

## SAMPLE YOUTH SOCCER COACHING PHILOSOPHY

“Look sharp, play sharp.”  
– John Harves

Short-term objectives: Learn soccer skills and tactics and have fun.

Long-term objectives: Learn all aspects of soccer in order to play at the college varsity level.

Unlike American football, which uses mostly set plays and demands far fewer individual decisions on the part of the players during a game, soccer has few set plays and demands hundreds of individual decisions on the part of players. Accordingly, coaching should focus on fundamentals (ball skills) and decision-making (tactics). Good fundamentals are maximized by using as many activities as possible with each player working with a ball. Good decision-making is maximized by using as many activities as possible employing small groups. Scrimmaging puts the whole game together and is fun. All players are expected to learn all skills and all of the positions.

Winning games is not considered to be a primary objective. Winning is considered to be the result of the application of good ball skills and good tactics. Good ball skills demand the use of both feet with equal ability. Since many players demonstrate the use of a dominant leg at a very early age, emphasis must be added during all drills to force the use of the non-dominant or “weaker” leg. Good tactics demand the ability to think and to react quickly. Whereas the coach can teach and drill tactics and proper decision-making, it is the players themselves who must achieve a true mental understanding of what is expected. This learning is often a function of age.

Players learn the most by playing. Until approximately age 15, or the equivalent of the start of high-school competition, all players on a developmental team should essentially receive the same amount of playing time in games. This is especially true because there is no way of knowing who will be a “late bloomer.” Because a team must carry enough players in order to scrimmage during practices and to allow for injury, illness, and absences during competition, no players should expect to play an entire game. A reasonable expectation might be half of a game. If the coach is particularly clever, it might be more. For example, an eleven-a-side game, lasting 60-minutes, represents 660 minutes of player-time (11 times 60). If each player of a 16-player team received equal playing time, they would get approximately 41-minutes each (660 divided by 16). Even though all attempts should be made to keep playing time fair and equal, there are circumstances which will affect this goal:

- Age/Maturity
- Emotional state
- Exhaustion/Physical well-being
- Warnings/Cautions/Ejections
- Opportunities for the coach to make substitutions
- Rewarding team members who play goalkeeper with time in the field

At the other extreme of possibly not getting enough soccer is getting too much. This has two aspects: 1.) At young ages, too much running and pounding of the feet and legs on hard surfaces has been linked to an increased risk of stress fractures and/or stunting of the growing zones of bones. Heading should not be done at young ages and the cumulative effects of heading are still being studied. 2.) By the time players who started the game at five-years old reach their high school varsity teams, they could have played two, three, or even four seasons of soccer a year for 12 years. As a result, just when it's time to get really serious, they can

exhibit “burnout” and announce that they are quitting the sport. Dating, jobs, school pressure, peer pressure, and cars can also play a role.

Soccer, therefore, needs to be kept in perspective in the overall development of youth. They should play soccer because they want to, not because they feel forced. In this regard, taking off-season breaks, playing other sports, or attending summer camps of their own choosing can be very beneficial. Similarly, nothing should be assumed. Good communication between parents and their child, and among the parents, player, and the coach, might include an annual assessment of how the player feels about continuing to participate.

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