Coaching the Youth Player

Posted by STLCoach - 14 Mar 2009 04:52

This thread I want to put some ideas I have been exposed to over the last few years about coaching the youth player.

1. As coaches, and adults, we must keep in mind that we are working with kids, kids who want to play soccer. I know this is obvious, but when faced with teaching, or coaching, the most obvious things can take a back seat to results.

Soccer is a game that has an objective.... score more goals than the other team. It is the coach who prepares his players to cope with all situations on the field without freaking out, that will be the most successful. So we coaches are there to teach our players how to cope with the stresses of the game(skills).
So lets start with the coach. Be prepared, patient, and reasonable.
gotta go coach ...so more about this later.

==========

What to say to player during match

Posted by STLCoach - 03 Dec 2009 06:10

Lost in Translation

By Susan Boyd

Watching my grandson's soccer game last week, I was reminded that even when we think kids aren't listening, they really are, it's just that they don't understand us. But they try, because they want to please us. The following results come from some of the most confusing and therefore entertaining vignettes of my journey through youth soccer.

* A U6 coach attempted to exhort his tiny players to get more energy into the game. "Come on. Pick it up you guys." With some confusion the team paused to consider this instruction. "What are you stopping for? I said pick it up." With a shrug of his shoulders, one player ran over to the ball rolling across the field, and picked it up.

* At an indoor game the teams were 3v3 using the smaller Pugg goals. When the players came out for the second half, we noticed that the team on the near side only had two players on the field. The coach started to laugh, walked over to the goal and pulled the third player out of the far back edges of the Pugg. "But you told me to get in goal," the frustrated 5-year-old shouted.

* During a particularly combative U10 game, the coach of one team was continually barking instructions to his players. One girl seemed frozen unable to respond to the increasingly strident orders from her coach. Finally, on the verge of tears she turned to him, "What do you mean goal-side? Which side of the goal?"

* In a post game dissection, the coach, trying to explain passing, asked if anyone could do a cross. A player popped up his hand. "I can do that. We do it before we pray."

* Once when Robbie was playing in a 3v3 tournament he got the ball and began to dribble down the field. I cheered, or so I thought, "Go Robbie go!" He stopped immediately. Stomping his foot, he yelled right at me "I'm running as fast as I can."

* When Bryce was 8 he used to run behind the goal during defensive plays. It took us a couple weeks to piece it all together. The coach told him to defend the far post.

* Innovation saved the day when a U8 girl was admonished several times during the game to "mark her man." First of all it was a girls game and second of all she had nothing to write with. After the fourth or fifth insistence a light bulb went on. She picked up some dirt, ran over to the sidelines, rubbed it on her father, and then looked proudly to her coach.

* Another coach explaining defensive midfield to his young player was telling him that he needed to move up during offense and then run back during defense. Unfortunately he said "I need you to straddle both lanes." A bowling reference in a soccer pep talk just doesn't cut it.

We parents all too often forget that what we know about the world we learned through decades of experience. What seems abundantly clear to us comes across as confusing and occasionally ridiculous to our half-pint players. Bless them for wanting to do the right thing, so we need to just enjoy the ride.

It may be a cliché, but it's true: they are young for such a short time. Let them invent their world. What they discover can be more fun to experience with them than what we try so hard to teach them. Their fresh minds can translate life into adventure.

(Susan Boyd blogs each Monday on USYouthSoccer.org, you can read her blogs as well as others at www.USYouthSoccer.org
.)

==========

Adults and their funny instructions

Posted by STLCoach - 19 Jan 2010 06:37

_____

Adults and their funny instructions

By Mike Woitalla

In last week's Youth Soccer Insider ("Lost in Translation"), Susan Boyd shared some priceless examples of adult sideline instructions that were misinterpreted - to say the least -- by the young children they were aimed at and yielded some humorous responses. The piece prompted our readers to share some of their own, and jogged my memory of some of the most entertaining "advice" I've heard from adults at youth soccer fields.

Daniel and Nancy Cohen said their son was playing ball with his grandfather, who told him "keep your eye on the ball." The boy walked over to his grandfather and put his eye right next to the ball.

"I explained to my team," Jim Froslid recounted, "that when the ball goes over the touchline, I want us to take our throw-ins as soon as possible in order to 'catch the other team sleeping.' After the game I asked if everyone had fun and the girl in the back raised her hand and said, 'Coach I did not see any players on the other team with their eyes closed when we took our throw-ins."'

