

CLUB SOCCER: SOME IDEAS ON DEVELOPMENT

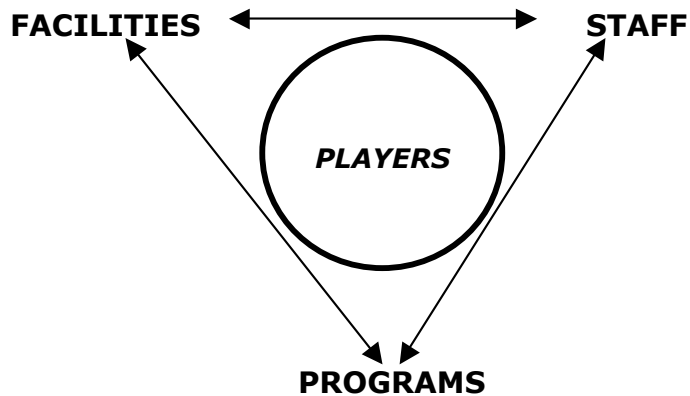
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The *growth* of club soccer in the United States has surged in recent years. The continued *development* of soccer in the club environment is necessary in order to meet the increasing demands of player development. The importance of club soccer is even more magnified when considering that it provides players with their “daily soccer diet”. The cornerstone for player development lies within the club system.

Four Necessary Components

Club soccer is very similar to other avenues for athletics. The components are:

- I. Organization, Planning, Management and Leadership
- II. Facilities
- III. Staffing
- IV. Programming



Organization, Planning and Leadership

Clubs must organize and structure themselves to serve the evolving needs of players. Take into account that within any club there are a variety of levels and needs. This can begin with the broad base of recreational participants as well as elite performers at under twelve years of age and older. Most importantly it's not a one size fits all approach. For instance *managing* the recreational component is an entirely different task than managing competitive players in older age groups. The aims and outcomes of the programs differ.

The organization, planning and administration of a club cannot be detached from the players and the game. The organizational and administrative aspects of club soccer have direct implications in player development. Without a firm commitment to serve these needs *first* a club can operate and subsist without ever affecting players or their development.

Clubs must begin with;

- A Strategic Plan
- Business Plan
- Operational Plan

The strategic plan includes mission statement and core values. This contributes to developing the vision a club has for itself. The structure of the most well run and successful clubs necessitate and allow the technical experts (coaches) to manage player development, team formation, player selection, try out format and organization and player placement with autonomy. Coaches are entrusted with the responsibility to make decisions on the technical and competitive aspects relating to player development. Board members, administrators, team managers and parents should understand the scope of their involvement in this partnership. Board members, administrators and parents from exerting influence or coercion in these issues which serves their own interests.

Planning needs to be comprehensive and include;

- Yearly competitive plan for age groups (leagues, competitions, tournaments)
- Comprehensive club wide training schedule
- Schedule for yearly tryouts
- Development of Technical Plan

While strategic planning outlines vision statement, core values, long / short term goals and objectives the technical plan becomes the blue print for player development.

The economics of administering and operating the club should be geared towards achieving the aims and objectives of player development. Cost effectiveness of coaching, programming and facilities should be assessed. This results in evaluating the impact that money spent in these areas has on player development, player participation, and player satisfaction.

While the organization of a club must have policies and by-laws it cannot thrive without leadership. The leadership is provided by the board and technical people. They must believe in a long-term commitment to player development and club development rather than "quick fix" for the short term on the fast track. Some of the challenges encountered in the process of club development are;

- I. An over emphasis on recruiting versus retention, coaching, competition, development and programming.
- II. Equivocates *results* (winning/losing) with long term player development.
- III. Sacrifices *quality for quantity*.

The next generation of clubs will be more comprehensive in their organization with the outcome as continuity and organizational cohesion. This will include clubs based in large numbers of recreational players at younger ages with an opportunity for select and more competitive programming in older age groups.

Facilities

This includes:

- I. Fields, lights.
- II. Changing rooms, locker rooms, and facilities for cross-training and athletic trainers.
- III. Clubhouse, storage

Facilities have an impact on programming.

Staffing

Staffing is an integral and essential part of what the club can offer to its players. Coaches directly interact, and have the greatest impact upon the one product in the game: players. Coaches hired into the club bring:

- I. Experience and expertise.
- II. Credentials: education, licenses
- III. Suitability
- IV. Professionalism
- V. Ability to impact a player's development

Coaches must be capable to do more than coach a team. They must have *managerial ability, communications skill and the ability to influence the organization.*

Appointing a qualified Director of Coaching (DOC) or Technical Director (TD) is an important step in a club's development. The club DOC / TD should retain an active role in coaching players and not become a "coaching administrator". Along with a role in coaching the DOC / TD should have specific responsibilities in *club management, managements of technical staff, staff development / education of technical staff, budgeting process, development of and implementation of programming, comprehensive competitive planning.* Some criteria include:

- I. "A" License, National Youth License
- II. Experience both in playing and coaching.
- III. Scope of experiences with coaching, management outside of the club (college, ODP, national teams, collegiate, other successful clubs)
- IV. Leadership

The DOC / TD is responsible for leading the coaching staff in developing and formulating a technical plan. This is the blueprint for player development. The DOC / TD needs to function with autonomy in developing and implementing the technical plan. They also have the responsibility to present the technical plan, rationale for the budgetary cost. The DOC / TD and coaching staff should have responsibility for formulating this part of the club's plan.

Programming

The extent of a club's programming amounts to what it's able to offer *after* registering its players and teams. This includes both recreational and competitive players. Programming to affect development must amount to more than two training sessions and one competitive game per week. Organized programming is necessary because of a variety of reasons:

- I. The lack of "free play".

- II. Decrease in Physical Education programs previously offered in the school system (movement education, motor development).
- III. Increasing role of *privatized* public recreation (sport clubs, YMCA, etc)

Programming, combined with the expertise of the technical staff, can have a positive affect on player development.

Programming may include:

- 1. Organized "free play", "street soccer".
- 2. Movement education, jump rope program
- 3. Collegiate / ODP preparation for potential elite performers.
- 4. Cross training programs that emphasize speed, core strength, agility, balance and power through a variety of activities such as bounding.
- 5. Player development programs aside and in addition to participation with their club team. For instance, programs which provide training and competition for more talented players *regardless of age*.
- 6. Coaching education / development for those working in the club.
- 7. Qualified goalkeeping coaches.
- 8. Alternatives to tournaments and the problems associated with "*tournamentitis*".
- 9. Player Development Academies.

