Dakota Alliance Soccer Club
Player Development Philosophy Article

A lot of the information in this philosophy has been the researched through the NSCAA, US Youth Soccer and various publications dedicated to the development of players and the sport of soccer.

Soccer is the number one growing sport in America today and becoming more popular each day. With each passing year other sports report diminishing numbers due to the loss to soccer. With this new popularity comes more and more pressure for teams to win at younger and younger age groups. In fact it is not unheard of to hear parents discussing the outcome of a U-8 age group game as if it was the World Cup!

Parents and coaches who are heavily emphasizing winning at such a young age are causing players to burn out or quit the sport altogether. The development of these players is being hindered by this attitude. Currently, 35% of players quit by age 12, and 80% of those who played youth soccer are finished by age 16! This dropout rate is linked to the pressure players feel to win soccer matches – a pressure placed upon them by parents and coaches.

One reason behind this pressure, and win at all costs mentality, may be the misperception people have as to what soccer player development is or are being led to believe that there is a lot of money in college scholarships available. Parents and coaches of very young players are increasingly identifying success as the results posted on a tournament board, league matches, and or rankings found on soccer.com. However, the differences between soccer player development and winning are numerous.

In soccer-playing countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany, the children are taught how to play the sport before competition. Competition in other countries differs as well. A majority of players play locally with youth clubs. It isn't until they are older that they are truly identified to play at a professional or higher level of play. In the United States, we are asking children to compete and win before they have been taught the necessary skills and tactics. This problem manifests itself at the older age groups.

This problem starts at an early age. Motivated by this adult induced focus, young players go out and attempt to win the only way they know how – they kick it hard and far and run after it. Without the technical skills, this is the surest way to win matches. It is athleticism that prevails not good soccer! The pressure to win, added to an inability by some coaches to teach good soccer skills, inhibits these players from developing the necessary skills to play at a higher level. The irony of it is that at this young age the players are the most receptive to learning!! These are the golden years of learning.

In most metro-areas, this problem manifests itself at the U-8 through U-12 age groups. As the Premier teams are formed, the best athletes are chosen. Their skill level is far behind where it needs to be, and is already losing players who are turned off by the sport or are lured away to other activities. **All occurring because of a focus on winning at too early an age!** Compare the average level of American youth players w/the average European youth players. At a young age we can compete, however, as the players mature the disparity is overwhelming. Even in this country and state the differences are great between the clubs. Top-flight clubs and second tier clubs is the technical ability of their young players. There are other factors as well such as metropolitan size and player talent pool but, the focus of this document is the technical and tactical development.

What happens to teams that win with athleticism and/or a win at all costs approach?
- Because they have been formed as a "super" team they become frustrated at the lack of competition and they lose the motivation to improve. When they are faced with a challenge on the field, they do not know how to respond.
- The constant pressure to win, and the disappointment, frustration, and yes anger that parents and coaches show these players when they lose begins to kill their passion for the game. This is the major reason for the large dropout rate between U-8 and U-13.

Technical proficiency takes time, effort, and patience to mature in many players and only a few have a natural ability. Therefore we have to be more vigilant in developing technical skills and tactical skills. **We must set the bar a little higher and yes at the expense of a few matches along the way.**

Dakota Alliance Soccer Club
Coaching Methodology

Try not to always dictate and direct the decisions players make. Create environments where players can **PROBLEM-SOLVE** on their own or with some assistance. Players need to make their own mistakes. Encourage them to make their own decisions. Reduce players' dependence on adult guidance by using a **GUIDED DISCOVERY** method. In practice and games, guide players to the correct answer rather than providing it to them all the time.

A variety of methods are used to teach players proper technique(s) and ideas of the game. For many technical coaching points, the coach employs a direct or task method where he/she is in control of the information and feeds it to the players. Providing clear pictures and demonstrations of appropriate technique or tactics is crucial with this method. Be careful not to drill your players for long periods, and avoid the 3 L's: LINES, LECTURES AND LAPS.

Weather using a direct or problem-solving method, employ a freeze or cue method. Be careful not to stop the game too much, though. Let the players play.

Regardless of the method used, a progression-based approach can be very helpful, particularly for younger players who internalize more readily when a single topic is stressed.

Training (Education) -> Game (Performance) -> Analysis (Evaluate) -> Training (Education)

EXPAND YOUR TOOLBOX

- Use Dynamic, FUN, challenging, competitive activities
- Use the freeze method to paint clear pictures
- Use cue method to prepare players during games with less stoppages
- Let the players play without interruption during the flow of the game by coaching during natural breaks
- Use guided discovery method to encourage players to make their own decisions/mistakes
- Use a progression based approach to provide smooth transition and clear digestible information
- Demand discipline, focus and concentration
- Pose challenges for all players
- Identify players in need of different challenges
- Be creative with your activities, but do not "reinvent the wheel"

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Player Development Philosophy

Our primary focus is to help each individual player develop, grow, and mature as soccer players, athletes and people. It is a long-term process that cannot be rushed. There is no guarantee that a player will reach his or her potential, but we must give the players an opportunity to become the best that they can be. There is no magic formula, no shortcuts to successful development. Coaching at the youth level is not about collecting or recruiting players to win team championships. It is about working the players and coaches to improve performance by creating age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate environments that are safe, healthy, challenging and competitive.

We need to understand who we are coaching; they are not mini-adults, they are children. Each age group has different characteristics that affect the way we teach and communicate. For all ages, winning is not the end all be all. While learning how to compete and (win and lose) are important, it is the acquisition of skills and life lessons which remains our highest priority. Since players develop at different rates, this is not just for those who are the most advanced for their age. Nor is it just for the best athletes or the most committed soccer players. It is why we should set individual challenges in front of each player.

Such a philosophy means sometimes taking unpopular stands regarding team formation and player placement. It means being honest with parents about the growth and development of their child. It requires us as coaches to challenge each individual player, while not forgetting about the needs of the player vs. that of the team(s) and the club. To accomplish these goals, we must all be committed to understanding the game and learning more about how we can coach, direct and lead. In this way, coaches need assistance, players need direction and parents need guidance.