

YGA ESPORT GUIDEBOOK 2025-26



Overwatch 2 || Valorant || Rocket league || Super Smash Bros Ultimate || Mario kart 8 Deluxe || Marvel Rivals

Dedicated to:

To all the coaches out there, tirelessly working to help kids follow their passion in esports. This book is for you. Your guidance, patience, and belief in your players shape more than matches; you build character, community, and confidence that lasts a lifetime.

Thank you for everything that you do!

-The YGA Team

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FOREWORD

Esports have been part of my world for as long as I can remember. My journey into competitive gaming began in elementary school when I would sneak onto my parents' computer to play Minecraft, focusing on a game mode called Ultra Hardcore (UHC). My teammate from New Zealand and I would compete in online UHC tournaments as often as we could. Although we never won, that early experience ignited my passion for competition that continues to drive me today.

In 2017, at the age of 14, my teammate introduced me to Overwatch which became the turning point that transformed my casual interest in gaming into a serious competitive pursuit. I quickly climbed the competitive ladder, joined my first organization in eighth grade, and became an esports manager in Overwatch Contenders by my sophomore year of high school.

Around the same time, my high school launched its first esports program and competitive team. I joined immediately and used my background in competitive Overwatch to help lead the team to three consecutive state championships and a second-place finish at the national level.

My time in the minor leagues and with my high school team represented two very different, but equally

important, sides of my development. The minor leagues taught me how to play at a high level within a professional structure where skill improvement was priority. I had to constantly push myself intellectually to keep up. This intense commitment came at a cost. I neglected my social life and even missed my school's Winter Formal to participate in a \$500 tournament. While this period helped shape me into the best player I could be, it did not help me grow as a person.

My experience with my high school team brought new challenges. I quickly noticed a gap in game knowledge among my teammates and took the lead in teaching them the fundamentals of Overwatch team play, with the goal of winning our first state championship. Although we succeeded, the intense mindset I had developed in the minor leagues caused friction with my teammates. My relentless drive led to conflict, and I was temporarily removed from the team just before playoffs.

During that time I was forced to reflect on my behavior and what it meant to be part of a team. I came to understand that true leadership isn't just about pushing others to improve, but also about listening, supporting and growing alongside them. After apologizing and rejoining the team, I focused on supporting my peers as they developed into competitive players, while I continued learning life lessons that still guide me today.

When I founded the Youth Gaming Association, my goal was to combine the best elements of both worlds I had experienced. I wanted to help build a path for young esports athletes to thrive, not just as competitors, but as people through social experiences and emotional growth. High school students shouldn't have to choose between pursuing high-level esports and maintaining a healthy, balanced personal life. With YGA, I set out to create an environment where players could grow in both arenas.

Youth Gaming Association exists to help schools build esports programs that develop both competitive skill and personal character. This guidebook was created to give students the tools they need to improve in the games they love to play. It is also designed to help teachers and coaches foster essential life skills such as accountability, communication, teamwork, resilience, and emotional regulation. These are the same skills students gain through traditional athletics.

Esports without structure is simply recreational gaming. Esports with structure has the power to develop students in meaningful and lasting ways. This guidebook offers a foundation to help educators turn their students into champions both in and out of the game.

Gavin Drummond

2019 to 2021 IHSEA Champion, Naperville North

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

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INTRODUCTION

Cultivating Champions In-Game and In-Life

Welcome to the Youth Gaming Association (YGA) Coaches' guidebook – your essential guide to building and nurturing successful esports teams.

In an ever-evolving landscape where competitive gaming captures the passion of millions of youth, the role of a dedicated coach has never been more vital. This guidebook is designed as a practical framework for educators and coaches who are committed to transforming that passion into tangible skill development and profound personal growth.

At its core, this guidebook provides the essential information needed for players to develop the skills and strategies crucial for excelling in their favorite games. Whether it's mastering linework in *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*, refining team compositions in *Marvel Rivals*, executing precise comms in *Overwatch 2*, optimizing rotations in *Rocket League*, or perfecting advanced combos in *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* and *Valorant*, our goal is to equip you with the baseline plans to lead your gamers to in-game victories.

Yet true success extends far beyond the scoreboard.

Just as in traditional after-school athletics, a structured esports environment is a powerful crucible for developing

invaluable life skills. This guidebook's unique framework will enable you to guide your players in cultivating accountability, communication, teamwork, resilience, and emotional regulation.

We firmly believe that **esports without structure is merely recess**. Through disciplined practice and intentional coaching, competitive gaming becomes a transformative experience—one that builds both sharp players and stronger people, prepared for high school and beyond.

This guidebook is organized into dedicated sections for each game title, offering a comprehensive fundamental roadmap broken down into weekly units. While these roadmaps provide a clear progression, we encourage you to adapt the content to your team's specific needs and skill levels.

We embed each lesson into structured practices, prioritizing consistent video on demand (VOD) review and the cultivation of positive, repeatable habits—both in-game and beyond the server.

Thank you for embracing the opportunity to shape the next generation of esports champions. By using this guidebook, you're providing young players with more than just a competitive outlet, you're opening a pathway for them to channel their passion, develop essential life skills, and grow into confident, resilient individuals prepared for any challenge.

RECOMMENDED PROVIDERS

Thank you for your support and dedication to helping grow and strengthen the scholastic esports community.



Gravity Gaming by Bytespeed



Gravity Gaming by ByteSpeed helps schools and organizations build successful esports programs. They offer more than just hardware, investing in your program's future and the future of esports. Their experienced team works with you every step of the way, from designing and equipping your space to providing helpful resources you need to succeed.

Gravity Gaming's high-performance esports desktops are backed by an industry-leading 5-year warranty and free lifetime U.S.-based tech support. From entry-level to advanced rigs, they'll custom build the perfect system for your needs, complete with team logo customization.

Gravity Gaming provides everything to level up your esports space including: esports furniture, pro-level broadcast and shoutcasting gear, mobile console stations, and caching solutions to streamline updates. Whether launching a new program or upgrading your arena, Gravity Gaming provides the expertise, equipment, and support to power your esports journey.

Learn more: www.bytespeed.com/gravitygaming

GLOSSARY

ADS (Aim Down Sights) – Zooming in with a weapon for improved aim, as opposed to hip-firing.

Anchor – A player who is responsible for holding a position alone, often defending or securing space while others rotate or attack.

Bio – A longer break between games, allowing players to use the restroom or step away briefly. Usually limited to once per scrim.

Buff / Nerf – A game update that makes a character or ability stronger (buff) or weaker (nerf).

Callouts – Specific phrases or terms used to quickly share vital information like enemy positions, ability usage, or intentions.

Carry – A player who performs at an exceptionally high level, often leading the team to victory.

Hard Carry – A player who performs so well they effectively win the game for their team, often by securing kills or objectives while others provide support.

Cheesing / Cheese strat – A tactic that relies on unorthodox, often gimmicky or annoying strategies to win, especially by catching the opponent off guard.

Clutch – A high-stakes moment where a player, often alone or at a disadvantage, wins a fight or round through strong execution and focus.

Coach cam – A camera or observer view used by coaches during reviews or scrims.

Comms – Voice or text communications between team members during a match, typically involving callouts, strategy, and updates.

Comp / Composition – The overall makeup of a team, usually referring to their character or role balance.

Conditioning – Repeating the same play or pattern to influence an opponent's expectations, then switching it up to catch them off guard.

Contact – The gamertag or battletag of the opposing team's representative, used for in-game communication or setup.

Cooldown – The period of time a player must wait before using a specific ability or action again.

Crossfire – A strategic setup where two teammates watch the same area from different angles.

DPS – "Damage Per Second." Refers to damage-dealing characters or roles in a game.

DPS (Damage Per Second) – A role or metric describing characters or players whose primary focus is dealing sustained damage to enemies.

ETA – “Estimated Time of Arrival.” Used to ask when a player or team will return or be ready.

Entry / Entry fragger – The player who leads the charge and takes the first engagement during a push.

Esports – Organized competitive gaming played at amateur or professional levels, often involving teams, leagues, and spectators.

Flank / Lurk – Flanking refers to attacking from the side or behind. Lurking refers to holding back or sneaking to catch opponents off guard from unexpected angles.

Frag / Fragger – “Frag” is slang for a kill; a “fragger” is a player who specializes in getting kills and winning fights.

Fundamentals – Core, foundational skills that apply across games: communication, decision-making, movement, awareness, and mechanics.

GG – Short for “Good Game,” said to show sportsmanship after a cup ends.

GLHF – “Good Luck, Have Fun.” A common phrase said at the start of a match to show good sportsmanship.

GR – “Good Round.” Said to the opposing team after a round ends in good spirit.

Hard clear – Methodically checking every position for enemies as a team pushes forward.

Host – The player or coach responsible for creating and managing the custom game lobby.

IGL (In-Game Leader) – The player who leads team communication and decision-making, calling plays and adapting strategy during the match.

KDR (Kill/Death Ratio) – A performance metric showing how many kills a player gets for every time they die; often used to measure effectiveness.

LFR (Looking For Ringer) – A message signaling that a team needs a substitute for a missing player, either sent in a Discord server or lobby chat.

LFS (Looking For Scrim) – Posted in Discords or chats when a team is trying to find another team to practice against.

Ladder – A ranked system of competition where players or teams are placed based on wins/losses, with the goal of climbing to higher tiers.

Loadout – The equipment, weapons, or abilities a player selects before or during a match, customized to suit their strategy or comfort.

Lobby – A virtual waiting room where players gather before a match starts.

Lobbying – The process of entering or setting up a custom match lobby.

Lock in – The act of committing to a character, role, or strategy at the start of a game, often irreversible after selection.

Lurk / Lurker – A player who takes a flanking or hidden role, often catching enemies off guard.

Macro – Large-scale strategy such as map control, rotations, and overall team plans.

Meta – The current most effective strategies, characters, or playstyles that dominate high-level play, often shifting over time with updates or trends.

Micro – Small individual mechanics like aim, positioning, and movement.

Mindgames – Psychological tactics meant to confuse, bait, or manipulate an opponent into making mistakes or poor decisions.

NA Host – A playful way to tease the lobby host when they make a mistake.

OT (Overtime) – An additional period of play used to break ties in matches, typically with increased pressure and consequences.

One-trick – A player who only plays one specific character or role across games, regardless of team needs or changing meta.

Outplay – Defeating an opponent through smarter decisions, better mechanics, or superior use of tools, even when evenly matched or disadvantaged.

P – Short for “Pause.” Used when a player disconnects or needs a break. Customarily used only between fights unless agreed upon.

P / P10 – “Pause.” Used to request a break during a match. “P10” means a pause will occur at 10 seconds remaining in a prep phase.

Peek / Ego peek / Dry peek – Looking around a corner. “Ego peek” refers to a risky peek made with overconfidence. “Dry peek” means peeking without using utility.

Playbook – A set of practiced strategies, plays, or team routines that players can draw from to execute consistent game plans.

Pocket pick – A character or strategy a player keeps “in their pocket” to use only in specific matchups or moments when it will have the most impact.

Pre-tilt / Tilt / Tilted – Emotional frustration or mental distraction that affects performance. Pre-tilt is when a player is already emotionally affected before a match even begins.

Punish – Exploiting an opponent’s mistake by immediately counterattacking or using a strong ability to gain an advantage.

R/R? – Shorthand for “Ready/Ready?” Used to ask the opposing team if they’re ready to begin the next match.

Radio silence – When a player or team suddenly goes quiet in communication, whether intentionally for focus or due to frustration or poor morale.

Remake – A call to restart a match due to an irreversible issue (e.g., wrong settings or player error).

Reset – Disengaging from a fight or retreating to recover health, regroup, or prepare for another push.

Resources – In-game tools such as health, abilities, cooldowns, or items that can be used to win fights or objectives.

Retake – Regaining control of an area (such as a site) after it has been captured by the enemy.

Ringer – A substitute player filling in when a regular team member is unavailable.

Roll maps – A command requesting the lobby host to quickly switch to a new map without discussion.

Roster – The list of players officially assigned to a team, often divided into starters and subs.

Rotation – Moving around the map or shifting from one area to another, either individually or as a group.

Sandbagging – Intentionally underperforming or playing below one’s actual skill level, often to manipulate matchmaking or surprise opponents later.

Scrim – A scheduled practice match between two teams, often used to test strategies and improve teamwork outside of tournaments.

Set play – A rehearsed or pre-planned strategy executed by a team, typically involving coordinated movements or actions.

Setup – The initial positioning or strategy a team takes before engaging or starting a round.

Shotcalling / Shotcaller – The role of giving in-game direction or making key decisions during matches.

Smurfing – Playing on a secondary account against lower-skilled players to gain an unfair advantage.

Snowball – Gaining an early advantage (like kills, items, or control) that grows over time, making it easier to dominate the rest of the match.

Spacing – Maintaining an optimal distance between oneself and the opponent to safely poke, bait, or react.

Spacing check – A quick maneuver or move to see how the opponent responds to pressure or spacing, revealing weaknesses or habits.

Support – A player role focused on helping teammates through healing, shielding, vision control, or setup, rather than raw damage.

Swaps? – A shorthand question to ask if the other team needs to make substitutions before the next round begins.

TYFS – “Thank you for scrim.” Sportsmanlike phrases used to end a scrim respectfully.

Tilt / Tilted / Pre-tilt / Tilt-proof – Emotional frustration or agitation that negatively affects gameplay. “Tilt-proof” refers to players who remain composed.

Timing – The coordination of actions at precise moments, whether to surprise the enemy, combo abilities, or initiate fights.

Trade – When two players eliminate each other (or deal equal damage) around the same time, effectively exchanging resources or lives.

Ult / Ultimate – The strongest ability in a character’s kit. Often game-changing and used strategically.

Ultimate – A character’s most powerful ability, usually gained through time or performance and used for major plays.

VOD Review – Watching recorded matches to analyze performance and identify areas for improvement.



THE MINDSET CHAPTER

This chapter outlines the core philosophies and practical mantras that define a strong competitive mindset. These principles emphasize the mental, emotional, and behavioral foundations required for high-level performance in esports. Success is not based solely on raw talent; it comes from a disciplined approach to self-improvement, effective teamwork, and the ability to remain resilient in the face of adversity.

What is Tilting?

Tilt can be defined as a mental state of frustration, agitation, or emotional instability that negatively affects a player's performance. It often occurs after a mistake, loss, or perceived unfairness and leads to impulsive decisions, poor communication, and a decline in gameplay. In esports and competitive gaming, recognizing and managing tilt is essential to maintaining consistency, team synergy, and personal growth.

Coach Mindset: Do's and Don'ts

Most teenage players don't respond well to lectures. Your role is not to dictate emotions. It is to create space for ownership, reflection, and growth.

✓ Do This	✗ Avoid This
■ Ask open-ended questions ■ Share personal stories or challenges ■ Tie lessons to in-game experiences ■ Let silence do the heavy lifting ■ Celebrate insights, not just performance	■ Lecturing or moralizing ■ Trying to be "right" ■ Keeping things abstract or vague ■ Forcing answers or rushing conversations ■ Ignoring emotional cues

Why This Works:

Teens don't always connect with adult language around performance. But they do connect with:

- Their identity as players
- Their desire to improve

■ The language of gaming and team dynamics

This is how you plant seeds of a championship mindset without ever saying “mental health” or “emotional regulation.”

Weekly Theme Prompts

Use these questions to guide short weekly check-ins:

Theme	Coach Prompt	Outcome
Tilt Management	“What does it look like when someone on our team tilts? How can we help snap out of it faster?”	Builds emotional awareness and regulation
Ego vs Team	“What’s more important, getting your clip or winning the round?”	Builds team cohesion and shared values
Pro Habits	“What’s one thing you’ve seen pros do that we don’t do yet?”	Encourages intentional improvement

Handling Feedback	“What kind of feedback is easiest or hardest to hear? Why?”	Builds reflection and accountability
Flow State	“When’s the last time the game just clicked for you? What helped you get there?”	Increases awareness of mental performance

Coach Tip: Pick one theme each week and guide the conversation for just a few minutes. Don’t try to fix everything. The goal is to get players thinking and talking.

Mindset & Growth

A competitive mindset starts with how players view failure, learning, and progress. Players must learn that mistakes are part of the journey and improvement is built over time through honest reflection and steady habits. Growth is not about chasing wins. It is about chasing mastery.

“Failure is the foundation of success.”

Losses reveal what needs work.

“If you’re not reviewing mistakes, you’re not improving.”

VOD review is not optional.

“Confidence comes from consistency, not emotion.”

Pros prepare. They don't wing it.

“Let your gameplay speak for you.”

Dominate with discipline, not trash talk.

“Don't chase rank. Chase skill.”

Improvement always wins in the long run.

“Play through your opponent's skill, not down to it.”

Do not get lazy when ahead.

Practice Habits & Playoff Preparation

“If you practice goofing off, you'll get great at goofing off.”

Why it matters:

Playoff nerves amplify habits. Players who took practice seriously will remain calm and composed under pressure.

When it matters:

End-of-season matches, bracket play, and high-stakes moments.

Key reminder:

“Focus up, lock in.”

Training & Preparation

Top-tier players separate themselves by how they prepare, not just how they play. Greatness is built through repetition, intentional routines, and structure. The training process must become a daily habit rooted in purpose and discipline.

“Train like a pro, think like a pro.”

Intentionality builds professionalism.

“Consistent habits lead to consistent results.”

Random practice leads to random outcomes.

“Championships are won in the film room.”

Studying is part of the grind.

“Before ranked: warm up, aim train, lock in.”

Execution starts with preparation.

“Pregame rituals create mental stability.”

Never skip your routine.

“Use ranked to train, not just to climb.”

Autopilot wastes opportunity.

“Write strategies like a test cheat sheet.”

Free up brainpower for high-stress moments.

Leadership & Team Dynamics

Championship teams do not form by accident. They are shaped by the daily behaviors of leaders and role models. Whether a player has the title of IGL or not, every voice has the potential to influence culture. Consistency, clarity, and character define great team environments.

“Act how you want your team to act.”

Your behavior sets the tone.

“Clarity wins.”

Ambiguity leads to mistakes.

“Good vibes only after wins is inconsistency.”

Strong teams stay grounded in all outcomes.

“Win during matches. Critique during reviews.”

Avoid blame in real time.

“Lead with confidence, not control.”

IGLs should uplift, not dominate.

“Respect starts with imitation.”

Model the leaders you admire.

Emotional Regulation

“Hear the info, not the emotion.”

Why it matters:

Frustrated callouts drown out important comms. Calm teams recover faster.

When it matters:

Losing streaks, bad days, or scrims spiraling into frustration.

Key reminder:

“Listen through the noise. Play your game.”

Mental Fortitude

Mental strength is the anchor of every competitive player. When emotions take over, decision-making suffers. Strong competitors train themselves to stay calm, redirect their focus, and treat every match as a learning opportunity, no matter the score.

“Judging teammates is the first sign of tilt.”

Keep your focus internal.

“Emotional noise is a distraction.”

Your performance must remain clear-headed.

“Tilt blocks learning.”

Every match has a lesson.

“Watch your own VOD to reset fast.”

Find it. Fix it. Move on.

Toxicity & Self-Critique

“It’s me and you versus the problem, not me versus you.”

Why it matters:

Blame breaks trust. Focus on what can be controlled: effort, communication, and mindset.

When it matters:

Scrims falling apart, post-loss frustration, and mid-season slumps.

Key reminder:

“Compliment your teammates. Critique yourself.”

Competitive Play Philosophy

Winning is not just about mechanics. It is about mindset, communication, and purpose. High-performing teams enter every round with discipline and clarity, refusing to let emotions, ego, or randomness take control. Success is a system, not a coin flip.

“Great teams are coordinated, not just cracked.”

Synergy beats raw skill.

“Comms bring clarity, not chaos.”

Louder is not better.

“If your mindset breaks, your aim will too.”

Resilience starts mentally.

“Every round is a chance to grow.”

Winning is secondary to improvement.

“Disciplined practice creates validation.”

Do not rely on the scoreboard for confidence.

Playing to Your Standard

“Never play down to your opponent. Play up to your fundamentals.”

Why it matters:

Sloppy play against weaker teams builds bad habits and leads to surprise losses.

When it matters:

Low-pressure scrims, early bracket rounds, or any match where the team feels overconfident.

Key reminder:

“Break the board. Play through them.”

Process Over Outcome

In esports, the final scoreboard tells part of the story, but never the full one. Focusing on the outcome blinds players to the real goal: improving the process. Wins and ranks are side effects of how well players prepare, practice, and perform every day.

“Outcomes are symptoms. Process is the cause.”

Focus on what you can control.

“Your rank reflects your preparation.”

If you don't like your rank, fix your habits.

Lifestyle & Consistency

“Handle life. Handle rounds.”

Why it matters:

School, sleep, stress, and nutrition all affect performance. Chaos off-server becomes chaos in-game.

When it matters:

Busy school weeks, tournament days, or any period of high outside pressure.

Key reminder:

“Consistency is earned off-server. Eat. Drink. Sleep. Then frag.”

Final Thoughts

This mindset chapter is not just a collection of quotes and tips. It is a foundation your players will return to every time things get tough. Revisit these principles often. Use them to shape your culture, reset your team, and build players who thrive not only in-game but in life. Consistency, resilience, and humility will carry your players further than talent alone ever could.

Let's build winners from the inside out.

UNDERSTANDING THE COLLEGIATE SPACE

with  **STAY
PLUGGED IN**

High school esports is only the beginning of a player's competitive and personal development journey. As educators, it is essential to support students in making informed decisions about their future, both as players and as young professionals. Collegiate esports represents the next step for many gamers who wish to continue pursuing their passion, whether through competition, academics, or career pathways in the broader esports industry.

When I personally made the jump into the collegiate space, the process was not as straightforward as it might seem. My parents were already on my case about college during my junior year of high school, but I did not really see the appeal at first. My mom ended up creating a *Stay Plugged In* recruiting page for me, and through that I started connecting with college recruiters. Before long, I had opportunities and offers from more than seventy different programs across the United States. That opened my eyes to the potential of collegiate esports and helped me realize how many doors could open if I took this next step.

After meeting with a recruiter and committing to the University of Missouri, I did not tell my parents or my high school coach. My schedule quickly doubled as I balanced my high school team, a semi-pro team, and coaching for Mizzou. Frustrated with how much time I was putting into Overwatch, my parents took my computer for two weeks until the university's esports director called to explain my situation. Once they understood, they became some of my biggest supporters, even moving me closer to campus my senior year so I could prepare for the collegiate scene.

This section has been designed to equip educators with the knowledge and tools they need to guide students toward the right collegiate program. By understanding the collegiate landscape and the role platforms like *Stay Plugged In*, coaches can help their players connect with recruiters, discover scholarship opportunities, and make choices that align with their long-term goals.

The collegiate esports ecosystem is diverse, with programs of all sizes across the country. Finding the right fit requires awareness of these opportunities and connections with recruiters. Coaches play a central role by helping students develop in-game skills, leadership qualities, and professionalism. Beyond strategy, their guidance prepares players to succeed academically, compete at the next level, and pursue scholarships and career opportunities. – *Gavin Drummond, YGA Founder*

Introduction

My name is Justin Ellis, Director of Education at Stay Plugged In and The Be Elite Foundation, and I have been a part of the esports landscape for over 12 years, with 6 of those being in collegiate and 3 in scholastic, so I have seen both sides of the coin for the collegiate recruiting process. I have served as the Director of Esports at Quinnipiac University and Huntingdon College and now am part of an organization where I help K-12 students discover their post-secondary potential through gaming and esports. To learn more about Stay Plugged In recruitment services or have me speak with you and your students, contact me: justin.ellis@staypluggedin.com.

The pathway from high school to college has always been a big decision for students and families, whether that is deciding on public or private, two-year or four-year, academic major, tuition cost, and more. In the world of esports, this decision becomes even more difficult with the complex nature of the growing industry and the opportunities it presents at the college level and beyond. Collegiate esports has grown rapidly over the years, with hundreds of colleges and universities offering esports teams, clubs, and more to their student population. Many will tell you that collegiate esports is still the “Wild West”: the landscape is not as solidified as traditional collegiate athletics, but the number of options are just as large, making it difficult for a student to determine what is their best fit.

This chapter varies from most of the handbook to highlight a crucial next step for students to consider near the end of their scholastic career: collegiate recruiting and scholarships. For many students in today’s scholastic landscape, coaches or educators are the first adults to notice a student-athlete’s potential, and showcasing that potential often falls on their coach, similar to traditional athletics. These pages will empower you in leading others through the recruitment process, providing guidance and support for the students you are building up with this handbook.

Options in the Collegiate Esports Landscape

When many high school student-athletes imagine their collegiate esports experience, they envision competing on massive stages under flashing lights, streamed to thousands of in-person and virtual viewers. However, there are a variety of esports-specific questions, in addition to the common college questions, coaches, students, and families should be asking as the collegiate esports experience vastly differs from program-to-program, based on a variety of factors. There is no general right or wrong answer, but the stakeholders in the student’s decision should have a preference when talking to programs.

Where does your esports program reside?

Not all programs operate under the same department at a college or university. The most commonly seen departments are:

■ Varsity Esports Program

- Housed under athletics (40% of non-club programs in the U.S. - *Esports Foundry*)
- Are led by an esports director (commonly a full-time staff member)
- Success is usually measured by recruiting numbers and job placement outcomes
- Students must often adhere to athletics guidelines and regulations, making the team a necessary obligation as part of the collegiate experience
- Frequently benefit from an athletics-style budget

■ Non-Varsity Esports Integration Program

- Housed outside of athletics in departments like student-life or under an academic program like engineering or computer science (60% of non-club programs in the U.S. - *Esports Foundry*)
- Are led by an esports director (commonly a full-time staff member, but part-time staff or graduate assistants could also full this role)

- Success is usually measured by recruiting numbers and student engagement on and off-campus
- Typically have less guidelines than a varsity program but still at discrepancy of the department to set guidelines and obligations for student-athletes, making the team a likely necessary obligation as part of the collegiate experience
- Budgets may vary based on department and resource allotment

■ Esports/Gaming Club

- There are more esports/gaming clubs than the first two categories combined - *Esports Foundry*
- Student-led program, similar to a regular club on campus
- Success is driven by community-development and student leadership
- More flexibility in guidelines for student-athletes than the previous options, due to student governing and decision-making, so the student-athlete is not necessarily obligated to continuously be part of the club and all activities
- Typically rely on student life club budget, club dues, fundraising, and donations to maintain an operating budget

What games does your program offer?



*Data from "2023 TRENDS IN COLLEGIATE ESPORTS REPORT" By
Esport Foundry*

There are over 20 collegiate program game offerings available across the landscape, but some are more popular than others. Game options are crucial to make sure a school has a student's primary game preference, but if a student has interest in a secondary title, wants to go with a school with a strong roster that may lead to them not starting their first year, or interest in other options, flexibility through schools with multiple offerings could be a deciding factor.

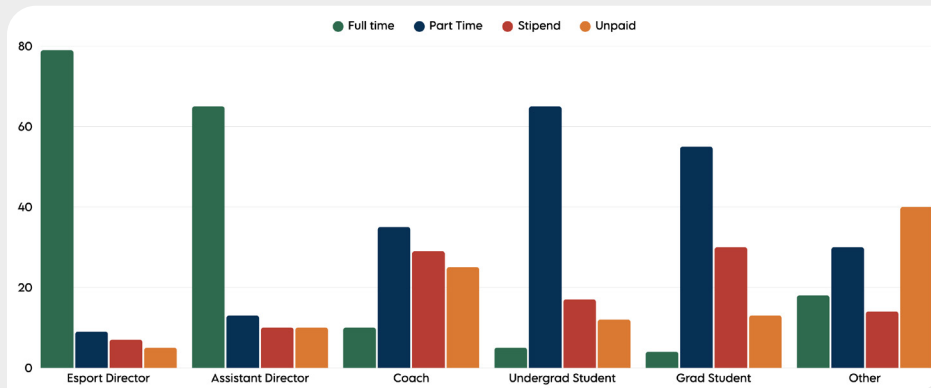
Most schools offer **Rocket League, Valorant, Overwatch, Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, and League of Legends**. The most common games after that include **Call of Duty, Rainbow Six Siege, Fortnite, sports titles, and fighting titles**.

*Important note: some scholastic titles such as **Mario Kart or Splatoon** can be popular for your program or region but have limited collegiate options. Student-athletes in these titles may want to have a second game from the primary titles list above to help strengthen their resume and collegiate esports opportunities.*

Does your program offer scholarships? If so, what kind? How much will my out of pocket be after scholarship and prior to FAFSA?

68% of schools offer scholarships for collegiate esports, according to *Esports Foundry*. With that being said, there are many different types of scholarships that are offered. Some schools offer scholarships that cover a portion of a school's cost with a limited few offering up to a full-ride. Another difference between scholarships is that some schools may allow an esports scholarship to stack on top of academic and other additional scholarships, typically meaning a smaller, individual esports scholarship, while additional schools may also only allow a student to receive the highest scholarship amount offered, but these esports scholarships will commonly be worth more than a stackable one.

What staffing does your program have?



*Data from "2023 TRENDS IN COLLEGIATE ESPORTS REPORT" By
Esport Foundry*

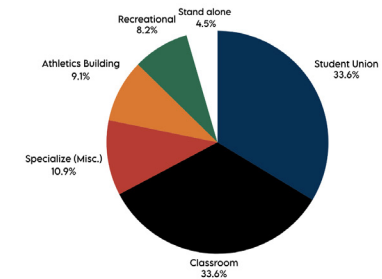
When looking at nonstudent-run programs, staff and their specialties can be important in a student's decision. Unlike traditional athletics, esports programs typically do not have a personal or specialized coach for each individual game title, meaning some teams may get deeper training than others. This means that it is important to know what staff is involved and if they are full-time, part-time, stipend, or unpaid to understand the financial and time investment that is being put into a program.

Most programs now have a **Director of Esports**, someone who oversees the day-to-day operations and coaches some, if not all, teams. **Student workers** are also popular, and an additional opportunity for a

student-athlete if offered, often allowing for additional coaching opportunities for individual teams. There are also a variety of other roles including **assistant director**, **in-person coaches**, **virtual coaches**, and **beyond** to consider.

**Does your
program have a
facility space?
What is in it?**

Via Esport Foundry 2023 Report



Nowadays, most nonstudent-run collegiate esports programs have a facility space or are developing one. The availability of a space and the specifications of it can be crucial to know that a student athlete has somewhere they can develop their skills and bond with their team, away from the distractions of their personal set-up.

Typical good facts to know about a facility space include:

- Location on Campus
- Number and Specifications of PC & Console Stations
- Open Hours of the Facility

Where does the program's budget typically come from? Does it cover student expenses for apparel and travel? What else does the budget help support?

As mentioned earlier, a collegiate esports program's budget can come from a variety of sources, so it is important to know where it comes from and what it covers for the student. If money is an important factor, a student-athlete will want to know if their travel to LANs or jersey will be covered by their program or if that is an additional expense the student will have to take on. Asking these questions also shows how much investment a school is putting into the program.

What leagues does your program compete in?

Unlike traditional athletic programs, collegiate esports is not governed by the NCAA, meaning that there are tons of different leagues for a program to compete in, with most competing in multiple, with there currently being over 20 different leagues.

