



## Harvesters FC Squad Management Policy 2023-24

### Overview

Harvesters FC's primary focus is mini and youth football, whilst also supporting a pathway for U18s into the adult 'open-age' format. We strive to provide a high-quality facility for young people to develop and enjoy playing football in a safe, friendly, supportive environment.

This document importantly covers Harvesters approach to squad management, including joining the club, squad allocation policy, structure, playing time and playing position.

Harvesters looks to accommodate all its activities up to U18 at its Smallford site, which means that only a certain number of new players can join each season.

Harvesters' experienced Football Development Team firmly believe that players develop most effectively, if playing with other players of similar abilities. Consequently, from U7 to U18, where an age group has more than one team squad, the players are streamed based primarily on abilities. The allocation of players to squads is reviewed annually.

The club also has internal guidelines on playing time and playing position.

It is important that parents and prospective managers, when joining the club, are aware of, understand and accept Harvesters' approaches to squad selection, playing time and playing position. It is recognised that these may not suit some, in which case a different club may provide a better "fit".

Having clear policies, approaches and principles, which demonstrably supports player development, also contributes to the Club's 3 Star accreditation by the FA. This accreditation is the highest level and a visible endorsement of how the club is run, that it meets or exceeds expected standards and that it has a club development plan to support continuous improvement. It also importantly:

reassures the community Harvesters serve; helps the club receive assistance from the FA and with prospective funding requests; and helps make Harvesters FC one of Hertfordshire’s flagship clubs.

Harvesters seeks to accommodate as many young players as possible to meet the high demand for places, The Club ensures the limited capacity at the Club’s Smallford site is maximised by using it as efficiently as possible, however there is a maximum number of players that can be accommodated. This is a purely a capacity issue and not the Club being elitist in its operational practices.

### Squad Sizes

To meet match day demands throughout the season, age groups affiliated to Leagues must satisfy League rules on squad size. Furthermore, Harvesters looks to ensure it has:

- Sufficient players in a squad to always meet the numbers required by the format
- Not so many players that some individual’s playing time may be very limited
- A pathway to ensuring teams have sufficient players to sustain a transition to age groups where there is an increase in playing numbers

Age Group	School Year	Format	Minimum	Maximum
[U5 / U6]	Reception / 1	<b>TRAINING ONLY</b>	32 across each age group	
U7 / U8	2 / 3	<b>5v5</b>	8	9
U9 / U10	4 / 5	<b>7v7</b>	10	12
U11 / U12	6 / 7	<b>9v9</b>	11	14
U13-U18	8 - 13	<b>11v11</b>	13	17

The final number of players in a squad is at the discretion of the Director of Football and the Lead Phase Coach (assisted by those involved in the allocation process), within Club guidelines shown in the table above.

Additionally, a squad will only contain 2 Goalkeepers if the Football Committee and the Football Development team deem it appropriate.

### Squad Allocation Process

Harvesters strive to create a quality facility for young people to develop and enjoy playing football in a safe, friendly, supportive environment. The allocation of players to teams is however an important part of this.

The Leagues to which Harvesters affiliates its teams, have rules that constrain the Club in terms of things like maximum squad size and player movement (or not) between teams or clubs during the season.

### Harvesters Squad Allocation Principles

Harvesters, and its experienced Football Development Team, firmly believe in the principle that players develop most effectively, if playing with other players of similar ‘abilities’. Consequently, from U7 to U18, where an age group has more than one team squad, the players are streamed, annually, based primarily on ability. **It is very important that parents accept this approach.**

The principles that Harvesters’ applies to squad allocation are:

- Team squads are determined through an allocation process, with their footballing 'abilities' the primary factor from ages U7+
- Secondary factors such as conduct, effort and commitment may also be taken into consideration; player position once at 9-a-side or above also becomes a factor
- Player movement between team squads is undertaken at the end of the season, unless exceptional circumstances deem it absolutely necessary e.g. at Christmas or before the typical end-February transfer deadline imposed by a number of Leagues
- There shouldn't be 'shocks' from the allocation process - discrete engagement with the parents of any player, who despite coaching appears to consistently struggle to play at the same level as team-mates, should commence well before the end of the season
- The process is still applied, even at age groups transitioning to a larger playing format (e.g. 9v9 to 11v11), when team squad sizes increase

The allocation of players to squads is reviewed annually and is guided by the Football Development Team, who have years of experience in developing young people of all ages and levels. Harvesters seek to ensure that the process is appropriately informed through input from:

- The Team's Managers at the age group
- The Lead Phase Coach for the age group – periodically watching matches & training
- With input from other Football Development Team members – watching match play and some training

Particularly for teams up to U12, the Club's aim is to enable squads from the same age group to train in close proximity at the same location and time, to assist with ongoing assessment.

