Welcome and onboarding tool for newcomers

coach pocket guide

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1. INTRODUCTION & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Entering a new sports club can be intimidating for anyone, but it is especially challenging for migrant and refugee newcomers who may face language barriers, unfamiliar social norms, or past experiences of exclusion. In inclusive sports coaching, inclusion is not automatic; it grows through intentional daily practice and predictable routines.

This tool is designed to move clubs from **"passive inclusion"** (simply allowing someone to attend) to **active inclusion** (ensuring they feel welcomed, safe, valued, and connected from day one).

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Learning Objectives for Coaches:

- **Structure the welcome:** Reduce newcomer anxiety through predictable before-during-and after-session routines.
- **Facilitate peer connection**: Implement a structured buddy system that builds trust and friendships without creating dependency.
- **Communicate clearly**: Use low-literacy, visually supported tools to explain club values and fair-play rules.
- **Activate the support network**: Know exactly when and how to refer participants to safeguarding, logistical, or language support roles within and beyond the club.

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2. COMPONENT 1: FIRST-SESSION CHECKLIST FOR COACHES

Use this pitch-side checklist to prepare for and manage a newcomer's first training session. The goal is to build confidence, avoid putting pressure on the participant, and ensure they leave wanting to return.

Phase 1: Before the Session (Preparation & Setup)

- Review known barriers: Check if the newcomer has identified specific needs (e.g., language, transport, religious fasting, or kit requirements) using the Participant Barriers Checklist.

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- Select and brief a Peer Buddy: Assign a supportive, current participant to act as the newcomer's guide (see Component 2).
- Check visual aids: Have physical cones, tactics boards, or the Visual Welcome Sheet ready to demonstrate drills and rules non-verbally.
- Learn basic greetings: Learn how to pronounce the newcomer's name correctly and, if possible, learn a simple greeting ("Hello" or "Welcome") in their primary language.

Phase 2: During the Session (Welcome & Active Inclusion)

- Warm and private greeting: Meet the newcomer at the entrance or pitch-side before the whole group arrives. Introduce yourself and their assigned Peer Buddy warmly.
- Low-pressure introduction: Integrate a cooperative warm-up or joint mobility exercise where participants share names and favorite sports. Do not force the newcomer to give a speech or stand in the center of the group.

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- Demonstrate, don't lecture: Explain exercises using physical demonstrations, visual cues, and simple, short words.

- Check understanding privately: Use quick 1-on-1 check-ins or observe them in small-group practice to see if they understand the rules. Never call out mistakes publicly.

- Apply cooperative rules: Modify small-sided games to encourage teamwork (e.g., in football or basketball, require three different teammates to touch the ball before scoring).

- Monitor group dynamics: Watch for whispering, isolation, or hesitation during contact drills. React immediately and calmly to any disrespectful comments or exclusionary behavior.

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Phase 3: After the Session (Follow-Up & Retention)

- Conduct a cool-down reflection: Gather the team in a circle for stretching. Ask participants to share one positive thing they observed a teammate do (praising effort over technical skill).

- 1-on-1 check-in: Speak privately with the newcomer. Ask simple questions: "Did you enjoy today?", "How did your body feel?", and "Do you have any questions?"

- Confirm next steps: Give them a physical or digital reminder of the exact date, time, and location of the next session.

- Thank the Peer Buddy: Acknowledge the buddy's leadership and supportive behavior.

- Log observations: Note any ongoing barriers (e.g., missing training gear, struggling with transport) on the Participant Barriers Mapping Tool to plan follow-up support.

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3. COMPONENT 2: PEER BUDDY PAIRING SYSTEM

A Peer Buddy is an established, reliable club participant who acts as a welcoming peer, guide, and training partner for a newcomer during their initial onboarding period. This system reduces isolation, bridges language gaps, and builds intercultural solidarity.

Step 1: Selecting the Right Buddy (Matching Criteria)

Do not automatically assign the team captain or the most competitive player. Select buddies based on empathy, patience, and fair play.

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Use the following criteria:

- Language & Background: Whenever possible, match with a peer who speaks the same language or has shared a similar cultural background.

- Social Personality: Choose participants who demonstrate active listening, respect for different skill levels, and an encouraging attitude.

- Skill Compatibility: Pair newcomers with participants of a similar or slightly more experienced athletic level. Avoid pairing a complete beginner with an overly competitive player who may get frustrated.

- Age & Gender: Match within a similar age bracket and respect gender preferences, particularly for contact drills or conservative cultural backgrounds.

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Step 2: Buddy Responsibilities (What to Do)

- Before Training: Meet the newcomer 10 minutes before the session starts. Show them the practical facilities (changing rooms, toilets, water fountain, equipment shed).
- During Warm-Ups: Always partner with the newcomer for pair work, stretching, and basic ball-control drills.
- During Drills: Demonstrate the exercise physically first. Use gestures, high-fives, and simple words of encouragement ("Good job," "Try again," "With me").
- During Breaks: Sit together during water breaks. Introduce the newcomer to at least two other teammates per session by name.
- After Training: Walk with them to the exit or collection point, say goodbye, and confirm when they will see each other next.

