Player Inclusion, Match Selection and Playing Time Policy

Underage and Juvenile teams

Applies to	All underage and 11-a-side Juvenile teams
Approved by	Club Committee
Date approved	8th November 2026
Review	End of each season

Our Key Principle

> **Every registered, eligible player is a valued member of the squad and must have fair opportunities to participate in matches, regardless of ability.**

Why We Have This Policy

At St Bernards Utd FC, every child who signs up is part of the team. We want players to enjoy their football, keep improving, and stay involved with the club for years to come.

Our squads are often bigger than our match-day panels. This policy explains, in plain terms, how coaches select teams and how we make sure every player gets fair game time across the season.

Many of our coaches already invite everyone, rotate starters, plan substitutions, aim for broadly equal playing time and arrange extra friendlies. This policy builds on that good practice so that every team in the club works to the same standard, and individual coaches are not left to set their own.

The challenge with large squads is that only 18 players can be named on the day. So a squad of, say, 22 players will have four players who cannot play on the day. To make sure all players are included and nobody goes unused throughout a season, a rotation system must be used. That is the purpose of this policy.

Equality and Inclusion

St Bernards Utd FC welcomes every child. No player will be treated less favourably in selection, playing time or any club activity because of their gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, or membership of the Traveller community (the grounds protected under the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2018), or because of their family's background or circumstances. Age-group eligibility set by competition rules is not affected by this.

Players with a disability or additional needs are full members of the squad. Coaches will talk privately with parents or guardians, and with the player where appropriate, about any reasonable adjustments that help

them take part. Examples include how instructions are given, substitution timing, rest breaks, or a quieter space on match days. Anything shared is kept confidential and used only to support the player.

Rotation in Practice: A Worked Example

This example shows how a squad of 22 players is rotated fairly across three games. The match-day panel is always subject to competition rules.

Squad of 22 players	Game 1 1st of the month	Game 2 14th (2 weeks later)	Game 3 28th (2 weeks later)
Players invited	22	22	22
Named on team sheet	11 + 7 subs	11 + 7 subs	11 + 7 subs
Rotated that day	4 players	A different 4 from Game 1	A different 4 from Games 1 and 2
Every squad player plays	Minimum 20 minutes	Minimum 20 minutes	Minimum 20 minutes

Minimum minutes are subject to injury or another genuine on-the-day reason. Not being competitive is not a valid or fair reason. Rotated players are welcome to attend and watch with their parents.

Coaches must always follow league and competition rules on panel size, eligibility and substitutions.

Our 10 Commitments

1

Invite the full squad.

All eligible players are invited to all games through Spond. Selected players should never receive invitations privately. Spond is updated approximately 7 days and again 3 days before each fixture, in line with fixtures published on the Galway FA website, and all parents are notified of any fixture changes.

2

No repeated deselection.

No player will be consistently left out of match-day selection because of perceived ability or performance. No player will be left out of the panel for two games in a row, unless one of the Fair Exceptions below applies. Players who are rotated are welcome to attend and watch games with their parents, and remain part of training, team photos and celebrations. Nobody is "dropped"; they are "rotated".

3

Fair squad rotation.

Where large squad numbers mean rotation is needed, all players are rotated, so that the same children are not repeatedly left out. At the start of the season, all parents are told that a rotation system is in place and how it will work. For example: the full squad is invited; Children A and B are rotated out for this game (unless a space opens up through illness, injury or unavailability); the next game, Children C and D are rotated, and so on through the squad. This way coaches are not choosing who sits out each week, and every player is rotated fairly. Across the season, every available player should be named in the panel for at least 3 out of every 4 games. See "Rotation in Practice" above.

4	**Minimum playing time.** All players in the match-day squad play a minimum of 20 minutes, subject only to injury, illness or other genuine welfare considerations. This is a club-adopted standard, not an FAI requirement.
5	**Rotate starting positions.** Every player should have opportunities to start matches through the season. The same children should not always begin on the bench. Players that are not named on the official starting list and are unlikely to play, should start the next game.
6	**Plan substitutions in advance.** Coaches prepare a substitution plan before each match to share playing time fairly, while allowing reasonable adjustments during the game. Use rolling substitutions where the league allows, and give players experience in different positions, as this helps both development and sharing minutes.
7	**Communicate directly and respectfully.** Parents and players are told clearly and promptly, through Spond, about match arrangements. Parents are told in advance which game day their child is being rotated. Children should never have to find out from teammates that they have been left out. A quick word with the player also helps: "You're rotated this week, you're starting next week."
8	**Provide additional playing opportunities.** Where squads are particularly large, coaches should arrange friendlies, additional fixtures or other suitable playing opportunities to support every player's development.
9	**Record and monitor participation.** Coaches keep a simple record of match invitations, attendance, selection and approximate playing time, using Spond wherever possible to keep the workload low. The manager also keeps a schedule of rotated players, showing the game date, time, location and opposition, so it is available if needed in future. The club may review these records periodically.
10	**Club oversight and accountability.** The Committee approves this policy, shares it with all coaches and parents, and provides a confidential process for raising concerns and reviewing exceptions (see "If You Have a Concern" below).

