Preventing Lopsided Scores

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Preventing Lopsided Scores

By Randy Vogt

It's the youth soccer game that I cannot wait to end. And nobody seems to be having a good time. The game that I am writing about is the one with two teams of very different abilities playing one another and the better team scores a lot of goals.

Hopefully, the better side will put a limitation on going to goal but often the losing team gets very discouraged, sometimes very frustrated, and stops trying to play.

I tell newer referees that the best refs are the ones who can concentrate throughout a rout partly since it shows a great level of discipline. And if you do not concentrate, especially when you have a frustrated team on the field, the game could spiral out of control if you miss a deliberate foul.

As somebody who has refereed too many routs, I would like to offer some suggestions for youth soccer organizations:

Leagues, tournaments and coaches need to be better aware of the abilities of the teams as competitions are being structured. Obviously, this is easier said than done. But it does not help anybody when a Division 6 team is grouped with a Division 1 team in a tournament or an indoor or summer league. If there are not as many teams entered, my suggestion would be to combine two age groups (such as Under-13 and Under-14) and have one division of the top teams and the other division of the less skilled teams.

Competitions should not use goal differential or goals scored as a tiebreaker. Most competitions in the United States are aware this encourages teams to run up the score. The only competition that I have refereed where the goal differential actually affected the standings was a foreign tournament. The top two teams in the group tied one another when they played. One squad, which wound up in the championship game, ran up the score against overmatched opponents while the team that wound up in the third place game did the sporting thing instead.

Better tiebreakers would have been head-to-head competition (a tie score in this case), goals conceded and even discipline record of yellow and red cards.

Coaches need to put limitations in place before games with overmatched opponents instead of putting them in place when the score is 5-0. As a referee, I can tell when the game is going to be a mismatch just by watching the teams practice before the match. The coaches should be in an even better position as they probably know the scores of previous games vs. common opponents better than I do.

It’s discouraging when the starting team goes up 5-0, then the coach puts in the subs with limitations. It’s as if the players on the same team are not being treated equally. For me, a better idea would be to put a limitation on the starting team from the kickoff. If the game is more competitive than believed, the limitation can be eased.

The best limitations that I have seen work are:

- Can only shoot with weaker foot.
- Can only score from inside the goal area, also known as the six-yard box.
- Own goalkeeper must touch the ball before an attack can be initiated.

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