



Squad Selection Process for Youth Football

BERKHAMSTED RAIDERS – PICKING THE TEAMS!

THE CHECKLIST/TIMETABLE OF EVENTS:

- 1 SET A DATE FOR YOUR SELECTION MEETING. Get a date in the diary soon after Christmas. Make it at a time (late May/early June) that suits you and the other managers...stick to it...and use it as your deadline.
- 2 DISCOVER WHICH CURRENT MEMBERS WILL RETURN. Send out an e-mail (perhaps in mid-March) asking ALL parents to reply (by a given deadline) confirming their intention (or otherwise) to be part of your age-group next season. Inevitably, some will need chasing!
- 3 EMPHASISE THAT ALL PLAYERS ARE JOINING/REJOINING AS MEMBERS OF THE CLUB...AND THAT THEY MUST BE READY TO BE PLACED IN WHICHEVER TEAM THE AGE-GROUP MANAGEMENT CONSIDER APPROPRIATE. Do NOT tolerate those who prevaricate with a view to withdrawing if selection goes against them.
- 4 MAKE CLEAR THE GUIDELINES/PRINCIPLES WITHIN WHICH YOU ARE SELECTING...and invite parents to respond with any worries/issues. Give them every opportunity to engage BEFORE selection...so that they cannot claim "ignorance" after selection. Explain and inform at every step of the process.
- 5 DO THE MATHS! Establish the capacity of your squad and how many vacancies you have.
- 6 CONTACT YOUR WAITING-LIST. Do this methodically and in order so that you don't raise the hopes of those who have no chance of getting a place.
- 7 CONSULT THE DOCUMENT ABOUT PLAYER RECRUITMENT. Remember that there is an implied promise to training/waiting-list members that they are first in line for membership (regardless of ability). That is key to our community ethos. Only if space exists once all training/waiting-list members have been exhausted should you consider recruitment.
- 8 CONSIDER HOLDING A TRIAL(S). Beware picking a player on reputation. Try to see him play first.
- 9 APPOINT AND INVITE A "NEUTRAL" PARENT TO YOUR SELECTION MEETING. Ideally, this should be the parent of a child who is unlikely to be an "issue". Try to invite someone uncontroversial...different every year...from a different team every year...Mums as well as Dads. Their role is NOT to have a vote (or even join the discussion)...merely to witness the fact that the meeting is carried out fairly and appropriately.
- 10 MEET AND SELECT with a sharp awareness of the principles (below), the ethos of the club and your own conscience.
- 11 COMMUNICATE THE OUTCOMES clearly and sensitively. Be aware that your blanket e-mail will evoke a vast variety of different responses...and be prepared to accompany it with any number of individual, pastoral calls!



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THE PRINCIPLES/AIMS/ISSUES etc

