

## HOW WE DEFINE SUCCESS:

The Big Picture  
By Tim Sekerak

"There are many people, particularly in sports, who think that success and excellence are the same thing and they are not the same thing.

Excellence is something that is lasting and dependable and largely within a person's control.

In contrast, success is perishable and is often outside our control - If you strive for excellence, you will probably be successful eventually - people who put excellence in first place have the patience to end up with success.

An additional burden for the victim of the success mentality is that he is threatened by the success of others and resents real excellence. In contrast, the person fascinated by quality is excited when he sees it in others."

**Joe Paterno** - Penn State football coach - 1990

Adults enjoy soccer so much that we have shared it with our children. Yet adults err when we bring our adult performance and outcome based thinking into the developing player's world.

For many adults, their criteria on how to measure sporting quality is absorbed from the sports media. The sports media predominately report on the outcome of adult games at the college and professional levels. Many of our nation's most popular sports are statistically driven and coach-centered, or are reduced to that for the purpose of debate and discussion. For soccer, simple statistics like won-loss-tie records, goals for/goals against, saves, number of corner kicks, time of possession and so on are straight forward ways to quantify what happened in a match. Yet those measurements fail to show the complete picture of a spontaneous, open ended, transitional sport with no timeouts. In particular, the won/loss record of a youth team does not accurately reflect how the game was played, how the players performed, qualities of the opposition, how well the coach prepared the team to play, or technical development of players over time. The bottom line is that typical media oriented statistics are largely meaningless in developing a quality youth soccer program.

**The process of doing one's best is the key to success.** The determining criterion of success is whether a player gave his or her best that day. Doing one's best is the most important statement a player can make about the importance of an activity and the meaning it has for them. It is the stance of Blackhills FC to focus greatly on match performance; yet this is not to say that teams should not strive to win. Wanting and trying to win is desirable and praiseworthy. It generally means trying your best. Indeed trying to play your best (match performance) often leads to winning. But not always!

**This is why Blackhills FC is a "Player Centered Program."** We believe that striving to improve match performance is the most important task at the youth level. Simultaneously, we believe players should play to win. Coaches should teach and develop players in a manner where they learn how to play at a high level and create for themselves the opportunity to win matches. But even if a team loses a match, they should feel competent and equipped to compete and enjoy the game. It comes down to this: We want our players to compete, learn, improve and enjoy the game for a lifetime.

Intrinsic success is by its nature more difficult to measure than extrinsic success. A trophy is more tangible to an adult than the exhilaration a child feels while playing soccer. The ultimate measure of success, a **child that stays in the sport into adulthood**, will require a good deal of patience from the adults in their lives - but yields lasting benefits making all the time and effort worthwhile.

Adapted from a US Youth Soccer Coaching Education Vision Document, *Youth Soccer in America: How Do We Measure Success.*