First off, there are the primary leagues; these leagues are national options that embody multiple game titles, divisions, and additional options.

Note: Leagues are listed in alphabetical order with no preference given.



ECAC is known as the league with the most total game options, focusing on a broad spectrum of primary game titles as well as niche secondary and tertiary titles, allowing students with specific game interests to get engaged with collegiate esports. Each game title holds multiple divisions, split by rank, enabling schools to play against opponents of similar skill level. There are over 300 schools that are a member of ECAC for one or multiple titles, and the finals typically end in an online event.



EGF is targeted exclusively at NCAA Division I schools, aiming to focus on primary game titles and a vision similar to the NCAA. Schools are put on a similar playing field, leading to fierce DI rivalries, leading to a mix of in-person and online championships.



NACE is known for holding a formal, high-level varsity league, with an emphasis on formalized esports programs that have school-backing, leading to heavily organized teams and competition. In recent months, NACE has added additional club program options and self-select leagues, along with divisions already used, allowing schools to have ultimate flexibility in-terms of who they compete with, and finals for primary game

titles are often LAN events for the highest level divisions and conferences..



NECC currently has the most member schools, offering a large number of divisions, conference competitions, a cumulative academic school-year playoff system, and more. This league focuses on primary game titles and has typically been the most

affordable over the years and continues to strengthen with additional one-off events, regional conferences for local competition match-ups, and an in-person finals for their top ranking schools.



PCL is newer to the scene, recently rebranding from PlayFly Collegiate League to PlayVS Collegiate League, which parted from NACE in recent years. With little known about the possible changes this league may have under

new ownership, many student-athletes can expect a similar experience to their high school experience with PlayVS being the leading platform for scholastic esports. Plans are currently in-place for the league to run in-person championships for their titles.

NJCCA offers an additional national league, exclusive for two-year or trade schools. Riot Games also offers national leagues for Valorant and League of Legends called CVAL and CLOL, respectively.

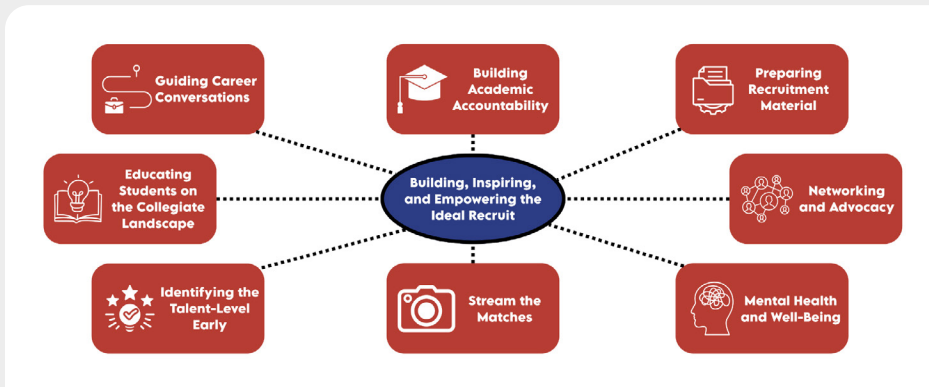
Regional or secondary leagues are also an important part of the collegiate landscape, with some NCAA Division I conferences or collegiate groupings investing into their own conferences. Some of these include Big Esports, Big Sky, ECC, ESC, Great Lakes, HBCU Esports, MAAC, MAEC, MEAC, Midwest, Mountain West, Peach Belt, and more. Participating in smaller leagues can often lead to more LAN opportunities and school rivalries.

Some conferences also focus on individual game titles such as CCA, CCL, Collegiate R6, and more, allowing for a more personalized and high-level experience for select games.

Overall, there are a lot of leagues for a school to choose from, and the choice is up to the student, coach, and family as to what would be the preferred competition format for the student-athlete's collegiate career.

The conversation between a student-athlete's stakeholders and a college and their staff should not be limited to these questions, but these serve as strong starting points for the student-athlete and their trusted advisors to consider before talking to a school and seeing how the college or university responds to these questions.

Building, Inspiring, and Empowering the Ideal Recruit



Now that you have some understanding of the background and options within the collegiate esports landscape, the time has come to dive into what your responsibilities are as a leader for these student-athletes and how you can impact their college-picking process. Below are just some of the ways you can enhance your student-athlete's recruiting process:

- 1. Guiding Career Conversations:** Esports is meant to be an add-on to a student's college experience, not the whole experience. College is not a consistent pathway to professional esports, similar to traditional college athletics, and arguably, even less esports student-athletes go pro than traditional

student-athletes. Conversations with students to set expectations and reasonable goals for what collegiate esports can do for them is crucial to making sure they can make an informed decision for their future. Whether their career ends up being in esports or not, their experience can help shape them as an individual and support their search for a career, regardless of what the field may be.

2. Educating Students on the Collegiate Landscape:

As taught in the previous section, there are a lot of differences between scholastic and collegiate but also individual collegiate programs as well. Informing students on these differences and analyzing the best fit for each student-athlete can be an essential part of helping them develop critical thinking about their future desires with esports.

- 3. Identifying the Talent-Level Early:** Teachers and coaches are often the first to notice when a student demonstrates exceptional skills that differentiate from their average student. These talents may be in areas such as rank or in-game skill, but intangibles, that a coach can also train, are just as valuable such as communication, leadership, composure, time management, and coachability.

Identifying the talent-level of students who may not be as skilled is also just as important. Even if your student is a bronze Valorant player or just

learned Super Smash Bros. Ultimate this year, some colleges may solely consider a student based on their intangibles or to fill out a roster spot.

Additionally, students with other talents may also be of interest to a collegiate esports program such as skills in shoutcasting, social media, team management, and more! These skills can be built on by building Twitch, Youtube, and social media channels for your team and enrolling students to upload and manage these networks.

4. Building Academic Accountability: Academic success is essential to a successful collegiate esports recruitment process, similar to the college decision process in-general. A strong esports resume will not lead to a student-athlete being accepted to a school, if a student has a struggling GPA, and esports programs often have their own playtime sanctions, depending on student grades and attendance. Coaches can help enforce strong academic and studying outcomes through integrating study hours, grade checks, or mentorship into their programs.

5. Stream the Matches: A must have for a semi-established program (running for over a year) is a stream set-up. Having the ability to stream will allow students to send their matches to collegiate scouts and share with family and friends, enhancing the experience and outcomes for students.

6. Preparing Recruitment Material: Coaches and students can collaborate on a set of information that can highlight a student's talents, successes, and ambitions. College recruiters, esports directors, and recruiting platforms, like Stay Plugged In, often ask for information including: name, gamertag, preferred game titles, graduating class, location, GPA, field of study of interest, accomplishments, background or a personal statement, developing social media platforms, and highlight reels that can be cropped together from school matches or a student-athlete's practice into one video, all before even having a meeting with the student.

Sample Stay Plugged In Student Profile

The image shows a sample student profile on the Stay Plugged In platform. The profile is for a student named Kyle Taylor, gamertag TAYLSSPIN1, from Charlotte, North Carolina. It includes a bio section, academic interests (Product Development, Computer Science, Programming), schools of interest (UNC Chapel Hill, Shenandoah University, NC State), and game-specific stats for Rocket League (Rank SSL, Role 2ND MAN). The GPA is 4.0 and the class year is 2025.

Section	Details
Profile Header	TAYLSSPIN1 KYLE TAYLOR Charlotte, North Carolina
Academic Interests	Product Development Computer Science Programming
Schools of Interest	UNC Chapel Hill Shenandoah University NC State
Primary Game	ROCKET LEAGUE
Rank	SSL
Role	2ND MAN
GPA	4.0
Class of	2025

Having this information allows for a college staff member or recruiting platform to quickly view your profile and

determine if a student-athlete is a good fit or not for a particular college or university. “What is on paper” is not the final decider, but for many, this information is the first impression.

7. Networking and Advocacy: Oftentimes, student-athletes need an additional push and assist to get out of their shell and market themselves. The duty of a coach is to help them break out of their shell. Using recruiting platform resources or school websites, coaches can find the contact information for colleges and esports directors and ask them to come speak in-person or virtually to the team. These meet-and-greets are a great starting point for students to make an introduction and learn more about what is out there in the collegiate landscape, while learning how to contact schools directly about opportunities. Additionally, there are many collegiate directors who would be open to scrimmaging and practicing with a scholastic team, allowing students additional exposure. Scholastic student-athletes can also compete in collegiate combines and online tournaments to further demonstrate their capabilities. Finally, exposing students through college visits is a great way to help them network. With parent work schedules, the biggest challenge that stops a student from committing to a school is their ability to visit

campus. If your school allows you to schedule college trips, students can see what their possible integration into the college experience could look like from an esports and personal perspective.

8. Mental Health & Well-Being: The pressure of competition, especially when hand-in-hand with the recruiting process, can often cause students to become burnt out; this feeling can become even more dangerous in the collegiate landscape, where students may be required to play the game they love more often and at a mandatory level, leading to possible disdain for something that would usually be an escape or relief from day-to-day stressors. Coaches can work on proactive measures to avoid burnout by prioritizing wellness and teaching healthy food and work-life balance skills. To counter burnout as a reactive measure, a coach must notice changes in a student like outbursts, arriving late to practices, limited improvement, or lack of communication. These duties are all essential for a coach to build a comprehensive program with end goals for students. Most coaches work hard to make the “in the moment” experience enjoyable for their students, oftentimes succeeding, but the responsibility of coaches is to help their students have positive outcomes that carry over after their time in high school ends. Setting these goals and expectations early will set-up students for long-term success.

THE RECRUITING PROCESS



For many esports student-athletes, being recruited can seem like a far away fantasy, but despite the lack of standardization in collegiate esports, there is still a pretty consistent timeline on how the recruiting process unfolds to be able to give student-athletes deadlines that will expand their opportunities.

Sophomore/Junior Year is where student-athletes need to start building up their resume or recruitment portfolio, keeping in mind big wins, game stats (screenshot game stats and put in a spreadsheet or document later), additional clubs, organizations, and activities, goals in esports, and researching programs that match esports and overall collegiate goals such as major, campus culture, location, competition level, and scholarship

options. At the end of junior year, make sure the student gets a copy of their transcript before the school closes for the summer; this allows them to begin sending out early college applications, as some schools begin the process as early as June.

Note: Unlike NCAA athletics, esports directors can reach out and begin recruiting students earlier than the summer before their senior year, meaning some students may be contacted during this time period as well.

Summer Before Senior Year is a great time to begin trying to contact colleges and universities of interest. First, each student-athlete needs to plan an initial message that describes who they are and what their goals are. Students should include items in their resume or recruitment portfolio mentioned earlier: name, gamertag, preferred game titles, graduating class, location, GPA, field of study of interest, accomplishments, background or a personal statement, developing social media platforms, and highlight reels.

Sample Email Graphic:

Subject: Prospective Esports Student-Athlete – [Game Title], Class of [Grad...]

Recipients

Subject: Prospective Esports Student-Athlete – [Game Title], Class of [Graduation Year]

Dear Coach [Last Name],

My name is [Student Name], and I am currently a [Grade Level, e.g., senior] at [High School Name] in [City, State]. I am reaching out because I am very interested in the esports program at [College/University Name] and would like to learn more about potential opportunities to join your team.

I specialize in [Game Title/Role, e.g., Overwatch – Support Player] and currently compete with [High School Team/Club Name]. Some of my recent highlights include:

- Current Rank: [e.g., Grandmaster 4200 SR / Immortal 2 / Champion 3]
- Average [Stat Example: KDA, Damage, Healing, Win Rate] over last season
- Tournament Results: [e.g., PlayVS Regional Finalist, State High School Esports League Champions]

Beyond gameplay, I am committed to my academics and maintain a [GPA]. I plan to pursue a degree in [Intended Major] and am looking for a program where I can balance both my education and my passion for esports.

I have attached my highlight reel, transcripts, and a short player resume for your review. Please let me know if there are additional steps I should take in order to be considered for recruitment. I would also be happy to schedule a time to meet or scrimmage with your team.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you and hopefully learning more about the esports program at [College/University Name].

Sincerely,
[Full Name]
[Email Address] | [Phone Number]
[Discord ID] | [Twitch/YouTube Link if applicable]

Send

Once the initial message has been created, the student can send it to programs of interest. To find a school's esports program's contact information, check school websites by searching "(insert college/university here) esports program" or join a recruiting platform like Stay Plugged In, where information is already centralized. Most schools begin their recruiting process for the following school year in the fall, but the summer is when esports directors are typically the least busy, since they are out of season; this means reaching out to them and having the conversation early will allow you to stand out more and get a head start on the recruitment process.

Sample Stay Plugged In College Profile


MIZZOU ESPORTS
 Columbia, Missouri
 @cpgraham5 esports@missouri.edu 5738822046

IN STATE TUITION
\$24,092.00
 OUT OF STATE TUITION
\$42,698.00

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

OUR ESPORTS TITLES
 Rocket League
 League of Legends
 Valorant
 Overwatch
 Super Smash Bros Ultimate

BIOGRAPHY
 The University of Missouri's esports program launched in August 2019 and supports varsity rosters for Rocket League, Overwatch, League of Legends, Valorant, and Super Smash Brothers Ultimate. Our teams practice and compete in the 5,000-square-foot MSI Training Facility on campus, one of the largest university gaming facilities in the nation. Each starting player will receive a scholarship, an apparel package, dedicated coaching and social media promotion. The main esports scholarship is the dorm room scholarship, which is valued at over \$9,000.

Prior to a student meeting with these schools, they would benefit from performing mock interviews with their coach. Typically, programs will have at least two calls with a recruit: an introductory interview and then a post-acceptance follow-up. The first interview is to get to know more about the recruit and the likelihood they

could be accepted to the school. Scholastic coaches and families can join in on these calls to help students make an informed decision, but the student and esports staff member should lead the conversation until the end. Common questions asked by the esports staff member include:

- What are you looking for in a collegiate esports program?
- What are you hoping to get out of your college experience?
- What got you interested in esports?
- What are your games of interest?
- What is your rank and accomplishments?
- What do you know about our school?
- What has you interested in our school?
- What major are you interested in and why?
- What is your GPA?

After these questions, the esports staff member will usually dive deeper into their program, talking about the facility space, scholarship opportunities, game choices, student population, campus life, and more. Students and the student's support system should be taking diligent notes during this time and considering additional questions that need to be answered as there

is usually time at the end to ask these. Before ending the call, make sure to attain the next steps for applying to the college or university. If interested, a student should apply for regular decision as soon as possible (early action and early decision are also options to consider based on research and remember that the student will need a copy of their transcript), as this will allow their application and interest to stand out and usually offers more scholarship opportunities as many esports programs have a scholarship budget that can disappear quickly, depending on the school's popularity.

Senior Year, the acceptance process can take varying amounts of time and some applications will likely still need to be completed, based on the school, but after the student is hopefully accepted: congratulations! This student is one step closer to starting their collegiate career. An esports staff member will typically try to get a student on a second call after being accepted, primarily to gauge a student's current interest, the student's FAFSA status (if open), other college offers the student may be pursuing (which they never have to give), and plan a tour to campus. Students should consider touring after they have heard back from the majority of programs, considering which ones best fit their financial, academic, and esports desires as visiting all campuses may not be practical. These tours will help a student see how they fit in with both the campus culture and the esports program on campus, helping students narrow down to their final choice.

Note: If a student is ever denied or waitlisted by a program, a coach can always remind the student that this is a common barrier. The process would be much easier if a student knew they were going to get accepted everywhere. For a school not to accept a student, they likely know that the college or university is not the best opportunity for them, so the student should be glad that they avoided a possible wrong fit and that there are plenty of options available.

Spring of Senior Year, the student will need to make their final decision. The majority of students will finalize their college choice in March or April, roughly right after their spring break, but esports programs appreciate when a student can make an earlier decision to help with roster management and planning for the following season, so if a student and family know for sure what they want in January or February, accepting a spot at a school earlier in the year can be beneficial so that an esports director can build around that student attending. Some programs may even start inviting the student to scrimmages to help build synergy with their future teammates!

Once a student makes a decision, the scholastic coach should coordinate with the collegiate esports director on doing a signing day, similar to traditional athletics. Signing day serves as a moment to celebrate a student's accomplishments in high school, where friends, family, teammates, administrators, and the student's future college or university can acknowledge the student's steps toward an exciting collegiate experience. Coaches

should also consider inviting local news media outlets and district leaders, as showing the scholastic to collegiate esports pipeline to stakeholders could yield additional interest and even new funds for the high school's esports program.

Hopefully when mapped out, the recruiting process seems much more feasible over the course of a student's scholastic career. With a firm plan on how to handle this important time in a student's life, the execution can be smooth, methodical and enjoyable, rather than tense, rushed and stressful.

Family Engagement

Parents and guardians are often the most influential people in the final decision during the recruitment process, even being the people making the final decision, depending on the family dynamic. While some are enthusiastic supporters, many are still unaware of the potential outcomes or even doubtful of the benefits of scholastic esports. A high school teacher or coach is responsible for showing family members why esports is positive in both the short and long term for a student's growth and development, especially when it comes to the collegiate pipeline.

Family-Coach Partnerships will be the best place to start with any parent or guardian. Early on info sessions to meet with you and consistent family-coach

conferences, similar to a regular teacher and classroom, can help keep everyone on the same page, especially if a family member has a concern about their student-athlete; this serves as a great opportunity to inform the family members of upcoming events and opportunities as the season goes on. As the student-athlete ages, these can become more frequent and focus on recruitment materials, colleges, and scholarships so that everyone is engaged in the recruitment process.

Educating families on the esports landscape is an essential part of the process. Consider hosting open houses or parent nights (in-person or virtual) to be able to teach families about the scholastic and collegiate esports landscape as well as what you are teaching the students, possibly even using sections of this handbook to do so or even bringing in collegiate esports directors you are interacting with! Informing families of how their student's game works will also allow them to be more engaged in streams and their student's experience, another great use of this handbook or explanations you can find on websites like Youtube.

Inviting families to be part of the journey can be a great way to get family members involved as your program progresses through volunteering to bring snacks for a gameday, watching the match in-person, joining in on esports program college tours or info sessions with schools, attending senior signing days, or even giving the students "training" to do with their family members at home.

Remember, family involvement is going to be what keeps your program alive and well. If family members are not an active part of the student-athlete's experience, they may have a sudden change of heart or issues with a student's gaming habits at home, likely leading to punishments that may impact not just the student, but the team as a whole, so being able to have open communication with parents and guardians will allow for a collaborative effort toward the ultimate goal that everyone aligns with: a successful student.

Case Studies & Success Stories

Case Study #1: Dylan Garrett - From High School Esports to Southern Miss Madden

<https://youtu.be/wPlbKfReMuY?si=mP3wOMGyTjprzshT>

Dylan Garrett's journey into collegiate esports began in middle school, sparked by casual gaming and conversations with his brother and a high school esports coach. By high school, he joined the Madden esports team, combining discipline, strong academics, and a love for football to excel both in-game and as a student-athlete, before joining Stay Plugged In.

Key factors in his recruitment included:

Self-Motivation and Discipline: Dylan prioritized schoolwork, learned the game deeply, and consistently improved his gameplay, while maintaining strong academic performance. “I made sure my schoolwork was done first because I’m a student-athlete, not an athletic student,” he explained.

Professional Networking and Outreach: He utilized recruitment platforms like Stay Plugged In to research schools, contact coaches, and respond to inquiries, taking an active role in his recruitment.

Engagement and Leadership: Beyond competition, Dylan helped teammates, assisted with streaming and production tasks, earning awards for sportsmanship and outstanding performance. “Sometimes I’d stay after just to support other teams because I felt like they needed it,” he said.

Research and Decision-Making: He carefully evaluated colleges, programs, and coaching staff, ultimately committing to the University of Southern Mississippi, after connecting with the esports coordinator, players, and community.

Support system: His parents and high school coaches provided guidance and encouragement while allowing Dylan to advocate for himself throughout the process.

Dylan’s story illustrates how combining gaming talent, academic responsibility, leadership, and proactive communication can successfully lead to a collegiate esports opportunity. It also highlights the critical roles of teachers, coaches, and family in supporting a student-athlete’s journey.

Case Study #2: Gabriel Hughes – Esports Leader to Huntingdon College Collegiate Caster

<https://youtu.be/f-NTBmRPQYY?si=7R2-b3VIDgPpwAFq>

Gabriel Hughes’ path in esports began with casual gaming on a PS3, playing Lego titles during childhood. His competitive journey took off with Overwatch, where he first explored casting by commentating on friends’ gameplay for fun. This playful start would later shape his career aspirations.

Gabriel joined Orange Lutheran High School’s esports program as a freshman when it was still a club. He stayed through its transition to an official academic program, competing on the Overwatch team that won the school’s first Overwatch League Championship in 2022. Over the years, he expanded his skills into Valorant and casting, becoming a versatile player and leader.

Key factors in his development included:

Adaptability and Versatility: Gabriel plays multiple roles across games, from support to tank in Overwatch, and casts college-level matches, demonstrating flexibility and leadership. “It’s very stressful, especially when you’re putting 110% into every single day of practice and games,” he reflected.

Commitment and Leadership: As the only remaining member from the original club, he embodied dedication and camaraderie, mentoring teammates and taking on responsibilities beyond gameplay.

Networking and Career Foresight: Gabriel leveraged Stay Plugged In (SPIN) to connect with Huntingdon College, quickly securing a \$14,000 scholarship for casting. “I saw your SPIN profile, and I saw that you’re interested in casting... that night I might as well apply and by Monday I was accepted,” he shared.

Skill Development Beyond Gaming: Working with coaches and participating in multiple esports titles helped Gabriel develop communication, strategic thinking, and resilience—skills applicable to his intended major in sports business.

Community and Coaching Support: Coaches like Spencer King emphasized the value of commitment, mentorship, and real-world esports experience, helping

students like Gabriel navigate both high school and collegiate opportunities. “Gabe is literally our poster child for esports... he’s earned that spot not only with his leadership skills, but with the heart that he has for his teammates,” Coach King said.

Gabriel’s journey illustrates that esports success is built not only on talent but also discipline, adaptability, and proactive networking. His experience underscores how scholastic programs can serve as springboards for diverse esports careers, from professional competition to casting and management.

Case Study #3: Kaer – From Casual Gamer to Collegiate Rocket League Competitor

<https://youtu.be/80u-HSQH8QE?si=c3jAkTazgi-1fokS>

Kaer’s journey in esports began casually during his sophomore year of high school, playing Rocket League for fun. At the time, his focus was on academics and football, with gaming being a recreational hobby. He reached diamond rank in Rocket League without committing to serious training, viewing it primarily as a pastime. Kaer’s entry into competitive esports began when his high school esports coach introduced him to Stay Plugged In (SPIN), a collegiate esports recruiting platform. Initially skeptical about the breadth of opportunities available in collegiate esports, Kaer quickly realized the platform opened doors he hadn’t considered. “I knew to some

extent, but not to this entire level... I didn't think it actually had so many opportunities to help players in need."

After joining SPIN in early December of his junior year, Kaer connected with a recruiter who immediately linked him to multiple colleges. He received several offers and ultimately chose the school based on a sense of camaraderie and team chemistry. Once committed to Illinois College, Kaer intensified his Rocket League training. His Diamond-level skills rapidly progressed to Grand Champion, driven by a combination of personal dedication and the guidance of his esports coach. Kaer noted that his support system was limited early on, relying mainly on one or two friends who shared his gaming interests. Despite this, he navigated the recruiting process with the help of SPIN's recruiting specialists. "Suave [the recruiter] definitely steps up to the plate and knows he's connected with so many colleges... being able to utilize that was huge."

Kaer also participated in the Esports State Federation for Illinois, where his team improved from top three in sectionals to top ten at state over successive seasons. This experience not only enhanced his gameplay but strengthened his teamwork and communication skills. Beyond competitive play, Kaer engaged with the Twitch community, forming connections with other players and content creators. These interactions inspired him to pursue collegiate esports seriously and helped him develop a network that would support his future career

in the space. Kaer participated in SPIN's Carry to College, an online recruiting showcase, where he balanced enjoyment with mentorship, supporting teammates while sharing his experience navigating the recruiting process. "Carry to College allows players to shine in their own ways... whether it's threes or ones, it gives them a platform to showcase what they can do."

Key factors in his development included:

Persistence and Growth: Kaer transformed from a casual player into a Grand Champion and collegiate competitor through focused practice and consistent engagement.

Leveraging Opportunities: Platforms like SPIN can connect aspiring athletes to multiple recruiting opportunities.

Community Matters: Coaching, peer support, and online connections were pivotal in Kaer's development, both on and off the field.

Enjoy the Process: Kaer emphasizes fun and collaboration as much as competition, creating a holistic esports experience.

Kaer's story demonstrates the true outcomes a student can see from the recruitment process, even if a student is not expecting it, and his skills grew as if someone had hit a switch. As soon as he realized there was a team waiting

for him at the collegiate level and received additional support from an esports director, his skills blossomed into the player he is now.

Resources & Tools

Stay Plugged In - staypluggedin.com

A recruitment-focused platform and tournament host, specializing in connecting high school players to collegiate coaches through showcases and scrimmages.

TrackerGG - [Tracker.gg](https://tracker.gg)

A stat tracker for many popular game titles, allowing student-athletes to easily share an up-to-date ranking.

Esport Foundry - esportfoundry.com

An analytics hub offering performance reports, VOD tools, and training modules for student-athletes. Esport Foundry also provides free statistical data on the high school and collegiate esports scene to support recruitment and team development.

Conclusion

Success in esports recruiting is about far more than in-game skill. While talent and dedication are important, the

guidance of teachers, coaches, and mentors can make the difference between a promising player remaining unnoticed and one finding the right collegiate fit.

Coaches, whether in esports or traditional athletics, must be able to offer technical insight, strategic direction, encouragement, and information about the complex recruiting landscape. Their role in shaping character, building confidence, and helping students navigate opportunities cannot be overstated.

Esports recruiting, like traditional sports, requires a balance of passion, perseverance, and preparation, but it also intersects with education and personal growth. The students who thrive are those who understand that their journey is not just about winning games or achieving high ranks; it's about leveraging their abilities to access educational opportunities, developing leadership and teamwork skills, and preparing for life beyond the screen. Colleges are looking for players who demonstrate maturity, resilience, and the capacity to balance academics and competitive play, qualities that mentors help cultivate.

Ultimately, the story of this chapter emphasizes the importance of empowering students to take ownership of their esports journey. Platforms like StayPluggedIn provide the tools, connections, and visibility, but it is the students themselves who must engage, practice, communicate with coaches, and make thoughtful decisions about their

future. At the same time, the presence of supportive mentors ensures that students are not navigating this path alone. By combining student initiative with teacher, family, and coach guidance, aspiring collegiate esports athletes can transform their passion into a tangible opportunity, earning scholarships, joining competitive programs, and gaining life skills that extend far beyond the game.

Esports recruiting is a holistic endeavor. It is about education, character, opportunity, and growth. By providing students with guidance, encouragement, and a structured path forward, we empower them to pursue their goals confidently, while fostering the personal and academic development that will benefit them for years to come. It is a partnership: students take charge of their journey, mentors provide the scaffolding, and together, they create a roadmap for success both on and off the digital field. To learn more, email justin.ellis@staypluggedin.com.

Discovering Funding and Grants Toward STEAM and CTE Labs & Programs for Students Through Gaming



Our mission is to ignite a passion for STEAM by providing access to cutting-edge technologies and educational opportunities. We discover funding opportunities for scholastic esports programs and beyond, allowing for hard and soft skill development for a successful career.

To begin discovering funding opportunities for your program, consider the following:

- 1. Discuss with school stakeholders** (principal, after-school program leads, district leaders, etc.) about if any school budget is available. Based on what you are looking for, they may be able to find budget for current or future years, especially if you can relate the need to STEM outcomes and classroom use cases.
- 2. School and District Grants** are often available for extracurricular programs that promote STEM, teamwork, or digital literacy. Esports programs often align with these priorities, especially when emphasizing strategy,

collaboration, and technology skills. Researching local and state education departments' grant opportunities, preparing a proposal, and highlighting the educational benefits of esports are a great way to generate funds.

3. Local Businesses, Corporate Grants, and Industry Sponsorship are all areas to

explore. Sponsorships can range from donating gaming peripherals and food to providing financial support for tournament travel or a whole space. Companies like HP, Intel, or Razer have previously supported esports or STEM programs in schools. Coaches can approach these businesses with a clear proposal outlining visibility opportunities, such as branding on jerseys, social media and stream shoutouts, or banners at competitions.

4. Community Funding is the most common and immediately enactable activity for small fundraising efforts, including options such as crowdfunding and booster clubs to promote fundraisers such as jersey sales with a free booster store through companies like emergeapparel.gg, hosting community events with a small entry fee, collaborating with colleges and universities on potential partnerships, events, or fundraising campaigns, or even reaching out to your school's alumni network.

Get your program's funding goals started today at <https://beelitefoundation.org/> or email us at averi.walker@beelitefoundation.org.



YOUTH GAMING
ASSOCIATION

YGA COACHES GUIDEBOOK:

MARIOKART
DELUXE 

Introduction

My name is Hallie Elder. I've been a competitive Mario Kart 8 Deluxe player for the past two years, consistently qualifying for both 1v1 and 4v4 Nationals every season. I am proud to have placed 3rd nationally in both formats. Beyond playing, I've served as the captain of my college Esports team for three seasons and coached for two. Through these roles, I've grown not just as a competitor, but as a teammate, leader, and mentor. I am excited to share everything I have learned from my experience as a player, a team member, a leader, and a coach.

Whether you are new to Mario Kart 8 Deluxe or aiming to compete at a higher level, this guidebook offers a clear path to improving your game through weekly skills development. Foundational skills are accumulated Week by Week, allowing teams to adapt their playstyles in a 7-day period. However, these skills build off of each other, so assess what topics your team should spend more coverage on before moving on to the next week.

The lessons learned in playing the game extend far beyond the virtual world, shaping how players think, communicate, and lead in real life. It is also important to remember why our students play and why we became coaches: **to have fun.**

A positive attitude and a willingness to show up, try, and support each other goes farther than any shortcut found in-game. In fact, we learn the most by consistently showing up for ourselves and others. Esports coaches have the ability to confer communication skills, responsibility, and leadership skills that will stay with their players for a lifetime. This guidebook will cover the greatest techniques of the game, but never forget to listen to your team as well; afterall, players having amazing ideas is why this guidebook exists.

Software & Hardware

Suggested tools for managing teams, practices, and competitions.

