



Street Soccer – Let The Players Play

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Most adult coaches reading this article can remember their days as a kid playing sports in the streets. Picking your own teams, learning technical skills from your peers, setting your own rules and the only time an adult would yell at you was when you were told that it was time to head home. More natives from African and South American countries where street soccer is still very favorable are now living and playing soccer in the US. Even one of the world's best players has opted to play the remainder of his career in the Major League Soccer, but even with these introductions and growth in the game what has happened to the Sandlot Kids? Perhaps you could argue that the streets are not safe due to more vehicles, the playgrounds are not as safe as what they were 20 years ago, and open grass fields are been taken over by houses or office buildings. This may be true, but the fact could also be that our children never get the opportunity to be children as we schedule their play time to be as busy as an adult work life.

Children are becoming involved in structured practices at an earlier age, meaning that they are being taught so much more and become use to structured environments at increasingly younger ages. Parents fear that if the do not put their little four year olds into this kind of set up that they may fall behind, allowing no room for trial and error which is found in street soccer.

We can not change the culture but through our practices we can give today's children some insight into what we experienced growing up in hope that they will pick this up and take it away, and perhaps set up games among friends or even just with a ball and a wall that is at their disposal. Almost every practice a young child will ask the question "Are we going to scrimmage today?" If you let your team scrimmage at the beginning or the end (or even both) of your structured practice, it should be a time when you allow the players to take control and create a street soccer environment. Players need to take responsibility in setting up the fields, teams and rules and lose the controlled approach. Observing your players take on these responsibilities will help you find leaders within your team. A captain's role is more than just leading the warm-up or stepping up to the center circle to flicking a coin. In a street soccer environment you will start to see every player take some personal responsibility and not rely on an adult to help them.

Positions may be set, but every child will be given the opportunity to learn every role. These positions will not only change from game to game but during any moment of that scrimmage, thus allowing your team to create a "Total Football" style seen by the likes of Arsenal in the English Premiership and the Dutch National team

of the 70's. But the principle is still to get the best out of each player and offer them the best opportunities.

I encourage clubs to set up a Street Soccer Festival/ League that has no standings. In today's society we focus too much on the results and do not allow our players to learn through the game. They know when they have won or lost, but they do not dwell on it. There are many different ways of setting up a Festival/League from having set teams for the whole event or changing from game to game. Ages can be mixed, leadership can change player's hands, but the children will learn from each other as well as the challenges and problems they face.

Many of the youth playing and living in America today may have never experienced the true and real meaning of Street Soccer, yet as we already know it is not new fashion trend. We just feel that we are getting something better by putting our children in a structured environment, instead of just letting them play.