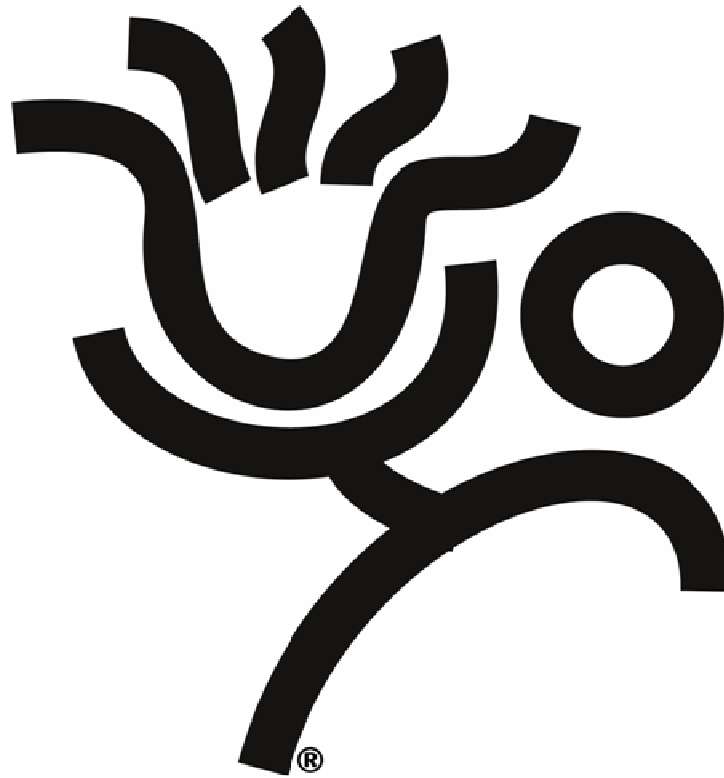


US YOUTH SOCCER
STATE DIRECTORS OF COACHING
COACHING EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

POSITION STATEMENTS

US YOUTH SOCCER'S BEST OPPORTUNITY
FOR NATION-WIDE EXPANSION OF SOCCER



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 07, 2008

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Should we add to the list the new issue of youth team rankings?

PLAYING NUMBERS – SMALL SIDED GAMES # 1

The intent is to use small-sided games as the vehicle for match play for players under the age of twelve. Further we wish to promote age/ability appropriate training activities for players' nation wide. Clubs should use small-sided games as the primary vehicle for the development of skill and the understanding of simple tactics. Our rationale is that the creation of skill and a passion for the game occurs between the ages of six to twelve. With the correct environment throughout this age period players will both excel and become top players or they will continue to enjoy playing at their own levels and enjoy observing the game at higher levels. A small-sided game in match play for our younger players create more involvement, more touches of the ball, exposure to simple, realistic decisions and ultimately, more enjoyment. Players must be challenged at their own age/ability levels to improve performance. The numbers of players on the field of play will affect levels of competition. Children come to soccer practice to have fun. They want to run, touch the ball, have the feel of the ball, master it and score. The environment within which we place players during training sessions and matches should promote all of these desires, not frustrate them.

- We believe that players under the age of six should play games of 3 v 3. This will provide a less cluttered and more developmentally appropriate playing environment. No attempt whatsoever should be made at this age to teach a team formation! **These playing numbers should be implemented by September 1, 2003.**
- We believe that players under the age of eight should play games of 4 v 4. This will provide a less cluttered and more developmentally appropriate playing environment. Players in this age group can be exposed to a team formation at the start of the game, but do not be dismayed when it disappears once the ball is rolling. The intent at this age is to merely plant a seed toward understanding spatial awareness. **These playing numbers should be implemented by September 1, 2003.**
- We believe that players under the age of ten should play games of 6 v 6. This will provide a less cluttered and more developmentally appropriate playing environment. The coaching of positions to children under the age of ten is considered intellectually challenging and often situates parent-coaches in a knowledge vacuum. Additionally, premature structure of U10 players into positions is often detrimental to the growth of individual skills and tactical awareness. This problem is particularly acute with players of limited technical ability. We also believe that the quality of coaching has an impact on the playing numbers. We recommend that parent-coaches would best serve their U10 players by holding a Youth Module certificate. **These playing numbers should be implemented by September 1, 2003.**
- We believe that players under the age of twelve should play games of 8 v 8. This will provide a less cluttered and more developmentally appropriate environment. The U12 age group is the dawning of tactical awareness and we feel it is best to teach the players individual and group tactics at this age rather than team tactics. **These playing numbers for the U11 age group should be implemented by September 1, 2004. These playing numbers for the U12 age group should be implemented by September 1, 2005.**

GOALKEEPING # 2

We believe that goalkeepers should not be a feature of play at the U6 and the U8 age groups. All players in these age groups should be allowed to run around the field and chase the “toy,” a.k.a – the ball.