- 1 CLUB ETHOS. Ours is a club which seeks to balance some impossible equations. We are principally about involvement...but aim – at the top end – for genuine competitiveness. Achieving the balance between those twin aspirations is the key to selection. That is our ongoing challenge.
- 2 IT IS ONLY AND ALWAYS ABOUT THE BOYS/GIRLS. If you ever start basing a selection decision on likely parental reaction (good or bad)...you are getting it wrong! Banish thoughts of parents to the back of your head...and think only of the child.
- 3 PICK BOYS FIRST...AND MANAGERS AFTERWARDS. Your duty is only to the children. It is no good saying that “xxxx has to be in the RED team (or stay in the YELLOWS) because his Dad is the manager”. That’s not fair. If selection disrupts your management pattern...too bad! You may have to find another manager!
- 4 SPLITTING YOUR SQUAD APPROPRIATELY. Agree, at the start, how many boys/girls will be in each playing squad. Broadly, all parents have paid the same and are entitled to equal playing opportunity...but you may deem it appropriate to have a slightly smaller RED (competitive) team (to enable fewer disruptive substitutions/rotations etc)...AND a larger “bottom” team (where commitment and availability tend to be flakier...and participation is everything).
- 5 MAKE IT A “WHOLE SQUAD” SELECTION. The introduction of age-group co-ordinators should make this a “given”...but it is crucial that squads are picked in a united, joined-up way. There should be just one waiting-list (not one each for the Reds, Blues, Greens etc)...and every name should start the selection meeting on the same sheet of paper. Every child merits fresh consideration every year. Failure to acknowledge the likely need for free movement within a squad will lead to staleness and resentment. All players must have (and genuinely feel) a realistic chance of progressing.
- 6 SELECT ONLY ON MERIT. It should be simple! If you are picking a four-team mini-soccer squad of 11 players per team...simply choose the best 11 for the REDS, the next best 11 for the second team...and so on. The same principle applies at 9-a-side...and still at 11-a-side. Of course, in reality there may be complications...
- 7 ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT EVERY CHILD IS OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE. We may select according to footballing merit...but we NEVER presume to pass judgement on children as human beings! Don’t lose sight of the fact that we’re talking about children who want a game of football on a Sunday morning – nothing more nor less.
- 8 FRIENDSHIP GROUPS. It is surely right to be sensitive to groups of friends within your squad...but these can NOT be a determining factor. Part of the point of a club like ours is to provide a social mix. Whilst it sounds appealing to say things like, “Let’s just keep the Victoria/Swing Gate kids together” (or even – later on – Ashlyns/Berkhamsted/Chesham)...it is in fact far more progressive to allow the kids to mix and broaden their social horizons. Sport enables them to make friends with people from different schools and backgrounds. It sounds cynical...but one man’s “innocent friendship group” can be another’s “divisive clique”.
- 9 GOALKEEPING. If – at any given moment in your squad’s development – you are fortunate enough to have exactly the right number of willing, able goalkeepers to fit your teams, you are indeed a fortunate AGC! No question, goalkeepers are different...and can take up a disproportionate amount of selection/management time. The dynamic on this changes as the



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- years go by...but GKs often have to be seen as a special case. Always be in close contact with goalkeeping parents...and be SURE of the child's willingness (or otherwise) to stay in goal BEFORE selecting on that basis.
- 10 PARENT-MANAGERS. Be prepared – within a meeting – to treat your own child's prospects just like anyone else's...and to be (sometimes embarrassingly) honest with your fellow managers about their own off-spring! It is almost impossible to have a genuinely objective view on your own beloved child. So – if you feel you can't achieve that – leave the room/remain silent/ask others to do it for you.
 - 11 SELECT FROM TOP DOWN. Essentially – whilst the AGC chairs the meeting – the team managers should pick the teams. It seems sensible to start with the RED (top) manager whose prerogative it is to pick the best 11/13/17 (whatever it is)...and work down from there.
 - 12 READ THIS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE "PLAYER RECRUITMENT" DOCUMENT (Oct 2011). Many of the principles are the same....particularly in regard to ability/commitment/participation/competitiveness.
 - 13 SPECIAL CASES. There always is one! Don't be ashamed to consult senior club/committee members.
 - 14 BRING YOUR CONSCIENCE WITH YOU! Ultimately, the nature of any selection is that some will be happier than others. You – and your fellow managers – must satisfy yourselves (and your "neutral" witness) that you have been fair-minded throughout.
 - 15 IF ALL ELSE FAILS...THE AGE-GROUP CO-ORDINATOR DECIDES. If a manager(s) can't accept that decision...then you may need the mediation of a "neutral" club official. If you can't accept that, you're in the wrong club!
 - 16 EVEN IN COMMUNICATING THE SELECTIONS...BE A "UNITED" MANAGEMENT TEAM. Inevitably, a selection meeting will include differences of opinion. But, once you have agreed your selection and published it, be united behind it. It is a poor and weak-spirited manager who tells a parent, "I would have promoted your son...but the others didn't want to!" Support each other's decisions...even when it's hard.
 - 17 LOOK FORWARD TO THE SEASON...AND REMEMBER AGAIN WHAT ITS ALL ABOUT – FUN!!!