Fair Exceptions

A coach may adjust selection or game time in these situations. These should be the exception, not the norm, and must be handled fairly under club procedures.

- **Eligibility:** Competition rules mean a player cannot be named on the team sheet or take part in a particular fixture. Being invited does not automatically mean a player can legally be named for every match.

- **Availability:** The player is injured, sick, on holidays, or not available. A reason should be given when declining in Spond.
- **Behaviour:** Repeated breaches of the club's code of conduct, dealt with fairly, discussed with parents first, and with the Children's Officer informed.
- **Player welfare and safety:** For example, a player returning from injury who needs their time built up gradually.

> Ability alone is **never** a reason to keep a player off the panel or the pitch.

Applying the Policy in Special Situations

- **Coaches' own children:** A coach's own child follows exactly the same rotation, minimum minutes and starting opportunities as every other player, with no preference in selection or position. Where possible, another coach makes any selection decision involving their own child.
- **Cup games, finals and "big games":** This policy applies to every match, including cup games, semi-finals, finals and league deciders. The rotation order is set in advance and must not be changed to strengthen the team for a particular game. Every player named on the panel for a big game still gets their minimum minutes.
- **Goalkeepers:** Time in goal counts as playing time. Where a squad has more than one goalkeeper, games or halves are shared between them, and goalkeepers are included in the panel rotation like everyone else. Goalkeepers who want outfield experience should be given it.
- **New players:** A new player joins the rotation from their first eligible game once registered, and receives the same minimum minutes as everyone else.
- **Returning players:** A player returning after injury or a long absence rejoins the rotation straight away, with their minutes built up gradually where welfare requires it (see Fair Exceptions).

Parents and the Club

What Parents Can Expect

- ✓ A clear, fair approach to team selection that is explained at the start of the season, including how rotation works.
- ✓ To know in advance which game day your child is being rotated.
- ✓ Every match notification sent to the whole squad through Spond, about 7 days and again 3 days before each fixture.
- ✓ Your child to get regular, meaningful game time across the season.
- ✓ To be told directly about any selection limitations, never through other players.
- ✓ A coach who is open to a calm, respectful chat.

What We Ask of Parents

- ✓ Let the coach know early through Spond if your child is unavailable, with a reason. Medical or sensitive details are not required.
- ✓ Support the whole team, not only your own child.
- ✓ Trust the process over the season. One week's selection is part of a bigger plan.
- ✓ Never discuss selection on the sideline or in front of players.
- ✓ Raise any concern privately, directly with the coach, and at the right time (see below).

If You Have a Concern

1. Wait 24 hours after a match before raising it.
2. Speak to the team coach privately, in person or by phone.
3. If still unresolved, contact the club's Children's Officer (Patrick McDermott). Concerns are handled confidentially.
4. The Committee will review the matter if needed, using the coach's participation record as a guide.

If the Policy Is Not Followed

Coaches are volunteers, and most issues can be put right with a simple conversation. The aim is to support coaches to apply the policy, not to punish them.

1. **Agreement at the start of the season.** Every coach confirms in writing that they have read and will follow this policy (see the Coach Acknowledgement below).
2. **Informal conversation.** If a concern is raised, or the participation records show a problem, the Children's Officer or a nominated committee member speaks privately with the coach and agrees how it will be put right.
3. **Follow-up review.** The participation records are checked again after a few games to confirm things have improved.

4. **Formal review by the Committee.** If the problem continues, the Committee meets the coach. Outcomes may include extra support or mentoring, another coach taking responsibility for selection and substitutions, or a change to the team management role.
5. **Serious or welfare-related concerns.** Where the treatment of a child raises a welfare concern, it is handled under the club's Child Welfare and Safeguarding procedures and the FAI reporting procedures.

How This Policy Fits FAI Guidance

The FAI Child Welfare and Safeguarding Policy 2025 (Section 6.1.1) lists unfairly rejecting players, failing to involve the full squad, and giving preference to winning over children's development, participation and enjoyment as examples of poor practice by coaches. The FAI Football Pathways Plan (2024) also puts participation, retention and age-appropriate development at its centre. This policy puts those principles into practice at St Bernards Utd FC.

The 20-minute minimum and the rotation targets in this policy are club standards, not universal FAI rules. Competition rules always take priority on who can be named for a fixture.

In Summary

- Bigger squads mean more children playing football, which is a good thing.
- Not everyone can play every minute of every game, but everyone plays a fair part of the season.
- Coaches invite everyone, rotate fairly, plan, record and communicate. Parents support, trust, and talk respectfully.
- We win and lose together as one club and one community.

Coach Acknowledgement

Following this policy is a condition of coaching at St Bernards Utd FC. All coaches are expected to read, understand and apply it with their team.

Every player belongs, every player plays, every player improves.