Hardware

- Nintendo Switch and a copy of Mario Kart 8 Deluxe (per player)
- Monitor (per player)
- Nintendo Switch compatible controller, Pro Controller preferred (per player)
- Nintendo Switch Online Membership (per player)
- USB to Ethernet adapter for a more stable connection (per player)
- Capture Card (per player)

Software

<https://www.mariokartcentral.com/mkc/>

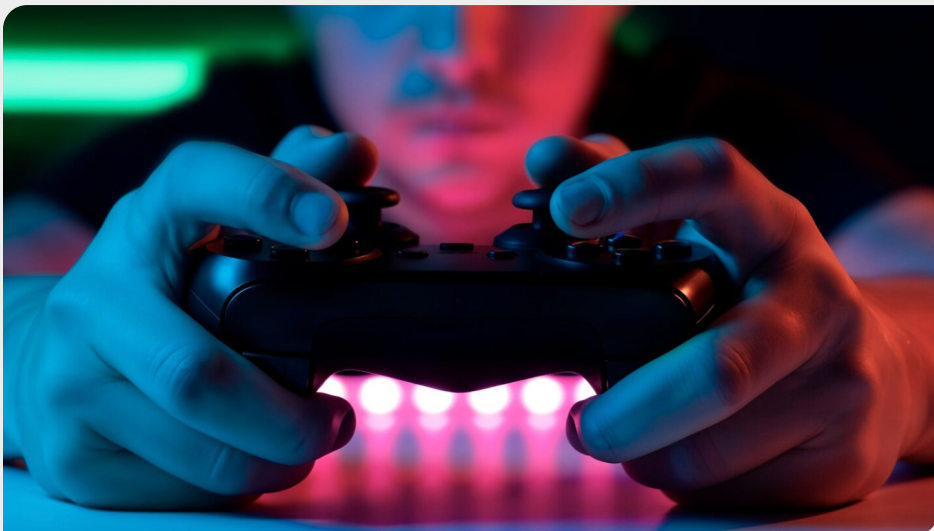
- Register your players and form your team to compete in tournaments. Tournaments are available for solo 1v1s and team plays 2v2s, 3v3s, 4v4s, and 6v6s.

<https://discord.com/>

- Connect with other players and host scrimmages (practice matches) with other teams.

Cross Platform Play

Mario Kart 8 Deluxe is not Cross Platform compatible and must be played on the Nintendo Switch.



Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Practice

An ideal practice consists of 4 key points structured into a 2 hour time frame.

Education:

- 15 min lesson
- Learn unit technique(s)
- Implementation

Linework:

- 30 min
- World Record Ghost Time Trials
- 2-3 new cups each week
- Focus on shortcuts

Scrim:

- 1 hour
- 4v4 Team
- Scrim within own team or utilize MKCentral Discord to schedule with another team

VOD Review:

- 15 min

- Review a player's footage
- Tailor concepts for player improvement

A practice day can include all 4 but does not need to.

How to Set Up

Below is a step-by-step guide to properly procure and host a Mario Kart 8 Deluxe scrim for your program:

1. Go to Online Play
2. Select 'Friends'
3. Create Room
4. Share Room ID with other team
5. Select 'OK' and adjust room settings as followed:
6. Select 150cc Race
7. Select Team Game
8. Select Normal Items
9. Select No COM
10. Select All Vehicles
11. Select 4 Races
12. Start the race when both teams say ready or "R"
13. Repeat Steps 6-12 for each cup

Helpful Resources

<https://www.mariokartcentral.com/mkc/>

Mario Kart Glossary

- **Anchor** – A player who is responsible for holding a position alone, often defending or securing space while others rotate or attack.
- **Backspam** – Dropping an item like a banana or shell behind your kart to defend or disrupt racers behind you.
- **Blue shell dodge** – Using an item like a mushroom or timing tricks to avoid the Blue Shell that targets first place.
- **Coin management** – Strategically collecting and maintaining coins during a race to reach top speed.
- **Draft boost** – Gaining a small speed burst by staying directly behind another racer.
- **Drifting** – A technique where players slide around corners to maintain speed and build mini-turbos.
- **Front-run** – Staying in first place for most of the race while defending your lead.
- **Item roulette** – The spinning item box that randomly gives you an item based on your position in the race.
- **Lines** – The optimal path around a race track's corners and boosts for the fastest lap times.

- **Mini-turbo** – A burst of speed activated by holding a drift long enough.
- **Sandbag** – Intentionally staying in lower positions early in the race to get stronger items later.
- **Sandbagging** – Intentionally staying in lower positions during early laps to obtain stronger items, then surging ahead later.

Player Improvement Roadmap

Players are expected to continue playing the game and practicing outside of team practices. Players should work on their lines by utilizing the World Record Ghost Time Trials, prioritizing learning 2-3 cups a week(8-12 tracks). These time trials include learning the fastest route for each track, shortcuts, and boosts. Players should also utilize online lobbies to practice their item game and strategy. I recommend players implement both time trials and online lobbies when practicing individually, starting with World Record Ghost Time Trials and ending with online lobbies. Roles and specific item play can also be practiced in online lobbies, such as bagging or practicing green shell snipes. Schedule bi-weekly meetings with your players to support them in achieving their goals. During these sessions, focus on identifying areas for improvement and provide actionable feedback they can apply in their individual practice.

Practice Frequency

Practices should last a minimum of 2 hours and occur 2-3 times a week for best results. On non-team play days, players should dedicate 30-60 minutes each day for individual practice to maintain consistency and reinforce skills development. For team practice, I recommend the following structure: 60% dedicated to scrims, 20% dedicated to online lobbies for situational flexibility and adaptation, and 20% to VOD review. VOD sessions should include analysis of professional time trials, tournaments, or individual player performance to reinforce strategic learning and game sense. When your team is working on learning shortcuts, incorporate VOD review sessions focused on professional gameplay. Have players study the execution of these shortcuts and then practice them by racing against the ghost data of professional players. When your team is learning their roles, prioritize scrims to develop coordination, communication, and in game responsibilities. When your team is working on mastering a new item or play technique, encourage players to join online lobbies to test and refine it in live scenarios with varied components.

Reviewing Tape

Reviewing our own gameplay footage is essential for deepening our understanding of both the game and our individual performance. During tournaments, players often make split second decisions that may feel right at

the time. However, by revisiting those moments, players can gain valuable perspective and recognise alternative strategies or improvements they may have missed in real time. Reviewing a player's gameplay style allows both players and coaches to assess and adapt techniques tailored to the individual's needs, as revealed in the footage. Additionally, studying professional gameplay enables players to expand their knowledge and creativity. By observing how pros implement advanced strategies and techniques, players can preview concepts they will be learning in the coming weeks, accelerating both understanding and execution. Keep VOD reviews sessions under 50 minutes to maintain focus and engagement. Limit each session to a maximum of three key topics to ensure depth of discussion and actionable takeaways.



Fundamental Roadmap

Week 0: Tryouts

Tryouts involve both individual and team based assessments to evaluate each player's skills. Individual players enter a VS Race, allowing coaches to observe individual play styles, decision making, and scoring abilities. After individual assessment, players should be divided into teams for a scrim allowing coaches to evaluate teamwork, communication, support roles, and overall synergy within a team environment. Coaches will use these insights to assign players to balanced teams and determine optimal roles based on strengths in solo and cooperative play. In assessing a player, key components include:

- **Coachability-** Willingness to accept feedback, make adjustments, and demonstrate a growth mindset.
- **Linework-** Optimal driving to maintain maximum speed and efficiency.
- **Communication-** Clear, timely, and effective communication with teammates; both talking and listening.
- **Item play-** How effectively a player uses, manages and reacts to in-game items during a race.

- **Decision Making / Risk Management-** Smart, timely choices during gameplay, and understanding when to take and avoid risks.
- **Situational Awareness and adaptability-** Ability to read the game, anticipate plays, and respond to unfolding scenarios.
- **Scoring System-** Awareness of how scoring works and the ability to maximize scoring opportunities and contribute strategically.
- **Sportsmanship & Mental Resilience-** Positive attitude, respect for others, and the ability to stay composed under pressure or after setbacks.

Goal(s): By the end of this week, coaches will create a roster of 8-10 players. This allows for scrimms hosted within the team and ensures accurate team numbers during tournaments. Register your team on MKCentral to find scrimms and tournaments. Designate the Leader role to one member of your team; they will be in charge of in-game strategy.

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Tryout Package”](#) to learn how to run a tryout like a [Pro!](#) Get it for free

Coach Notes:

Week 1: Practice Routine & Kart Build Basics

This week focuses on laying the foundation for long-term skill development. A major focus will be on character and kart setup selection. Helping players identify combinations best suited for each player's strengths, strategies, and preferred playstyle. Players will understand how different setups affect speed, handling, acceleration and traction is key to mastering gameplay. By the end of the week, players should understand the components of a good practice routine, define personal development goals and choose a character and kart setup that fits their personal strengths.

Practice format

- Communication
- Team goals
- Personal goals
- Receiving & implementing feedback
- How to do a VOD review
- Leader Role
- Defensive Role
- Sportsmanship

- Tiers of Characters
- Types of drift vehicles

Goal(s): By the end of this week, the team will have established personal and team-wide goals, setting a clear foundation for growth throughout the season. Players will explore and identify the kart, character and tire combinations that best complement their individual playstyles. The team will build a structured practice framework, learning how to approach training sessions with focus and intention.

Free Resource: [Ultimate Guide to Building the Best Combo in Mario Kart 8 Deluxe!](#)

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Practice Routine & Kart Build Basics”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 2: Lines

This week focuses on line work, which refers to the “racing line” or path that a Mario Kart should follow on each track to achieve the fastest and most efficient route from start to finish. Tracks have many split paths and alternate routes, boost pads, shortcuts, and paragliding routes, and hazards and obstacles. While there are many ways to navigate a course, each track has an optimal line. Skills to develop include:

Drifting

- Soft drifting, faster mini turbo charge
- **Alignment Hopping:** allows longer drift, can correct direction

- Braking
- Shortcuts
- Boost pads to trick off of and boost pads to avoid tricking off of
- Paragliders to trick off of and paragliders to avoid tricking off of
- Track jumping
- Adjusting to hazards

■ Learn the most optimal line for each map via:

- Download the World Record Ghost Time Trials for each map
- Replay the World Record Ghost Time Trial to learn the most optimal route.
- Race against these ghosts following the lines they use.

Goal(s): By the end of this week, the players will have a solid understanding of optimal racing lines and why following them is essential for maintaining speed and consistency. Players will learn to study a track for key features like corners, boost pads, item sets and shortcuts, and practice repeating racing lines in both time trials and online races to build muscle memory. The team develops essential skills including drifting, braking, and brake-drifting.

Free Resource: [What is SOFT Drifting? | Mario Kart 8 Deluxe - YouTube](#)

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Lines Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 3: Item Play-Smart use of Items and Strategy

This week focuses on item play and how to utilize items strategically based on your position in the race, your surroundings, and your overall game plan. Items in the game can be used to maintain or gain the lead, recover from setbacks, or disrupt opponents in key moments. Skills to develop include:

- Holding/dragging items
- Checking rear view mirror
- Lag trail vs sniping
- Using and holding coins
- Throw timing
- Ghosts
- Rerolling Items Do's and Don't's
- Banana placement
- In-game item strategy callouts

Goal(s): By the end of this week, the team will be able to make educated decisions on item play, avoid hitting their own teammates by effective communication, and analyze the enemy team's item usage and adjust their strategies accordingly. Players can reevaluate and refine personal item play based on past races and

performance. Players reflect on what went well, or what did not, and adjust team strategies including when to prioritize collecting coins for top speed or when to cycle items for better set ups.

Free Resource: [Are Coins USELESS in Mario Kart 8 Deluxe?? - YouTube](#)

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Item Play Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 4: Team Roles-Playing to Individual Strengths

This week focuses on assigning team roles, a key part of successful team coordination. Roles help define how each player contributes to the overall strategy and utilizes each individual's strengths and playstyles to support the team effectively.

- **Leader:** frontrunner of your team that should be protected at all times
- **Defensive Player:** typically there are 2 defensive players, one which protects the leader with item play, utilizing items to block or hit enemy team, and one which plays more offensively
- **Item Manager:** acquires vital items for the team, such as shocks and blue shells, and may choose to stay at the back of the pack in order to do so
- **Role Cycling:** swapping roles, secondary roles, last lap shifting
- Each player should be assigned a primary role and secondary role

Goal(s): By the end of this week, teams will be able to designate roles based on individual player skill set, track preferences and kart setups. Each player will understand their role and what is expected across different tracks and situations. Different tracks reward different skill

sets, teams will be able to shift roles accordingly. Players reevaluate their play style based on learning the other team's strategy. In following weeks, players will be able to learn and approach maps within their roles.

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Roles Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 5: Callouts-Building Effective Team communication

This week focuses on team callouts, the real-time communication that forms the backbone of successful team play. Quick and accurate callouts help teammates make better decisions, avoid friendly fire, and capitalize on opportunities. Callouts are important for players to know where their teammates are on the map and with what items. Skills to develop:

- Placement & Item Callouts
- Shortened item phrases
- When to callout
- When to request team callout
- Split second In-game decisions
- Calling out enemy team items
- Loudness/Volume
- Positive Reinforcement

Goal(s): By the end of the week, teams will be comfortable and consistent in calling out their placement and items throughout the race. Clear communication about position (e.g. “I’m in second”) and item status (e.g., “Holding red”, “Got shock”) should become second nature. The use of callouts helps to coordinate team strategy, adapt to race

situations, and help the team develop a shared team language for quick and effective communication.

Check out our “Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Callouts Course” to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 6: Tracks-Mastering the 96 Tracks

This week will focus on learning and mastering the 96 tracks available in *Mario Kart* and how they are most often played in competitive settings. The tracks themselves favor different roles. Favored roles are categorized into 4 categories each offering a unique type of challenge and experience.

- **Runner:** favors players who get out in front early and can maintain their lead
- **Shroomer:** favors the player who excels at using mushrooms or stars to take major shortcuts
- **Drafter:** favors players who use slipstreaming (drafting) and pack position to gain speed boosts
- **Bagger:** favors players who stay behind to pull strong items (especially lightening) and help a team make a comeback
 - **Utilize website:** <https://shortcat.pro/> to look up track before each race
 - Learn best starting/running placement for each track
 - Learn best Bullet Bill spot for each track
 - Learn how to gauge the minimum distance between yourself and 1st to get a star or shock (Knowing this in the Bagger Role is vital to utilize shock)

Goal(s): By the end of this week, teams will prioritize the optimal strategy for each track but recognize that in-game conditions can change the plan. The team will be able to adapt strategy in real time based on current placement, items held, coin count, elapsed time, nearby threats and track layout. The team gains understanding that while a track may traditionally favor a specific role, the right call is situational and players develop the awareness and judgement to make smart, flexible decisions. Players can implement well-rounded knowledge of track mechanics, roles and timing to support team success.

Free Resource: [The BEST Strategy in Mario Kart 8 Deluxe - YouTube](#)

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Maps Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 7: Advanced Driving Skills-Refining Control and Speed

This week focuses on developing high level driving techniques that go beyond the fundamentals. After players have become comfortable with core mechanics like soft drifting and counter hopping introduced in week 2, players will now work on refining and chaining these skills to gain competitive edges in races. Advanced driving skills include:

- **Delayed drifting-** waiting after a hop to allow you to adjust your angle or realign your kart
- **Counter hops-** hopping in the opposite direction of your drift immediately after releasing your mini-turbo allowing a tighter turn and better control of the kart
- **Snaking-** chain drift boosts (mini-turbos) back to back to constantly gain speed
- **Shroomless shortcuts-** off-road or alternate route shortcuts often taken using a mushroom but can be completed through skillful driving alone

Goal(s): The team will be able to perform nuanced, high level driving techniques that may appear subtle or even imperceptible to the untrained eye, but result in perfect lines, smoother execution, and optimized speed. These skills reflect true mastery and reinforce consistency under pressure.

Free Resource: What is DELAYED Drifting? | Mario Kart 8 Deluxe - YouTube

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Decision Making/Risk Management Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 8: Decision Making/Risk Management-Playing Smart for the Team

This week focuses on developing smart decision-making and risk management during races. In Mario Kart, every offensive, defensive or positional action can impact your race and the entire team's outcome. It's important to know when to take a risk to remove an enemy threat and when to wait despite having an opportunity.

- Learn to avoid common trigger happy situations and friendly fire
- Learn when it is viable to attempt an enemy team snipe with teammates around
- Assess number of enemy team players ahead
 - If more are ahead, risk may be worth it; if less are ahead, playing it safe can be optimal
- Leaving banana hazards on enemy team's lines
- Effectively calling out hazards on track
 - Collaborate traps as a team, avoid enemy team's traps
- Refine Blue Shell and Shock callouts, deciding as a team when Bagger should utilize items
 - Bagger often listens to decision of current frontrunner, who has eyes on top of pack

- In a 8-player 4v4, 7th and 8th place have the chance to get a shock
 - Utilize Bagger role accordingly. Contrary to popular belief, do not let the enemy team keep all lower placements for most of the race.
- Bring entire team to front on last lap

Goal(s): By this week, the team will be able to move as a cohesive unit. Instances of friendly fire should decrease as players become more aware of their teammates' positions, roles and intentions. Decisions are made as a team and group strategy becomes a focal point of communication.

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Decision Making/Risk Management Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coch Notes:

Week 9: Placement-Specific Items- Strategic use of Placement for Item Advantage

This week focuses on the statistical system behind item distribution and “Mario Kart luck.” Items are generated by the game based on a combination of your placement and distance from the leader (1st place).

- **1st place items:** weak item pool
 - **Learn how to utilize coins:** against ghosts, to hide items, & to keep defensive item
 - Smuggling 2nd place items into 1st
- **2nd place items:** strong item pool
 - **2nd Place Defender:** learn how to increase red shell rolls and triple red shell rolls strategies
 - Receives triple red shells when at far distance from leader
- **3rd-8th place items:** mid item pool
 - Cannot acquire coins
 - Receives bananas and green shells at far distance from leader
- **9-12th place items:** powerful item pool
- Smuggling items

Goal(s): By the end of this week, the team will have a solid understanding of placement-specific items. Rather than relying solely on staying in top placements through raw speed (running, players now recognize that intentionally prioritizing item pulls at the right time can be crucial for achieving top finishes.

Free Resource: [Are ITEMS based on DISTANCE in Mario Kart 8 Deluxe? - YouTube](#)

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Placement Specific Items Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 10: Secondary Roles-Adapting Strategy Mid-Race

This week focuses on developing the flexibility and awareness needed to shift strategies, roles and placements mid-race. In competitive *Mario Kart*, there is a fluidity between running and bagging, and successful teams must be able to adjust in real time based on evolving race conditions. For example, a Frontrunner can be hit by a blue shell and may need to swap to bagging, and a Bagger can dodge a shock and Bullet Bill into top placement. Secondary roles are crucial in helping teams read the race, shift strategies and make the adjustments needed to win. Skills to develop include:

- Swapping roles with teammates
- Creating secondary role fluidity
 - Practice mainly within secondary role until accustomed
- Typical frontrunner drop positions and practice sniping and protecting

Goal(s): By the end of this week, players will be able to confidently adapt to a secondary role, expanding their skill set and becoming more versatile competitors. Rather than relying solely on their primary roles, players will learn to approach each race individually, recognizing that roles are fluid and should be determined by the dynamics of the game, not fixed skill sets.

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Secondary Roles Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 11: Blue Shells and Shocks-Mastering Game Changing Items

This week focuses on mastering two of the most powerful and disruptive items in *Mario Kart*: the blue shell and the lightning bolt (shock). These items can dramatically shift the outcome of the race in seconds, and understanding how to use or avoid them is critical to high level play. Blue shells target and stall the leader longer than any other item in the game and shocks slow down the entire opposing team making them one of the strongest tools for comeback and control. Blue shells and shocks are acquired by the current Bagger. Skills to develop:

- Acquiring and strategizing Blue Shells and Shocks
- Strategizing Blue Shells, Bullet Bills, Stars and Shocks
- Avoiding Blue Shells and Shocks
- Utilizing mushrooms, cars, Lakitu, and other items to avoid being hit by a Blue Shell
- Timing Shocks at jumps for enemy team
- **Custom VS Race Practice:** Item Pool limited to Blue Shells and Mushrooms, practice dodging blue shells with mushrooms
- Sniping teammates for blue shell dodge
- **Tiers:** vehicles, bananas, shells, Lakitu
- How to drag enemy players into blue shell hit if blue shell is unavoidable

Goal(s): By the end of this week, the team will be able to assess each track for hazards and make informed decisions on which hazard to intentionally hit in order to avoid a blue shell. Players will learn to gauge which hazard will cause the least slowdown and when it is smarter to take a minor hit or even request friendly fire to avoid a greater loss in momentum. Players can alert other teammates to blue shells and shocks held by the enemy team and begin strategizing immediately.

Free Resource: [Using a Mushroom to DODGE a Blue Shell? | Mario Kart 8 Deluxe - YouTube](#)

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Blue Shells and Shocks Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 12: Playoffs-Putting it All Together

This week marks the culmination of everything we have learned so far. Players will be challenged to apply their knowledge, communication skills, and ingame strategies independently as a team. Players will assess their strengths and weaknesses, appoint roles, and choose their team's cups. Skills utilized:

- Choosing cups to optimize outcomes
- Primary, secondary roles
- Initial strategies based on tracks and player profiles
- Effective communication before and during play
- Assessing how team is playing and reassessing strategy/roles as a cohesive unit
 - Swapping offensive, defensive strategy

Goal(s): Players are able to apply everything they have learned the last 12 weeks and form their own plans with their knowledge as a team.

Check out our [“Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Playoffs Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Outro

As coaches, our responsibility is to guide players not only toward in-game success, but also toward becoming better teammates and individuals. This guidebook was built to help you through structure, communication, and consistent practice. It's important to remember that in Mario Kart, only one player crosses the finish line in first place, but no single player is ever bigger than the program. True success comes from how players support one another, adapt to challenges, and put the team first. Stay committed to the process, lead with intention, and never lose sight of why we play: to grow, to compete, and to have fun.





YOUTH GAMING
ASSOCIATION

YGA COACHES GUIDEBOOK:

MARVEL
RIVALS

Introduction

My name is Nathan Trotman, professionally known as “Coach Cuffy.” I’ve been competing and coaching in esports for the past five years, with a primary focus on *Overwatch*. I’ve worked with organizations such as NTMR, Munich Esports, and Shikigami, and had the honor of representing Team Peru in the *Overwatch* World Cup. Between 2024 and 2025, I helped lead teams to multiple top 8 finishes in North America.

Most recently, I’ve been competing in *Marvel Rivals* under the organization Ereus. Within the first five months of the game’s release, our team earned a top 5 ranking in North America during MRC Season 1. In addition to team success, I’ve had the privilege of coaching multiple players to top global rankings and helping them secure invites to the *Marvel Rivals* Invitational.

Software & Hardware

Suggested tools for managing teams, practices, and competitions.

Hardware

- PC (That matches the games minimum running requirements)

- Monitor (Minimum 120 Hz)
- Keyboard
- Mousepad/Mousemat
- Mouse (Preferably with 2 sidebuttons for extra inputs)
- Headsets (with microphones)
- Controllers (Optional)

Software

- Marvel Rivals
- Discord
- Epic Pen
- OBS

Cross Platform Play

Although cross platform play is possible, most tournament formats are separated between either console or PC. However, use of a controller is supported on both platforms, so students that play on their consoles at home, will find no trouble playing on a PC if provided with one.

Some players may argue that using a PC has its limitations. However, many well-known players that are

contracted by major organizations and are competing at the highest level successfully use PCs in professional play.

Devices in Marvel Rivals:

■ PC Keyboard & Mouse

□ **Advantages:**

- More responsive to movements
- More PC models means more options
- More buttons, no overlapping keybinds
- More software
- Customizable gameplay performance including sensitivity

- More natural muscle movements
- Faster Camera Movement

■ Controller

□ Advantages

- Joysticks provide more controlled movements
- Aim assist
- Optimized for accessibility across all physical skill levels

□ Pressure sensitive binds

- Less muscle fatigue
- Less space needed

Marvel Rivals Practice

Setting clear expectations around the length and structure of practice is essential, as it helps players attend consistently and contributes to building team cohesion. Take inventory of your team's average rank and note down your roster information:

What Platform (PC/Console)

What region (North America)

What Rank (General estimation or calculated)

What time (Usually set in EST)

Example: PC NA Platinum-Diamond 8 EST

The next step is to designate a contact, an ingame username responsible for accepting lobby invites. Alternatively, you can add one of the opposing team's contacts and host the lobby yourself. Once the scrim is booked, be sure to share the details in a place that's easily accessible to your team.

The length of a typical scrim is 2 hours long, and the standard scrim times are:

6pm - 8pm EST

8pm -10pm EST

10pm -12am EST

Practice Expectations

- Practice individually at least once a week for 2 hours.
- Dedicate an additional hour to VOD (video on demand) review.
- Commit an additional 2 hours for scrims.
- Allocate 2 hours per week for official matches.
 - Depending on the coach's availability, time should be reserved for supervisory feedback and guidance.

How to Set up

1. Book a Scrim Partner

- Use Discord servers, scrim finder tools, or direct outreach.

■ Confirm the following with the opposing team:

- Date & Time
- Server Region
- Best-of Format (Bo9)
- Any additional rules or expectations

2. Enter Custom Lobby

- From the main menu, select "Custom Game."
- Create a new lobby for your team's scrim.

3. Adjust Match Settings

- **Game Mode: Tournament** – Best of 9
- **Bans:** Enable Tournament Bans

4. Set Map Selection

- **Map Pool: All Maps** – Random Select
- After each match, remove maps that have already been played to prevent repeats.

5. Configure Lobby Access

- **Spectators:** Off
- **Lobby Type:** Invite Only

6. Invite Players

- Invite only active scrim participants from both teams.
- Do not allow spectators or outside users.

7. Double Check All Settings

- **Before starting, confirm the following:**
 - ☐ Best of 9 enabled
 - ☐ Tournament bans on
 - ☐ Random map select
 - ☐ Previously played maps removed
 - ☐ Spectators turned off
 - ☐ Lobby is Invite Only

8. Start the Scrim

- Once all players are ready and settings are verified, begin the scrim.

Helpful Resources

Public Discord Servers to Find Marvel Rivals Scrim

Marvel Rivals Tournaments

Large competitive hub for scheduling scrims, finding ranked teams, and entering tournaments.

Marvel Rivals Official Server

Official server with channels for team recruitment, LFG, and scrim coordination.

Marvel Rivals Competitive & LFG

Focused on helping players find teams, coaches, and scrims for organized practice.

Marvel Rivals Lower Ranked Scrims

Designed for bronze-to-diamond players looking for casual or entry-level competitive scrims.

Marvel Rivals Global

General-purpose community with active players across all regions. Includes scrim-finding and custom game channels.

Other Places to Find Scrims

[r/MarvelRivalsEsports](#)

Reddit community with regular posts looking for scrims, tournaments, and team tryouts.

[Gangster.gg](#)

Platform for organizing and scheduling scrims, managing teams, and tracking match results.

Marvel Rivals Glossary

- **Brawler** – A character class that specializes in close range fighting and absorbing damage.
- **Comp**– The combined selection of characters on a team. A balanced comp typically includes a mix of damage, support, and tank roles.
- **Healer** – A character role that restores teammates' health over time or with abilities.
- **Map control** – Gaining and maintaining advantageous territory on the map.
- **Rotations** – The movement of players between objectives or areas on the map, done either as a group or individually, to respond to the enemy or set up plays.
- **Setups** – Planned starting positions or prefight arrangements that allow a team to execute coordinated plays or defend key areas.
- **Stagger respawns** – When teammates die at different times, preventing a full coordinated team push.
- **Ult** – A character's most "ultimate" ability, typically with a long cooldown. Often used to break stalemates or swing fights.
- **Remake** – Used when something irreversibly bad has happened (For example; using the wrong scrim

settings or accidentally replaying a map) It is a request to leave the lobby and remake another one, so practice time isn't wasted.

Player Improvement Roadmap

A players improvement should be split between 3 sections

1. Player Mechanics

"Mechanics" refer to a player's fundamental ability to perform well in the game. These skills are transferable across all heroes and include movement, aiming, and precise control of input devices like the mouse and keyboard. Strong mechanics enable a player to consistently execute intended actions successfully ingame.

2. Character Micro

Character micro includes mechanical skill but focuses more specifically on the character being played. In *Marvel Rivals*, the composition of both your team and the enemy team can drastically change how a single character should be played. Understanding key matchups and interactions is crucial for evaluating a player's skill and development. The challenge lies in the

vast roster of heroes and the many factors that influence how playstyles must adapt.

3. Teamplay and Macro

This aspect focuses on strategy and synergy. In *Marvel Rivals*, individual player mistakes are expected and can happen at any level of competition. That said, teamplay and coordination usually have the greatest impact on the outcome of the game.

Think of mechanics and micro as the individual puzzle pieces, while teamplay and macro represent the complete picture. Player mechanics and character micro are skills that require continuous development and never truly have an endpoint. Because of this, the time players spend practicing on their own should be focused on improving these areas. It's essential for players to have realistic expectations about the time commitment required to teach themselves effectively.

Players should always be encouraged to work on their individual skills outside of scheduled practice sessions. While the amount of time each player dedicates will vary, it's recommended to play as much as possible while prioritizing real-life responsibilities, as well as mental and physical health.

VOD Review

What a Video Review Can Include

1. Macro Review

Focuses on team-wide mistakes across one or more maps. The goal is to identify patterns, correct strategic errors, and provide actionable solutions. Macro reviews are typically coach-led.

2. Micro Review

Focuses on individual player mistakes and habits across one or more maps. Corrections and improvement strategies are discussed. This can be led by a coach or done as a self-review by the player.

3. Scouting

Involves reviewing maps played by an upcoming opponent or a professional team. The purpose is to gather new information to develop counter-strategies or inspire ideas to enhance your own gameplay.

"Seeking inspiration, not necessarily copying"

Video reviews are just as important as scrims. They're one of the only opportunities to identify and correct bad habits. If overused, video reviews can take away from the time needed to apply concepts through gameplay.

If they're too long, players may struggle to absorb all the information. Effective video review strikes a balance: targeted, concise, and followed by opportunities to implement what's been learned.

It is recommended that team reviews (macro) are prioritised over player reviews (micro) but a coach should be expected to balance their teams specific needs accordingly.

Documenting the conclusions of video reviews is recommended to support long-term improvement and track progress.



Fundamental Roadmap

Week 0: Tryouts

Tryouts will be different for every team environment, but it should roughly resemble this format:

- Checking availability
- Open tryouts (Consider rank requirements)
- 2 hour scrim against an existing team OR internally
- Sort and assign players to rosters accordingly

Things that you should consider during trials:

- Ability to play the game
- Player ranks
- Player schedules
- Personality types
- Player Roles

If time allows, incorporating team icebreakers can help players build rapport and create a more inclusive, supportive environment.

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals Tryout Package”](#) to learn how to run a tryout like a [Pro!](#) Get it for free

Coach Notes:**Week 1: Foundations & Expectations**■ **Introduce the Basics**

Begin with a clear overview of the roles each player is expected to take on. Follow this with a brief introduction to the types of ingame communication you expect from the team. Keep it simple and direct to avoid overwhelming new players.

■ **Set Expectations Early**

This is the time to establish your team culture. Emphasize that practices should be fun and engaging, but also make it clear that everyone must respect each other's time and effort. Encourage consistent attendance, mutual respect, and open-mindedness.

■ **Goal Setting**

Create a quick and efficient system for players to set:

- Individual goals (e.g., improving accuracy, learning a specific role)
- Team goals (e.g., better communication, winning a scrim)

Encourage players to write down and reflect on their goals weekly to track progress.

■ Teach Self-Sufficiency

There may be times when a coach is unavailable. To prepare for this, teach players how to independently create and manage ingame lobbies. This ensures practice can still happen productively without constant supervision.