Monica McMillan reported that at her 7-year-old daughter's first soccer practice, the coach shouted "dribble, dribble." Because she had only ever seen her cousins playing basketball, she picked up the ball and started bouncing it with her hands.

I once heard a coach yell at 6-year-olds, "Give him a target on the flank!" What are the odds, I thought, that the youngsters had any idea what that meant? Never mind they could barely kick the ball 10 yards.

Eavesdropping on a coach addressing his 9-year-old troops at halftime, I heard him commanding that, "We need to neutralize No. 10!" The No. 10 managed to stay happily un-neutralized in the second half

One of my all-time favorites: A U-10 coach screamed, "Over here! Over here!" at the top of his lungs while a little goalkeeper had the ball in his hands. The coach apparently wanted the keeper to send the ball to the right wing. And so the keeper punted the ball - more precisely than I imagined he had the skill for - and it rolled out of bounds, right to the coach's feet. Well done!

==========

8 essential rules for coaching kids

Posted by STLCoach - 03 Mar 2010 02:59

_____

8 essential rules for coaching kids
While you can (and should) play to win matches, your prime objective as a youth soccer coach should be to create the right conditions for your players to enjoy themselves, get fit and develop new skills. They can experience all this while doing what they enjoy most - kicking a ball about.

However, to achieve this outcome you need to remember these 8 essential rules:

Have a plan but be flexible - if the plan isn't working, do something else!
Plan age-appropriate coaching sessions - always bear the physical and mental capabilities of your players in mind.
Focus on ball skills rather than tactics - do not waste time trying to teach tactics to players who can't pass the ball properly.
Give your players as much playing time as possible - players don't learn anything sitting on the bench except, perhaps, that their coach is not interested in them as a player or as a person.
Accept everyone into your team or club - all children deserve the chance to succeed.
Communicate your coaching philosophy to parents before you start - if parents know what you are trying to do, they can't complain later.
Have clear rules (not guidelines) regarding behaviour - everyone should be made aware of how you expect them to behave.
Avoid getting sucked in to a 'win-at-all-costs' mentality - that is when you stop being a coach and the team starts playing for your benefit instead.

==========

The search for youth soccer's Holy Grail

Posted by STLCoach - 29 Jul 2010 02:53

_____

The search for youth soccer's Holy Grail
To be able to coach a team of four- to six-year-olds who look up and pass the ball around like a mini-Manchester United seems to be a Holy Grail for many youth soccer coaches.

But if you listen to coaches shouting "pass!" and "spread out!" to players who are trying their hardest to get within touching distance of the ball, you will realise there is a disconnect between what the coach wants the players to do and what the players want to do.

Why is that?

As I've mentioned before, very young children (up to the age of about seven) are egocentric. That doesn't mean they are selfish, they just lack the ability to see the world from another person's viewpoint. They certainly don't see what you see when you look at a soccer pitch. They just see the ball, and they want to play with it.

Children up to the age of seven have other characteristics that a soccer coach needs to be aware of. Four- to seven-year-olds have, for example, a relatively high centre of gravity. This means they will sometimes seem unco-ordinated and no amount of practice will change that.

They also have a limited control of their body's motor systems. A youth soccer coach should, therefore, spend time on balance and co-ordination activities that do not require the use of a ball. Playing games that involve balancing a bean bag, for example, will indirectly improve your players' ball skills.

Players from the age of seven begin to appreciate that other people may have a different view of the world from their own. This is the time when they begin to understand the concept of a 'team'. Up to this point, there is no team, only 'me'.

But before you encourage your seven-year-olds to move away from the ball and each other, they must:

Be able to control a pass without the ball bouncing away from them.
Be able to pass the ball accurately over 10 yards.
Be able to shield the ball from pressure.
Understand WHY they need to space themselves out on the pitch.
But many coaches, especially the ones you see screaming from the touch line, don't do this. They expect a group of players with rudimentary soccer skills to spread themselves out and pass to each other simply because they are told to do it. It doesn't work that way.

You have to give your players the tools first. Only when you can put a tick against every one of the above learning points can you expect your players to even consider moving away from the ball by a few feet.

In the next newsletter I'll suggest several ways that you can do this.

Have a go hero!
This game encourages your players to work as a team and get their heads up.

Objective:

To improve shooting skills and decision making.

Skill level:

Any.