For teams in the U10 and older age groups goalkeepers should become a regular feature of play. However, young players in the U10 and U12 age groups should not begin to specialize in any position at this time in their development.

REALIZING PLAYER POTENTIAL # 3

To maximize player potential, we believe that State Associations and progressive clubs should work to expose their better coaches, who should hold the “Y” License, to their youngest players. It is also seen as important that mentoring programs be established for community soccer coaches to improve the quality of youth soccer training.

The developmental approach emphasizes the growth of individual skills and group tactical awareness. We feel too much emphasis is placed on “team” play and competition in the preteen years. We believe in an inclusion model for preteen players. From this perspective, the goal of youth soccer programs at all levels is to include players in matches at an age when experience is more important than outcome.

Further options for players in their teen years that are not interested in competing at the highest level, but still have a love for the game should be created. Perhaps older teen coed teams or high school based teams on a recreational basis.

AGE OF COMPETITIVE PLAY # 4

While it is acknowledged and recognized that preteen players should be allowed to pursue playing opportunities that meet both their interest and ability level, we strongly discourage environments where players below the age of twelve are forced to meet the same “competitive” demands as their older counterparts therefore we recommend the following:

1. 50% playing time
2. no league or match results
3. 8 v 8 at U12

MINIMUM AGE FOR PLAY # 5

We believe that a child must be five years old by August 1 to register with a soccer club for the soccer year September 1 to August 31. Children younger than five years old should not be allowed to register with a soccer club.

COACHING LICENSES # 6

We believe that competitive level coaches should hold a minimum of a “D” License. Recreation level coaches should hold a minimum of an “E” certificate, if they are coaching teenage players and an age appropriate Youth Module certificate if they are coaching children. Coaches working at the top level (premier/classic) should hold a “C” License or National Diploma. Ideally they should hold a “B” License and/or an Advanced National Diploma.

The overall intent here is to create minimum license requirements in the U.S.A. and to establish levels of license with commensurate levels of play. We recommend that this implementation be completed by December 31, 2004.

The rationale for these requirements follows:

- ∴ To provide continuing education on the game in the United States of America.
- ∴ To ensure that American coaches have an equal opportunity for education and standards in the game as our domestic and foreign counterparts. Many countries now require mandatory licensing.
- ∴ To create the appropriate training environment to minimize the risk of injury. To provide information on the prevention and care of injury.
- ∴ To reduce the risk claims against negligence and to be accountable for background screening.
- ∴ To equal other sports such as softball and ice hockey who have established mandatory coaching education requirement policies. Ice hockey's rationale is very similar to that of U. S. Soccer.

"The coaching education program of USA Hockey is committed to developing coaches through a comprehensive education program at all levels. Since quality coaching is the single most important element affecting the athletes and the sport itself, the experience athletes' gain through participation will be a direct result of the coach's qualifications, education and competencies. Therefore, it is paramount that we prepare our coaches through a comprehensive curriculum which follows the different levels of skill progressions for the development of players."

RISK MANAGEMENT # 7

We believe all coaches involved in youth soccer should be subject to background checks and that coaching licenses be required as part of the risk management process. We also believe that each coach should be issued a registration card, certifying that they have completed the risk management process and have attained the required coaching certification.

PARENT EDUCATION ISSUES # 8

We believe that parents should be required to sign and comply with a Code of Conduct. We also believe that proactive and ongoing parent education should be the responsibility of every club and league. We urge clubs to put the US Youth Soccer Principles of Conduct into the hands of the parents associated with their club.

FESTIVALS FOR PLAYERS UNDER 10 # 9

We believe that Soccer Festivals should replace soccer tournaments for all players under the age of ten. Festivals feature a set number of minutes per event (e.g., 10 games X 10 minutes) with no elimination and no ultimate winner. We also endorse and support the movement to prohibit U10 teams from traveling to events that promote winning and losing and the awarding of trophies.

