyweight circuit training (upper & lower body, trunk). Develop core strength (the plank). Learning correct weightlifting techniques (squats, snatch, lunge etc.) Introduce light free weights and medicine balls</p> <p>Stamina</p> <p>3v1 games. Drills incorporating the ball.</p> <p>Flexibility / Co-ordination</p> <p>Maintain flexibility exercises Dynamic warm-up</p>	<p>Part Invasion</p> <p>Such games encourage awareness of time and space but also develop characteristics of team play (support & communication). They also allow players to develop positional sense and decision making with limited pressure from opposition. EG. Wide man & Zone to zone.</p> <p>Full Invasion</p> <p>The key element with invasion games is the number of players involved. The less space a player has, the less time they have on the ball and the more skill is required. EG. Back & Forwards, 15V15, Modified & Conditioned games.</p> <p>Possession Games</p> <p>Concept games designed to correct a failing in general team play or one rule games to develop a weakness in general play. EG. Give & go, 4 second rule, 2 touch, 1 hop 1 solo, Heads up, First touch.</p>

Learning to Perform (16-18 Years Old)

Player Characteristics

- During this phase players begin to reach their physical peak and those slow developers begin to catch up with their peers.
- Encourage ideas 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 the Critical Success Factors (CSF's) 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 Strength & Conditioning Coach. Every player should be committed to their programme as they will have had an input into 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 their role within the team structure.
- 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

Skill Emphasis	Physical Focus	Game Specific
Hurling		
<p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tap & move - Soloing at speed with changes of direction <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hurley pass - Shooting for scores (left & right) - Lift & Strike (left & right) - Doubling (left & right) - Striking off the hurley on the run (left & right) - Strike on the run from the hand (left & right) - Handpass & dummy handpass (both hands) <p>Contesting Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hooking (stationary & on the move) - Shoulder to shoulder clash & shouldering - Blockdown (1 & 2 hands) - Doubling in the air - Flicking the ball off the hurley - Ground tussle <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roll & Jab lift at pace - Catch (Body & low) - High catch (protect from behind & front) - Ground frontal block - First touch control - Overhead ball control 	<p>Speed</p> <p>Multi-directional (efforts less than 20 secs in response to hand signals). Quick footwork, change of direction, agility & reaction sprints.</p> <p>Running mechanics & technique.</p> <p>Strength work to improve speed.</p> <p>Strength</p> <p>Bodyweight circuit training (upper & lower body, trunk).</p> <p>Develop core strength (the plank).</p> <p>Learning correct weightlifting techniques (squats, snatch, lunge etc.)</p> <p>Introduce light free weights and medicine balls</p> <p>Stamina</p> <p>Small sided games</p> <p>3v1 games.</p> <p>Drills incorporating the ball.</p> <p>Flexibility / Co-ordination</p> <p>Maintain flexibility exercises</p> <p>Dynamic warm-up</p>	<p>Intense Small Sided Games</p> <p>These 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.</p> <p>15 aside</p> <p>15 aside games are helping rehearse for the match day scenarios. EG. 15V15 (deploying a sweeper, defending the zone, 2 man full forward line, various other match tactics.</p> <p>Modified / Conditioned Games</p> <p>These games are very beneficial for players by modifying the rules to suit certain game plans or to help involve everyone in that game rather than the strong' player being dominant all the time. These also help players get more touches on the ball, with less space and less time on the ball to help develop their decision making options, which will improve this side of their game in a proper match.</p>

Learning to Perform 16-18 Year Olds

Skill Emphasis	Physical Focus	Game Specific
Football		
<p>Maintaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bounce / Hop & Solo - Side step / feint - Change of pace with the ball - Support of the player with the ball <p>Releasing Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Handpass (closed fist)(left & right) - Punt kick (left & right) to moving target - Hook kick (left & right) to moving target - Scoring from angles - Free kicks & penalties <p>Contesting Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blockdown & Dive block - Breaking the tackle - Near hand tackle - Hand off & shadowing / checking Fontal tackle - Group tackling <p>Gaining Possession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick up (left & right) - Catch (overhead, body & low) 	<p>Speed</p> <p>Multi-directional (efforts less than 20 secs in response to hand signals). Quick footwork, change of direction, agility & reaction sprints. Running mechanics & technique. Strength work to improve speed.</p> <p>Strength</p> <p>Bodyweight circuit training (upper & lower body, trunk). Develop core strength (the plank). Learning correct weightlifting techniques (squats, snatch, lunge etc.) Introduce light free weights and medicine balls</p> <p>Stamina</p> <p>Small sided games 3v1 games. Drills incorporating the ball.</p> <p>Flexibility / Co-ordination</p> <p>Maintain flexibility exercises Dynamic warm-up</p>	<p>Intense Small Sided Games</p> <p>These 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.</p> <p>15 aside</p> <p>15 aside games are helping rehearse for the match day scenarios. EG. 15V15 (deploying a sweeper, defending the zone, 2 man full forward line, various other match tactics.</p> <p>Modified / Conditioned Games</p> <p>These games are very beneficial for players by modifying the rules to suit certain game plans or to help involve everyone in that game rather than the strong' player being dominant all the time. These also help players get more touches on the ball, with less space and less time on the ball to help develop their decision making options, which will improve this side of their game in a proper match.</p>