Goal: By the end of Week 1, players will have a clear understanding of their roles and expected communication, embrace a positive and respectful team culture, confidently set and track individual and team goals, and develop the self-sufficiency needed to independently manage practice sessions when coaching support is unavailable.

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals How to Practice Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 2: Ban Theory

Due to the ban system in *Marvel Rivals*, maintaining consistent practice with the same team composition and hero pool is extremely difficult over time. This week, players will begin learning how to navigate that challenge by understanding ban theory and how it influences both individual picks and overall team strategy.

■ Understanding Team Identity and Playstyle Fit

Start by identifying which characters *don't* fit your team's preferred style of play. This includes heroes that disrupt team cohesion or require playstyles your roster isn't built around. Use this as a foundation for deciding who your team should avoid using and, more importantly, who they should consider banning.

■ Learning the Value of Strategic Bans

If there are heroes your team consistently struggles against, now is the time to discuss banning them out. Introduce the concept of “**team-up synergy**” and how banning a single hero can impact multiple layers of strategy.

- Example: Luna Snow + Namor Synergy

In Season 0, Luna Snow's ice turret dramatically improved Namor's effectiveness by adding slow, damage, and increased HP to his kit. This synergy made them a top-tier pair, especially for countering flankers.

While the turret technically belonged to Namor's kit, it only existed when paired with Luna. Smart teams would ban Luna—who, even at her weakest, was still one of the top healers with a powerful ultimate. By banning her, they not only removed a strong support but also disabled Namor's full potential, effectively using one ban to neutralize two heroes.

■ 3. Evaluating a Hero's Effect on Allies

In *Marvel Rivals*, certain hero combinations amplify each other's strengths in ways that can heavily impact match outcomes. These **synergistic interactions** can turn average heroes into game-changers when paired correctly and, conversely, become liabilities when broken apart.

Coaches and players should look for:

■ **Ability synergies** (e.g., one hero enabling another's full potential)

Example: Scarlet Witch + Groot

*Scarlet Witch and Groot demonstrate a strong example of ability synergy in *Marvel Rivals*, where the effectiveness of one hero's abilities is amplified by another's. Groot's kit includes a root ability that immobilizes enemies, temporarily preventing them from moving or escaping. This crowd control creates the perfect setup for Scarlet Witch, whose Chaos Zone and Chaos Orbs deal high area-of-*

effect damage but can be difficult to land against mobile targets. When Groot successfully roots opponents, Scarlet Witch can immediately follow up with her abilities, ensuring full damage output while the enemies are locked in place. This combination becomes especially lethal in teamfights, often leading to quick eliminations or zone control. On their own, both heroes are powerful but when played together, their coordinated abilities create a level of consistency and impact that neither could achieve alone. This synergy highlights the importance of pairing heroes not just by role, but by how well their abilities complement and enhance each other.

■ **Playstyle alignment** (e.g., both excelling in dive comps or poke comps)

- *Example: Punisher + Hela*
- *Punisher and Hela form a strong example of playstyle alignment, thriving in a slow, methodical poke-and-zone approach. While their kits serve different functions, Punisher focusing on long-range poke, suppression, and utility through traps and vision control, and Hela dealing sustained AoE damage with powerful area denial, they both excel in drawn-out, controlled fights. Punisher rewards patient, high-ground positioning, chipping away at enemies before they can engage. Hela, in turn, punishes overcommitted opponents who linger too long in contested areas, thanks to her shadows and impactful ultimate. Together, they create a composition that dictates the tempo of the game, wearing down enemy resources before*

closing in. Neither performs well in fast-paced, dive-heavy metas, but as a pair, they provide consistent pressure and defensive strength. When heroes with aligned playstyles are picked, team movements feel intuitive, players rotate together, conserve ultimates more effectively, and maintain synergy throughout engagements. In contrast, misaligned pairings such as matching Hela with an aggressive diver can disrupt cohesion and reduce overall impact.

■ **Hidden dependencies (e.g., a hero underperforming without a specific teammate's utility)**

Example: Storm + Magneto

While Storm and Magneto are both capable of functioning independently, their synergy reveals a subtle but impactful dependency that isn't immediately obvious. Storm brings high mobility, strong zoning tools, and excellent vertical control through her ultimate, allowing her to manipulate the battlefield and create space. Magneto, on the other hand, offers high damage output but lacks reliable mobility and is particularly vulnerable to pressure or dives. When paired together, Storm naturally covers Magneto's weaknesses—her zoning abilities create safe lanes for him to operate, her control of vertical space limits flanking routes, and her mobility and threat level often draw enemy attention away from him. This enables Magneto to position more aggressively and contribute more consistently in teamfights. Although Magneto may seem viable on his own, in practice, his effectiveness greatly improves when

Storm is present. Teams unaware of this interaction might focus on more obvious ban picks, overlooking Storm's critical role as a subtle enabler in the composition.

There are many such hero interactions throughout *Marvel Rivals*. Use this week to help players begin recognizing them. Make it a habit to ask:

- *What does this hero enable in others?*
- *What impact does this ban have beyond just one character?*
- *Can we shift the meta by disabling a key synergy?*

■ **4. Emphasizing Adaptability and Identity**

The team will learn that there are no universally “correct” bans. Every opponent will present different challenges and force adaptations. By exploring ban theory early, players will begin to develop flexibility and a clearer sense of their team's strategic identity.

Goal: By the end of Week 2, players will understand the complexities of the ban system in *Marvel Rivals* and how it affects team composition and strategy. They will be able to identify heroes that do not fit their roster's playstyle, recognize the value of strategic bans—especially those that disrupt powerful synergies—and evaluate how individual heroes impact their teammates. Through studying examples of ability synergy, playstyle alignment, and hidden dependencies, players will develop the skills to adapt their drafts and counterplay effectively, fostering greater team flexibility and strategic depth.

Free Resource: https://youtube.com/shorts/82VYIsi13mA?si=TX_OQZguSGMBf6EW

Check out our “[Marvel Rivals Ban Theory Course](#)” to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 3: Strategic Comps Development

The starting point for experimenting with team compositions is understanding the strengths of your roster. Ideally, you should have at least two players capable of filling each of the Vanguard, Duelist, and Strategist roles to ensure maximum flexibility in drafting and adaptation. In some cases, you may find that the heroes your players are comfortable with don't naturally synergize. As a coach, it's your responsibility to decide whether to guide players toward learning new heroes, adjust your overall strategy, or identify and develop synergy within the current pool.

During scrims, especially between maps, avoid changing too many variables at once, whether that's bans, hero picks, or roles. Instead, focus on isolating a few key elements to evaluate what parts of your composition are effective, which aren't, and why. When approached deliberately, this process can yield valuable insights that inform your long-term strategy and counterplay development.

Goal: By the end of this phase, coaches and players will understand the importance of assessing their roster's strengths and role flexibility to build adaptable and strategic team compositions. Through deliberate experimentation during scrims, changing only a few variables at a time, they will develop the ability to analyze what works and why, using these insights to refine their overall strategy and improve counterplay.

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals Experimenting with Comps Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 4: Dive, Poke and Brawl (As Comps)

Week 4 is an ideal time to introduce players to the three fundamental composition templates in *Marvel Rivals*: Dive, Poke, and Brawl. They represent **strategic frameworks** for how a group of heroes functions together in combat, each with distinct strengths, weaknesses, and preferred engagement ranges. These styles guide how a team approaches fights, positions on the map, and responds to enemy strategies. After spending previous weeks exploring individual characters, this week offers their first deeper insight into how professional teams strategically build comps.

Dive Comps focus on **high mobility** and **close-range engagements**. These teams excel at quickly closing the gap between themselves and the enemy, targeting key opponents with aggressive, coordinated strikes. Dive comps rely on heroes who can rapidly maneuver around the map and isolate vulnerable targets before retreating or resetting. Their strength lies in overwhelming enemies through speed and surprise, but they can struggle against comps that control space or sustain damage from a distance.

Poke Comps emphasize **long-range attacks** and **zoning control**. These teams prefer to keep enemies at bay, chipping away at their health and resources without committing to direct fights. Heroes in poke comps typically have abilities that can pressure from a distance,

control key areas of the map, or apply sustained damage over time. While poke comps excel at map control and attrition, they can be vulnerable to fast, aggressive dive comps that can bypass their zoning.

Brawl Comps are characterized by **low mobility** but excel in **close-quarters combat** with durability and sustained damage. These teams often feature tanky heroes who can soak up damage and disrupt enemy formations while dealing heavy damage at close range. Brawl comps shine in drawn-out fights where staying power and brute force are paramount, and they tend to have the upper hand against dive comps due to their resilience. However, brawl teams can struggle against poke comps that keep them at a distance and wear them down.

To reinforce learning, conduct “comp building exercises” that challenge players to create viable team compositions reflecting each playstyle. If players struggle, provide clear examples of well-constructed comps as models.

If confusion arises between dive and brawl styles, encourage it as a natural part of the learning process, emphasizing that the nuanced differences and overlaps will be addressed in Week 5.

Goal: By the end of Week 4, players will have a solid understanding of the three core team composition types in *Marvel Rivals*—Dive, Poke, and Brawl. They will be able

to identify the defining characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses of each comp style and how these impact gameplay and counterplay. Through guided comp-building exercises, players will apply this knowledge by creating balanced team compositions reflecting each style. Additionally, players will recognize that the lines between Dive and Brawl can blur, preparing them for deeper strategic nuance in the following week.

Free Resource: https://youtu.be/98clc_WWlwo?si=6N5nQrPfAGi3QOYL

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals Dive, Poke and Brawl \(As Comps\) Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 5: Dive, Poke and Brawl (As Playstyles)

In Week 5, players will learn that while a composition may lean toward one dominant playstyle, it can still incorporate elements of others and often must, in order to adapt effectively during a match. Here the concept of “hybrid comps” should be introduced, as well as the concept of “rock paper scissors.” Players must understand the core meaning of terms like **dive**, **brawl**, and **poke**, as these concepts shape both team strategy and in-game communication.

When someone refers to a “dive,” they’re describing a coordinated movement where one or more players rapidly close the distance to target and eliminate an enemy, typically a ranged or vulnerable backline threat. Dive strategies rely on mobility and timing, and they’re often more successful in open spaces, where players have more room to maneuver and isolate targets.

In contrast, “brawl” refers to a group-based, close-range approach where teammates move together as a tight unit to avoid being picked off and to apply maximum short-range pressure. Brawls are strongest in enclosed areas or room-like spaces, where it becomes harder for enemies to disengage and escape.

Lastly, “poke” is a style centered around dealing sustained, long-range damage rather than closing distance. Poke

compositions are designed to chip away at opponents from afar, forcing them to burn cooldowns or reposition before a full fight even begins. Understanding these distinctions is key to building synergy, making smart map decisions, and developing adaptive team strategies. To help players fully understand the practical application of **dive**, **brawl**, and **poke** compositions, it’s important to introduce the concept of **killboxes** or specific areas of the map where certain styles are most effective. A **killbox** is a zone where a team can consistently execute their win condition due to favorable map geometry. It is best presented if you screenshot stills of certain maps, and highlight in different colours where brawls are strong (enclosed space), where poke is strong (open space with sightlines), and where dive is strong (open space where there is no enclosed space nearby). This visual method will help players recognize killboxes in real-time and understand how to position themselves based on team comp and enemy strategy.

Style	Engagement Range	Mobility	Tempo	Win Condition
Dive	Close	High	Fast	Quick kills and disruption
Poke	Long	Low–Mid	Slow	Outlasting and zoning
Brawl	Mid–Close	Low	Medium	Sustain and area control

Goal: By the end of Week 5, players will deepen their understanding of the Dive, Poke, and Brawl playstyles, learning how each differs in engagement range, mobility, tempo, and win conditions. They will explore how teams can blend these styles into hybrid compositions and adapt strategically through map-specific “killboxes.” This knowledge will help players communicate effectively, make smarter positional decisions, and develop flexible strategies to counter opponents.

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals Dive, Poke and Brawl \(As Playstyles\) Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 6: Reflection and Refining Comps

In Week 6, players will focus on evaluating their team’s current position within the evolving Marvel Rivals meta. This includes analyzing the impact of recent balance patches, identifying outdated strategies, and preparing for upcoming changes. Coaches should encourage players to adapt by learning new characters and diversifying their skill sets to maintain competitive flexibility. One challenge in Marvel Rivals is its frequent updates and constant evolution, making it essential for teams to regularly pause and analyze whether their current strategies remain effective or have become outdated.

Goal: By the end of Week 6, players will understand that it is important to take a step back and reevaluate strategy, comps and playstyles in response to the evolving game meta.

If your team decides that a review is not necessary, you can progress to the next week early. The content in weeks 11 and 12 can be spread out to slightly over a week each, enabling the team to start working on “Ult fights, Ult cycles, Ult tracking”.

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals Refining and Solidifying Comps Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 7: Optimizing Ult Usage and Teamfight Impact

This week, players will learn to understand the purpose and strategic use of each character's ultimate ability, recognizing that ultimates can serve different roles whether offensive, defensive, or utility, even when associated with a specific team role. Players will analyze how to maximize ultimates based on their unique properties and playstyles to enhance overall team effectiveness.

With the characters that your players intend to play in mind, you should write down what is the purpose of each ultimate. One important nuance to keep in mind is that some characters, like Magneto and Captain America, though classified as Vanguard, often use their ultimates defensively or to negate enemy advantages. Conversely, heroes such as Rocket Raccoon and Jeff the Land Shark, who have defensive playstyles and ultimates with defensive properties, frequently utilize their ultimates in aggressive and proactive ways.

I usually divide ultimates into two categories: defensive and utility. In Marvel Rivals, managing your team's ultimates carefully, what we call "ult economy", is really important. I advise teams not to expect to get a kill with just one damage ultimate. Instead, ultimates should be used as tools to force the enemy to use their defensive ultimates. The team that uses an ultimate when the

opponent doesn't have a defensive ult ready to counter it usually has the advantage. This means players need to use ultimates strategically, sometimes forcing the enemy to react, and other times saving their own ultimates to secure the win in fights. Initially, you should get the team into the habit of asking each other, which ultimates the enemy team used, before any given fight begins. This will later be refined once a proper comm structure is established.

This week marks a crucial milestone in player development, as it introduces their first opportunity to apply a high-level concept, ultimate management—into real gameplay. This skill will be ongoing and requires constant reinforcement, especially when performance begins to dip. It's important to positively reinforce any progress, such as successful ult tracking or winning ult engagements, since mastering this concept is challenging to translate consistently in-game. Mistakes are expected throughout this process, and even the highest-level competitors experience them.

Goal: By the end of Week 7, players will understand the strategic purposes of different ultimates—offensive, defensive, and utility—and develop the ability to manage ult economy effectively. They will learn to track enemy ultimates, use their own ultimates to force opponent responses, and apply these skills in real gameplay to improve teamfight outcomes and overall team coordination.

Free Resource: <https://youtu.be/qXee2deXm2Q?si=1ApPuCaBr-O-tKmm>

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals \(Fundamental\) Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 8: The Concept of a Win Con and How to Identify It

A win condition is simply the way a team is most likely to win a fight. It can depend on the strengths and properties of a team composition or be influenced by the specific context of a game.

Players should learn to recognize patterns behind their wins and losses, and understand why certain comps are strong or weak in particular matchups. Additionally, understanding the strengths and ideal timing for each ultimate is crucial.

Mastering this concept is vital for team adaptability and allows teams to overcome even the toughest challenges.

Learning this skill enables the team to win even the hardest of games.

Goal: By the end Week 8, players will be able to identify their team's win conditions, understand the strengths and weaknesses of different compositions, and recognize the optimal timing and impact of ultimates to adapt their strategies and improve their chances of winning.

Free Resource: https://youtu.be/OSWtFmw1So4?si=blzm2GuFSniAWif_

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals \(Fundamental\) Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 9: Role Clarity and Team Trust

This week focuses on role clarity and contextual decision-making. Players will learn the specific responsibilities their chosen characters hold within a team composition and how their actions can directly influence the outcome of a match. For example, while a Starlord might find value in pressuring the enemy frontline by damaging tanks, doing so could leave the flanks exposed thus creating space for enemy flankers to disrupt the backline.

The goal is to help players see the **bigger picture**: not just what they *can* do, but what they *should* do based on the team's needs. Overzealous players will learn to respect their role boundaries and avoid trying to fill roles meant for others. This awareness will cultivate **trust and synergy**, allowing teammates to rely on one another and better recognize when coordinated, high-risk plays are necessary to shift the tide of difficult fights.

Goal: By the end of Week 9, players will understand the specific responsibilities their characters hold within a team composition and how their individual decisions impact the group's success. They will learn to make context driven choices, avoid overstepping into roles not their own, and begin building trust by recognizing and relying on their teammates' roles and laying the foundation for more coordinated and adaptive teamplay.

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals Micro Responsibilities and Micro Plays Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 10: Establishing Ingame Communication Structure

By the end of this week, players will understand how to build and operate within a team communication structure that reflects both their ingame roles and personal strengths. They will learn to delegate responsibilities such as ultimate tracking, fight planning, and real time fight status updates, creating a clear hierarchy of communication. This foundation will allow for faster decision making, more efficient ult usage, and better team coordination during competitive matches.

The first element of this structure is ultimate tracking, typically handled by a Strategist role player. This player should communicate which ultimates the enemy team used in the previous fight and predict which they are likely to have available in the next, based on timing and cooldown knowledge.

The next step is the fight plan, usually led by the Vanguard player. Using the information provided by the Strategist, the Vanguard should formulate a plan based on the ultimates the team has and how they can disrupt or counter the enemy's win condition. For example, suggesting an early ultimate to preempt enemy support ults.

During the fight itself, Duelist players contribute by calling out cooldowns they've forced, enemies they've pressured

or weakened, and encouraging follow up damage. Their live updates help maintain momentum and capitalize on small openings.

Lastly, the Strategist should also track the live state of the teamfight using a "one up/one down" system—communicating how many players are alive on each side (e.g., "3 up" or "5 down")—to help the team decide whether to continue committing or reset for the next engagement. This system not only ensures clarity mid-fight but also improves team coordination, decision-making, and ultimate economy.

Goal: By the end of Week 10, players will understand how to operate within a structured communication system during matches, based on their ingame roles. Each player will be assigned specific responsibilities such as ult tracking, fight planning, live cooldown updates, and win/loss status calls to improve clarity and coordination in high pressure situations. The team will practice establishing a reliable hierarchy that enhances decision making, maintains ultimate economy, and builds trust during competitive play.

Check out our ["Marvel Rivals Creating a Comm Structure Course"](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 11: Refining Map Setups

One effective way for the team to gain an early advantage over opponents is by mapping out their starting positions for each map. This approach is especially valuable on convoy and convergence maps, where one team begins on the defensive side. In game modes such as “domination”, the outcome of the very first fight often heavily influences which team controls the entire point.

The most efficient method to plan these setups is by loading a replay code and adjusting the camera to an overhead view. Using tools like the “Epic Pen,” you can mark the map with player names and their intended starting positions.

While the initial fight positioning is typically the most critical, since predicting the flow of the game beyond that is difficult, it’s always beneficial to also identify and discuss key high value positions that may arise later during a match.

Goal: By the end of Week 11, players will be able to identify optimal starting positions for each map and game mode, using role-based logic and strategic intent. Special emphasis will be placed on high-impact moments such as first fights in Domination and initial setups on Convoy and Convergence. Players will practice using replay tools and visual aids to map out and document these setups,

creating consistent openers that give the team a tactical edge from the start of each match.

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals Refining Map Setups Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 12: Map Breakdowns and How to Analyze Map Structure.

In Week 12, players will engage in an exercise designed to develop a critical long-term skill: analyzing map structure. Building on last week's focus on positioning, this week players will take screenshots of various map areas and write down the strengths and weaknesses of each section.

For example, a high ground area with good sightlines is ideal for poke characters, while an open space critical for controlling the map might serve as a prime dive killbox.

This exercise not only reinforces understanding of the three core playstyles but also cultivates trust, precision, and accuracy within the team. Additionally, it creates a valuable resource that can be referenced in the future. Given Marvel Rivals' frequent addition of new maps, honing the ability to break down map layouts will prepare the team to quickly identify which compositions to experiment with upon release, something that wasn't possible when the team initially formed.

Goal: By the end of Week 12, players will be able to evaluate and label key areas of each map based on how they support different playstyles (Dive, Poke, Brawl). This skill will deepen their understanding of map control, strengthen team coordination, and equip them with the

tools to quickly analyze and adapt to future maps as they are released.

Check out our [“Marvel Rivals Map Breakdowns and How to Analyze a Maps Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Outro

Marvel Rivals is more than a test of mechanics or hero picks. It is a game built on coordination, discipline, and trust. This guidebook was created to help coaches and players grow into teammates who understand their responsibilities, make thoughtful decisions, and commit to a shared purpose. No single player wins a match by themselves, and no one is more important than the program they represent. Only one person may land the final blow or finish first, but it takes an entire team working together to make that possible. When players communicate clearly, support one another, and put the team first, they not only become better competitors but also build the mindset needed for long-term success.



YOUTH GAMING
ASSOCIATION

YGA COACHES GUIDEBOOK:



OVERWATCH 

Introduction

My name is Gavin “LilLucio” Drummond, and I’ve been immersed in Overwatch since joining my first team in middle school. As a player, I lead my team to three consecutive ISHEA state championships in 2019, 2020, and 2021. After graduating, I returned to my former high school as a coach guiding them to another state title using the very curriculum featured in this guidebook. From 2019 to 2022, I served as a manager in Overwatch Contenders, gaining valuable experience at the semi-professional level. In 2021, I received a scholarship to the University of Missouri and moved to Columbia to coach their collegiate Overwatch team. Through an educational exchange program I spent a year living in Seoul, South Korea, the global epicenter of esports, where I deepened my understanding of the competitive scene. This guidebook is the product of years of competition, coaching, and curriculum development, built to help coaches and players succeed at every level.

If there’s one thing I’ve learned in my career, it’s that there’s no single “correct” way to play Overwatch. The concepts in this curriculum are designed to elevate your team, but real success comes from knowing when and how to apply them. Strong teams regularly engage in open, honest conversations to refine their approach and discover what works best for their unique playstyle. Use this curriculum as a foundation, but don’t be afraid to

adapt it to fit your team’s identity. Best of luck, and I look forward to supporting you as your team continues to grow!

Software & Hardware

Suggested tools for managing teams, practices, and competitions.

Hardware

- 5 Computers that can run Overwatch on low settings on at least 60 FPS (120+ is standard)
 - Low settings are suggested as less particles = better vision
- Monitors with a refresh rate of at least 120 Hz are ideal
- Headphones for each computer are required
- A microphone for each computer is required (can be part of the headphones)
- A 6th computer is good to have for a coach to watch or record

Note: Players prefer to use their own mouse and keyboard (or controller) for muscle memory purposes.

Software

■ [Discord.gg](#)

Most common communication platform for gamers. Also used to find scrimmages

■ [OBS](#)

Recommended recording software for creating VODs to review

■ [Overbuff](#)

Look at a profile's rank/history. Good for scouting

■ [Epic Pen](#)

Good for drawing on your screen- important in VOD reviews

■ [Workshop.Codes](#)

Find fun custom lobby settings for team bonding activities

Cross Platform Play

Overwatch 2 is a cross-platform game, meaning players on Xbox, PlayStation, and PC can all compete together on the same team. While PC is the standard at the highest levels of competition, the gap between PC and console players at the high school level isn't significant enough to say one platform is clearly better than the

other. That said, each comes with its own advantages and disadvantages to consider:

■ PC

□ Advantages

- **Higher frame rate and visual quality:** Allows for smoother gameplay and quicker decision-making.
- **Stronger solo practice environment:** The competitive ladder on PC is widely considered more challenging and rewarding.
- **Easy recording and review:** Compatible with various software tools that make POV recording and VOD review simple.
- **More precise movement:** Keyboard controls offer finer movement, especially useful for high-mobility heroes like Lucio and Winston.
- **Smoother aiming:** Mouse aiming allows for quicker turns and more accurate flicks, benefiting tanks, supports, and mobile projectile DPS.

□ Disadvantages

- **Limited cross-platform play:** Unable to get meaningful practice with console teammates outside of scheduled team sessions.

■ Console (Xbox/Playstation)

□ Advantages

- **Aim assist:** Built-in feature that helps players stay on target, especially noticeable for hitscan DPS roles.
- **Steadier aim:** Console players often hold angles more consistently, which can be an advantage in defensive setups.
- **Greater accessibility:** Console platforms have a larger casual player base, making it easier to find and recruit new players.
- **Controller flexibility:** Players can connect their console controller to a PC if needed, offering more input options.
- **Cross-console practice availability:** PlayStation and Xbox players can practice on the competitive ladder together outside of scheduled team sessions.

□ Disadvantages

- **Lower frame rates and visual quality:** May impact reaction time and clarity during fast-paced moments.
- **Weaker solo practice environment:** The console competitive ladder is generally considered less challenging than its PC counterpart.

- **Limited recording and review tools:** Fewer options for capturing gameplay and conducting VOD reviews. Replays still available ingame.
- **Less precise movement:** Joysticks offer less control compared to keyboard input, especially for high-mobility heroes.
- **Slower aiming mechanics:** Harder to execute fast turns or accurate flicks, which can affect performance on certain heroes.

Overwatch 2 Practice

Overwatch 2 practice is fairly standardized, with most teams scheduling in Eastern Standard Time and using common scrim blocks to keep coordination simple. While your high school league may differ, following this structure helps with scheduling and finding strong practice partners. Not everything about running practice can be taught in a guidebook. Some lessons will come through hands-on experience.

■ Scrims (Scrimmage)

- 2 hours
- Play as many maps as you can in 2 hour block
- 5v5 vs another team

- ❑ **Set Blocks(In EST): 6-8pm, 8-10pm**(Most Common), 10-12pm

- ❑ **Recommended Custom Lobby Code:** [DKEEH](#)

■ Warmup

- ❑ 1 hour
- ❑ Play as many maps as you can
- ❑ 5v5 vs another team
- ❑ **No Set Blocks:** Try to a schedule before a match
- ❑ Run same was as scrims

■ VOD review

- ❑ **30 mins - 60 mins**
- ❑ Go over a recording of your team's game or a pro's game
- ❑ Focused on a maps and concepts
- ❑ Recommended to schedule before a Scrim

How to Set Up

Below is a step-by-step guide to properly procure and host an Overwatch 2 scrim for your program:

1. Post

- a. Post an LFS in dedicated channel in Public Server
 - i. Format "LFS {Region} {Platform} {Avg. Team Rating} {Time & Date}"
 - ii. [How to find your teams Avg Team Rating](#)
- b. Look for adverts that fit your teams criteria

2. Talk to Scrim Partner

- a. Ask if they are looking for a scrim
- b. Provide Name & Avg. Team Rating of your team
- c. Provide map pool and any other requirements for practice
- d. Establish which team is hosting
- e. Exchange Contacts (Battletags)
- f. Reconfirm scrim time

3. How to Host - Best Practices (Free resource: ["Overwatch 2 Lobby Guide: How To Setup A Custom Match" By British Esports](#))

- a. Recommended Scrim Code: [DKEEH](#)
- b. Select Map
 - i. Recommended Rotation: Control, Hybrid, Flashpoint, Push, Escort, Clash

- c. If Bans
 - i. Team that lost previous map chooses first ban
 - ii. Hosting Team bans first map 1
- d. Map selection
 - i. If rolling maps is not established, teams will alternate map picks
 - ii. Host Team selects map 1
- e. Ask enemy team about substitutions
- f. Start Match
 - i. Players must ready up ingame before a round can start so do not wait for enemy team unless specifically requested

Helpful Resources

- Public Discord Servers to find Scrims
 - [Overwatch 2](#)
 - [Overwatch Esports](#)
 - [Overwatch University](#)

Overwatch 2 Glossary

- **Bio** – Slang for a bathroom break. Teams may call a “bio” between maps if a player needs to step away.

- **Composition / Comp** – The specific combination of heroes chosen by the team. A comp determines playstyle and strategy (e.g., “dive comp” or “brawl comp”).
- **Contact** – Refers to the battletag or username of the opposing team’s representative for setting up or organizing a scrim.
- **Crosshair placement** – Keeping your crosshair aimed where enemies are most likely to appear.
- **Dry peek** – Looking around a corner without using any protective utility like a flashbang or shield.
- **Ego peek** – Exposing yourself to danger purely out of confidence or pride, usually against better judgment.
- **Flick** – A quick motion to move your crosshair to a target and shoot, often used in sniper duels.
- **Hero** – A playable character in Overwatch with unique abilities and an assigned role.
- **Holding angles** – Staying locked onto a known enemy route while waiting to shoot.
- **Host** – The person who creates and controls the custom game lobby.
- **NA Host** – A tongue-in-cheek jab at the host when they make a mistake, referencing the stereotype of unreliable hosts from North America.

- **Off-angle** – A positioning tactic where a player attacks from a less predictable side.
- **P** – Short for “Pause.” Used when a player disconnects or needs a break. Customarily used only between fights unless agreed upon.
- **Roll maps** – A directive to the host to quickly move on to the next map without further discussion.
- **Rotations** – The pathing and movement choices players or teams make to reposition for fights, flank, or escape after engagements.
- **Setups** – The initial positioning or strategy teams use before a fight begins, often based on map control, team composition, or enemy prediction.
- **Spray transfer** – Continuing to shoot while switching targets by dragging your aim smoothly.
- **Swaps?** – A quick way of asking the opposing team if they need to make substitutions before starting the next map.
- **Ult / Ultimate** – A hero’s most powerful ability, earned over time or through performance.
- **Utility – Non-lethal** abilities used for support, such as barriers, healing, or crowd control.

Player Improvement Roadmap

Players are expected to practice on their own to reinforce the lessons learned during team practices. At the start of the season, set clear weekly goals for players to follow both in and out of practices to maximize improvement, such as setting a target number of competitive games they should play each week. Team practices are best used to teach macro concepts and team strategies, while solo practice helps players refine their individual mechanics. Some players may also benefit from practicing their aim in custom lobbies, which can be found at [Workshop Codes](#).

Practice Frequency

At a minimum, we recommend that all teams dedicate one day each week to full team practice. This session should be three hours long, starting with one hour of VOD review followed by a two-hour scrimmage. If you plan to practice more than once a week, avoid doing a VOD review before every session, as it can overwhelm players with too much information. Outside of team practices, players should aim to practice individually or with teammates for three to five hours per week to improve their mechanics and reinforce what they’ve learned during team activities.

Reviewing Tape(VOD Review)

VOD reviews are essential for helping players better understand mistakes and patterns that occur during matches. If you rely only on scrims, players can develop a warped view of what is happening based solely on their own perspective. VOD reviews also provide a structured way to introduce and demonstrate new ideas or concepts in a setting that forces players to see how they apply in real scenarios. Try to keep VOD reviews under 50 minutes and focus on no more than three main topics to avoid overwhelming players. It is recommended to conduct a team VOD review before the first practice each week to set the tone and priorities for the days ahead.

Fundamental Roadmap

Week 0: Tryouts

Tryouts are typically run as a scrimmage against another team or as an in-house if you have more than ten players. We recommend holding tryouts over a two-day period during normal practice times. Coaches should mostly take a hands-off approach, focusing on evaluating players across key categories to help with team assignments and future development tracking.