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Step 3: Duration & Handover Guidance

- Weeks 1 to 2 (Sessions 1–4): Active Buddying: The peer buddy is the newcomer's primary partner for all structured pair activities and introductions.

- Week 3 (Session 5): Guided Rotation: The coach intentionally rotates pairs during the main training drills. The buddy introduces the newcomer to a new partner and encourages them to work together.

- Week 4 (Session 6+): Full Integration: The newcomer rotates naturally through the squad like any other player. The buddy transitions back to a standard teammate role but remains a friendly point of contact.

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4. COMPONENT 3: VISUAL WELCOME SHEET

This low-literacy, accessible welcome sheet is designed to be printed, laminated, or shared digitally via messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp). It explains club expectations using simple sentence structures.

you can find the link for the every language here:

EN : https://canva.link/krte2fni1u3jisb
ES : https://canva.link/yhdgmtfip9ldy53
IT : https://canva.link/3wyh6m2ntphpa5k
LT : https://canva.link/bam1nym0w48a0s1
TR : https://canva.link/aeof878f2thb2dy

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5. COMPONENT 4: "WHO TO CONTACT" SUPPORT GUIDE

Coaches are pitch-side facilitators, not social workers. When a newcomer faces complex barriers (legal, financial, emotional, or severe logistical issues), coaches must use a partnership approach to refer the participant to the right support actor.

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Quick Reference: Who Can Help With What?

Type of Issue / Barrier	What You Might Observe	Who to Contact	What They Can Do
Pitch-side Safety & Injuries	Physical injury during play, unsafe equipment, or physical exhaustion.	Head Coach / First Aid Trainer	Provide immediate first aid, modify physical drills, or adjust session intensity.
Language & Translation Needs	Participant cannot follow basic safety rules; severe misunderstanding between peers.	Bilingual Volunteer / Peer Buddy / Language Support Service	Assist with pitch-side translation, translate critical club schedules, or provide peer interpretation.
Equipment & Financial Barriers	Missing boots, worn-out clothes, inability to pay membership fees or travel costs.	Club Inclusion Coordinator / Club Manager	Provide access to the club's shared gear bank, waive membership fees, or access municipal inclusion funds.
Transport & Scheduling	Frequent late arrivals, missing evening sessions, reliance on long foot travels.	Community Coordinator / Municipal Sport Officer	Coordinate car-sharing among parents/players, provide bus passes, or adjust session timetables.
Wellbeing & Safeguarding	Discriminatory comments, bullying, signs of abuse, or sudden withdrawal from the group.	Club Safeguarding Officer / Designated Lead	Follow formal safeguarding protocols, intervene in harassment cases, and ensure a safe pitch environment.
Emotional & Social Support	Extreme shyness, visible anxiety, isolation, or distress related to life outside sport.	Local Migrant Support NGO / Youth Worker / Family Support	Provide specialized social work support, family counseling, mentoring, or integration guidance.

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Club Contact Directory Template

Translation & Customization needed

Fill in this table with your organization's specific staff names, active phone numbers, and local NGO partners before printing or distributing.

You can find the link for every language here:

EN : https://canva.link/5clcdkowkukta6h
ES : https://canva.link/revzdr27qhreeok
IT : https://canva.link/kkmwo5nj7dsflsa
LT : https://canva.link/povivpuv5477t69
TR : https://canva.link/re6u74c4euzzp48

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6. HOW TO ADAPT THIS TOOL FOR YOUR CLUB

This onboarding framework is designed to be flexible across different sports, organizational sizes, and cultural contexts. Here is how to tailor it to your specific setting:

- For Individual or Dual Sports (e.g., Padel, Tennis, Athletics):
  - Buddy System: Adapt the Peer Buddy system from a "team squad" model to a "training partner" model. In padel or tennis, keep the buddy as the fixed doubles partner or rallying partner for the first 3–4 sessions before introducing box-league rotations.

- For Youth vs. Adult Groups:
  - Youth (Under 18): Ensure the Visual Welcome Sheet is shared directly with parents, guardians, or reception center caseworkers. Require the Safeguarding Officer to be visible during the first drop-off.

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- Adults (18+):

Focus heavily on peer-to-peer respect and flexible scheduling. Adults often face severe time constraints due to language classes, shift work, or family care; adapt the checklist to normalize flexible arrival times without judgment.

- For Clubs Without Specialized Staff:

If your grassroots club does not have a dedicated "Inclusion Coordinator" or "Safeguarding Officer," assign these functional responsibilities to a trained volunteer or link directly with an external partner from your Partnership and Referral Map (Learning Tool 6).

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- Digital Integration:

  Convert the Visual Welcome Sheet into a smartphone-readable image or PDF. Send it via WhatsApp or SMS prior to the participant's first arrival so they can review the visual rules and equipment expectations in the comfort of their home.

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