**It is recognised that this allocation process can be difficult for some parents and young people, as well as manager/coaches. For this reason, it is taken extremely seriously by the club who aim to manage the process objectively and with empathy.**

The selection process is conducted objectively and so there are a number of further principles that an age group's managers and Lead Phase Coach adhere to when undertaking the squad allocation process:

- ALLOCATE PLAYERS FIRST... CONSIDER THEIR MANAGEMENT AFTERWARDS – allocation will not be made on the basis of who might manage a team. If allocation to a different team results in a manager reconsidering their own role, so be it – a new team manager may need to be sought
- CONFLICTS OF INTEREST – sounds a bit grand for mini/youth football, but for the allocation process all of these will be declared (e.g. the manager's child is in the team; manager & player(s) are related or close family friends; the boss at work's child is in a team etc etc)
- In these instances, the conflicted Manager/ Coach may defer to the other contributors to the process; &/or another member of the Football Development Team may be asked to contribute
- POTENTIAL REACTION FROM PARENTS OR PLAYERS – the process will not consider this; furthermore, engagement earlier in the season should limit unexpected reallocation
- FRIENDSHIP GROUPS amongst players and/or parents – the process will not consider this during the allocation process, but it will be recognised in communicating outcomes sensitively and with empathy
- PARENTAL CONTRIBUTION – although positive parental contribution is always welcomed by the club, the allocation process will not consider this. Whether that contribution is: financial,

e.g. through exceptional one-off contribution or team sponsorship, performing a role in the running of the club, supporting a team's activities or match day roles; none of these confer any advantage in the allocation process

- PARENTAL OPINION – parent's opinions on allocations should neither be sought, nor taken into account. The allocation process is ultimately the responsibility of the Director of Football but led by the Lead Phase Coach with assistance of the Football Development Team, and it must be conducted objectively.
- ARBITRATOR – in the event the age group's Lead Phase Coach is unable to reach a decision on all players, 'neutral' but informed members of the Football Development Team may assist. The Director of Football is the ultimate arbiter.

#### Exceptional Allocation Circumstances – Ability

Harvesters welcomes players of all abilities at all ages and allocate these to appropriate teams. At age groups where players are typically playing in one or two positions in the team, it is possible that all the players' abilities match either the highest ability team or the lowest. This may need careful consideration by the age group's Lead Phase Coach.

Harvesters is committed to developing players of all abilities, trying where possible to put players together of similar abilities. It is the belief of Harvesters, that a player can suffer from playing in a team that significantly mismatches their ability, which can potentially reduce playing time and compromise the development of other players.

If a situation arises that too many players of one playing position are together, the Football Development Team will be engaged to consider possible solutions. In exceptional circumstances in a strong age group, where there are many players at the same level, these players could be split across teams, if that achieves the aim of aiding and quickening their development.

No player will be requested by Harvesters to leave the club based on ability.

#### Exceptional Circumstances – Individual Need

For specific players, the Club may perceive there to be exceptional requirements that need to be considered for a player. These are detailed in the section heading 6 Young People with Different Requirements.

Equally, if a child has, or develops, a specific need in relation to their football requirements, this should be highlighted to the Lead Phase Coach for the age group, when looking to join or after the requirement has emerged. The Football Development Committee can then consider how and whether the Club can provide the right environment to meet the requirement.

#### Joining Harvesters at the Youngest Age Groups

Harvesters prefers to support all young people's age groups up to U16 together at its Smallford site. The number of players able to join Harvesters and number of teams supported at an age group is constrained by capacity at this site, together with League rules on kick-off times.

Harvesters 'recruits' a new intake of players at the youngest age groups, U5 and U6, prior to the start of each season. At these ages, we work on a first-come first-served basis with young people in the local community in the St Albans area viewed preferably, irrespective of ability.

If there are no longer places available, a child can be added to the age group's 'expression of interest list' (this is not 'team' specific) & the parents will be contacted if a place arises.

When players join Harvesters FC, they effectively secure a place that will endure throughout the age groups the Club supports, regardless of ability; as long as they adhere to the Players' Code of Conduct (and renew their annual membership!)

Harvesters strives to retain its players from season to season as they move up the next age group; and hope this is assured through the player's football (and social) development and their experiences with the Club.

#### New joiners when the team format changes or replacing leavers

Additional new joiners also are required:

- When a squad transitions to an age group that plays a larger match format (i.e. 5v5 to 7v7; 7v7 to 9v9; and 9v9 to 11v11) and the squad size increases
- To replace any individual(s) that occasionally leave the Club, if deemed necessary by the Football Development Team, including the age group's Lead Phase Coach

In these instances, additional players will firstly be considered from the age group's 'expression of interest list' and thereafter, 'recruitment'. For the 'expression of interest list' and in order of interest recorded date:

1. The player's parents will be contacted and their current playing situation, interest and availability will be confirmed
2. The player will, subject [1], be invited to attend training and/or trials, to establish through observation by the age group's managers and Lead Phase Coach, the team to which their ability is best suited
3. 3. If the player's ability (and position) corresponds with a vacancy an age group's team has, they will be offered a place
4. 4. If their ability appears at a higher level than the team which has the vacancy, they will be offered the place in the team with the vacancy for the remainder of the season (subject to League rules) and the team to which they're allocated considered during the squad allocation process

If vacancies exist after players on the expression of interest have been considered, the club will seek to recruit, through advertising (e.g. on the club website) or word of mouth. The steps above will be repeated for any applicant.