STATE, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL COMPETITION FOR U12'S # 10

We believe that youth soccer is too competitive at the early ages, resulting in an environment that is detrimental to both players and adults; much of the negative behavior reported about parents is associated with preteen play. The direct and indirect pressure exerted on coaches and preteen players to win is reinforced by state “championships” and tournament “winners.” We therefore advocate that, in the absence of regional competition for under 12’s, state festivals replace state cups. We also strongly recommend that with regard to regional and national competition the entry age group should be U14.

TOURNAMENT PLAY # 11

We believe that excessive play at competitive tournaments is detrimental to individual growth and development, and can serve to reduce long-term motivation. Do not multiple matches being played on one day and one weekend have a negative effect on the quality experience and development of the individual player? Further far too many playing schedules include so many tournaments and matches that there is never an “off season.” We believe that players under the age of twelve should not play more than 100 minutes per day, and those players older than thirteen should not play more than 120 minutes per day.

We also recommend to tournament managers and schedulers:

- The players should be allowed ample rest between matches.
- That all tournament matches be of the same length and that no full-length match be introduced during play-off rounds.
- Kick-off times allow players a reasonable opportunity to prepare for competition. This encompasses rest and recovery, nutrition and adequate time to warm-up and stretch after traveling a long distance in addition to taking into consideration extreme environmental conditions.

PRIORITIES OF COACHING # 12

We also recommend the prioritization of events by coaches:

- ✓ Objectives are identified and a season plan is developed that balances training, competition and rest and recovery.
- ✓ The interest of the player must be dictated by the quality of scheduling and the choice of events.
- ✓ Entering all the possible competitions/tournaments available can have a long lasting negative impact on basic skill and fitness development.
- ✓ A systematic approach will maximize the chances of achieving peak performance by bringing players to peak form for important competitions and minimize the chances for over-training, over-use injuries and burnout.
- ✓ We recommend the following training session to match ratios:
 - U6-U8 1:1
 - U10-U12 2:1
 - U14-U19 3:1
- ✓ In order for an athlete to adapt (improve technical, tactical and psychological components) there must be periods of low intensity activity or complete rest interspersed with periods of high intensity activity.

- ✓ “More is not better.” Quantity alone does not improve quality; soccer should be a test of skill not survival.
- ✓ Practicing or playing in matches where players are “going through the motions” due to fatigue or lack of interest reinforce bad habits and retard development.
- ✓ Sound nutrition and ample rest allow for more rapid recovery from intense activity.

LEAGUE PLAY AND MATCHES PER YEAR # 13

We believe that the optimal playing and learning environment includes participating in no more than two matches per week. We also believe that players should not compete in more than one full match per day and no more than two full matches per weekend. There must be a day of rest between full-length matches. We strongly oppose the practice of scheduling regular season and/or make-up matches in a manner that results in four full matches in the same week. Modified FIFA rules apply: no reentry per half for the U14 and younger age groups and no reentry after substitution for the U15 and older age groups. In addition, we believe that players should not compete in more than 40 playing dates in a calendar year. Players must have one full month off from all soccer activity.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES COMPETITION # 14

We believe that, in order to be consistent with the final stages of the competition, the national tournament for the top players should adopt a no reentry rule for state and regional level play.

THE PROFESSIONAL LINK # 15

We believe that the professional level plays a necessary and vital role in the growth and development of youth and amateur soccer. In all soccer cultures, the professional level serves to provide for the vertical movement of top players and creates the conditions for national heroes to emerge. The professional influence also accounts for much of the indirect education that permeates soccer societies. Television ratings and paid attendance have a significant local and national impact on media perception and civic response. We feel that promoting professional soccer is foundational to all professional coaching positions.

ACTIVE COACHING # 16

We believe that top-level coaches, particularly those in administrative positions, such as club and state directors and national staff coaches must remain active practitioners. In order to gain respect and proactively affect change it is essential that coaches in leadership positions are current in their knowledge and constantly evolving their craft. In addition:

- Soccer continues to evolve rapidly and nowhere more dramatically than at the youth level in the United States. Coaches must have practical contact with the newest trends and be well positioned to proactively test new theories against existing models.
- Many coaching directors in the United States are in their 20’s and 30’s and still developing their personal philosophy and pedagogy. If these talented young coaches are removed from their fertile learning environment before gaining the lessons of experience, the short- and long-term impact on the next generations of players will be sorely felt.