Number of players:

The whole squad divided into two teams.

Set up:

Create a 40 yards by 30 yards playing area with a halfway line. Place a goal at either end of the playing area. Half of each team enter each half of the playing area. For example, if you have two teams of six, three from each team go in each half. Goalkeepers are optional.

How to play:

Play soccer with the following conditions:

A shot on target is worth one point if you are using goalkeepers.
A goal scored from the attacking half is worth two points.
A goal scored from the defensive half is worth three points.
No player may cross the halfway line.
Play first to 10 points wins. All restarts are from the goalkeeper if you are using them.

Coaching points:

Praise players who take their chances decisively.
If you play with a goalkeeper, encourage forwards to follow up shots.
For younger children, make the goal bigger and the playing area shorter.

Steve's Coaching Clinic
Should this manager play to win?

"I have recently started helping out with a local U7s boys team that my son plays for. We have nine players but can only play seven at a time during matches. Recently, we have been subbing the 'weaker' players during matches, but ensuring they get at least 20 minutes of soccer over two 20 minutes games.

"We have heard rumours of some disgruntled parents complaining that it is always their child who seem to be subbed. This is effecting the players' confidence and parents find it hard explaining the situation to their children.

"The team manager's view is we play to win, and the weaker players have to accept this and just keep trying hard at training to impress. My view is the children are only seven-years-old and winning isn't the most important thing. Having fun and enjoying their soccer is.

"I appreciate that life won't always be 'rosy' for them, but I think it would be better to have a rota-style system where every child gets at least 30 minutes soccer every week (out of a possible 40 minutes over two games). Have you ever come across this kind of situation before and what advice would you give?"

My answer

There are a lot of coaches who take the same view as your manager. The inevitable consequence of this is the 'weaker' players get less game time and less opportunity to improve - it's a vicious circle.

There are probably three or four 'weaker' players in your team and they are the ones who get to play 20 minutes (good). But you can guarantee they will never play a full match (not so good).

I have to say that your manager has it half right. At least he does give all the players 20 minutes' match time. But he really ought to go one step further and share out the playing time equally. Seven players, playing a total of 40 minutes = 280 player minutes.

Divide that by the number of players in your squad (9) and you get a little over 31 minutes. That's how long each player should play if you have an equal playing time policy. Of course, it's impossible to give every player exactly the same playing time, but you should try to give all of them about 30 minutes each.

It's not in the players' or the team's best interests to give the 'weaker' players 20 minutes and the stronger players 40. As I've said before, players won't improve by sitting on the bench! You should try to convince your manager that he (I assume it's a 'he') should not be overly concerned by winning matches with seven-year-olds.

Think long-term

It's far better to have a longer term plan that is designed to instill a love of the game in all your players, and develop all their soccer skills as much as possible. Neither of these will be achieved if you take the view that seven-year-olds are either 'weak' or 'strong'. They are far too young to be judged in that way.

As you say, some parents are grumbling about their children having less match time than the rest. At the very least, your manager should be up front with them and explain why they are not getting a full game (or even a fair share of the game).

Then the parents will know where they stand and can decide if they want their child to continue to play for a club that values winning above player development. You can test any policy or decision in youth soccer by asking, 'is what I'm doing in the best interests of the children?' In this case, I think the answer is 'no'.

==========

GOLDEN RULES OF COMMUNICATION

Posted by STLCoach - 19 Oct 2010 05:48

_____

Which of these golden rules of communication are you breaking?

1. Know your players' names – and use them!

I find it hard to remember names. But I've worked on it because it's so important. How would you feel if you went to a meeting every week, took an active role but the person in charge didn't know your name? It wouldn't make you feel very good about going to that meeting, would it?

It's the same for young soccer players. You should get into the habit of greeting every player by name as they arrive at training or matches and asking how they are doing.

Being friendly and interested in your players as people – not just as players – is the first step to successful communication.

Tips for remembering names:
Drop the excuses. Telling yourself you can't remember names because you have a bad memory is like telling your dentist you haven't been brushing your teeth because you lost your toothbrush – it's rubbish!

Concentrate hard on players' names. Listen to them and use them during the training session or match.

If you forget a name, apologise and ask the player to tell you what it is. Don't worry about seeming forgetful – you need to know!

Repeat names to yourself, silently.

Address players by their names during the session and when they leave.

Write your players' names down afterwards.

