

ARE YOU READY FOR THE FOOT DANCE

Long term player development for Huronia District Soccer Association.

Steve Payne, Technical Director

PREFACE

Long term player development gives young players the guided freedom to fulfill their potential without pressure to win.

WHY

When winning is *emphasized*, young players worry about making mistakes, destroying their joy and creativity. It kills the fun. Kill the fun – kill the player.

SOLUTION

Have a positive, encouraging learning environment that allows errors and lets players make decisions and adjustments themselves rather than being constantly told what to do. Let them play with a smile and the occasional instruction, not an ear bashing.

CRUCIAL

Coaches and parents must not berate players for errors or “trying things.” Coaches must not bench players for not being big enough, strong enough, or fast enough. Everyone grows

TRAINING

Soccer is a game, so training must be. As the Australian player development plan says: “If the practice doesn’t look like soccer, change it.”

TECHNIQUE

Technique is everything. Technique decides games, so ball work is the priority. Young players must touch the ball constantly. No ball, no improvement. Children in just about every other nation practice more than us, so any loss of precious ball time widens the gap.

FITNESS

Fitness work outside of soccer games wastes valuable playing time. Small sided games provide conditioning. Having youngsters in a gym, lapping, up and down hills, cross-country running, suicides, push ups, sit ups etc. must be abandoned.

COMPETITION

Games are naturally competitive and small sided games will feed this component naturally. Players will try to win, it’s instinctive. They don’t need to be told or reminded. Winning and losing is part of growing up, having adults telling young players that winning is the only thing and everyone else is a loser is stupid and harmful.

ABILITY

Some players will always be better than others. Adults should not expect their dreams to be fulfilled by children in their charge. Help them reach their individual potential, but don't ask or expect them to perform tasks that are beyond their capability.

PARENTS

Parents are the ultimate support for their children, the people they look to for encouragement and support. Parents are the last people sons and daughters want yelling at them or criticising them for errors in training and at games.

PART ONE

THE WAY TO GOAL

“The art of coaching is to take the spontaneity and creativity of street soccer and transfer it to the soccer field.”

Street soccer in Canada is rare; in Africa and South America it is second nature.

On the street, kids play wherever they can, often with others of different ages and sizes. They just play and natural order sorts them out.

The only street game commonly played in North America is basketball - and look at the exciting players that emerge as a result.

Showing coaches how to develop our young players by reproducing a street soccer environment is the first step.

The game is the best teacher, so with the street soccer formula, developing players will be easier.

Kids arrange street games. At clubs, all the coach need do is copy what kids would do if left alone. There is no need for complicated coaching manuals.

In its simplest form, if you have 16 players set up an 8v8 game or even better, 4v4 with teams rotating. This allows players to do what they like best – play, as on the street.

I know – an experiment I did with 12-year-old state level players in Australia proved it – that if youngsters only play games from 1v1 through 4v4 for a season, plus Futsal in the off-season, they will improve more than a similar group using drills.

In recent years, especially in North America, coaches have micro-managed training with constant stoppages and instruction, formulas, movements and patterns. Players are told where to run, where to stand, when to pass, how to pass, when to dribble, when to do just about everything.

The game is not like that. Each time out the ingredients vary. There is no set recipe. The only constant is technique and skill, the ability of players to receive and play the ball as required during a game, usually under pressure.

To develop players who can receive and play the ball as demanded during a game we must play games in training. It's that simple.

There will be free time from training and matches when players will be on their own, or with one or two friends. Here is an opportunity to work on technique in different ways, with ball juggling contests, hitting a ball up against a wall, dribbling around objects etc. Imagination will find a way.

PART TWO

COACHING

“I do not teach my students, I provide the environment in which they can learn themselves,” Albert Einstein.

Small sided games are the best way to develop players.

Games range from 1v1 up, some with uneven numbers.

For example: The coach wants to practice passing and sets up a 5v2 practice within a 15 by 15 yard square. The coach sees that the five cannot keep possession of the ball. The common reaction is to tell players where to run, where to find space and where and when to pass.

A better approach is to increase the size of the area or reduce the numbers to 5v1, or both, changing the scenario to get the success the coach is seeking.

In the same set-up, let's say the coach notices that the five players are easily able to keep the ball. Possible remedies: Reduce the area size, limit the number of touches the five can take or go to 4v2.

All the coach is doing is changing the environment to find success.

If the practice is not working, then adjust it until it does. This is good coaching at any level, especially for young players. This method of coaching by altering the environment or game conditions can be used for all sorts of topics.