Suggested Evaluation Categories:

- **Communication:** Does the player consistently share ideas and information during matches?
- **Coachability:** Can the player accept and apply feedback effectively?
- **Mechanics:** How strong are the player's aim and ability usage?
- **Micro Understanding:** Can the player identify what they personally need to do to win a fight?
- **Macro Understanding:** Can the player recognize what the team needs to do to win a fight?

When building teams, it is important to think long-term. Not all categories carry equal weight across every role.

For example, a tank with strong communication skills pairs well with a mechanically gifted damage player. Coachability, however, is crucial for every position.

Ultimately, you are building a machine. Each part may look different, but when they work together, they can accomplish any goal.

Goal(s): Select a team for the remainder of the season

Free Resource: [“Overwatch 2 Lobby Guide: How To Setup A Custom Match” By British Esports](#)

Check out our [“Overwatch 2 Tryout Package”](#) to learn how to run a tryout like a [Pro!](#) Get it for free

Coach Notes:

Week 1: First Practice

Use this week as an introduction to the season. Take things slow and allow players time to get to know one another. It is critical that players naturally develop a communication structure during this time. Instruct them to focus on making basic calls, such as enemy positions, who they are targeting, and when they intend to use abilities or ultimates.

This week emphasizes the best methods for maximizing the value of each practice session. Establishing these habits early will enhance both the players' experience and the amount of information they can integrate in the weeks ahead.

Mentality Focus Areas:

- **Player mentality:** Build a positive mindset focused on growth and teamwork.
- **Setting goals:** Create clear, achievable objectives for practices and matches.
- **Personal vs team goals:** Help players set both individual and team-based goals for each practice.
- **Structured feedback:** Teach players how to give and receive feedback in an organized and productive way.

Basic Calls Focus Areas:

- **Target calling:** Communicate who the team should focus on during fights.
- **Scouting:** Call out enemy positions and movement patterns.
- **Line of sight:** Support players should notify teammates when they cannot provide healing.
- **Ability usage:** Call when enemies use important cooldowns or ultimate abilities.

Goal(s):

- Players practice with a learning mindset, clear goals, and the ability to evaluate themselves and others productively.
- Players demonstrate basic collaboration and communication skills during gameplay.

Free Resource: [“How To Practice With a Scrim Team | Overwatch Amateur Team Esport Guides” By Dojo Game Guides](#)

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: First Practice Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 2: Communication Fundamentals

Now that the team has developed a basic communication structure, it is time to assign specific responsibilities within that framework. Introducing these roles early allows players to build and refine these skills over the course of the semester.

As a coach, you should hold players accountable for fulfilling their roles without dictating the exact way they should execute them. It is also important to note that any player can step into these roles as needed during a match, but if no one is actively performing a role, the designated player must be held responsible.

Key Roles:

- **Target Caller:** This player calls out who the team should focus on mid-fight, typically by quickly repeating the character's name. This role is often filled by the tank or the team's in-game leader.
- **In-Game Leader(IGL):** Responsible for making final strategic decisions mid-game and creating a “fight plan” for the team after each fight.
- **Ult Tracker:** Tracks enemy ultimate abilities after every fight. This information is critical for the in-game leader to make informed fight plans.

Goal(s): Establish who your team's Ult Tracker, Target Caller, and In-Game Leader are.

Free Resource: YT link explaining topic

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: Communication Fundamentals Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 3: The 3 Composition Styles

Over the next two weeks, the focus will be on composition building and learning how a team's playstyle changes based on hero selection. These “comps” are primarily defined by their engagement style and target priorities. There are three main composition styles, which interact in a “rock-paper-scissors” relationship:

Brawl:

- **Description:** Slow-moving, high-damage characters paired with speed supports (e.g., Lucio, Juno). Brawl comps rely on sustain and horizontal movement, excelling in close-range fights.
- **Target Priority:** Frontline
- **Strong Against:** Dive
- **Weak Against:** Poke
- **Example Heroes:** Reinhardt, Reaper, Mei, Lucio, Baptiste

Dive:

- **Description:** High-mobility, close-range characters with strong burst potential. Dive comps use vertical movement to collapse on weak or isolated targets.
- **Target Priority:** Backline / Isolated characters
- **Strong Against:** Poke

- **Weak Against:** Brawl
- **Example Heroes:** Winston, Genji, Sombra, Lucio, Kiriko

Poke:

- **Description:** Long-range, high-mobility characters that keep distance to chip away at the enemy's resources. Poke comps spread out across multiple angles, punishing mistakes.
- **Target Priority:** Low-health characters
- **Strong Against:** Brawl
- **Weak Against:** Dive
- **Example Heroes:** Sigma, Sojourn, Genji, Zenyatta, Illari

Have your team practice running each of the three compositions to discover which style they naturally excel at.

Goal(s): Team should be able to build and play variations of Brawl, Poke, and Dive compositions.

Free Resource: [“overwatch comps EXPLAINED” By yeatle](#)

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: The 3 Comp Styles Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 4: The 3 Playstyles

Now that your team understands the fundamentals of composition building, it is time to focus on playstyles. A playstyle refers to a team's overall approach, strategies, and behaviors during a match.

While the three primary playstyles share names with the three compositions (Brawl, Dive, Poke), it is important to understand that composition does not automatically determine playstyle. Successful teams must adjust their playstyle based on the enemy composition.

Work with your players to guide their thought process: how should they approach fights against different enemy comps? Help individuals recognize how they can adjust their play within the team structure to better support the playstyle.

A single hero can fit into multiple playstyles depending on the situation. For example:

- **Genji in Dive:** Starts fights alone, then collapses with the tank to secure kills.
- **Genji in Brawl:** Stays with the tank throughout the fight, enabling aggressive pushes.
- **Genji in Poke:** Plays independently around health packs, taking 1v1s and drawing enemy attention across the map.

Every hero in Overwatch 2 is like a Swiss Army knife. It's the team's job to figure out which role and playstyle each hero must adopt to make the composition succeed.

Goal(s): Team should be able to adapt their playstyle based on the enemy composition.

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: The 3 Playstyles Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 5: Prefight Positioning

How and where a fight takes place can drastically impact its outcome. This week, the focus should be on pre-fight positioning based on your team's fight plan. A key concept to understand is tempo — the pace at which your team plays and which team uses abilities first.

Tempo is influenced by your playstyle and in-game factors. For example:

- If you are playing a **Brawl playstyle**, you may want to play fast and aggressive, using “first tempo” to engage the enemy as soon as possible.
- In the same match, if you are waiting for an ultimate ability, you may need to slow down, adopt a **Poke playstyle**, and play “second tempo”, holding positioning until you are ready to engage.

Another key concept this week is leveraging corners, choke points, and natural cover. Tanks often hold specific corners or choke points at the start of a fight, allowing them to survive longer and anchor the team's setup.

Combining Tempo and Positioning:

- If playing **first tempo**, your tank should aggressively hold a forward corner, and the team should position close, ready to push with them.

- If playing **second tempo**, the tank may hold the same corner or choke point, but the rest of the team should play farther back, prepared to retreat and re-engage at the right moment.

As a coach, ensure your team is actively incorporating tempo and positioning into their fight plans, setting up properly around their tank.

Goal(s): Team can identify where they want the fight to happen and set up accordingly.

Free Resource: [“How to Teamfight in Overwatch 2 | Learning Your In-Game Priorities”](#) By: Tikatee

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: Prefight positioning Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 6: Midfight Movement

Building off Week 5, it is important to recognize that because of the constant movement in Overwatch 2, your team will often need to readjust their positioning based on the enemy or to gain a strategic advantage. What matters most is that the team synchronizes their movements. Even if players are spread out, they must move together as a unit. If movements are not coordinated, players can easily find themselves isolated and quickly eliminated from the fight.

Key Concepts for This Week:

- **Rotating:** Moving together to a new position to change the corner or chokepoint the enemy team is controlling.
- **Flipping:** A complete rotation where the attacking and defending teams switch sides of the map before a fight begins.
- **Kiting:** Backing out of a fight temporarily to avoid the enemy’s advantage, then quickly re-engaging once the threat passes.
- **Stabilizing:** Regrouping mid-fight around a specific area or player to quickly regain abilities and reset team positioning.
- **Clearing:** Sending a player to control a specific part of the map, often used by DPS players to remove enemies from high ground or alternative angles.

- **Stuffing:** Holding a chokepoint aggressively to force the enemy to use abilities just to move forward.

As a coach, walk players through their decision-making process for when to use each of these concepts. Help them figure out how to communicate and execute them effectively during matches.

By this point in the season, your team should also have a strong sense of which compositions they are most comfortable playing. Spend time identifying three of these compositions and assign code names to them for clarity and quick communication.

Goal(s):

- Team is able to identify and communicate how to move together as a unit.
- Team selects three compositions to refine for the remainder of the season, each with a code name.

Free Resource: [“PERFECT Positioning: the OW2 solution for DPS & Supports” by Spilo](#)

Check out our “Overwatch 2: Midfight Movement Course” to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 7: How to Self Vod

This week, players should focus on looking inward to better execute their individual responsibilities. Younger players especially tend to make decisions based on what looks cool rather than what makes strategic sense. Encourage players to take time to review their ability usage and perk selection to better understand how they can use their character to fulfill their role within the team.

Players should also reflect on their positioning and consider whether they could get more value by adjusting their playstyle while still fitting into the team’s overall strategy.

As a coach, be critical of player decisions, but remember that players often have a higher level of mastery of their individual characters than you do. Your role is to guide them by offering new perspectives and playing devil’s advocate, not by telling them exactly what to do. Have players walk through their thought process behind how they use abilities, select perks, and position themselves during fights. This is also a great opportunity to set aside time for players to review their own gameplay footage and self-assess their performance.

Goal(s): Players should critically assess their in-game decisions and adjust to better fulfill their responsibilities within the team’s strategy.

Free Resource: [COACH YOURSELF in OW2: The COMPLETE Guide \(In-Depth Self-Review Guide + Demo!\)](#)
By Spilo

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: How to Self Vod Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 8: Bans & Counter picking

By this point in the season, bans are likely something your team has already been facing. This week is focused on reviewing your compositions and adding flexibility to your strategies. Different scenarios require different heroes, and it is important to identify when a hero becomes obsolete or when your team must adjust their playstyle if a key hero is unavailable.

For example, if your team likes to run a composition of Winston, Reaper, Sombra, Lucio, and Kiriko, and the enemy bans Sombra, the Sombra player might swap to Tracer to maintain similar effectiveness, allowing the team to continue playing the same style with minimal disruption.

Sometimes, your team may also need to make a single hero swap in response to enemy strategies. Using the same example, if the enemy picks a long-range threat like Pharah, it is better for the Sombra or Tracer player to swap to a hitscan hero like Cassidy or Sojourn, rather than having the entire team change how they are playing. One player making a strategic swap allows the rest of the team to stay in their original game plan without losing structure.

Flexibility is key. Your goal is to master your core strategies while making small, focused adjustments, instead of completely changing how your team plays because of one bad matchup.

As a coach, use this time to review your compositions' weaknesses. Look for opportunities where players can adjust how they play or swap heroes individually to solve problems. Make clear plans for what players should swap to if certain heroes in your main compositions are banned, and ask players how they would adapt their playstyle based on these swaps.

Goal(s): Team can adjust their playstyle or make isolated swaps when necessary, keeping the overall strategy intact.

Free Resource: [SWAP: a Guide to Overwatch 2 Counters By Spilo](#)

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: Bans & Counter picking Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 9: Target Focus

Going forward, much of the focus will be on reviewing and refining topics we have already covered. This week can be simplified to one key idea: **“Make sure you are shooting the right person.”** With so much happening at once in a match, it is crucial for players to understand who they should be fighting and when in order to properly execute the composition.

Certain strategies may also require specific abilities to be used on specific targets. For example, a Sombra might need to hack the enemy tank to prevent them from diving the backline, while at the same time looking to finish off low-health heroes to secure kills. It is important to understand that not all five players need to shoot the same target at the same time to achieve the best result.

Key Concepts for Target Focus:

These ideas are often intertwined and can be used as midgame commands:

- **Apply Pressure:** Shoot at an enemy to force a disengagement or to clear an area.
- **Match:** Force a 1v1 duel against an enemy player to control space or prevent a flank.
- **Collapse:** Coordinate with teammates to quickly eliminate a weak or isolated enemy.

- **Trade:** Play extremely aggressively to kill a key target, even at the cost of dying.
- **Target/Focus:** Aim to eliminate a specific enemy hero without playing recklessly.
- **Peel:** Stay near a teammate to protect them when they become the focus of an enemy attack.

As a coach, actively ask players who they are shooting and why. Also ask who they are not shooting, and whether a different target focus is needed to improve the team's overall play.

Goal(s): Players should be able to prioritize who they need to execute strategy

Free Resource: [“Overwatch 2 TARGET PRIORITY Guide | Who You SHOULD Focus Fire for EASY PICKS” By Baileys OW](#)

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: Target Focus Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 10: Win Conditions

This week focuses on refining your team's fight plans. While somewhat self-exploratory, win conditions, or “win cons,” are the specific actions and strategies a team uses to secure a fight. It is important for players to not only identify their own win conditions but also recognize the enemy's win conditions in order to plan countermeasures in advance.

Strategies can have many different win conditions. Here is a breakdown to help players identify how both teams want to play:

Key Areas to Analyze:

- **Playstyle:** What playstyle and tempo will the enemy use?
- **Hero:** Which enemy hero is most important to their strategy?
- **Abilities:** Which key abilities will the enemy rely on to engage, and who are they likely to target?
- **Ultimates:** How will the enemy's ultimates change their engagement style or fight plan?

As a coach, work with your team to walk through these questions both before and during practices. Help them practice identifying win conditions quickly and adjusting their strategies based on what they see.

Goal(s): Team can identify their own strategy's win conditions and make countermeasures based on the enemy team's win conditions.

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: Win Conditions Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 11: Economy

This week is all about balance. Teams often overcommit their ultimates to win a single fight, only to find themselves vulnerable in the next one. Ultimate abilities can completely shift the momentum of a match, so it is critical to clearly define how and when they should be used within your strategy.

It is equally important to think about how ultimates can be used to gain an edge across the entire map, not just in isolated fights. For example, if the enemy team uses Nano Boost and Dragonblade together (NanoBlade), it might be best to respond with a Sound Barrier, allowing your team to kite the damage and re-engage once their ultimates have expired. In this scenario, you would have used one ultimate to counter two enemy ultimates, preserving your resources for the next fight.

Categories of Ultimates:

- **Engagement Ultimate:** Used at the start of a fight to initiate an engagement.
- **Win Condition Ultimate:** Used specifically to secure a win during a fight.
- **Negation Ultimate:** Used to counter or nullify an enemy ultimate.
- **Tempo Ultimate:** Used to maintain momentum during a fight or recover from a disadvantage.

As a coach, work with your players to help them recognize when and why to use their ultimates, and when it is best to combine ultimates for greater impact.

Goal(s): Team can identify the purpose behind each ultimate use and make smarter decisions about the ultimate economy.

Free Resource: “How the Pros Use: Ultimate Economy [GUIDE]” By Atlas_AV

Check out our “[Overwatch 2: Economy Course](#)” to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 12: Playoffs - Player Lead Practices

Now that the team has a solid strategic foundation and a strong understanding of the fundamentals of Overwatch 2, the focus moving into playoffs should be on refining and improving what has already been taught. Avoid introducing major new strategies during this time, as it can confuse players when consistency and clear communication are critical.

As a coach, begin to take a step back and select players to lead reviews and practices. This allows them to make minor adjustments to their communication structure and playstyles to better complement each other. Encourage players to stick to what they are good at rather than experimenting with new, unproven strategies. The goal is to sharpen what works, not to rebuild.

This is also a good time to introduce Performance Scrims, where the team treats practice sessions like official matches, focusing on winning as many maps as possible by any means necessary. You can even incorporate light punishments, like physical exercises, for losing maps to build competitive discipline — just be careful not to overdo it.

Playoffs are the time for innovation within your established systems, not for creating entirely new ones. Keep the team focused and hungry for improvement, and make sure every week leading into playoffs is centered around polishing and executing at the highest level.

Goal(s):

- Maintain and refine existing strategies.
- Empower players to take leadership in practices and reviews.
- Build competitive intensity through performance-focused scrims.

Check out our [“Overwatch 2: Playoffs – Player lead Practices Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Outro

One of the most important lessons I’ve learned is that there is no single way to play Overwatch. The strategies and concepts in this curriculum are designed to help your team grow, but their true impact depends on how you apply them. Strong teams succeed by having open conversations, testing new ideas, and finding what fits their unique playstyle. Let this curriculum be your foundation, and build on it in a way that reflects your team’s identity.

Give your players the chance to lead. Student-led practices create space for collaboration, creativity, and shared learning. Encourage them to bounce ideas off each other and explore new approaches together. As a coach or teacher, be willing to learn alongside your team. You do not need to have all the answers, just a commitment to grow with your students. Best of luck this season. We are here to support you every step of the way.



YOUTH GAMING
ASSOCIATION

YGA COACHES GUIDEBOOK:



**ROCKET
LEAGUE**

Introduction

Hey there! Coach Ulti here.

I've been coaching for about eight years now, and first off: huge congrats on stepping into the world of Rocket League coaching! You're in for an exciting journey. I still remember my own early days: full of energy, passion, and more than a few questions about whether I was doing things "right."

There's a big difference between playing Rocket League and coaching it and that gap can feel massive at first. When I started with my first roster, I kept looking for a roadmap or guide that just didn't seem to exist.

That's why I've put together this guidebook. Inside, you'll find everything from foundational rotation principles to advanced offensive and defensive strategies, plus how to identify and build around your team's win conditions. My goal is to help you step onto the pitch with confidence not just as a player, but as a coach with the one up your team needs.

Hardware & Software

Suggested tools for managing teams, practices, and competitions.

Hardware

- 4 Computers per team that can run Rocket League on low settings on at least 60 FPS (120+ is standard)
- Monitors with a refresh rate of at least 120 Hz are ideal
- Headphones for each computer are required
- A microphone for each computer is required (can be part of the headphones)
- A 5th computer is good to have for a coach to watch or record

Software

<https://bakkesplugins.com/>

Essential 3rd party tool for Rocket League that allows access to useful plugins and modded maps for training.

- <https://epicpen.com/>
 - On-screen annotation tool
- <https://obsproject.com/>
 - Recording for VODs
- <https://lndrindr.github.io/>
 - Analysis tool

- <https://rocketleague.gankster.gg/scrim>
 - Connect with other teams and schedule practice games (scrims) in advance.

Cross Platform Play

Rocket League is primarily a PC game. It has a console version, although there are much fewer resources and events in place for that platform.

Rocket League Practice

Practices generally consist of 3 different activities:

- **In-game tournaments:**
 - 45 mins – 1hr 30 mins
- **Scrims**
 - 1hr
 - Best of 7
 - Can either be through mutual contacts or Gankster app.
- **VOD Review**
 - 1hr
 - Go over a replay of your team's game or a pro's game

- Typically 1 to 2 focus topics

While a practice day can incorporate all three elements: scrims, VOD review, and individual work, it is not required to include them all every time.

How to Set Up

Below is a step-by-step guide to properly procure and host a Rocket League scrim for your program:

1. Create a private match
2. Choose party or name/password
3. Start the game once all players have joined and signaled readiness—either by jumping in or if both teams type 'ready' or 'R' in chat.

Helpful Resource

- <https://rocketleague.gankster.gg/scrim>

Rocket League Glossary (Key Terms for Coaching and Players)

- **50/50** – A challenge between two players who arrive at the ball simultaneously, often resulting in a neutral deflection. Winning a 50/50 can lead to strong offensive opportunities.

- **Aerial** – Jumping and boosting into the air to strike the ball mid-flight. Mastering aerials is essential for higher-level play and controlling the vertical space of the field.
- **Boost Management** – The strategic collection and usage of boost pads. Effective boost management is critical for maintaining offensive pressure, recovering on defense, and enabling advanced mechanics.
- **Demo / Demolition** – Ramming into an opponent at supersonic speed to temporarily remove them from play. Demos can create openings, relieve pressure, and disrupt enemy rotations.
- **Dribble** – Maintaining possession of the ball while controlling its movement, either by carrying it on the car or with soft, controlled touches along the ground. A core skill for solo plays and baiting challenges.
- **Rotation** – The structured movement pattern players follow to maintain spacing and role coverage—typically cycling through positions like first man (challenger), second man (support), and third man (defense/anchor). Good rotations reduce double commits and strengthen team play.
- **Shadow Defense** – A defensive technique where the player tracks the attacking opponent at a slight distance instead of immediately challenging.

This allows for better reaction timing and forces mistakes from the attacker.

Player Improvement Roadmap

Individual Practice Expectations

Players are expected to continue playing and improving outside of scheduled team practices, aiming for 15–20 hours per week. This time should focus on individual mechanics such as:

- Shot placement
- Movement and recoveries
- Positioning and awareness

Encourage players to use their solo time intentionally, not just to grind ranked, but to target specific skills they need to develop. Keypert's car control guides are highly recommended as a resource for refining muscle memory and improving core mechanics.

Practice Frequency

Practice should run for at least 2 hours, three times a week for optimal improvement. A typical balance is around 60% scrims and 40% VOD review, but this ratio can shift based on the team's current needs.

Use each tool with intention:

- If your team is unsure what to improve or focus on next, conduct a VOD review to identify patterns, mistakes, or growth areas.
- If your team just learned a new concept or strategy, prioritize scrims to immediately put that knowledge into practice.

Adaptability is key so let the purpose of your practice sessions guide the format.

VOD Reviews

VOD reviews are essential for helping players gain a clearer, more objective understanding of what's happening in the game. Relying solely on scrims can give players a distorted view based on their limited, in-the-moment perspective. VOD sessions allow you to pause, reflect, and highlight key mistakes or successes that may go unnoticed during live play.

They're also an excellent way to introduce and reinforce new concepts in a controlled setting, showing players exactly how and where those ideas apply. To keep reviews effective and engaging, limit sessions to under an hour and focus on no more than three key topics at a time.

Fundamental Roadmap

Week 0: Tryouts

Player Evaluation Criteria

When scouting or assessing players, focus on these core characteristics:

- **Coachability:** Do they listen to instructions and actively try to apply feedback? Willingness to learn is key.
- **Attitude:** How do they react under pressure or when losing? Are they uplifting and supportive of their teammates?
- **Coordination:** Do they work well with others? Look for passing plays, follow-ups, and overall synergy.
- **Communication:** Are they consistently calling out plays, positioning, and in-game events?
- **Mechanics:** Look for proficiency in advanced techniques such as flip resets, wave dashes, speed flips, dribbling (ground and air), wall play, and recovery.
- **Reads:** How accurately do they anticipate ball movement, especially 50/50s? Can they make plays before the ball hits the ground or wall?

- **Gamesense:** Do they make smart decisions under pressure? Are they calm when a play isn't a threat? Do they trust teammates and avoid double commits?

How to Use This

Tryouts should be structured around benchmarking these traits and not just watching passively. Document everything. Track progress over time and use it to set goals, adjust training, and identify team gaps. The more measurable your evaluation, the more intentional your coaching can become.

Check out our [“Rocket League Tryouts Package”](#) to learn how to run a tryout like a [Pro!](#) Get it for free

Coach Notes:

Week 1: Goal Setting and Comms

Week 1: Goal Setting and Communication

This week is crucial for getting to know your team on a deeper level. Begin by discussing each player's goals and motivations. Ask whether they aim to go pro, seek to thrive in a team environment, or simply make friends along the way. Understanding these personal aspirations will help keep everyone motivated throughout the season and foster stronger team bonds. When players know each other's values, it builds a powerful team identity that drives cohesion and commitment.

Next, establish fundamental ingame communication habits. Players should consistently call out locations, intentions, and key information such as: “I’m up,” “I got it,” “Taking back left boost,” “Took their right boost,” “I’m left,” “I’m mid,” “Back pass?” or “He’s up.” These simple, clear communications form the foundation of effective teamwork.

Communication is the backbone of coordination. While players may not always know their next play, they should always communicate what they are doing in the moment. Encourage forward-thinking comms: if a player is rotating back or moving to pick up boost, they should announce it before they act. This proactive communication helps avoid confusion and keeps the team aligned.

Remember: Keep comms future-based. If someone is heading back, they need to say it before they do. If someone is taking the mid-left boost, they need to say it before they grab the pad.

Goal: By the end of Week 1, players will have established clear individual and team goals that reflect their motivations for joining the team. They will also learn and consistently apply basic ingame communication standards to improve coordination and build trust. This foundational week sets the tone for team identity, mutual understanding, and efficient gameplay throughout the season.

Free Resource: [The EPIC Guide to Communication in Rocket League](#)

Check out our [“Rocket League Foundations Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 2: Basic Rotation

This week introduces the fundamental principles of basic rotation, including key roles and the critical importance of rotating effectively. Roles should be defined by clear objectives that guide how players position themselves and move on the field. Rotation is the process that ensures players transition smoothly after making decisions. As long as teammates don't interfere with each other's movements and only override positions to assist when necessary, the rotation will flow naturally. For a basic standard, aim to maintain a smooth, cyclical rotation pattern, like a fluid circle, that adapts and cuts in only when needed.

- **First Man:** Applies immediate pressure on the opponent with challenges, fakes, and attacks that don't overcommit. It's crucial they maintain momentum to recover quickly if the play turns against them.
- **Second Man:** Responds based on the first man's actions—playing close to support short plays like 50/50s or dribbles, and positioning farther back to handle larger plays such as aerals, backboard reads, or clears.
- **Third Man:** Prepares for the worst-case scenario, buying time for teammates to recover. This player often carries the ball to the corner or pushes it over opponents to force a difficult turnover, especially if teammates are low on boost or out of position.

Emphasize how proper rotation supports momentum, efficient boost usage, and quick recovery. Teach the difference between far-side and ball-side rotations: the back post rotation is the far-side relative to the ball's position. For example, if the ball is on the left, rotating through the right side of the field (middle or right) counts as far-side rotation.

Remember: The more your players move smartly around the field, the more boost they collect, and the better prepared they'll be to switch between offense and defense smoothly.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 2, players should be able to cycle through their rotations without getting in each other's ways/slowing down the plays that prevents them from being ready.

Free Resource: [Rotation Guide for Rocket League](#)

Check out our ["Rocket League Basic Rotation Course"](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 3: Offense

This week focuses on offensive strategies that apply consistent pressure to the opponent's defense while maintaining your team's momentum.

Key concepts include:

- **Boost Stealing:** Denying opponents boost limits their ability to clear the ball from their defensive half, putting them under sustained pressure.
- **Demo Line:** This is the positioning just outside your net where players maintain momentum and remain a constant threat to the opposing defense.
- **Effective Boost Management:** Efficient use of boost is crucial. Overusing boost on aerial plays without coordinated support can slow down your offense, resulting in lost momentum.
- **Forechecking:** Aggressively challenging opponents in their corners to disrupt their possession and force mistakes.

Offense is where the team can really control the pace, focusing on outpacing the opponent, stealing boost, and overwhelming them at every opportunity. The biggest challenge is preventing your third player from getting isolated in a 1v2 scenario, which can lead to lost possession in midfield. At the same time, creating space for the third player to join the play is often the difference between scoring or missing a chance.

An interesting analogy from high-level chess highlights this: a fully defended king typically requires at least three attacking pieces to be checkmated. Similarly, having all three players actively involved in offense increases your chance of breaking down a strong defense and scoring. This makes teamwork and coordinated pressure essential to offensive success.

Goal: By the end of Week 3, players will understand the fundamentals of offensive play, including how to maintain consistent pressure on opponents through effective boost management, demo positioning, and forechecking. They will learn how to disrupt the enemy's defensive setup by controlling boost resources and applying coordinated attacks while balancing team positioning to avoid isolation and maximize scoring opportunities.

Free Resource: [6 of the BEST Offensive Strategies in Rocket League | Offence Tips](#)

Check out our [“Rocket League Offense Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 4: Defense

This week focuses on building a strong defensive foundation to help your team effectively stop threats and maintain control.

■ Back Post Rotation:

Back post positioning allows players to maintain an angle toward defending the center lane, especially after grabbing 100 boost in the corner and moving into position. It's crucial to manage pacing so players neither overcommit nor undercommit, avoiding panic decisions that can lead to defensive breakdowns.

■ Backboard Play:

Backboard defense is primarily designed to counter aerial attacks aimed at the backboard. If a play fizzles before reaching the backboard, it's often better for your player to defend from the ground. A key drawback of backboard defense is limited mobility. Facing away from the play can be risky compared to other defensive options.

■ Front Post Rotation:

Front post rotations typically involve players moving through the middle of the field rather than the backfield, allowing better control over the center. Players often stop just short of the front post to respond quickly to corner plays. This method is considered the current meta standard, but flexibility remains important.

■ Cuts:

Cuts are defensive moves that compensate for a teammate's late rotation into a play. The goal is to intercept or slow opponents advancing through open spaces to prevent uncontested attacks.

■ Backchecking:

Backchecking involves challenging opponents who are receiving passes and transitioning into offense. This can include demos or boost stealing—any tactic that disrupts their momentum and effectiveness.

Remember: While front post rotations are generally considered standard, all these defensive techniques will be used situationally throughout the game. There is no “one size fits all” approach.

Goal: By the end of Week 4, the team should confidently manage boost pickups while ensuring timely rotations back into defensive positions.

Check out our [“Rocket League Defense Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 5: Team Structures

This week introduces the concept of team structures: how your roster positions and rotates around the ball to maintain pressure, control pace, or prepare for counterattacks. These foundational structures help define your team's identity and inform how players support each other throughout a match.

Common Structures in the Current Meta:

- **Cover 1:** One player consistently covers the play while the other two remain supportive or rotate defensively. This structure thrives on capitalizing on opponent mistakes with simple, reactive positioning. It's more commonly seen in CRL and lower-tier play but still has value in slower-paced matches.
- **Stacked:** Two players stay close to the ball while one plays at a distance. This style applies more immediate pressure than Cover 1 and supports faster follow-ups and quicker plays. It's the most popular structure in high-level play, seen in teams like The Ultimates (Firstkiller, LJ, Chronic).
- **Cover 2:** Two players are always near the play, favoring counter-attacks and quick transitions. This setup excels at punishing overextensions and is used effectively by teams like NRG (Daniel, Beastmode, Atomic). It offers defensive reliability and explosive offense when executed well.

Team structures can be nuanced and vary even within the same archetype. No team is identical, and as a coach, it's your responsibility to identify which structure best suits your players' strengths. While the above examples are common, many hybrid or experimental systems exist: some that prioritize pace, others pressure or possession.

Goal: By the end of Week 5, the coach should be able to identify which team structure—Cover 1, Stacked, or Cover 2—best aligns with the players' strengths and begin shaping a playstyle that supports that structure.

Free Resource: [Do you actually UNDERSTAND how to PLAY Rocket League?](#)

Check out our [“Rocket League Team Structures Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 6: Counter Play

This week focuses on reading opponents and developing micro-level adaptations that create your team's win conditions during a match. By understanding and practicing counter play, players will be able to respond effectively when the other team gains the upper hand.

Core Concepts:

- **Below Crossbar Play:** A grounded defensive approach useful for countering aerial shots.
- **Clears:** Used to buy time, reset pressure, and force opponents into less advantageous positions.
- **Control:** Smart ball control can bait opponents into overcommitting or falling out of rotation.