2. K.I.S.S – Keep It Simple, Stupid!
The easiest way to lose a group of young soccer players is to make them listen to long-winded instructions. Think about how you are going to explain a drill or game before you go to training sessions - not when you get there – and if you can't explain it in 30 seconds or less – don't use it!

And never use jargon.

3. Telling is good but showing is better.
Demonstrations are a great way to communicate with your players and I suggest you try showing your players what you want them to do instead of talking to them about it. But the demonstration has to be good! If you can't perform the skill or technique yourself, don't be embarrassed, just find someone who can. It could be a fellow coach, a parent or a player.

4. Sssssh.....
Perhaps the most important part of communication is listening. Take the time to find out what your players want from your coaching sessions. Ask them what they think of the drills and games you use and find out what they want to play. You need to have your own objectives for a session but you can let your players choose a game occasionally.

If your players are old enough it's good practice to let them run a whole session sometimes. Let them design a session that works on the skill or technique they think they need to be better at.

5. Tell your players what you expect of them – and what they can expect of you.
We all want hard work, concentration and focus from our players but have you explained to them why you want them to work hard?

Explain that you will help them become the best soccer players they can possibly be but they have to help you in return by listening to you and giving 100% effort.

Don't expect good behaviour if you haven't explained what good behaviour is.

6. Toddlers are people too!
These golden rules apply to coaches who work with all ages of children. Three and four year olds will understand your objectives, what they must and must not do and can they can choose which games they want to play. You just need to keep your questions short and use very simple language.

Summary
Good coaches don't need formal qualifications but they do need to be skilled communicators.

Think about how you speak to your players. Do you use their names? Are you friendly? Are you clear?

Do you listen to them and let them speak to you whenever they want to? Do they know what you expect of them and what they can expect from you?

If you want your coaching sessions to run smoothly, be productive and fun for everyone concerned (including you!) you have to plan and learn how to communicate.

==========

EQUAL PLAYING TIME DEBATE

Posted by STLCoach - 21 Jun 2011 12:33

_____

Your views on the equal playing time debate

How you use your substitutes during matches seems to be a difficult problem for many youth soccer coaches.

There seems to be so much to consider. For example:

Should I have an equal playing time policy, even if it means losing games we could have won if I kept my best players on the pitch?

Shall I start with my best players or my weaker ones?

What shall I do with my star striker who doesn't have a good reason for not turning up for training last week? Shall I leave her out of the team?

How can I keep track of the time my players spend on the pitch?

Should I make subs every few minutes or at half time?

Should I risk getting little Johnny on the pitch even though we all know that he's got "two left feet"? Will it destroy his confidence?

These extracts from the emails you've sent me on the subject of equal playing time provide possible answers to these questions.

But I would suggest there is only one question you need to ask yourself... "Is what I'm doing in the best interests of every child on my team?"

1. We need a result so you're not getting on!

My son's team needed a draw in the last game of the season to get promotion.

My son and two of his team mates were left on the sidelines while his manager chose to play three players who hadn't turned up for training in the previous weeks rather than the subs who hadn't missed a game or training all season.

But the worst thing is the manager barely acknowledged the subs or apologised. Ironically, two of the players he used in that game have now decided to leave the club and my son and the other subs are planning to leave as well. – Coach Stewart

2. "Coach... am I going to be sub today?"

All my players take turns starting as sub.

But the first question to come from the boys was always "who is sub today?". The second was "who is going to be subbed?".

So I changed the way I carried out substitutions so that I made a substitution every five minutes throughout the game. This gave all the team equal time on the pitch and the boys knew they all had to come off at some point. – Coach Mark

3. This is how I do it.

I guarantee every player will play a minimum of half of every game.

We have 12 players, with 8v8 games. We play two 30-minute halves, so I divide the game into 10-minute segments. My players know they will play a minimum of two segments in one half and one segment in the other half of the game.

Players who have worked hard at practice or shown improvement may play somewhat more, depending on the number of subs for that day. – Coach Jim

4. How to give less experienced players the chance to succeed.

I don't think there is any issue that gives me more heartburn as a coach than playing time. I set up a substitution schedule each week for the game and allocate playing time as equally as I can and I try to stick to that schedule no matter what the score is.

I balance the team out and do not have all of my more developed players or all of my less developed players on the field at the same time.