PART THREE

RECREATIONAL SOCCER

Community based soccer, including select and representative teams, is the foundation on which the rest of the house of soccer is built and must have the attention it warrants and deserves.

The vast majorities of players are in soccer for recreation and will not play for Ontario or Canada. It is the same for every sport.

Adults must acknowledge this fact and understand that recreational players, like every player, are there for fun and enjoyment. In turn, it is hoped they will pass on that love to their children.

Using a win at all costs mentality at these levels, such as putting the biggest players on the field and never starting the weaker players is selfish, wrong and harmful to a child's development.

Success with youngsters should not be measured in wins, but in individual improvement. If one or two youngsters in house league, for example, improve enough to reach a select or representative team, or higher, then the adults responsible have achieved their task and should be congratulated.

For a club and coach to say one of their players went on to play for Canada would mean more in reality than all the local championship wins put together. This is what long term player development is all about, helping every child reach their potential in a fun filled environment.

PART FOUR

ELITE SOCCER

Some players are inevitably more gifted and as leaders and parents we are, I believe, obliged to help them nurture their gifts.

Leaving a nine-year-old gifted player in a recreational team may mean he can score five or six goals a week, but it is not helping his or her progress. That player needs a bigger challenge, either with another team or by playing up an age in order to fulfill potential.

If your son or daughter is a gifted violinist, you do not leave them in a village band, you seek a more advanced learning environment.

Highly talented players must be elevated to the level of play their ability demands – the best have to train and play with the best to progress.

Some coaches are reluctant to allow their most talented players to move on up because of the loss to their team. They must remember that the development of that individual player is the most important factor.

This winter's district player programme was in place before I was appointed.

I will be evaluating the programme during the winter, assessing shortfalls and needs and addressing them in time for the spring.

In addition, the plan is to expand the programme in 2012.

During the spring and summer, with the help of clubs and coaches, the most talented 2005 born players will be identified by myself and other staff and provided with the opportunity to have regular specialist training.

In 2013, players born in 2006 will be similarly identified, while the 2005's move up a year. Eventually over the long term, groups of eight, nine, 10, 11 and 12-year-olds will be involved in the district elite player programme.

The most talented and best qualified coaches will be identified and given specialist training to lead the groups, which will likely at most have 20 boys and 20 girls.

The vision is that four or five years down the road, we have close to 200 gifted players in this programme.

The aim is to set the standard for elite player development and have as many of these players as possible selected for the Ontario Soccer Association regional programme, Ontario provincial squads and eventually national teams.

It is important to note that worldwide research into various sports has discovered that most of the best players are from small towns and rural areas, not big cities. This indicates that a number of talented soccer players in Huronia have gone under the radar. It is time to stop that happening.

PART FIVE

COACH EDUCATION

As Technical Director, I will be making contact with clubs to arrange seminars/workshops at their locations.

I hope that head coaches and volunteer board members will provide assistance in setting up such events, which will be open to all coaches and interested parties.

It has been my past experience that many volunteers are reluctant to help with teams because they feel they are not qualified to do so.

These workshops will be designed to allay those fears. With a little guidance, volunteers will be able to provide teams with the right fun training and playing environment that will ensure children are enjoying themselves and improving.

The courses will be designed to ensure team leaders have fun too.

There will be no need for complicated coaching manuals, just an imaginative mind and a willingness to allow the game to be the teacher.

Of course, all coaches are encouraged to take the official OSA coaching course and in some cases, depending on the teams they coach, will eventually be required to do so.

The OSA courses have undergone extensive user friendly change as part of the long term player development plan and as one of the new OSA facilitators I will be able to conduct official courses.

Some people do not have the time or inclination to take official courses. My workshops and seminars will be able to assist.

I ran seminars and workshops as a Technical Director in Tasmania, Australia, plus the official Football Federation Australia courses.

In every case, they were received enthusiastically by participants, all of them surprised at the simple methods used to help coaches, especially at the grassroots.

Many of the people who attended workshops went on to take the official courses once they realised that they were not as complicated as they feared.

Finally, reverting to the Long Term Development Plan, some misconceptions must be addressed.

Firstly, this is not a plan put forward by the Ontario Soccer Association. It has been put forward by the Canadian Soccer Association.

Long Term Player Development is also not just for soccer players, but for all sports, all of them backed and assisted by the National Coaching Association of Canada.

Sports associations do not have an option on whether to adopt LTPD or not. It is a requirement of their governing bodies.

Changes in the way our young children are developed in sports are underway and will continue.