Counter-Pass: A sudden midfield redirection that shifts momentum and opens up offensive opportunities.

Counter play is more of an art than a formula—it varies based on your opponents' tendencies. Some teams overextend or rush plays, others have exploitable recoveries or over-rely on possession. Identifying these habits allows you to create a tactical response, whether that's speeding up your transitions or applying pressure to their setup structure.

Goal: By the end of Week 6, coaches should be able to identify the specific problems their team faces in

matchups and begin developing counter strategies tailored to those challenges.

Free Resource: [How To Play Against ANY Playstyle In Rocket League](#)

Check out our [“Rocket League Assessing RLCS Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 7: Kickoffs

This week introduces your team to a variety of kickoff strategies that can give them early control, disrupt the opponent's setup, or even create instant scoring opportunities. Kickoffs are more than just mechanics, they're micro-strategies that, when mastered, set the tempo of the match.

Core Kickoff Strategies:

- **Delayed Kickoff:** The first player intentionally delays contact to absorb the opponent's impact and create space for a controlled counter. This is risky if mistimed, as it can lead to getting overpowered early.
- **Fast Cheat:** A classic aggressive strategy where the second man cheats up quickly to challenge gaps in the opponent's structure and pressure immediately after the kickoff.
- **Ahmad Cheat:** A diagonal cheat through small boost pads, allowing quicker force-side plays and faster follow-ups on net. Ideal for fast-paced, coordinated attacks.
- **Karmine Corp (KC) Breakaway:** A highly aggressive cheat where the second man positions to the side opposite their first man. If timed correctly, the ball is redirected left for an uncontested shot before the opponent can respond.

- **Back Corner Kickoff:** The first man intentionally loses the kickoff backward to a teammate rotating through the back corner for 100 boost. While this sacrifices pressure, it allows safe possession and resets tempo.

Kickoffs operate in a cat-and-mouse meta, every strategy has a counter. The goal is not just to “win” the kickoff, but to maximize your team’s advantage while minimizing the opponent’s.

Goal: By the end of Week 7, your team will understand how to select and execute the most effective kickoff strategy for a given situation, aiming to limit the opponent’s options while creating their own momentum.

Free Resource: [ROCKET LEAGUE 3v3 KICKOFF GUIDE \(YOU NEED TO KNOW THESE TIPS in 2023\)](#)

Check out our [“Rocket League Kickoffs Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 8: Adv. Rotation, Values

This week focuses on how to create meaningful advantages through smart positioning, timing, and understanding high-level team interactions.

- **Demo Timing: Well-timed** demolitions can disrupt the opposing team’s structure, but they must be coordinated around your 1st and 2nd man’s mechanics. Knowing when to demo—versus going for a pass or supporting the play—is crucial.
- **Advanced Cuts:** Recognize tendencies in opponents. Does the other team wait too long on possession? Do they overly rely on aerials? This is where your players learn to anticipate and punish hesitation or telegraphed plays through intelligent cutting.
- **Angle Play:** Learn where shots are strong and where they fall flat. For example, corner ball control rarely results in strong net pressure—recognizing when to reset, pass, or redirect is essential. Doomsee Dishes used to be strong, but current meta often counters them.
- **Back-Passes:** Risky but valuable, back-passing is best when done to reset pressure or swing possession safely. The key is knowing your teammate has space and time to use it.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 8, your team should understand how angle control affects play outcomes, know when to pursue demos, and recognize opportunities to create value through rotation and cuts.

Check out our [“Rocket League Advanced Rotation Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 9: Counter Attacks

This week focuses on how to exploit the opponent's defensive structure and turn pressure into fast, efficient offensive plays.

- Midline positioning is a key skill. By hovering just behind the centerline, players can buy time, intercept poor clears, and re-initiate pressure when the offense stalls. Knowing when and how to play this line is vital for enabling your third man to rotate in with confidence.
- Corner play is equally important in setting up strong counterattacks. Directing the ball into or out of the corners can shift tempo, retain control, and pull defenders out of position. Players will develop awareness of how corner usage ties directly into recovering pressure and setting up scoring opportunities.

Counterattacks are highly situational because every team defends and transitions differently. What works against one opponent may completely fail against another. That's why learning how to adapt is key. Midline and corner play form the foundation of strong counterattack strategy. Controlling these areas allows your team to regain possession and create space for quick transitions. But just like kickoff strategies, counterattacks come in many forms, and players need both solid fundamentals

and plenty of ingame experience (“exposure therapy”) to recognize patterns and react effectively in real time.

Goal: By the end of Week9, players will learn how to convert defensive situations into scoring chances through strategic midline and corner positioning, building fast and intelligent counterattack habits.

Check out our [“Rocket League Counter Attack Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 10: Transition Play

This week focuses on creating more opportunities to transition the ball effectively between offense and defense.

- **Stabilizers**—These are openings in defensive play for both your team and the opponents. The goal is to position your team so that you cannot be scored on either by buying time or by making clears and control plays. These scenarios can vary widely, but the key is putting the ball into space where the opponent loses scoring opportunities.
- **Pressure Relief**—This happens when your team is under heavy pressure—perhaps your boost is depleted, momentum is low, and you need a way out. The most essential way to relieve pressure is by clearing the ball effectively, often by winning 50/50 challenges or making smart plays that reset the situation.
- **Sustained Counter**—Unlike quick counter-attacks, sustained counter play is about consistently transitioning from offense to defense. It involves creating pressure, cycling possession smoothly, and maintaining precise timing to keep control while shifting the flow of the game.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 10, your team will learn how to prevent opponents from generating scoring chances

and where to place the ball to delay or disrupt the opponent's offensive rhythm.

Check out our ["Rocket League Transitions Course"](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 11: Resources

This week, we'll focus on the core resources that form the backbone of Rocket League gameplay. Mastering these is essential to gaining an edge over your opponents:

■ Boost

Boost is the lifeblood of Rocket League. It allows players to accelerate faster, reach the ball quicker, make powerful clears, and execute aerial plays. Managing boost wisely, knowing when to conserve it, when to use it aggressively, and how to collect boost pads efficiently, can make the difference between winning and losing key challenges. Teams with better boost control have greater freedom to pressure opponents and maintain control of the field.

■ Player Momentum

Momentum refers to how effectively your players maintain flow and pace during the game. This includes the timing of challenges, rotations, and ball control. Positive momentum means your team is consistently putting pressure on the opponent, forcing mistakes, and creating scoring chances. Negative momentum occurs when your team is reactive or scrambling, often allowing opponents to dictate play. Understanding momentum helps teams decide when to push aggressively or when to reset and regroup.

■ Positioning

Positioning is about where players are on the field relative to the ball, their teammates, and opponents. Good positioning allows for quick rotations, effective defense, and smooth transitions between offense and defense. It also minimizes risky challenges and reduces the chance of double commits or gaps in coverage. Teams with strong positioning control space better and can anticipate and counter opponent plays more effectively.

These three elements, boost, momentum, and positioning, are the recipe for consistent success. If you analyze any Rocket League match, you'll find the winning team usually maintains higher averages in these resources. Even if an opponent doesn't make a clear mistake like missing the ball, the team with better resource management will generally come out on top.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 11, your players will gain a deeper understanding of why boost, momentum, and positioning matter and how managing these resources can turn the tide of a game. As a coach, you will develop the ability to assess which resource your team lacks at any moment and implement strategies to improve it effectively.

Check out our [“Rocket League Resources Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 12: Tournament Prep

This week focuses on how to effectively prepare for your tournament run. Preparation is crucial, not just physically, but mentally and strategically, so your team can understand how opponents operate and develop plans to counter their tactics.

Playstyles

Every team has a unique approach to the game, shaped by their strengths, weaknesses, and player preferences. Recognizing different playstyles helps you anticipate how opponents will behave under pressure. Some teams play aggressively, constantly pressuring; others rely on defensive setups and quick counters.

Individual Player Characteristics

Teams often assign roles based on individual player skills and tendencies. For example, NRG often positions Beastmode in front when he's confident about making key calls or plays. Understanding these individual quirks, like who tends to challenge aggressively, who favors aerials, or who anchors defense, helps you predict and disrupt opponent strategies.

This section serves as mental preparation for your tournament mindset: how to keep your players confident and adaptable, how to scout opponents effectively, and how to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and unique

tendencies. Maybe an opposing team allows a particular player to dominate a certain skill area, or maybe they cover a section of the field unusually. Spotting these “special quirks” gives you tangible advantages in planning your approach.

Tournament prep isn’t just about practicing mechanics; it’s about developing a philosophy of the game that embraces analysis, adaptability, and mental toughness.

Goal(s): As a coach, you will gain the skills to analyze what your opponents are doing to win and identify specific weaknesses in their players. This insight will empower you to craft strategies that neutralize their strengths and exploit their vulnerabilities.

Check out our [“Rocket League Tournament Prep Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Outro

Rocket League is a fast-paced game that demands precision, awareness, and trust. As a coach, your job is to turn raw potential into teamwork, to guide players toward making smarter decisions, and to help them understand that every rotation, every pass, and every goal is a shared effort. This guidebook was built to support that mission, offering the tools you need to grow confident, capable players who understand their role within the team. No one player can carry a match alone, and no individual achievement outweighs the progress of the program. Only one teammate can touch the ball last, but it takes everyone to create the play that led there. Keep building that trust, keep developing those habits, and success will follow.



YOUTH GAMING
ASSOCIATION

YGA COACHES GUIDEBOOK:

**SUPER
SMASH BROS.™**
ULTIMATE

Introduction

Hey there! I'm Scotty O'Dell, better known in the Smash community as *Kiodahawk*.

I've been competing in *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* since 2017, primarily in the Kansas City and Columbia, MO regions. During my time at the University of Missouri - Columbia, I served as the captain of the school's Smash team. Under my leadership, we competed in the NACE league and reached the playoffs both years I was captain.

Currently, I'm ranked among the Top 50 Villager players in the world and am a former Top 100 Bowser player.

My top advice for starting a Smash team?

Build a roster with a wide variety of characters and always lead with positivity.

It is incredibly easy to let a single bad result erode your confidence, but improvement takes time, so as long as you're better than you were yesterday, you're already succeeding.

Software & Hardware

Suggested tools for managing teams, practices, and competitions.

Hardware

- Nintendo Switch
- Gamecube adapter (if a student is using that type of controller)
- Gaming monitor
 - TV can work but make sure it is in "Game Mode" in the settings to reduce input lag
- Ethernet adapter for switch

Software

- Nintendo Switch Online
- Bracket creation software
 - [Start.gg](https://start.gg), challonge.com are my recommendations

How to Host a Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Crew Battle Scrim

Follow this step-by-step guide to set up and run a crew battle scrim for your program:

1. Set Up the Match

- Contact a team to arrange a date and time.
 - This could be another school, a group of local players, or even casual players from your campus.
- If playing online, create a private arena in *Smash Ultimate* and share the room code with the opposing team.

2. Set the Rules

- **Game Ruleset:**
 - 3 Stocks
 - No Time Limit
- Make sure all players are aware of and follow legal stage lists (these may vary depending on your league or agreement).

3. Determine the Starting Players

- Each team selects and declares their starting player.
- Decide on a starting stage (mutual agreement or by following league rules/stage striking process).

4. Begin the Crew Battle

- Play Match 1
- After the match, record how many stocks the winning player has remaining.

5. Continue the Crew Format

- The losing team selects their next player.
- The winning player announces their stage bans.
- The losing team picks from the remaining stages.
- Start the next match, with the winning player self-destructing to account for any stocks lost in the previous match (e.g., if they ended with 1 stock, they SD twice at the start).
- Repeat the above process until one team is out of players.

6. Use communication hubs like Discord to coordinate.

- Ideally, your league should have a shared Discord server for coaches.
- You can also connect with others through regional Smash Discords — find a list at smashcords.com/smash-5

This format not only sharpens individual performance under pressure but also builds strong team dynamics and strategy. Be sure to save replays or watch matches live to give feedback and identify growth areas for your players.

Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Glossary

- **Bans** – Short for *stage bans*. Used to initiate the stage selection process by deciding which legal stages will be removed from play for that match.
- **Button Test / Hand Warmers** – A brief warm-up or practice round before a set. Players check their controls and get comfortable without the pressure of a competitive match.
- **Combo** – A sequence of attacks that connect together, leaving the opponent little to no time to react or escape.
- **Combo String** – A planned or reactive sequence of moves that flow together, often difficult to escape once started.
- **DI (Directional Influence)** – A defensive technique used to slightly alter the trajectory you're launched when hit, helping you survive longer.
- **Edgeguard** – The act of preventing an offstage opponent from recovering back to the stage, usually by intercepting or pressuring them at the ledge.

- **Fastfall** – Pressing down during a jump to fall faster than normal, often used to land quickly or extend combos.
- **Frame Data** – Technical details about each move, including startup frames, active frames, endlag, and total duration—used to analyze move efficiency and safety.
- **Gimp** – A low-damage knockout caused by interrupting a character's recovery with a weak or non-lethal move, often at low percentages.
- **Hitbox** – The invisible area of an attack that deals damage when it comes into contact with a hurtbox.
- **Hurtbox** – The area on a character's model that can receive damage from an opponent's attack.
- **Knockback** – The force with which a character is launched after being hit, increasing with both damage taken and move strength.
- **Lag Test** – A short, casual match or exchange used to check for input delay, stuttering, or Wi-Fi connection issues before playing seriously.
- **Ledge Trap** – A tactic where a player maintains control of the ledge area, pressuring or punishing an opponent trying to get back on stage.
- **MU (Matchup)** – Shorthand for matchup; refers to how one character performs against another, including strategy, strengths, and weaknesses.

- **Neutral** – The phase of the game where neither player has clear advantage. Both are feeling each other out, spacing, and looking for a safe opening.
- **PS2** – Short for Pokémon Stadium 2, a widely used neutral stage. Saying “PS2?” is shorthand for offering to skip the banning process and mutually start on this stage.
- **Punish** – The act of taking advantage of an opponent’s mistake, such as a whiffed move, by counterattacking or dealing damage.
- **R/R?** – Short for “Ready/Ready?”, a quick message sent before starting the next match to confirm both players are ready.
- **Read** – Predicting your opponent’s next move and punishing it—often a sign of strong awareness and adaptation.
- **Recovery** – The process of returning to the stage after being launched off, using jumps, specials, or movement tools.
- **Spacing** – Positioning yourself carefully to apply pressure, stay safe, or bait out your opponent’s actions.
- **Spike** – A powerful downward-hitting move that can send opponents straight down, often resulting in an early KO.

- **Tech Chase** – Following and reacting to an opponent’s get-up option after they’re knocked down, often leading to a punish or combo extension.

Practice Structure

Practices should last between three hours and focus on reinforcing the core concept of the week (outlined below). Begin each session by teaching or reviewing that week’s fundamental topic keeping the explanation clear and interactive.

After the lesson, transition into hands-on application. Players can hop into the ingame training lab to refine specific mechanics or face off in 3-stock matches to put the concept into real-game practice. You can also organize a small bracket where everyone plays each other or set up a full tournament-style bracket to simulate the intensity of competitive matchups.

As a coach, it’s important to observe matches and give constructive feedback after each set. Encourage players to offer each other tips as well pointing out strengths, identifying habits, or suggesting areas of improvement. This peer-to-peer interaction builds a strong team culture and helps players grow together.

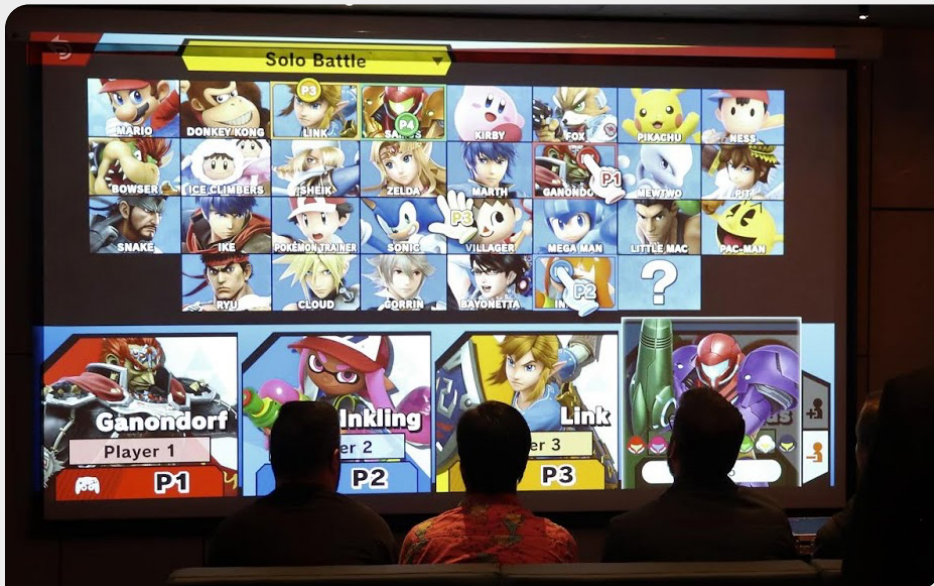
Spend 30 minutes reviewing matches from the past week to understand why a player won or lost. Focus on decision-making, missed punish opportunities, and

especially on how and why stocks were lost. Losses, while tough, offer the most valuable learning moments, just be sure to highlight the good alongside the bad to keep morale up.

As Oscar Wilde once said, *“Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes.”*

Use VODs to identify patterns, reinforce growth areas, and recognize when players shine. Thoughtful review is one of the most effective tools for long-term improvement.

In addition, watching high-level tournament matches is also valuable practice—it helps players see how different characters and playstyles are used effectively and can inspire new strategies or adaptations.



Player Improvement Roadmap

Week 0: Tryouts

I recommend running tryouts as a small tournament to evaluate how players perform against one another. This helps you determine skill level, adaptability, and playstyle.

If you have 8 or fewer students:

- Set up a round robin tournament
- Each player should play against every other player in a Best of 3
- Record who wins each set
- This format gives a clear picture of how everyone stacks up
- If there are ties, play out tiebreaker matches to determine final placement

If you have more than 8 players:

- **Double elimination bracket:** Allows players a second chance and helps determine overall rankings

■ **World Cup-style format:**

- Players first compete in small round robin groups

Based on performance, all players are seeded into a main bracket for final placement

Team Sizes & Selection:

- Most teams are composed of 4-6 players
- The bracket format provides individual placements for everyone trying out, making it easier to select the objectively strongest team

Goal: The goal of Week 0 is to evaluate each player's current skill level, adaptability, and playstyle through structured competition. By running tryouts in a tournament format, every player has the opportunity to face multiple opponents and character matchups, giving coaches a well-rounded understanding of individual strengths and team potential.

Whether using a round-robin or bracket system based on group size, the focus is on ensuring all participants get meaningful match experience. This process not only helps identify the strongest players for the team but also fosters a competitive, growth-oriented environment from the start.

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Tryout Package”](#) to learn how to run a tryout like a Pro! Get it for free

Coach Notes:



Week 1: Choosing a Character

After finalizing your roster, the next step is to ensure that each player is using a character they both enjoy and play effectively. Every character in *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* falls into a general playstyle archetype such as zoner, brawler, rushdown, or trapper though many characters can be played flexibly depending on the player's approach.

This is a great opportunity to help your players explore and define their preferred playstyle, while also ensuring your team has a diverse range of strategies. A well-balanced roster with varied character archetypes can give your team greater versatility and adaptability in crew battles or tournament play.

Common Playstyles in Smash

Have your players experiment with each style to discover what fits them best.

■ Rushdown

- Very fast, aggressive, and in-your-face
- Focus on big combos and quick pressure
- Often “glass cannons” that die quickly

■ Bait and Punish

- Defensive and reactive
- Wait for the opponent to make a mistake, then capitalize
- Focus on spacing and timing

■ Grapplers

- Focus on landing grabs for high-damage combos
- Must be played close to the opponent
- Thrive on reads and pressure

■ Zoners

- Defensive and patient
- Use projectiles to control space and keep opponents out
- Slowly chip away at the opponent's percent

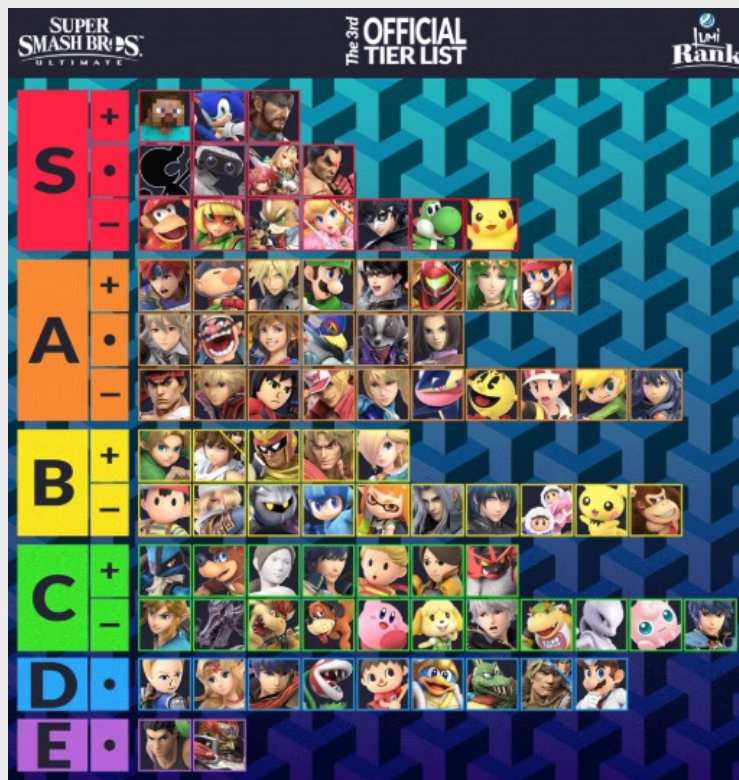
Tier List Awareness

- Some characters are objectively stronger than others based on current meta
- Players should pick a main character to specialize in

- Having a secondary character is fine, but it requires double the learning and practice

Goal(s): By the end of Week 1, every player should confidently identify their primary character, one that aligns with their playstyle and personal enjoyment. Coaches should also aim to foster roster diversity by avoiding duplicate mains when possible, ensuring the team has a wide range of tools and strategies to draw from in competitive play.

Free Resource: Most Recent Smash Tier List



Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Choosing a Character Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 2: Basic Movements

As the saying goes, “Every journey begins with a single step,” and the same holds true in *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate*. Movement is one of the most essential fundamentals in the game. Unlike traditional fighting games, Smash takes place on large, open stages with platforms, giving players the freedom to move in dynamic and creative ways.

While most new players can run and jump, competitive movement requires greater precision and control. Learning techniques like short hopping, fast falling, dash dancing, and perfect pivots allows players to move more efficiently, pressure opponents safely, and avoid predictable patterns.

Mastering movement gives players a significant edge and what separates solid fundamentals from high-level play.

Core Movement Options

- Walking
 - Slow, controlled movement
 - Useful for micro-spacing
- Running
 - Fast ground movement
 - Enables quick approaches and retreats

■ Jumping

- Basic vertical mobility
- Full hops cover more distance but are slower

■ Short Hop

- A lower jump that allows for faster aerial attacks
- **Multiple ways to perform:**

- Lightly press the jump button
- Press two jump buttons simultaneously
- Press jump and attack at the same time

■ Fast Falling

- While falling, press down on the control stick
- Speeds up descent, helping with quicker landings and mix-ups

Goal(s): Players should begin by learning all standard movement options, including walking, dashing, jumping, and shielding. Once comfortable with the basics, they should start practicing short hops to improve their aerial control and spacing. From there, introduce fast falling to enhance mobility and apply pressure more effectively during engagements. Mastery of these movement techniques lays the foundation for higher-level play.

Free Resource: Smash Ultimate Movement Guide – BlueSiriusGaming

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Basic Movement Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 3: Attacking

Once players have a solid grasp on movement, the next step is learning how to integrate attacks into the fast-paced gameplay they’ve been developing. Every player should become familiar with their character’s full moveset, understanding which attacks are best for racking up damage and which ones can reliably secure stocks.

Equally important is input precision. It can be frustrating for players to accidentally perform a tilt attack when intending a smash attack, or vice versa. Developing consistent, intentional inputs is key to building confidence in competitive settings.

As players continue to refine their movement, especially techniques like short hopping and fast falling, they should also begin to incorporate aerals into their gameplay. Well-timed aerals can apply pressure, catch opponents off guard, and transition smoothly into combos or kill setups.

Move Types to Practice

- **Jabs**
 - Quick, close-range attacks that come out fast and can start combos or interrupt opponents.

■ Tilts

- Light directional attacks performed by lightly tilting the control stick. Each direction has a unique function, often used for pokes or combo starters.

■ Smash Attacks

- Strong, chargeable attacks used to secure KOs. Players must learn to differentiate the input from tilts for consistent execution.

■ Dash Attack

- Performed while running. Players can use the C-stick while running to help execute this move cleanly.

■ Aerials

- Attacks performed in the air. Combine these with short hops and fast falling to quickly apply pressure or follow up on opponents.

■ Special Moves

- Unique to each character. These include projectiles, recoveries, and powerful utility options.

■ Grabs

- Used to punish shielding opponents, control space, and set up throws or combos.

Goal(s): Players should take time to learn and understand every move their character can perform, including the purpose and utility of each one. This knowledge helps in choosing the right option during fast-paced matches. Equally important is the ability to reliably execute those moves specifically distinguishing between tilt attacks and smash attacks. Developing control and consistency with these inputs ensures players can respond accurately under pressure and maintain their intended game plan.

Free Resource: [How to Tilt vs Smash – SubtleTypos](#)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Attacking Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 4: Combo Fundamentals

The most common way to take stocks in *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* is by building up your opponent's percent and then finishing with a strong attack that launches them off the stage. To do this effectively, players need to learn the best combos for racking up damage quickly and consistently.

In Smash, “building up percent” refers to dealing damage over time using a variety of attacks. As a character takes more damage, their percentage (or “percent”) increases—displayed beneath each character's icon during a match. The higher a character's percent, the more knockback they suffer, meaning they'll be launched farther by powerful moves.

This mechanic is key to securing knockouts (KOs). By using safe, reliable combos to build damage, players can push opponents into a high-percentage range where a finishing move is much more likely to send them offstage and secure the stock.

Every character in *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* has a set of fundamental combos, often referred to as “bread and butter” combos. These are reliable, go-to sequences that help players build damage and set up for knockouts. Some characters, like Bowser, rely on straightforward, high-damage moves, while others, like Joker, have more complex combo chains that require greater technical

precision. Regardless of the character, learning consistent combo starters and finishers is essential for controlling the match and taking stocks with confidence.

Combo Concepts to Practice

- Bread and Butter Combos
 - Basic combos that work on most characters
 - Typically effective at low percents
 - Every character has a few of these and they are vital to learn early
- Combo Throws
 - Many characters have a grab that leads directly into a combo
 - A reliable way to start building percent
- Combo Starters
 - Moves that begin a combo chain
 - Often these are tilts like down tilt or up tilt
 - These should lead into follow-up attacks or aerals
- Combo Enders
 - Strong finishing moves that end a combo string

- These can include smash attacks or high-damage aerals

■ Kill Confirm Combos

- Specific combos that lead directly into a stock-taking move
- Extremely useful under pressure and great for warm-ups

Goal(s): By the end of Week 4, players should be confident executing all of their character's basic combos, focusing on the core sequences that build damage and set up kills. Identifying all reliable combo starters in a character's moveset is crucial, as these are the attacks that consistently lead into follow-up moves. Once the starters are understood, players should consistently practice the timing and spacing required for consistent execution, ensuring they can land combos reliably in real matches.

Free Resource: [Mario Combo Guide – FrenzyLight](#)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Basic Combos Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 5: Defensive Options

Now that your players have started learning basic combos, it's time to shift focus to one of the most overlooked yet essential parts of competitive play: **defense**. Many casual players underuse the shield button, but strong defensive fundamentals are just as important as offensive ones. Effective shielding and movement not only help players survive longer but also create opportunities to counterattack and control the flow of a match.

When a player enters the shield animation, they gain access to several powerful defensive tools such as rolls, spot dodges, jumps, or out-of-shield attacks. Mastering when and how to use these options can dramatically swing momentum in their favor. One key concept is identifying each character's fastest and most reliable out-of-shield options, which allow players to quickly punish opponents who attack unsafely.

It's also important to warn players against holding shields for too long. A shrinking shield is more vulnerable to being broken, which leaves the player temporarily stunned and wide open to a devastating punish. Good defensive play is not just about blocking, it's about smart, reactive decisions that keep your player in control even when under pressure.

Core Defensive Options

- **Shielding**
 - Basic block that protects from most attacks but shrinks over time
- **Shield Grab**
 - Grab performed while holding shield
 - Useful when opponents hit shield too closely
- **Rolling**
 - A quick reposition left or right while shielding
 - Helps avoid pressure but can be punished if predictable
- **Spot Dodging**
 - Temporary invincibility while standing in place
 - Great for dodging single hits or grabs
- **Air Dodging**
 - Used while in the air to avoid attacks
 - **Comes in two forms:**
 - **Neutral Air Dodge:** Dodges in place
 - **Directional Air Dodge:** Dodges in a chosen direction

Out-of-Shield Options

Actions performed immediately after letting go of shield to punish an attack

- **Jump**
 - Opens up aerial punishes or retreats
- **Up B**
 - Many characters have fast up specials that are strong out of shield
 - Especially effective against close-range pressure
- **Up Smash**
 - For characters with fast upward smash attacks, this can be a reliable kill option

Advanced Technique: Parrying

- Performed by releasing shield just a few frames before an incoming attack
- Allows for faster punishes
- Can be risky but extremely rewarding

Goal(s): By the end of Week 5, players will understand and begin applying core defensive mechanics—such as shielding, rolling, spot dodging, and air dodging—

to extend survivability and create punish opportunities. Each player should also identify their character's most effective out-of-shield options and learn when to use them. By practicing these fundamentals, players will develop smarter reactions under pressure and start to control the pace of matches through defensive awareness.

Free Resource: [Shielding and Defense Guide – BlueSiriusGaming](#)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Defensive Options Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 6: Teching

Teching, short for “technical recovery”, is a crucial defensive mechanic that allows players to maintain control after being knocked down. By pressing the shield button just before hitting the ground or stage, players can perform a tech to recover quickly and avoid being vulnerable to follow-ups or edgeguards.

There are several types of techs players should become familiar with. Ground techs help players get up faster after landing on the ground, while tech rolls allow them to reposition left or right immediately after a successful tech. This helps avoid pressure and resets neutral.

If a player misses a tech, they still have recovery options: they can perform a roll, a neutral get-up, or an attack get-up. Each of these has its uses and vulnerabilities, and learning to read and punish missed techs is an important part of developing a strong neutral game. For example, a jab lock can trap opponents who miss their tech and lead to guaranteed damage or even a kill.

Players should also learn stage and wall techs, which involve pressing shield just before colliding with the side of a stage. This prevents knockback and opens up options like jumping off the wall to escape danger. Wall techs are especially helpful in avoiding edgeguards and surviving longer in tough matchups.