#### Training Only Membership

A player may join the Club for training only, not matches, and be added to a squad as long as the Lead Phase Coach for the age group and Football Development Team agree. Training only players would need to add themselves to the age group's expression of interest list if potentially wanting to play matches the following season. They will need to pay a reduced, 'training only' membership and would not be included in the squad's size number.

#### Squad Structure and Playing Policy

With our younger teams, the Football Development Team guide our Managers to play football the 'Harvesters FC way'. Our philosophy is about players passing and moving; being comfortable and having the confidence to express themselves. Various playing structures may be employed to support this philosophy.

#### Playing Time

Harvesters seek to ensure that all players in a squad are afforded reasonable playing time across the season. The Club has a philosophy of 'equal playing time' for the younger age groups.

At U7-U11 age groups, where neither match results, nor any league table are published, managers will seek to ensure that players receive broadly equal playing times in each match (players with an injury being an exception).

At U12+ age groups, managers will seek to ensure players receive at least the FA recommended minimum player playing time of 50%.

Format	Typical Structure	Playing Time <sup>1</sup>	Additional Information
5v5	1-2-2	Equal	Goalkeepers rotate each half as do player positions, we want them all to enjoy the game but gain experience in different positions. 2 defenders, 2 attackers
7v7	1-2-3-1	Equal	Normally regular Goalkeepers - Players able to be able to play 2 positions.
9v9	1-3-2-3 1-2-4-2	The FA recommendation of player playing time of ≥50%, we like to keep broadly equal playing time where possible.	
11v11	Various	The FA recommendation of player playing time of ≥50%, will be complied with.	Our managers work with the Football Development Team to find an appropriate structure to fit the players in those squads but always working to the Harvesters FC philosophy.
<p><sup>1</sup> - If a child consistently falls short on the Players' Code of Conduct, this will be highlighted to the parent(s) and may result in a reduction in playing time.</p>			

#### Playing Position on the Pitch

Players joining Harvesters pre-U7 and when playing 5v5 will be played in different positions, including as goalkeeper, to gain both experience and a broader view of playing the game itself.

The positions a player is played in can be discussed with the Coach and Lead Phase Coach at various points during the course of the season. More information can be found in our Harvesters Journey document.

This can be difficult if the player &/or the parents believe the child is destined to be a free scoring centre forward in the Premiership, whilst the Lead Phase Coach and the Football Development Team see attributes better suited to playing in defence.

#### Young People with Different Requirements

Harvesters recognises that young people have differing aptitudes and abilities for many things and they develop at different rates. Joining Harvesters at the youngest age groups may be the first time that a child has had opportunity to try football in a structured environment and demonstrate their football abilities. Harvesters' welcomes young people of all abilities to join, subject to available places.

#### Not Ready to Play Matches

If, in age groups that play matches, the Club feel a player is not ready to do so, the parents will be advised of this. The player will certainly be able to train at the club with the squad whilst Harvesters' Football Development Team and Lead Phase Coach continue to try to help & develop the player for readiness for match play.

If the player doesn't reach that situation, but they continue to aspire to play in matches, they may be offered additional training. If playing in matches appears to be unsuitable, or if the player elects to continue to train only, then Harvesters will adjust the membership cost to a 'Training Only' membership. (The reduced cost contributing toward the training and registration with the Club, to ensure covered by the necessary insurance).

#### Exceptional Talent

Harvesters' Football Development Team have a wealth of experience in coaching and developing young people at football and if they identify an apparently exceptional talent, they may consider that the player could play up an age-group. This decision will only be made if it is deemed appropriate in order to both: help the individual player's development; and the ongoing development of the team at the player's age group.

#### Young People with Specific Needs

For young people recognised as having specific special needs, Harvesters, at present, do not unfortunately have 'Inclusives' teams. If the environment for the child is not felt to be right by either the child, parent or club then Harvesters FC would help the child and parents to find a team that would support the child and help make football as enjoyable as possible.

#### Appendix A

**DEFINITION:** Harvesters considers **football abilities** as talents and proficiency consistently demonstrated in a range of skills, that a player possesses to play football.

- These abilities typically change as the child gets older and as they develop, and include:  
Technical ability to manipulate the football in a way that creates problems for opponents or solves problems for your own team, as they arise, e.g.
  - Ball control
  - Range of passing
- reading the game, adopting positions and movement to create problems for opponents or solve problems for your own team as they arise
- creating opportunities and solving problems whilst abiding by the rules of the game
- best exploiting physical attributes within the laws of the game
- performing in a match situation (as well as training)
- listening, learning and playing in accordance with the 'Harvesters way'
- bringing the best out of others
- always supporting the team ethos

- performing in given positions/roles on the pitch
- able to play in, and adapt to, different team formations
- demonstrating an understanding of the laws of the game, at the format played, and adapting to new formats (e.g. off-side)