But sometimes your options as a coach are limited. Players don't come to the game or are late. They get injured or want to come out during the game so "equal time" never quite plays out exactly as it should. But those are things out of my control as a coach. I can only do my best to ensure the kids feel like they are getting quality playing time.

The only people who have ever voiced a concern to me about playing time have been parents, not players.

Next season however, we will be playing in a more competitive division and teams field players with the intent to win the game. I don't expect that playing time will be as equal as I have done it for the past two seasons. However, I do think it is important for everyone to play. If a kid comes to practice consistently, works hard and listens well, then the expectation to play on the weekend is not an unreasonable one.

For less developed players, I think the trick is to find points in the game where they can enter and be put in a place to succeed. It's OK if they make a few mistakes but if they are aren't making any positive plays, even small ones, it's better to have them come off in my opinion.

It's counterproductive to have a less developed player on the field for extended periods if they are getting overwhelmed by the other kids. I've found it's not good for their morale and it's not good for the team. I want to give them enough time to make a contribution but not leave them on the field for too long where they get discouraged.

As they come off the field, tell them they did a good job and let them build on that experience for more playing time.

Developing confidence in young players is as important as teaching them technical skills. – Coach Tony

5. No one is perfect.

We play 11-a-side, two 35-minute halves. I try to rotate my subs through the game and I usually start changing around the 15 to 20-minute mark, again at half time and then during the second period.

Most players get roughly equal time on the pitch. There are very few grumbles when they come off as they know they take it in turns and they will be back on.

Unfortunately I broke this rule a month or two back during a cup final. I felt the pressure from the parents and kids to win the game and did not rotate based on playing time, but on performance and ability.

One boy did not get much time on the park and after the event (which we won on penalties) I felt pretty bad, especially when his dad told me his boy had been feeling very down and that he said that "he wished he had not been part of the cup final squad".

He has continued playing and I hope he continues to do so but to think that my actions may result in a player stopping playing really grates with me.

I have now resolved to rotate players fully during every game regardless of the situation and ensure that all players within the squad will get their fair share of match time. – Coach Alex

6. Am I a victim of our team's success?

I know that this will sound wrong, but if we are not in a position to win the league I'll give all my players equal playing time but if we are in with a chance of winning the league, my better players will play more.

It seems to me that some coaches are victims of their own success. – Coach Justin

7. My boy was left to rot on the sidelines.

My son had average skills and experience so was very much a "work in progress". Initially he was getting 15 or 20 minutes but as the season wore on and the team started losing, this diminished. I spoke to his coach and thought we had sorted things out – my son was not the strongest player in the squad but would get at least 10 minutes.

Then came a game against a bottom-half team in December. It was bitterly cold with bouts of sleet. My son was told that he would play in the second half and was told to warm up, twice. However, the game ended and Luke had not played a single minute.

I asked the coach:

How could he keep an eight-year-boy standing around on the side of a pitch for an hour?
Why did he not keep his word to play Luke?
The response was that it was a close game and winning might help the team avoid relegation.

I pointed out that kids do not care about the result – they care about playing soccer – but he was just not listening.

I wrote to the club and asked their policy on playing time. They didn't have one, even though it is a FA Charter Standard club.

How can kids enjoy soccer if the adults involved are allowed to lie to young boys by telling them they will get to play when there is no intention of doing so and, by not playing them, they are telling kids indirectly that they are rubbish?

Surely the FA could be prescriptive on what is acceptable behaviour, e.g. if a boy turns up to a game then they must spend at least a quarter of it on the pitch, barring injury or illness.

All teams would then be in the same position and coaches would have no lame excuses for leaving a boy to rot on the sideline. – Mark

8. You're going to need your subs one day!

My U9s play seven-a-side.

We can generally hold our own in matches if I have two developing players in the team and I've communicated that principle (if not the exact numbers) to the parents of my players.

How did we do? Won 11, Drawn 3, Lost 12. Could we have won more if we'd played our strongest team every week? Yes, of course – but that's not the point. And, looking ahead, I need a large squad when we move to nine-a-side next year. I therefore absolutely need to keep the developing players engaged. – Coach Andy

9. My girls have to earn their playing time.

We have a club with around 260 kids. I coach and now manage an U13s girls team.

I began my coaching "career" in the usual way – as a dad who took his daughter along and then instead of just standing watching, got involved.

When we started at U11s, most of the girls hadn't really kicked a ball before and we did try and make sure they all got similar playing time by making lots of subs. This proved difficult to control so we moved to subbing at half time instead.