Key Teching Concepts

■ Ground Tech (Knockdown Tech)

Performed by pressing the shield button just before hitting the ground after getting knocked down

Allows players to recover faster and avoid pressure

■ Tech Rolls

- After a successful tech, players can roll left or right to reposition
- Helps avoid follow-up attacks

■ Missed Tech Options

If a tech is not performed, players can:

- **Roll:** Quick movement left or right while lying down
- **Neutral Get-Up:** Standard recovery in place
- **Attack Get-Up:** Stand and perform an immediate attack

Learning to read and punish these is an essential skill

■ Tech Punishes

- Punishing predictable tech habits is key to winning neutral exchanges

- **Jab Locks:** Used to punish missed techs by locking opponents in place for a guaranteed follow-up

Stage and Wall Techs

■ Stage Tech:

- Press the shield button just before hitting the side of the stage
- Prevents knockback and allows immediate recovery

■ Wall Tech Jump:

- Press the jump input during a wall tech to jump away from the stage safely
- Often used for escaping edgeguard situations

Goal(s): By the end of Week 6, players have learned how to consistently perform techs on the ground and against walls to stay safe and recover quickly from knockdowns. They should also become familiar with post-tech options and missed-tech punish scenarios, both to improve their own survivability and to capitalize on their opponent's habits.

Free Resource: [Smash Teching Guide – BlueSiriusGaming](#)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Teching Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 7: Directional Influence (DI)

Another critical defensive technique to master is Directional Influence (DI). When a character is hit, they are launched in a specific direction based on the angle and power of the attack. However, players can influence that launch angle by tilting the control stick during or immediately after being hit. Proper DI can significantly reduce knockback, helping players survive longer, escape follow-up combos, and maintain control during high-pressure situations.

Certain moves act as “DI checks”, attacks where incorrect DI can result in an early stock loss. For example, Bowser’s side special (Flying Slam) can KO opponents as early as 80–90% if they DI incorrectly (inward), but with proper DI (away), players can often survive until 120–140%. Recognizing and reacting to these high-risk moves is essential for competitive play.

In stock-based formats like crew battles, every stock is crucial. Mastering DI not only extends a player’s survivability but can also disrupt the opponent’s momentum and shift the tempo of the match.

DI Concepts to Practice

- How DI Works
 - Tilt the control stick in a direction as you are hit
 - Controls how high, low, far, or short your character flies

■ Survival DI

- Helps keep you alive longer after strong hits
- Usually involves holding diagonally away and up from the attacker

■ Combo DI

- Used to escape or avoid being caught in multi-hit combos
- Often involves holding away from the opponent or toward a platform

■ Smash DI (SDI)

- A more advanced technique used to move slightly during multi-hit attacks
- Can help you escape certain follow-ups or avoid finishing hits

Goal(s): By the end of Week 7, Players will understand the fundamentals of Directional Influence (DI) and begin practicing how to use it effectively during matches. The goal is to consistently survive longer by correctly influencing their launch trajectory after being hit.

Free Resource:

[DI Guide – Beefy Smash Doods](#)

[SDI and Combo DI – JforJonas](#)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Directional Influence Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 8: Edgeguarding

While most of the fighting in *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* takes place onstage, players can only secure a stock by preventing their opponent from returning after being knocked off. Once an opponent is offstage, mastering edgeguarding, the act of intercepting and stopping their recovery, is essential to closing out stocks effectively.

Many characters possess powerful spike moves that send opponents straight downward, often securing early KOs. Other times, simply jumping offstage to land a well-timed hit is enough to finish off an opponent. However, players must always remain aware of their own recovery options to ensure they can safely return to the stage after attempting an edgeguard.

If your player finds themselves offstage, their priority should shift to survival. Using tools like jumps, air dodges, and recovery specials, they must work to safely reach the ledge and avoid being edgeguarded in return.

Edgeguarding Concepts to Practice

■ Spikes

- Moves that hit opponents downward, often leading to early KOs
- Most characters have at least one aerial or special move that spikes

■ Gimps

- Light hits or weak moves that interrupt recovery
- Useful against characters with poor or linear recovery options

■ Forcing Opponent High or Low

- Use positioning and pressure to make the opponent recover in a predictable direction
- Helps set up punishes or edgeguards

■ Throwing Out Safe Moves Off Stage

- Use quick, low-risk attacks while chasing opponents off stage
- Helps maintain control without risking self-destructs

■ Hitting Characters Into the Stage

- Can cause a stage spike if the opponent does not tech
- Especially effective at mid to high percents

Goal(s): By the end of Week 8, players will understand the fundamentals of edgeguarding and begin applying them in matches. Equally important is developing awareness of which moves are risky or unsafe to use offstage, in order to avoid self-destructing during an edgeguard attempt.

The overall goal is to help players confidently pressure opponents offstage while maintaining control of their own recovery.

Free Resource: [Edgeguarding Guide – TooCozy](#)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Edgeguarding Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 9: Ledgeplay

The ledge is one of the most critical positions in Super Smash Bros., often determining whether a player can regain control or lose a stock. When a player grabs the ledge, they receive a brief period of invincibility. However, once that window closes, their movement and options become significantly more limited. If their opponent is already on stage and ready, they hold the advantage, much like the iconic “high ground” moment from Star Wars, where positioning determines the outcome.

Players need to understand how to play both sides of this exchange. They should practice trapping opponents on the ledge, punishing predictable get-up options, and using their character’s tools to cover multiple escape paths. At the same time, they must also learn how to vary their own ledge recoveries to avoid getting caught. Encouraging players to be creative and adaptable in these situations helps them regain stage control more consistently and deny it to their opponents.

It’s important to note that every character in Smash has tools that can cover multiple ledge options at once, allowing them to maintain stage control and pressure opponents effectively. Most players naturally gravitate toward one or two preferred ledge options, such as neutral get-up or roll, which can become predictable over time. By learning to recognize these patterns, your players can consistently punish escape attempts and take advantage of their opponent’s habits.

Ledge Options to Understand and Practice

■ Neutral Get-Up

- Player climbs straight up onto the stage

■ Roll

- Player rolls from the ledge toward center stage

■ Ledge Attack

- Player climbs up and performs an immediate attack

■ Jump

- Player jumps from the ledge to return from the air

■ Drop From Ledge

- Player lets go of the ledge, then performs another option like a jump or aerial

■ Do Nothing

- Staying on the ledge too long removes invincibility, which can lead to punishes

Goal(s): By the end of Week 9, players should begin developing strategies to counter their opponents' habits and adapt during matches. The goal is to teach players how to recognize patterns in their opponent's play,

like repetitive recoveries, predictable ledge options, or common combo starters, and respond with effective punishments or adjustments.

Free Resource: [Ledge Trapping Guide – BananaBoySSB](#)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Ledgeplay Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 10: Advanced Combos

After a few months of practice, your players should have a strong grasp of their character's full toolkit. This is the ideal time to return to the training lab and begin refining advanced combos. The focus now shifts to identifying the most damaging and reliable follow-ups in specific situations and mastering how to close out stocks efficiently.

Some characters have the potential to take a stock from 0 percent with the right setup. If your character has access to these high-reward combos, prioritize practicing them until they're consistent. However, the more universal and critical goal is developing a deep understanding of all the kill-confirms available to your character. These should function like a flowchart, when you land a certain move at high percent, you should know immediately what follow-up leads to a confirmed KO.

To reinforce this, consider quizzing your players on common in-game scenarios. For instance, ask, "What's your kill-confirm if you land a down tilt at 90%?" Helping them internalize these decision trees will improve their reactions and execution under pressure.

Advanced Combo Concepts

- Learn a Zero to Death (ZtD) combo if your character has one
 - **Characters known for ZtDs include:**
 - Luigi
 - Kazuya
 - Ice Climbers
 - Bayonetta
 - And others
- Use the training lab to replicate combos performed by professional player
 - Mimicking pro setups helps players understand real-match applications
- Begin incorporating footstools into extended combos
 - This adds a layer of creativity and potential for optimization
- Practice all advanced kill confirms your character can perform
 - These are essential tools for converting a hit into a stock, especially at high percent

Goal(s): By the end of Week 10, players should be able to identify and perform at least one advanced combo and one reliable kill confirm for their character. They should also begin developing a clear understanding of their character's percent-based flowchart, recognizing which moves lead into kill setups at different damage levels.

Free Resource: [Advanced Joker Combo Guide – TooCozy](#)

(Similar guides exist for most characters. Encourage players to search for their main)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Advanced Combos Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 11: Crew Battle Tactics and Mental Thoughts

Now that your players are consistently securing stocks, it's time to shift focus to the mental side of competition and the unique dynamics of Crew Battles. Unlike standard one-on-one matches, Crew Battles are team-based showdowns where each player's performance directly impacts the team's overall success. It's not just about individual skill, it's a game of matchups, momentum, and mental endurance.

One of the most important Crew Battle decisions is lineup order. Some teams opt to lead with their strongest player in hopes of gaining early momentum and putting the opposing team on the back foot. Others prefer to save their ace as the anchor, ready to clean up stocks in a tense final match. A balanced strategy often starts with a consistent, adaptable player who can handle a wide range of opponents and set the tone. As the battle unfolds, you can then counterpick with players who have favorable matchups against the characters still in play, maximizing your team's chances of winning key rounds.

Use the regular season as a testing ground. Track which players consistently perform well in specific matchups, and identify patterns that can inform your playoff strategy. Reinforce to your players that every stock counts, reckless decisions or panic can shift momentum and cost the team a winnable game. Encourage them

to play with discipline and intention, treating each stock like it could decide the match. Developing this mindset not only improves their competitive resilience but also strengthens the team as a whole.

Crew Battle Concepts

■ Lead Off

- Choose a player who performs well against most characters
- They should have few bad matchups and a solid mental game

■ Counterpick Matchups

- After the first round, select players based on who counters the opposing character
- This helps shift momentum and stop losing streaks

■ Anchor Role

- Saving your best player for the final matchup can give your team the clutch factor needed to close out a battle

■ Stock Value

- Every stock counts
- Avoid unnecessary risks and focus on consistent decision-making

- Play every stock as if it is your last to maximize efficiency and minimize mistakes

Goal(s): By the end of Week 11, players should understand the strategic importance of Crew Battle formats, including how to approach matchups, manage momentum, and maintain a strong competitive mindset. They should be familiar with different lineup strategies and be able to discuss the advantages of starting strong versus anchoring with a top performer. Players should also begin thinking critically about their role on the team and how their character fares in specific matchups. Most importantly, they should learn to value every stock, recognizing that smart, disciplined play can shift the outcome of an entire battle.

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Crew Battle Tactics Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 12: Baiting and Reading your Opponent

The final part of this course focuses on two advanced and essential competitive skills: baiting and reading your opponent.

Baiting is the deliberate act of provoking a specific reaction from your opponent, like a roll, jump, or unsafe attack, that you can then punish. It involves creating situations that tempt your opponent into making predictable mistakes. For example, jumping toward an opponent but then stopping just above them without attacking can cause them to panic and throw out a move or roll away, giving you an opening to punish. Another common bait is using a safe move to pressure an opponent's shield; if they attempt a shield grab and miss, you have an opportunity to punish their whiff.

Reading your opponent means carefully observing their habits and tendencies in different scenarios, like how they recover from techs or get off the ledge. By recognizing these patterns, you can anticipate their next move and prepare an effective counterattack.

A practical way to improve both baiting and reading is by studying your character's frame data, the detailed timing of each move. This knowledge helps you understand which moves are safe to use in pressure situations and how to punish common defensive options. Mastering

baiting and reading elevates your gameplay by turning your opponent's decisions against them and controlling the flow of the match.

Key Concepts

■ Safe and Unsafe Moves

- Use safe moves to bait your opponent into trying to punish you
- Punish their attempt if they miss or overcommit

■ Spacing Moves on Shield

- Space your moves at the edge of the opponent's shield to make them harder to punish
- Practice this technique to make more of your options safe

■ Footsies

- Run just into your opponent's range, then quickly move back
- If they swing, you can punish their whiff

■ Empty Hops

- Jump without using an attack to bait out a defensive option
- If they roll, air dodge, or grab early, punish the response

■ Reading Opponent Habits

- ❑ Watch how your opponent reacts to common situations
- ❑ Notice if they shield or roll when you run at them
- ❑ Pay attention to how they get off ledge
- ❑ Track which way they usually tech
- ❑ Once you figure out their habits, you can start punishing them more reliably

Goal(s): By the end of Week 12, players should be able to intentionally bait opponents into making predictable mistakes and capitalize on those opportunities with well-timed punishes. They will develop the skill to read their opponent's habits and tendencies in various situations, allowing them to anticipate actions and respond effectively. Additionally, players will gain an understanding of their character's frame data to identify safe moves and punish options. Together, these skills will enhance a player's ability to control the pace of the match and make smarter, more strategic decisions under pressure.

Free Resources:

[Reading and Baiting Guide – BananaBoySSB](#)

[Out of Shield Tool](#)

(This site helps you check which moves can be punished after hitting your shield)

Check out our [“Super Smash Bros Ultimate Baiting Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Intro

Thank you so much for reading through this guide, and I truly hope it helps you lead your team to victory and getting better at a game they love to play. One of my favorite things about Smash is the skill expression in the game. Two players can play the same character but in vastly different ways that still works, so encourage your team to be creative and have fun. Also, the players will also be great teachers to the other players throughout the scrimmages. Every week, the team should be pushing each other to get even better.

Growing up, my motto was “smiles go for miles”, so I encourage you to stay positive throughout the teaching process and try to foster a great, team environment for the game - even though the players compete in a one on one setting in the game. The journey to get great at Smash takes a lot of time and effort, with all the matchups, techniques, and combos you need to learn, so making sure to fall in love with the process of getting better is paramount to success. Good luck and have fun this season!



YOUTH GAMING
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YGA COACHES GUIDEBOOK:



VALORANT

Introduction

My name is Luke Moore, known online as *SkyAxe*, and I have been coaching *Valorant* for the past four years. I've worked with players and teams across all skill levels, and this guidebook is designed to be relevant and adaptable to everyone, from beginners to advanced competitors.

This guide covers everything from fundamental aiming techniques to the most advanced team tactics and strategies in *Valorant*. Each week's content is intended to be learned and applied within seven days, but feel free to adjust the pace to fit your team's needs, making sure each topic is fully understood before moving forward is key.

Above all, remember that attitude and team atmosphere are the most important factors in growth. Real improvement happens when players stay open-minded, are willing to learn, and support one another. Encourage creativity and experimentation, even if players have unconventional playstyles, work with them to refine those approaches instead of forcing everyone into a rigid plan. This guidebook outlines commonly accepted best practices, but the ultimate goal is to help your team find what works best for them.

Software & Hardware

Suggested tools for managing teams, practices, and competitions.

Hardware

- 5 Computers that can run Valorant on low settings on at least 60 FPS (120+ is standard)
- Monitors with a refresh rate of at least 120 Hz are ideal
- Headphones for each computer are required
- A microphone for each computer is required (can be part of the headphones)
- A 6th computer is good to have for a coach to watch or record

Software

- <https://valorant.gankster.gg/scrims>
 - Connect with other teams to book and schedule practice games (scrims) in advance.
- <https://valoplant.gg/>
 - Draw strategies and plans with agent icons and abilities included.

- <https://tracker.gg/valorant>
 - Look at a player's rank history. It is good for planning tryouts and grouping similar skill levels.
- <https://discord.com/>
 - Most common communication platform for teams that is easy to set up and use.
- <https://obsproject.com/download>
 - Recommended recording software for creating VODs to review.

Cross-Platform Play

Valorant is primarily a PC game. It has a console version, although there are much fewer resources and events currently in place for that platform.

How to Set Up *Valorant* Scrims

Below is a step-by-step guide to properly procure and host a *Valorant* scrim for your program:

1. Create a custom lobby and change lobby settings
2. Allow Cheats: ON
3. Tournament Mode: ON
4. Overtime: Win By Two: OFF
5. Play Out All Rounds: ON

6. Hide Match History: ON
7. Change the map to the map you agreed to play on with the other team
8. Generate a party code and send it to the other team
9. Choose a server that is even for both teams
10. Start the game when both teams say ready or "R"

Helpful Resources

- <https://valorant.gankster.gg/scrims>
- <https://pracc.com/> (Immortal 3 - Radiant scrims)

Valorant Glossary of Terms

- **ADS (Aim Down Sights)** – Aiming through a weapon's sights to improve accuracy, often at the cost of movement speed.
- **Composition / Comp** – The set of five Agents chosen by a team. Each comp influences how aggressively or defensively the team can play.
- **Point of contact** – The IGN (in-game name) or Discord of the opposing team's organizer, used for coordination.
- **Contact** - Walking into a site without making noise until the enemy is seen.

- **Duelist** – A role or agent type designed to take 1v1 fights and entry into sites.
- **Eco round** – A round where players save money and buy minimal equipment.
- **Entry fragger** – The first player into a site or fight, often tasked with getting the opening kill.
- **Hard clear** – Methodically checking a corner or angles when entering an area.
- **Host** – The person who creates and manages the custom game lobby.
- **Inf?/mm** – Shorthand for “Infinite credits?” or “money match.” A rule agreement to turn on infinite money during scrims for practice purposes. Usually after one team wins 13 rounds.
- **P10** – A custom scrim rule meaning “pause at 10 seconds.” Used in the buy phase for tech issues or other discussions.
- **Peek** – Briefly stepping out from cover to check or challenge a position.
- **Remake** – Used when a match needs to be restarted due to issues like incorrect map settings or major disconnects.
- **Retake** – The process of regaining control of an area after losing it, such as a bomb site.

- **Ringer** – A substitute player stepping in for a missing teammate during a scrim or custom match.
- **Rotations** – The movement of players between bomb sites to adapt to the enemy’s strategy or to retake lost ground.
- **Setups** – Defensive or offensive positioning and trap strategies set up before the round starts, often using utility.
- **Midround** – Giving a clear plan in the middle of a round to direct teammates.
- **Trade (kills)** – Killing an enemy right after they eliminate your teammate while they are distracted.
- **Ult / Ultimate** – A powerful ability unique to each Agent, earned with orbs or through kills. Often game-changing if timed correctly with a team push or retake.

Practice Structure

For optimal results, practices should last at least two hours, three times per week. Typically, teams allocate around 60% of practice time to scrims, 20% to VOD review, and 20% to focused server work. However, these tools should be used flexibly based on your team’s needs. If the team is uncertain about what to improve next, begin with a VOD review to identify areas for growth. When introducing a new skill or concept, prioritize scrims

to give players real-game practice. If a recurring issue persists despite previous work, dedicate server sessions specifically to addressing that problem.

VOD Reviews

VOD reviews are an excellent tool for helping players gain a clearer understanding of the mistakes they make during matches. Relying solely on scrims can give players a limited, often biased perspective of what is really happening in-game. VOD reviews also provide a valuable opportunity to introduce new ideas or concepts in a way that encourages players to see how these strategies apply in real situations. To keep sessions effective and engaging, try to limit VOD reviews to under 50 minutes and focus on no more than three key topics per session.

Players are expected to continue practicing and playing outside of team sessions, aiming for approximately eight games per week. Individual practice should focus on key areas such as aiming, movement, and positioning. For mechanical skill improvement, popular aim trainers like Aim Lab or Kovaak's are highly recommended. When working on agent-specific skills, players should study professional gameplay featuring their agents, especially on maps where they feel less confident. Additionally, meeting with players individually every other week provides valuable opportunities to guide their personal practice and address specific areas for improvement.

Check out our “Valorant Tape Review Package” for a step-by-step guide!

Fundamental Roadmap

Week 0: Tryouts

Tryouts are typically run as a scrimmage against another team or internally against other players trying out, especially if you have more than ten participants. Coaches should closely watch and listen during these tryouts to evaluate players in key categories. This process helps with assigning teams and tracking player development throughout the season.

Suggested Evaluation Categories

- Coachability
 - Willingness to listen, adapt, and apply feedback
- Attitude
 - Team-first mindset, sportsmanship, and emotional control
- Communication
 - Quality and consistency of callouts, listening, and teamwork
- Mechanics
 - Aim, movement, reaction time, and general technical skill

■ Decision Making

- Awareness, timing, and ability to make smart plays under pressure

Goal(s): By the end of Tryouts, Coaches are familiar with the scrim booking software and have learned how to coordinate schedules with players to ensure smooth practice sessions. A finalized roster is set consisting of five to six players, creating a balanced and versatile team. Additionally, one player is selected to serve as the dedicated ingame Leader (IGL), who will take charge of calling strategies and guiding the team during matches.

Check out our [“Valorant Tryout Package”](#) to learn how to run a tryout like a [Pro!](#) Get it for free

Coach Notes:

Week 1: Practicing Effectively

Week 1 focuses on practicing effectively to maximize the benefits of each session. By implementing structured habits and systems, players can improve their experience and increase the amount of knowledge the team retains and applies in the following weeks. A well-organized approach fosters a productive learning environment and promotes collective growth.

Key Areas of Focus

■ Player Mentality

- Players should show up ready to learn, improve, and support each other
- A growth mindset is key to long-term success

■ Setting Goals

- Each player should have both individual and team goals
- Personal Goals focus on skill development and mechanics
- Team Goals center on coordination, communication, and strategy

■ Structured Feedback

- Create space for players to give and receive feedback

- Focus on being specific, actionable, and respectful

■ How to VOD Review

- Review footage with purpose
- Identify mistakes, decision-making patterns, and areas for improvement
- Ask questions like “What was the goal?” and “What could have been done differently?”

■ IGL Responsibilities

- In-game leaders (IGLs) guide communication and set the pace
- Teach IGLs to manage callouts, keep team morale high, and maintain focus during matches

■ Coaching Tips and Pitfalls

- Be consistent with expectations
- Avoid overcoaching during matches
- Prioritize clarity over complexity
- Encourage self-reflection and team-driven solutions

Goal(s): By the end of Week 1, players should approach practice with a learning-focused mindset, using structured

goals to guide each session. They will develop the ability to evaluate their own performance and provide clear, respectful feedback to teammates, fostering a positive and productive environment for growth.

Free Resource: [VALORANT Scrim Etiquette & How to Practice](#) | [METRO TDAWGG](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Practicing Effectively Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 2: Approaching a Map

This week focuses on building a structured game plan for a new map, a specific playable area or environment where matches take place. In Premier, each week introduces a different map, so the ability to quickly analyze and prepare for these varying layouts is a critical skill. Each map has unique features such as choke points, objective locations, and terrain that influence how the game is played. A strong preparation process allows the team to develop a shared understanding of these elements, as well as clearly define player roles and strategies. Through focused discussion and targeted practice, the team can adapt their gameplay to the specific demands of the map, ensuring they enter each match with confidence and a cohesive plan.

Key Focus Areas

- Breaking Down the Map
 - Identify key chokepoints, strongholds, rotation paths, and common enemy setups
- Key Areas
 - Determine map control points that need to be prioritized
 - Recognize important utility zones and areas that define tempo

■ Generating Plans

- Begin by brainstorming possible strategies for attack and defense
- Include fast hits and slow defaults

■ Condensing Plans

- Narrow down options to one or two clear plans per site
- Choose what fits the team's playstyle and agent pool

■ Creating an Agent Composition

- Build a comp that supports your strategy

■ Implementing the Plan

- Practice executes and defaults
- Use scrims to test timings, utility usage, and communication

Goal(s): By the end of Week 1, the team will be able to analyze a new map and develop a clear, effective game plan. Each player will understand their individual role and how it fits within the overall team strategy, achieved through structured discussions and focused practice sessions.

Free Resource: How Do Pros Approach New Maps? | VCT EMEA

Check out our [“Valorant Approaching a Map Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 3: Mastering Aim and Shooting Techniques

Week 3 centers on developing precise aiming and effective gun control, fundamental skills that are crucial in every round of *Valorant*. Mastering these abilities enables players to win individual duels, maintain control of key areas, and convert rounds into victories more consistently. Building a strong foundation in gunplay not only improves immediate performance but also supports long-term growth as players refine their mechanics through ongoing practice.

Key Focus Areas

- Tap vs Burst vs Spray
 - Learn when to tap for precision, burst for quick control, or spray for sustained pressure
 - Develop situational awareness for each shooting style
- Spray Control
 - Understand spray patterns and how to correct for recoil
 - Practice controlled spraying in common engagement ranges

■ Flicking

- Build fast, accurate flick shots for sudden target acquisition
- Emphasize timing and muscle memory

■ Micro Adjusting

- Make small corrections to aim during or after a flick
- Crucial for follow-up shots and multi-kill situations

■ Underflicking

- Identify and correct this common issue where players stop short of the target
- Focus on tracking full motion with confidence

■ Crosshair Placement

- Keep your crosshair at head level and pre-aimed at likely enemy positions
- Reduces reaction time and increases first-shot success

■ Common Bad Habits

- Review and correct habits such as overflicking, panic spraying, peeking without preparation, or poor movement while shooting

Goal(s): By the end of Week 3, each player will be able to evaluate their own gunplay, identifying both strengths and areas for improvement. Players will also be equipped to build and follow individual and team practice routines tailored to their specific aiming and shooting needs.

Free Resource: [Get PERFECT Aim! \(BEST METHOD\) | Valorant Aim Guide](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Aim and Gun Control Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 4: Movement Mechanics & Mindset

This week focuses on refining player movement mechanics and developing the mental discipline needed to support consistent and confident aim. In *Valorant*, movement is not just about where you are on the map, but *how* and *when* you move. Purposeful movement helps players take space intelligently, avoid unnecessary risk, and set themselves up for favorable engagements. Whether it's counter-strafting for sharper shots, clearing angles methodically, or repositioning after a kill, disciplined movement separates high-level players from the rest.

Equally important is cultivating the right mindset, one that emphasizes focus, confidence, and deliberate decision-making. A strong mental approach keeps players calm under pressure and consistent in their mechanics. Together, sound movement and mentality create a foundation for winning more gunfights and playing more effectively as a team.

Key Focus Areas

- Linking Aim and Movement Together
 - Practice coordinating crosshair placement with movement
 - Focus on staying accurate while repositioning or peeking

■ Mentality Before Swinging

- Players should be intentional before every swing
- Know why you are swinging, what you are looking for, and what comes next

■ Jiggle Peeking and Jump Spotting

- Use jiggle peeks and jump spots to gather information safely
- These tools help identify enemy positions without fully exposing yourself

■ Patience in Gunfights

- Learn when to wait and hold angles instead of rushing
- Reward discipline and smart timing in high-pressure situations

■ Controlling Panic

- Build habits that reduce panic during fights
- Use drills that focus on breathing, focus, and repetition to improve control

■ Common Bad Habits

- Identify and correct habits like wide swinging without purpose, overpeeking, unnecessary strafing, or careless movement during fights

Goal(s): By the end of Week 4, players will demonstrate intentional and efficient movement habits that support confident, consistent aim. They will be able to recognize and apply proper mechanics such as counter-strafting, angle clearing, and repositioning. Players will also develop a focused and resilient mindset that enables them to stay composed under pressure and make purposeful decisions during gameplay.

Free Resource: [Get INSANE Movement \(NO BS\) | Valorant Movement Guide](#)

Check out our “Valorant Movement and Focus Course” to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 5: Attacking Strategies

This week focuses on how to effectively execute team-based attacks in *Valorant*. Attacking is a fundamental part of the game and plays a key role in setting the pace and momentum of each round. Mastering offensive tactics gives teams the initiative and sharpens their understanding of timing, coordination, and map control. It also helps players better anticipate and counter similar strategies when playing on defense.

In *Valorant*, attacking styles refer to the core strategic approaches teams use to gain space and execute site plays. Each style has unique strengths, limitations, and ideal scenarios depending on your team composition, the opponent's tendencies, and the current economy. These styles form the backbone of a well-rounded offense and teach players how to adjust mid-round based on information, pacing, and enemy behavior.

Throughout the week, review real gameplay examples and practice adapting these styles across different maps. Help your team build flexible, effective attack plans that play to their strengths while reinforcing key tactical fundamentals.

Here are the core attacking styles most commonly used in competitive *Valorant*:

1. Defaults

Purpose: Slow play that focuses on gathering information and punishing defender aggression.

How it works: Players spread out across the map to control space, watch for pushes, and scout enemy utility/setup.

When to use: Early rounds to learn defender habits, when unsure of enemy setups, or to punish aggressive defenders.

Pros: Flexible, safe, strong against aggressive teams.

Cons: Slower tempo, may result in time pressure if not decisive.

2. Executes

Purpose: Fast, coordinated attacks on a specific bomb site using utility and timing.

How it works: All players commit to a site hit, layering utility (smokes, flashes, walls) to overwhelm defenders.

When to use: When you know a site is weak, after successful defaults, or on low-buy rounds for surprise value.

Pros: High pressure, strong when well-coordinated.

Cons: Requires strong timing and comms, predictable if overused.

3. Fakes

Purpose: Force defenders to rotate or overcommit to one site so you can hit the other.

How it works: Use utility and presence to sell a site hit, then rotate and hit another location.

When to use: After conditioning defenders with consistent executes, or if defenders over-rotate.

Pros: Creates favorable numbers on the real site.

Cons: Requires good acting and map control; poor timing can result in being split.

4. Lurks / Deposits

Purpose: Leave a player behind (lurker) to catch rotates, regain map control, or anchor flanks.

How it works: While the team executes or fakes, one player stays back to delay enemy rotations or create pinch timings.

When to use: Against teams that rotate quickly or flank often.

Pros: Adds unpredictability, punishes fast rotations.

Cons: Risky if the lurker is isolated and loses the duel.

5. Rotations / Mid-Round Adaptation

Purpose: Shift your site focus based on defender setup, utility used, or teammate picks.

How it works: Begin with a default, gather info, and rotate to the better site.

When to use: Mid-round when you've gathered key intel or forced out utility.

Pros: Increases chance of hitting a weak site, keeps defenders guessing.

Cons: Risk of time running out or losing players in rotation.

6. Map Control / Space-Taking

Purpose: Push into key parts of the map (like mid or B main) to limit defender options.

How it works: Use utility and coordinated pushes to take high-value map areas.

When to use: Early in rounds to set up for fakes, splits, or late-round executes.

Pros: Puts pressure on defenders, creates room for flexible strategies.

Cons: Requires discipline and coordination; early picks against can stall momentum.

7. Contact Plays

Purpose: Quietly walk into a site or area without using utility, aiming to catch defenders off-guard.

How it works: Avoid giving away your position (no utility or noise) until the first contact/fight.

When to use: On anti-eco rounds, to surprise defenders, or when utility is limited.

Pros: Can catch defenders off-guard, conserves utility.

Cons: Risky if defenders are posted and ready.

Style	Best For	Risk Level	Tempo
Defaults	Early info, punishing aggression	Low	Slow
Executes	Strong site hits, confident utility usage	Medium	Fast
Fakes	Out-rotating defenders, mind games	Medium-High	Varies
Lurks/Deposits	Catching rotations, map control	Medium	Varies
Rotations	Reacting to info, avoiding stacked sites	Mid	Mid
Space-Taking	Pressuring map areas, forcing utility	Mid	Slow-Fast

Goal(s): By the end of Week 5, the team will have a clear understanding of all core attacking playstyles in Valorant and know when to use each one effectively. The ingame leader (IGL) is expected to confidently call a specific strategy at the start of each round, based on team strengths, opponent tendencies, and available information. Players will be able to execute the chosen plan with clarity, coordination, and trust in their teammates, adapting when necessary and maintaining composure under pressure.