- Personal growth stagnates without constant challenge. Each new training session is an opportunity to reaffirm or reassess existing soccer knowledge, beliefs and pedagogical skills. Each level of play provides unique coaching challenges and, in order to service the needs of players and coaches at every level, practical and ongoing contact with players of all ages and abilities is essential.
- Top club coaches are influenced by actions, not words. To gain the confidence and respect of these coaches, it is important for the coaching director to demonstrate their knowledge and skills as a field coach. Without respect, the possibilities for positive growth and evolution within the top leagues and clubs are severely hamstrung.
- The director of coaching is often uniquely placed to vertically integrate the technical, tactical, physical and psychological insights gleaned from the regional and national teams programs. Often, these messages can only be delivered through contact with players; this is particularly the case at the area and state Olympic Development Program levels.
- One of the most important messages in the coaching education process is that coaching skills evolve with use and erode through inactivity. This message is true of both experts and beginners. Coaching directors must be seen to practice what they preach.
- The motivation for coaches to administrate can be found in the rewards of the field.
- The vast majority of soccer coaches within the United States are parents with no formal background in the sport. The coaching director must serve as a role model and inspiration for this population by conducting clinics and workshops and by learning to appreciate and focus the unique challenge of the parent/coach experience. This process is practical, ongoing and very demanding.
- The director of coaching must remain connected and sensitive to the balance of competitive pressures that influence those players striving to reach the top level and those coaches making a living from the game. Competition is a necessary and important element in sport and society. Without periodic re-exposure to the stresses of intense competition, coaches in leadership positions can easily lose touch with the balance between the theoretical and the practical: X's and O's must always be grounded in the reality of the playing level.

PLAYING UP # 17

The majority of clubs, leagues and district, state or regional Olympic Development Programs in the United States allow talented, younger players to compete on teams with and against older players. This occurs as a natural part of the development process and is consistent throughout the world. Currently, however, there are isolated instances where the adult leadership has imposed rules or policies restricting the exceptional, young player from “playing up.” These rules vary. Some absolutely will not allow it. Others establish team or age group quotas while the most lenient review the issue on a case-by-case basis. Associations that create rules restricting an individual player’s option to play at the appropriate competitive level are in effect impeding that player’s opportunity for growth. For development to occur, all players must be exposed to levels of competition commensurate with their skills and must be challenged constantly in training and matches in order to aspire to higher levels of play and maintain their interest in and passion for the game.

When it is appropriate for soccer development, the opportunity for the exceptional player to play with older players must be available. We believe that “club passes” should be adopted as an alternative to team rosters to allow for a more realistic and fluid movement of players between teams and levels of play. If there is a concern regarding the individual situation, the decision must be carefully evaluated by coaches and administrators familiar with the particular player. When faced with making the decision whether the player ought to play up, the adult leadership must be prepared with sound rationale to support their decision. Under no circumstances should coaches exploit or hold players back in the misplaced quest for team building and winning championships, nor should parents push their child in an attempt to accelerate to the top of the soccer pyramid. In addition,

playing up under the appropriate circumstances should not preclude a player playing back in his or her own age group. When the situation dictates that it is in the best interests of the player to do so, it should not be interpreted as a demotion, but as an opportunity to gain or regain confidence.

Some rationale for the above includes:

- ❖ Pele played for Brazil in his first World Cup as a seventeen year old; Mia Hamm earned her first call to the U.S. Women's National Team when she was fifteen. An exceptionally talented young player playing with older players has been an integral part of the game since its inception. Certainly, a player that possesses soccer maturity beyond that of his or her peers should be encouraged to "play up" in order that his or her development as a player is stimulated.
- ❖ The playing environment must provide the right balance between challenge and success. The best players must have the opportunity to compete with and against players of similar abilities. Players with less ability must be allowed to compete at their own level in order to enjoy the game and to improve performance.

In conclusion the development of players and advancement of the overall quality in the United States is the responsibility of every youth coach, administrator and policymaker in this country. It is our obligation to provide an environment where every player is given the opportunity to improve and to gain the maximum enjoyment from their soccer experience and ultimately, what is best for the player.

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