

Questions Parents Should Ask

By Mike Barr

As a parent, you are constantly faced with decisions that have a profound impact on your child's future. I believe it is important to examine some of these issues as they relate to youth soccer and all youth sports today.

The Formative Years

As a coach and educator for close to 30 years, I believe the coaches your child has at the younger ages are critical. Many clubs have begun to shift their focus from the older, travel ages to the young ages. Much as successful elementary school teachers provide the building blocks and love for learning, coaches in the ages of 6 to 12 can and should provide the same.

Questions for your club and their coaches during the Formative Years:

- * Does your club have prerequisites for coaches who are involved with coaching players under the age of 10, and coaches who are involved with early-age travel teams?
- * Do they place development above winning?
- * Are they aware of the physical, social and cognitive stages of development for those ages?
- * Does your child's club have a curriculum with exercises and activities based on age and development?
- * Is my child's practice fun, and is every child involved?
- * Are the practices organized, with a progression and theme?
- * Does the practice facilitate learning?
- * Does the coach recognize coachable moments to instruct?
- * If there are travel teams for ages 9 through 12, is travel distance limited and are tournaments in which they participate played locally?
- * If your child is involved with a travel team, is there a fair balance of practice time and matches (two or three practices to one match)?
- * Does the coach of the travel team have a philosophy regarding the team that is shared with parents and players?
- * Does the coach allow a player to miss practice due to homework, school functions, family outings, or priorities in other sports?
- * If playing travel, is there considerable down time from the sport at certain times of the year?

I believe the answer should be, "Yes," to all of these pertinent questions.

(Mike Barr is the Director of Coaching of the Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer Association and the head men's coach of Immaculata University. He coached the boys team at Strath Haven High School in 1984-2005, winning five PIAA state titles, six PIAA District One titles and 16 Central League titles.)