Free Resource: [Attacking Strategy Guide – Red](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Attacking Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 6: Defensive Operations

Core Defending Concepts

This week focuses on the various ways to defend as a team in *Valorant*, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Defense can often feel more challenging than offense, as it demands constant reaction to the attacking team’s evolving plan.

A well-rounded understanding of defensive playstyles allows teams to adapt in real time, rotate with purpose, and maintain strong site control. This week emphasizes the importance of communication, setup variety, and coordinated utility usage to create a responsive and resilient defense that can shut down enemy pushes and regain lost ground.

Breaking down the pros and cons of each defensive strategy, reinforced with real-world examples from professional play, will help solidify players’ understanding and application of these concepts.

Rotations

Rotations involve shifting players between sites in response to gathered information or enemy pressure. Fast and efficient rotations are essential—especially on larger maps.

- **When to Use:** When sound cues, utility usage, or teammate communication suggest a site hit is coming.
- **Pros:** Keeps defenders in the right place at the right time; avoids being outnumbered.
- **Cons:** Rotating too early or too late can leave a site open or cause you to arrive too late to help.

Retake

A retake strategy means intentionally giving up site control, letting the enemy plant, and regrouping for a coordinated post-plant retake.

- **When to Use:** When defenders are at a disadvantage during the site hit but have utility or player numbers to retake.
- **Pros:** Enables a coordinated attack with all players and full utility; safer than rushing into a lost site.
- **Cons:** **Time**-sensitive; requires disciplined utility usage and communication.

Flood

Flooding is a fast and aggressive retake tactic where multiple players push into a site simultaneously to overwhelm attackers.

- **When to Use:** When the spike has just been planted and you want to deny post-plant setup.
- **Pros:** Can catch attackers off guard and prevent them from holding strong positions.
- **Cons:** Risky if poorly timed or disorganized; susceptible to crossfires and utility traps.

Re-clears

Re-clearing means taking back a part of the map after losing early control, usually in pairs or with utility support.

- **When to Use:** After attackers push and then stall; when map presence needs to be re-established.
- **Pros:** Prevents attackers from controlling too much space; creates opportunities for picks or info.
- **Cons:** Requires careful coordination; pushing alone can be punished.

Reactions

This strategy centers on responding to enemy presence, sound cues, or utility usage in real time.

- **When to Use:** Always—this is a mindset applied throughout a round.
- **Pros:** Allows for fluid, informed decision-making; can lead to early picks or quick rotations.

- **Cons:** Overreacting or hesitating can put your team out of position.

Aggressive Play

Aggressive defense includes early-round peeks, pushes, or flanks to disrupt attackers or gain info.

- **When to Use:** To surprise passive attackers or punish slow defaults.
- **Pros:** Can generate early picks, delay the attacker plan, and gather intel.
- **Cons:** High-risk if predictable or unsupported; may leave your site exposed.

Poking

Poking is a low-commitment way to gather information using shoulder peeks, jump spots, or light utility.

- **When to Use:** Early in rounds or when you want to confirm enemy presence.
- **Pros:** Helps assess where attackers are going without overextending.
- **Cons:** Doesn't stop pushes; needs to be used intelligently to avoid bait.

Utility Usage

Defensive utility—such as smokes, slows, molotovs, and flashes—should be used to stall pushes, deny vision, and delay the plant.

- **When to Use:** To slow attackers down, force poor engagements, or help with retakes.
- **Pros:** Can waste attacker time, break their tempo, or turn the tide of a round.
- **Cons:** Poorly timed or solo utility has limited impact; needs team coordination.

Agent Roles on Defense

- **Sentinel:** Anchors site, sets traps, watches flanks.
- **Controller:** Uses smokes and stall utility to delay site hits.
- **Initiator:** Gathers early information and supports retakes.
- **Duelist:** Takes early duels, rotates quickly, or helps contest space.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 6, the team will have a clear understanding of all core defensive playstyles and when to apply them based on enemy tendencies and map control. The IGL will consistently call a strategic defensive approach at the start of each round, and players will

be able to execute the plan confidently through clear communication, precise timing, and coordinated team play.

Free Resource: [HOW TO DEFEND IN VALORANT!](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Defending Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 7: Post Plant Strategy

This week focuses on how teams should approach the game after the spike (Valorant’s version of a bomb) has been planted, a critical phase that shifts the game’s tempo and decision-making. Both attackers and defenders have unique roles and strategic options in this stage, and knowing how to execute them can often decide the outcome of the round.

For attackers, the goal is to protect the spike until it explodes. This means setting up in strong positions, using utility (abilities) wisely, and maintaining clear communication about enemy movements. For defenders, the objective becomes retaking the site and defusing the spike before time runs out, which requires speed, coordination, and sometimes taking calculated risks.

Common mistakes in the post-plant phase often include playing too spread out, which weakens team presence and makes it easier for the enemy to pick off isolated players. Another frequent error is wasting utility too early, leaving the team without crucial tools to delay defuses or contest retakes when it matters most. Failing to trade kills effectively also hurts the team’s chances, as losing players without quickly responding allows the opponents to gain numerical advantage. Lastly, lacking a clear plan or leadership during this critical phase can cause confusion and poor coordination, ultimately costing the round.

Because the spike plant happens in most competitive rounds, this phase of the game is one of the most common and crucial. Teams need to be prepared with specific post-plant strategies, understand optimal positioning, and adapt their approach based on whether they are in a numbers advantage or disadvantage.

Core Post-Plant Concepts

Flood Retake

A common defensive strategy after the spike is planted is the flood retake, where defenders commit multiple players to quickly retake the site. This approach relies heavily on speed, coordinated utility usage, and strong communication among teammates. When executed well, it can be especially effective against attackers who have weak post-plant setups, overwhelming them before they can solidify control.

Off-site Post-Plant (Attackers)

Attackers playing off-site post-plant fall back to safer positions away from the spike site. From these spots, players use lineups or hold long-range angles to control enemy movement and delay retakes. This strategy reduces risk by avoiding direct fights near the spike but requires disciplined utility timing and good team coordination to maximize its effectiveness.

On-site Post-Plant (Attackers)

Alternatively, attackers may choose to stay on or near the spike site to maintain aggressive control. This high-pressure approach is typically used when there are no opportunities for safe pushes or off-site plays. Remaining close to the spike allows the team to contest retakes immediately, but it demands strong aim, quick reactions, and confidence under pressure.

Aggressive Push (Defenders or Attackers)

Both defenders and attackers can use aggressive pushes, which involve taking unexpected fights into enemy-controlled space immediately after the plant. This tactic can catch opponents off guard, creating opportunities to disrupt their post-plant plans. However, aggressive pushes must be well-timed and tightly coordinated to avoid costly overextensions.

Flipping the Map

In a more advanced strategy, attackers can flip the map by taking full control of areas typically held by defenders. From this new position, they execute their off-site post-plant setup, effectively turning the tables and forcing the defenders to adjust to a new threat angle. This requires excellent map control and awareness.

Communication

Clear communication is essential during the post-plant phase. The in-game leader or team captain must call

out the chosen post-plant setup clearly and decisively. Teammates should actively echo these calls and confirm details such as utility usage and positioning to ensure everyone is synchronized.

Utility Usage

Managing utility carefully is critical after the spike is planted. Players should save key abilities for retakes or to delay enemy defuses. Proper use of utility—such as smokes to block vision, flashes to force movement, or other abilities to secure time—can provide the team with crucial advantages during the tense post-plant moments.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 7, the IGL will be able to quickly identify the best post-plant strategy for each situation and clearly communicate it to the team. Players will actively listen for the plan and use their utility and positioning to execute it effectively. Additionally, every player will understand how to adapt and adjust their role in real time if the situation on the site changes.

Free Resource: [Play PERFECT On Post-Plants \(Attackers\) | Radiant Valorant Guide](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Post Plant Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 8: Micro Plans and Callouts

This week focuses on how to quickly create small, actionable plans with nearby teammates during real-time situations. Communicating these micro plans using callouts empower every player to contribute ideas confidently and effectively in the moment. Building this skill is essential for sharpening mid-round decision-making and strengthening overall team coordination, especially in dynamic or unpredictable scenarios.

Knowing when to make quick, small-scale plans is a key part of ingame awareness.

Core Concepts

Micro plans are especially useful in clutch moments, scramble situations, unexpected rotations, or when you and a teammate are isolated from the rest of the team. Knowing when to make a plan can be the difference between success and confusion in high-pressure scenarios. Common micro plans include:

1. Double Swing

Two players peek the same angle at the same time to overwhelm an opponent. This increases the chance of getting a trade or clean kill. It's especially useful when retaking space or clearing a common holding spot.

2. Trade Setup

One player takes a risky position or peeks first while a teammate is ready to trade immediately if they die. This ensures you don't lose a teammate for free and is a strong tactic in close-quarters or clutch situations.

3. Crossfire or Bait-and-Switch

Two players hold different angles that cover the same zone (crossfire), or one holds an angle while the other hides and swings after contact (bait-and-switch). These setups force enemies into difficult fights and help secure kills efficiently.

4. Fast Flank or Instant Rotate

Players commit quickly to a flank or rotate as soon as information is gathered. This can catch opponents mid-execution or beat them to a site. It relies on speed and confidence, especially when the enemy is committing hard to one direction.

5. Contact Play

Players move together silently and wait to make noise or take a fight only when an enemy is seen or engaged. This type of play maximizes surprise and avoids giving away intentions early. It's effective for flanks or late-round executes.

6. Trap Play

Set up specifically to punish aggressive enemy behavior. One or more players wait to ambush pushing opponents using utility or off-angles. This strategy works well when expecting an enemy to overextend or when on an eco round.

7. Delay and Swing

One player delays a peek until a teammate uses utility like a flash, smoke, or molly, then both swing together. This helps control the fight and gives your team the upper hand in contested areas.

8. Stacked Utility Push

Multiple players coordinate to use their utility at once (flashes, stuns, mollies) to force enemies out or overwhelm a position. It's a high-impact way to take map control quickly or break through a stronghold.

9. Fake Setup into Real Play

Players show presence in one area—by using utility or making noise—then quickly rotate or commit to another area. This micro plan is designed to bait out rotations, delay enemy utility, or create misdirection before the real execute.

10. “I’ll Stick / You Cover”

A clear call where one teammate commits to planting or defusing the spike while the other focuses entirely on covering. This eliminates hesitation and helps both players know exactly what their role is in that moment.

These micro plans help teams adapt in the moment, improve mid-round coordination, and create win conditions from even the most unpredictable situations. Practicing them in scrims or ranked play builds trust and sharpens decision-making.

Effective communication is key, keep your callouts clear and concise, using actionable phrases and speaking with confidence helps teammates quickly commit to the plan and react without hesitation.

Here’s a list of actionable phrases commonly used in *Valorant*, along with explanations for how and when they’re used. These phrases are short, clear, and designed to prompt immediate action or coordination between teammates:

1. “Swing with me”

Meaning: Peek an angle at the same time as me to increase our chance of winning the fight.

When to use: When you want to overwhelm an opponent or trade a kill. Helps prevent getting isolated or peeked alone.

2. “Hold my cross”

Meaning: Watch the angle where I could be exposed while I hold or take another position.

When to use: Common when a teammate is planting/defusing or repositioning and vulnerable to an angle.

3. “I’m baiting” / “Bait me”

Meaning: One player intentionally draws attention or fire so another can trade or get the advantage.

When to use: Useful in 2vX clutches or when one player has low health. Creates favorable trade opportunities.

4. “Flashing now” / “Flashing close”

Meaning: I’m about to use a flash ability—get ready to push or look away.

When to use: Communicates coordination around flash timing to avoid blinding teammates and time entries.

5. “I’m smoking off [location]”

Meaning: I’m placing a smoke to block vision in a specific area.

When to use: Helps teammates plan pushes or rotations with map control in mind.

6. “Tap the bomb” / “Stick the defuse”

Meaning: Touch the spike to bait utility or force enemies to peek / commit to fully defusing.

When to use: Post-plant situations where time pressure or utility makes the defuse contested.

7. “Trade me”

Meaning: Be ready to kill the opponent immediately after I die.

When to use: When taking a risky duel; helps maintain man advantage even if you fall.

8. “Play time”

Meaning: Don’t peek or fight—let the spike timer run out.

When to use: Post-plant situations when the goal is to stall, not engage.

9. “Peek off me” / “Peek off contact”

Meaning: Don’t peek until I shoot or take damage—then swing while they’re distracted.

When to use: Great for coordinated aggression or holding angles without giving away positions.

10. “Save”

Meaning: Don’t fight or go for the round—keep your gun and utility for the next round.

When to use: When the round is unwinnable and economic preservation is the priority.

These phrases are powerful because they combine clarity, brevity, and intent. They help teammates react quickly, avoid confusion, and build trust in tight situations. Practicing them helps teams stay synchronized, especially during fast-paced mid-round decisions.

However, there are common mistakes to watch out for. Over-talking or hesitating in the moment can delay execution and cause confusion. Giving vague directions, such as “go here” without context, can lead to miscommunication. It’s also important to actively listen when a teammate initiates a plan, and to consider your teammate’s position and available utility when making or responding to a call. Avoiding these pitfalls helps ensure that micro plans lead to confident, coordinated plays.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 8, players will recognize key moments, such as clutch scenarios, fast rotations, or when isolated from teammates, where making a quick, small-scale plan is necessary. They are able to communicate effectively using callouts. They have the awareness and confidence to initiate these micro plans

in real time to maintain coordination and improve team outcomes during unpredictable rounds.

Free Resource: [How To Communicate Like a PRO in VALORANT](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Micro Plans Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 9: Communication Structure

This week focuses on how to keep communication flowing clearly and efficiently, even in high-pressure or fast-paced rounds. If your team has been applying the habits from previous weeks, you likely already have a solid foundation of callouts, listening, and clarity. However, even well-practiced teams can fall into chaos when too many players talk at once, information becomes disorganized, or critical calls get buried in background noise.

Structured communication helps prevent this by giving each player a mental framework for how and when to speak. It ensures that priority information, such as enemy positions, utility usage, or timing plans, is clearly heard and acted on without delay. This doesn't mean limiting communication, but rather organizing it so that every voice has a purpose. Players should learn to identify when to speak up, when to stay silent, and how to echo or clarify calls without adding confusion.

By improving how your team communicates under pressure, you reduce hesitation, increase trust in each other's decisions, and sharpen your execution in every phase of the round.

Key Communication Roles and Methods

1. IGL's Communication

The in-game leader (IGL) sets the foundation for team communication by clearly outlining the overall game plan before each round starts. This includes assigning agent setups and deciding on defaults or early strategies. During the round, the IGL guides key decisions such as rotations, tempo changes, and site executions. Because of their role in coordinating the team, the IGL's calls should take priority to avoid confusion during critical moments.

2. Player to IGL

Players must provide the IGL with quick, clear, and relevant information to help guide decisions. Using short, precise phrases like “one mid,” “Chamber op A,” or “can walk up B” allows the IGL to process intel efficiently. Avoiding speculation and sticking to factual information ensures that the IGL can trust the calls and act quickly.

3. Player to Player

Communication between non-IGL teammates often involves micro calls such as “swing with me” or “hold my cross.” These calls focus on immediate surroundings and specific situations rather than broad strategies. Keeping these callouts brief and actionable reduces clutter on the comms channel and helps teammates coordinate small plays smoothly.

4. Communication Priority

It's important that every player understands when to speak and when to listen. The IGL's voice should be prioritized during key moments like rotations and executes, as their calls guide the team's overall strategy. Dead players should limit their communication to essential, factual information to avoid overwhelming active teammates. Interrupting or over-talking during fights often causes misplays and should be avoided.

5. Pre-Round vs. Mid-Round Structure

Communication differs before and during the round. Pre-round communication focuses on planning agent roles, utility placement, and map control defaults. Once the round starts, communication shifts to adapting based on new information, including enemy positions, timings, and emerging threats. Understanding this distinction helps teams stay organized throughout the round.

6. Agent Roles in Communication

Different agent roles have natural communication responsibilities. Initiators and Sentinels often provide intel from their utility use, like revealing enemy positions or triggering traps. Duelists frequently call for entries and space creation. Controllers generally lead utility deployment like smokes and guide rotations, supporting overall team movement.

7. Dead Player Communication

Dead players can still contribute valuable information, but they should keep their calls short, factual, and relevant. Excessive talking, backseating, or coaching after death can distract and frustrate active players. Using pings or brief statements ensures dead players add value without disrupting team flow.

8. Common Mistakes

Teams often struggle with communication mistakes such as talking over the IGL or active players, providing vague or unnecessary info, failing to identify locations clearly, and panicking during high-pressure moments. These behaviors increase confusion and reduce the team's ability to execute coordinated plays.

9. Practice Techniques

To improve communication, teams can run silent rounds where only the IGL is allowed to speak, reinforcing listening and discipline. Reviewing scrim footage focused solely on communication helps identify weak points and habits to improve. Assigning specific roles for pre-round or post-plant calls further clarifies responsibilities, leading to smoother team execution.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 9, players understand the different types of communication within a team, including the roles of the IGL, players, and dead teammates. They

are able to prioritize their calls appropriately, use clear and concise language, and maintain structured, effective communication throughout all phases of a round to enhance team coordination and decision-making.

Free Resource: [How To Communicate Like A *PRO PLAYER* In VALORANT !](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Communication Structure Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 10: Communication Atmosphere

This week focuses on deeper communication skills, emphasizing both in-game and out-of-game dynamics. Valorant's fast pace and high pressure can quickly lead to frustration, so maintaining a positive and productive environment is crucial for long-term success and team cohesion.

1. Direct Communication

Clear and concise callouts are essential for effective teamwork. Players should speak with purpose, avoiding filler words or emotional outbursts that can distract teammates. The goal is to say exactly what needs to be done or what is happening in a straightforward manner, so everyone understands the plan immediately.

2. Actions vs. Information

It's important to distinguish between actionable calls and general information. Actionable calls, like "swing now" or "hold my cross," prompt immediate responses and should be prioritized during high-pressure moments. General info, such as "one long" or "Jett dashed," provides situational awareness but doesn't require instant action.

3. Stress in Communication

Stress can cause players to yell, talk over each other, or shut down completely. Maintaining a calm tone and practicing

intentional breathing helps keep communication level-headed. Teams should encourage players to reset mentally mid-game if needed, understanding that mental clarity improves decision-making.

4. Giving Feedback

When providing feedback, timing and tone are key. Using "I" language and focusing on specific observations prevents blame and defensiveness. Detailed critiques are best saved for after the match rather than during live rounds, to avoid distracting teammates.

5. Dealing with Player Conflicts

Conflicts should be addressed quickly and respectfully to prevent negative tension. Creating a team culture that values open conversation helps resolve disagreements constructively, rather than letting silence or sarcasm build resentment. Encouraging mutual accountability strengthens trust and team unity.

Common Mistakes

Some common pitfalls in communication include passive-aggressive or sarcastic callouts, shutting down or isolating after a bad round, overwhelming teammates with unnecessary information, and giving unsolicited feedback during live play. Recognizing and avoiding these behaviors fosters a healthier team environment.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 10, players are able to communicate clearly and calmly under pressure, and distinguish between actionable calls and general information. They will develop skills to give constructive feedback respectfully, manage stress effectively during gameplay, and handle player conflicts in a positive, solution-focused manner. These abilities will help foster a supportive and productive team environment essential for long-term success.

Free Resource: [YOU SUCK At Communication! - Valorant Noob To Pro Ep.6](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Communication Atmosphere Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Week 11: Site Control Strategies

This week centers on developing a deep understanding of both the mechanical skills and communication strategies essential for executing perfect site takes and holding positions effectively in *Valorant*. Because the outcome of most rounds is determined by what happens on the site, whether attackers successfully breach or defenders maintain control, mastering these aspects is crucial. Success on site requires more than just aiming skill; it demands precise planning, impeccable timing, efficient use of utility, and clear, timely communication among teammates.

Players will learn how to analyze and understand the layout and structure of each site, recognizing key areas that are vital to control, such as main entry points, back site zones, and critical post-plant positions. This spatial awareness enables teams to anticipate enemy movements and strategize accordingly. For attackers, knowing how to approach these areas and synchronize their utility and movement increases the chances of breaking through defenses smoothly. For defenders, understanding these approaches allows them to set traps, hold important angles, and coordinate rotations that can stifle the enemy's advance.

Furthermore, this focus encourages teams to build better coordination through communication. Sharing clear information about timing, enemy locations, utility status,

and planned entry routes allows the team to operate as a unified unit rather than as isolated individuals. By practicing these mechanics and communication techniques, teams can improve their ability to adapt on the fly, maintain control of crucial areas, and ultimately increase their chances of winning rounds through well-executed site plays.

1. Sections of the Site

Knowing the key areas within a site, such as entry points, back site, and post-plant zones, is fundamental. This knowledge helps attackers plan their push and defenders decide where to hold or rotate. Controlling or contesting these sections often determines round outcomes.

2. Contact Points

Contact points are the specific locations where teammates decide to engage the enemy. Planning utility use and movement around these zones is crucial to avoid being caught off-guard and to maximize chances of winning fights.

3. Splits

Splitting a site means attacking it from multiple angles or lanes simultaneously. This strategy requires tight coordination and communication to overwhelm defenders and reduce their ability to focus on a single threat.

4. Pathing

Pathing refers to the pre-planned routes players take when entering or defending a site. Clean, efficient pathing reduces delays, improves trade potential, and helps maintain team cohesion during executes or holds.

5. Active vs Passive Angles

Active angles are positions where players swing out to engage enemies, taking initiative in fights. Passive angles are more defensive, where players hold positions and wait for enemies to peek. Balancing active and passive play styles helps teams control the pace and flow of the round.

6. Traps

Traps are defensive setups using utility or positioning designed to punish or slow attackers. Typically employed by Sentinels or Initiators, traps can catch opponents off-guard, forcing them into disadvantageous fights or delaying site control.

7. Anchor vs Rotations

The anchor is the player who holds the site steadfastly no matter what. Rotators move dynamically based on gathered information or utility usage to support or reinforce the anchor. Understanding these roles ensures the site remains defended while maintaining flexibility.

8. Refights

Refighting occurs when defenders or attackers simultaneously re-peak or retake control of a contested area. Proper timing and communication are essential to avoid isolated deaths and maximize the chance of reclaiming the site.

9. Delays

Delaying tactics involve using utility or careful movement to slow down enemy pushes. This is especially important in rounds where the defending team has a weaker economy or limited time to react, allowing teammates to rotate or prepare for retakes.

10. Counter Utility

Counter utility includes using flashes, smokes, mollied, and other abilities to disrupt or deny the enemy's plans. Properly timed counter utility can block vision, force enemy repositioning, or delay spike plants, shifting the round's momentum.

11. Utility

Planning utility usage involves deciding which abilities to use first, how they support team movement, and how to chain them effectively. Avoid stacking similar utilities without purpose, as this wastes resources and reduces overall effectiveness.

12. Communication

Effective communication includes calling out timing, entry paths, enemy locations, and utility status. Being precise, clear, and quick with calls enables the team to execute strategies cohesively and respond to evolving situations on the site.

Common mistakes during site takes and holds include rushing onto the site without using utility or having a clear plan, which often leads to easy losses or unfavorable fights. Overcommitting to a single entry path without properly clearing other angles can leave the team vulnerable to flanks or surprise attacks. Another frequent error is using all utility before engaging, leaving no resources to support crucial moments like post-plant situations or retakes. Additionally, failing to have a defined plan for the post-plant or post-retake phase can result in disorganized plays and lost rounds, as the team lacks coordination when it matters most.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 11, the team is able to quickly call and plan a site execute within eight seconds, effectively coordinating pathing, utility use, entry timing, and post-plant holds. Additionally, players confidently establish a comprehensive site hold plan during the pre-round phase, anticipating and preparing for all likely forms of enemy aggression to maintain strong defense.

Free Resource: [Valorant Guide - Pathing, Kill Zones and Angle Isolation](#)

Check out our [“Valorant Taking and Holding Sites”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:



Week 12: Playing Strong and Weak Sides Effectively

This week delves into the concepts of strong side and weak side play in Valorant, explaining what these terms mean and how each side should function strategically during a round. Many players intuitively feel the difference between the side of the map where their team has the advantage or heavier presence (the strong side) versus the side that is less defended or supported (the weak side), but they may not fully grasp how to leverage these dynamics effectively. Strong and weak side roles impact gameplay at all levels—from broad, team-wide macro strategies to the fine, split-second decisions made by just two players holding a site or an angle.

By understanding the responsibilities and expectations tied to strong and weak sides, players can better fulfill their roles, whether that means applying pressure, supporting rotations, or holding passive positions to cover flanks. Playing appropriately to your side creates a more balanced and reactive team dynamic, allowing your squad to adapt smoothly to enemy movements, capitalize on map control, and coordinate efforts more efficiently. This knowledge helps prevent overextension or neglect of critical areas, ultimately improving your team’s ability to control space and make decisive plays throughout the round.

Core Concepts

1. Identifying Sides

The strong side is the part of the map where the team focuses more players, utility, and pressure. In contrast, the weak side has fewer players and generally adopts a slower, more defensive posture. These roles are not fixed and can shift constantly based on the team's overall setup and the information gathered during the round.

2. Jobs of Each Side

The strong side's role is to apply pressure, take control of key areas, and establish map presence. Meanwhile, the weak side is responsible for holding space safely and gathering crucial information about enemy movements. Both sides must understand their specific purpose in the round to ensure balanced team play.

3. Communication Between Sides

Effective communication between the strong and weak sides is essential. The weak side should quickly relay information to the strong side, such as enemy locations or movements. Similarly, the strong side must inform the weak side when rotating or committing to an area. Constant feedback helps prevent misplays and ensures no gaps in map coverage.

4. Linked Playstyles

A passive weak side often supports an aggressive strong side, allowing pressure to build without risking overextension. Conversely, a proactive weak side can create opportunities that shift pressure elsewhere on the map, forcing the enemy to react. Teams should adjust these playstyles fluidly based on the round's flow and the enemy's positioning to maintain an advantage.

Examples of how strong and weak side dynamics play out can be seen at different levels of team coordination. On a team-wide scale, you might have three players applying pressure on one side of the map (the strong side) while the other two players anchor the opposite side, maintaining a defensive posture. During a site hold, one anchor may play a contact role by actively engaging enemies entering the site, while the other holds a safer off-angle or positions to trade kills if needed. Mid-round, these roles can shift dynamically—for example, the weak side may rotate and become the strong side during a site hit or retake, adjusting their positioning and pressure based on new information and team strategy. This fluid movement between strong and weak sides allows teams to adapt quickly and maintain control throughout the round.

Goal(s): By the end of Week 12, players will be able to quickly identify strong and weak sides in any situation and confidently play their assigned roles accordingly. They will communicate clearly across the map, actively

listen for information from teammates on the opposite side, and adjust their positioning and decisions based on evolving game conditions to maintain balanced and effective team play.

Free Resource: [VALO U - MAC 351: Strong Side, Weak Side](#)

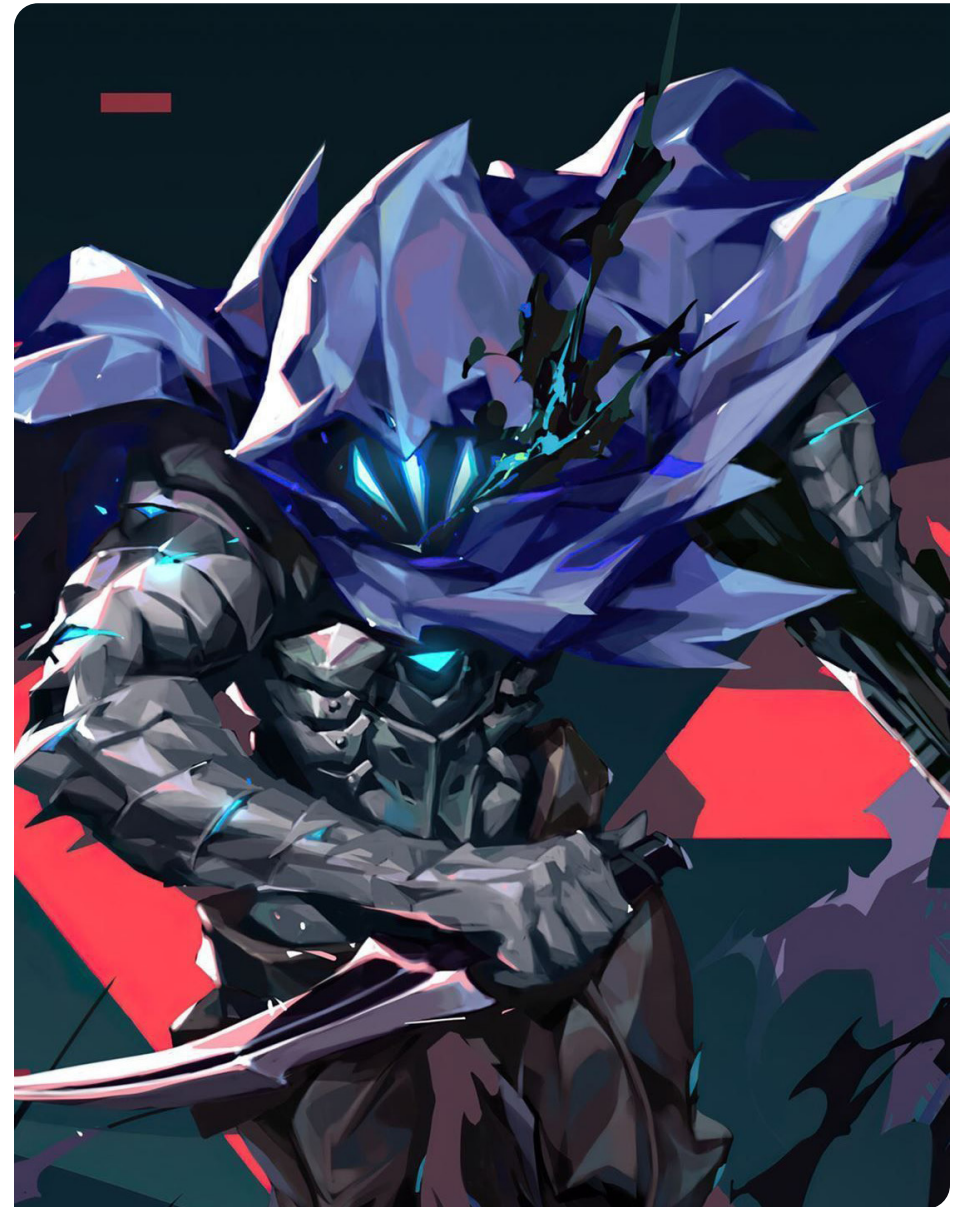
Check out our [“Valorant Strong and Weak Sides Course”](#) to learn how to implement this into your practices!

Coach Notes:

Outro

Thank you for working through the Valorant Fundamentals Manual. The skills and strategies you’ve learned here are essential building blocks for developing into a confident, strategic, and effective player. Valorant is a constantly evolving game that rewards teamwork, communication, and smart decision-making just as much as individual skill. Keep applying these fundamentals in every match, stay open to learning, and focus on growing both your game sense and your mindset. With persistence and a positive attitude, you’ll see steady improvement and

greater success. Remember, every round is an opportunity to learn and contribute. Good luck out there!



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