
Necessities for Being "in it" For the Long Term;

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Philosophy

The development of soccer talent is an on going process; it truly is longitudinal. It is a *process* in which individuals' progress gradually from simple to the more complex *experiences* that the game provides. The **process** of player development requires planning that has clarity and based upon a modern technical development ideas. This plan and direction needs to come from the technical people; coaches who are educated, experienced and knowledgeable. Anything *less* than a comprehensive and coordinated effort only means that player development is left to chance rather than being maximized as a result of coaching, programming, competition and well thought out planning.

This process can not be rushed. It is not positively affected by "if this much is good then *more must be better.*" The process of player development can be *influenced* by elements that are essential for effective player development.

The Necessities

Training: The development of HABITS and a *TRAINING MENTALITY*.

To stimulate players to raise the level of response training needs to balance demanding and challenging with motivating and interesting. Much of a training mentality has to do with the development of concentration and the responsibility within the players to coach themselves. While we often hit the peak we'd like to in training --- the attitude and intensity, we lack the ability to pick up in the next session where we left off in the previous one. Transferring what's been retained from one session to the next is one indicator of learning. Even the simplest aspects that are associated with mentality - punctuality, correct equipment and attentiveness are huge in the whole process.

The additional aspect of training is to balance it with games. The accepted ratio at U12 and older between competitive games and training is 2:1 training to games. At U16 the ideal ratio is 3:1 training to games. Too many games results in a poor mentality and attitude; "it's just *another game*". The lack of training also creates the added difficulty of fixing problems from competitive games. It is the basic issue of *QUALITY* versus *QUANTITY*. There needs to be balance!

- Competitive Matches: Games of varying difficulty. Games that suffice for different priorities or purpose; Games that are **player development opportunities (PDO)** versus games that are **result driven**. Competition is important but games differ in importance of achieving a result versus player and team development. Ultimately competitive players must earn playing time in result oriented games. There's also a necessary element

of "fear free" playing time in games that are oriented towards player development versus a result. While the result is not the be all, end all, it allows for the necessary experience of "winning" or "losing" in games other those that are the most coveted to win in order to be successful in. There are those coaches who also believe that losing a "big game" while disappointing in the short run is beneficial in the long term of winning more important matches in the future.

- The "Political Pipeline" of administrators, politicians, coaches, referees and parents.

Parents are tremendous assets and necessary pieces of the youth sport mosaic here in the United States. Parents can be tremendous during the entire player development process or detractors. Parents can, and do have, operated in what they believe to be the "best interests" of their children. While parents can lend all the necessary financial support and assistance they can't do it for their youngsters. They can only assume an ancillary role which is best described as supportive. Sometimes the *best and most realistic* thing parents can allow youngsters and teenagers to do is to learn to fail in order to decide how important soccer, and learning to be an accomplished player is to them. In the case of board members (club, league, state) they must operate with the technical professionals in the mutual interest of the players and the game. They must avoid being inclined to carry out the aims of their own "technical plan" based on their presumptions and not expertise. The coaches owe those in the positions of being "trustees" explanations and the rationale for planning out technical and competitive issues. The organization of recreational and competitive playing environments need to come in line with the mainstream and accepted rationale based upon what is tested , tried and definitely in the best interest of players.

- Coaching: it is the one thing that interfaces MOST with the one product in the game; the players. Coaching is responsible for more than 90 minutes of training or 90 minutes of game management. In the youth game coaches are instrumental in communicating with parents; articulating information in order to educate them. The club in concert with the coaches is collectively responsible for the long term of preparing players for collegiate opportunities. This includes working towards academic requirements, matching players with institutions, ensuring that players are working with guidance counselors at school and networking with college coaches. In coaching older teams and players this is an absolute necessity in the United States. There are some older boys who are now by-passing college and transferring directly into MLS. Dealing with this is also an important facet for the coach and the club.

Coaching younger players under 12 years of age has become its own art and science. Coaching these players involves putting experiences into them that contribute to their development while investing in them for the future.

There is no guarantee that every player will reach his or her potential. Much happens outside of training and the club to distract and deter individual players and their progress. But at least we must give all of them the opportunity to "Become The Best They Can Be".

Bobby Howe, former U.S. Soccer Director of Coaching remarked "Soccer is as much art as science. The game should be played attractively as well as effectively. Soccer is a game of skill, imagination, creativity, and decision making. Coaching should not stifle, but enhance those elements. Neither should politics or alternative interests."

"There is no magic formula or short cut to successful player development," added Howe. "Coaching at youth levels is all about working with players to improve performance, not about recruiting players to build teams to win championships. Soccer is a player's game and players should be considered first when political, administrative, and coaching decisions are being made".

Good principles of business or enterprise are mainstays no matter what continent or country. Good principles of player development are no different. It's a long term proposition in either case. Business and enterprise is not a seasonal activity neither is soccer and player development. It's not a matter of convenience or chance in terms of doing what will be best for achieving goals in the long term. It is a matter of priorities, planning and design.