We feel that at the age they are now, there is a need to work for their place and learn a life lesson that you have to put the effort in to get into the "first" team.

We take into account the effort and behaviour in training, timekeeping and other elements that we hope will help develop them away from soccer.

Although we try to get our weaker players on in a match, it's not always possible, or we choose not to if the game is close. Those that don't get playing time in the main match however, do play the whole of the friendly that we usually play after the league match.

Since we went down the road of girls having to earn playing time in the "main" match dependent on effort, behaviour and listening to what was being taught etc, results have improved dramatically.

All the girls really work hard for each other because they enjoy the buzz of winning or at least improving from where they were two seasons ago: losing games by double figures. Even on wet and windy nights, they still turn up for training, and it's great to see. – Coach Bill

10. "He's absolutely useless".

In the mid-1990s, I was the soccer development director to a city just north of London.

At the time I operated a Saturday morning academy for eight to 12-year-old kids.

One lad was not particularly gifted but simply loved his soccer. Always the first to arrive and the last to leave after assisting me to collect in the equipment.

On a bitterly cold Sunday morning I stopped to observe a junior soccer game. The lad in question was huddled up on the bench soaking wet from a non-stop drizzle of icy rain.

With about 10 minutes to go I approached his coach and and asked the score. He told me that "we are winning 9-0". "Any chance of the lad on the bench getting a run out?" I asked. "No chance, we need all the goals we can get and he is absolutely useless."

Even more disturbing was that over a period of 28 games he had NEVER started a game and had only come off the bench five times for a total of 70 minutes.

I later learned that the lad had stopped playing soccer, had become very withdrawn and that his school work was also suffering. I also learned the coach in question had been awarded "coach of the year" for his team winning the league.

How sad it is when children are made to suffer by so called "coaches" who are only concerned with satisfying their inflated egos. – Coach Dennis

11. "Mum, my heart is going to explode!"

My kids were actually the ones getting all the playing time while their team mates sat on the bench being used only when one of the weaker players on the field asked for a sub, and then staying on just long enough for that player to get a drink.

When my second child was an U8, her team played up a year at U9 – 8v8 on the larger field, and she was a tiny seven-year-old but that's another issue.

In one match she raised her hand repeatedly to get a sub and her coach ignored her.

She even came to the side and he sent her back to play. We had to tell him she needed to come off, she was nearly in tears!

Unfortunately, we saw the same behavior with my older child when she was an U7. She was so exhausted on the field she could barely move and her coach continued to yell at her rather than giving the subs a turn.

I finally went to him and told him to get her off the field or I would. Needless to say, my girls did not continue to play for those coaches – it's not fun to "feel like your heart is going to explode" as my daughter put it, either! – Name withheld

12. The importance of a blanket by the pitch.

From a tactical point of view, equal playing time is difficult but all parents pay the same amount of money and we all expect our money's worth, especially when it comes to our kid's self esteem!

This year I am coaching two teams. I have coached for four years and the age groups have varied. As the kids get older they want to win and they start to accept that some are better players than others.

Keep in mind our season here in Canada is only June to August and our town is too small to afford an indoor facility, so the excitement and competition on the pitches begins on day one.

I must also admit to being the only female coach in this age level and honestly, I love it when we win against the men!

But the male coaches are there only to win in spite of this being a house league and the kids are only eight to 13 years old!

But I know that all kids love winning and it is hard to make everyone happy.

I begin the year organised with schedules and send emails to parents with my expectations. I try to meet and greet with kids and parents prior to our first game, I give out uniforms and my kids come to games relaxed, suited up and there is no anxiety with who is on their team as they have all met and team "bonding" has begun.

I believe the emotional conditioning of a team is important and I work at that as a well-bonded team is accepting of their peers' faults and skills and they do not compete with each other.

I tell my players that if they do not get much playing time in one game then they start the next and they seem pleased with that.

I have a blanket I bring to games and there is a rule that if you want to be subbed on you must be on or by the blanket. The parents accept this as fair. – Coach Kim

13. I use a spreadsheet and issue handbooks to parents.

In July of every year, I hold a pre-season meeting where players and their parents are invited along so I can run through how the season will pan out in terms of selection, playing time, training policy, code of conducts etc. I also provide each parent with a "handbook" detailing all the information for their future reference.

