



Sacrificing Quality for Winning

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The fall season presents me with the opportunity to go and watch all levels of soccer games from recreational to collegiate. And as every player steps on to the field they do so with a desire to win that game. Coaches, players and parents all want to win because the game of soccer is competitive which has an objection to score more goals than your opponent.

Many youth soccer leagues throughout the country measure results week in week out by league standings and when teams travel across the states at a weekend to participate in tournaments, their success is measured on whether they return with a trophy. So if the emphasis is predominantly on winning are coaches, players and parents sacrificing the bigger picture of player, team and club development. After watching some of the better players and teams from Kentucky compete in this spring's state cup and regional events, I was not overly impressed with the performances, and the same pattern seems to have carried over into the games I am witnessing this fall soccer season. If success and winning could be redefined by how well a team plays not matter of the result perhaps these games would be more fun to watch.

Although soccer is a team sport, it allows both players and coaches the opportunity to stamp their own personality on the game. I understand no matter what level you play or coach at you will have a different style than your opponent, but you have to find a style that will meet the needs of your personal, not for the needs of winning a game.

Winning does matter to the players and they do care about the result, but ever since I have been involved with the game I know that coaches and parents take a defeat much harder than the person who just left everything on the playing field. Better coaches know how to find the right balance between educating the team to play and be successful in the same process. The reason they have found this success is because they look at the long term picture by following some of the simple steps below.

- * Gained appropriate soccer coaching qualifications
- * Encourages their players to express themselves freely and learn from the game
- * Allows all of the players to have equal player time (especially important with the younger age groups)
- * Continuously review their coaching methodology to up date it with the needs of the players and the team
- * Establishes a fine balance between friendly and competitive games throughout the season

* Allows and encourage their players to experience other sporting activities (especially important with the younger age groups)

* Educates the parents on their plans of long term player development

Coaches have to be brave and stick with this philosophy, because with so much competition out there no matter how many articles are written about how youth soccer players should be developed there is always going to be those coaches that believe winning at all costs is what is important. I use the terminology of "Soccer Gypsies" for those families that move from club to club depending on whether the child is selected for the "A" team or if the team won the league last season, and coaches that putting winning first will often attract these families. The reality to this matter is that a coach that puts development first will eventually be more successful, because they help children love and respect the game.

You will find that the more teams that work hard, learn and have fun are more likely to successful in the long term than a coach who emphasize winning at all costs when either will not be successful long term or more depressingly they aren't even around because the team player's choose to do something completely different than soccer since it wasn't fun.

Winning is a direct result of development and fun and you can be successful in gaining these results by encouraging quality soccer to be played. I have yet to see a youth soccer coach get fired because their team was not successful, but I have seen them been released from their duties because they did not develop the players.