I make sure that everyone knows that by signing the club's registration form and paying their fees by the end of August, they understand and accept how the team will be run over the course of the season.

During the season (I've just finished 10 wins and 11 losses with the U13s having been with them from U7s level). I also keep a spreadsheet with an average playing time percentage (may seem a bit extreme but it's a decent way of keeping track).

I'm glad to say that all my players have a playing time of around 72%. There are no extreme anomalies

barring our goalkeeper, but this is only as no one else wants to go in goal and the lad that goes in is pretty good too. – Coach Andy

14. The forgotten eight-year-olds.

First, let me say that English is not my first language so I hope what I write makes sense.

I am a mum of twins. They are now eight and both of them are goalkeepers with the same team.

When they started as seven-year-olds they shared their position, made good progress and were both awarded the "most improved player" trophy at the end of the season.

When we moved from U8s to U9s, the team was divided into two new teams.

Both my boys were sent to team B. Our previous coach – who took team A – said: "They will have more chance to play in team B."

Later in the season a new player joined team B and so we had three players on the bench at the start of every game.

My boys played one half each in goal but the other two subs were not used very often.

The new player had a powerful shot and my boys found his shots to be very hard to save in training sessions, more difficult even than the team's attackers.

Unfortunately, his talent went unnoticed by the coach who made him play as a defender on the rare occasions he came off the subs' bench.

His parents think this is unfair and I have heard a rumor that he may not join the team for next season.

Then the coach thought we could win games so he stuck to the best players (at least he believed so) and often players on the bench were completely forgotten about.

These children will probably seek another team where they can play more and the team will lose players.

I believe that the coach needs to let every player feel they are a part of the team all the time. If some players are not being used at all, how they can they feel as though they belong? – Sayuri

15. I try to start with my weaker players.

I have managed my U14s youth soccer team for four years.

I have always had a squad of a minimum of 15 players who vary from very strong and skilful to average to rather weak.

It has always been my philosophy to ensure every player that turns up to play, regardless if they have trained that week, to play at least 10 minutes minimum of the game.

This has been achieved in every match, regardless of how close or important the game was.

Some games I find it easier to start with some of the weaker players and bring the stronger ones on if

we aren't doing well, but I will continue with the weaker ones if we are we winning or playing well. That way they have a chance of playing the whole match.

In the four seasons I have managed the squad, we have done well in the league and reached the semi final of the cup.

The squad has only changed minimally from one year to the next and I still have 13 of the original squad from the first season.

I monitor playing time to the nearest five minutes and I know that every player in every season has had at least 40% game time each for the season. Some players may peak up to 90%, but the majority of the squad end up around the 70% mark.

Therefore if I am confronted by a disgruntled parent claiming their child isn't seeing enough game time, I can show them exactly how many minutes their child has played and suggest reasons why they aren't getting the same playing time as some of the stronger players. That way they can make an informed decision to move their child to a team more to their child's standard if they wish.

In my opinion, it is almost impossible to ensure all players play the same amount of minutes but no player should have to sit on the bench ready to play and not get at least 15% game time no matter how important the result means to anyone.

What gives us, as a manager, the right to stop a player from playing the sport they love if they are signed on to play, train regularly and have paid their subs, irrespective of how important the match might be? - Coach Steve

16. A nine-year-old who needs his own transport.

The saddest thing I have encountered this season is the boy who came up to me at the last game in a non-competitive park league looking completely downtrodden. He had missed practice and he was certain that he would not be allowed to play... because that was his coach's rule last year.

He is not old enough to get himself to practice (he's nine), his parents had both had to work that night and the babysitter didn't have a car to bring him in.

That boy wanted to be there, but his circumstances prevented it.

Should he be punished for that? I don't think so, not at this age. But apparently there are others that think otherwise. – Coach Julie

Conclusion

It is quite easy to agree that all players should play but it's not always easy to stick to your principles in the last game of the season when you need to win to avoid relegation or win the league.

But it's really important we get this right and get it right every time. Because how you use your subs will not only have an impact on the way your team plays, it will either make children happy to be in a team with their friends or make them feel sad that they're not obviously good enough to join in the fun.

Your decision to leave a child on the bench could also make them want to give up the game, adversely affect their self esteem and even make it harder for them to do well at school.

So if you're coaching a team of eight-year-olds and you sometimes leave some of your players on the bench for most of a match... think again.

Is winning a game of soccer more important than a child's happiness?

==========