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AFSC



DOC Newsletter

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LONG TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

Existing models of athlete development in USA exhibit a number of problems with training methods, policies, coaching, and talent identification that are detrimental to the development of athletes. Clubs can do a better job of training athletes if these issues are addressed. In the early stages of club play, athletes often overcompete and undertrain. As a result, they do not develop the skills and abilities necessary for reaching optimal performance levels in competitions later in life. Sports programs have athletes specialize too early in an attempt to attract and retain participants with the misguided assumption that winning at an early age will result in long-term success. The result is that athletes do not enjoy being physically active and fail to reach their genetic potential and optimal performance level.

Imposing adult training and competition programs on developing athletes often takes the fun out of sport as well. Moreover, using training methods and competition programs focused on short-term outcome (winning the next game or tournament) and not on the process of having fun and developing abilities often results in burnout. Current athlete development programs should review their policies and raise the question: Is it essential in youth sport to determine a clear winner? Is it true that ranking children serves little value and often creates some negative effects like early specialization? What about tiering children early? Research has shown that children in the top tiers are older and thus bigger and stronger but not necessarily better.

At very young ages determination of winners, records, statistics and numerical data are not

necessarily exact and most of the time have very little value to the cause. Athletes develop at different pace for different reasons. It is not easy to predict success. Plus excessive emphasis on the assumption that success is only possible thru external rewards, can bring negative effects within young athletes - like harming long term performance, creates short term thinking, crush creativity, creates dependency, creates possibility for unethical behavior (cheating), and in most of the cases expresses someone else's desires but the athlete's one (coach/parent/association).

Young athletes need to develop physical literacy which is the development of fundamental movement and fundamental sport skills that permits them to move confidently and with control in a wide range of physical activities, rhythmic and sport situations. The sport club, therefore is the business of developing well-rounded athletes first and foremost. Physical literacy also includes the ability to read what is going on in an activity setting and react appropriately to those events. The goal with all children from early childhood to late adolescence is quality daily physical activity and a coordinate approach to developing physical abilities, NOT THE SCORE BOARD!

Miami Heat forward Michael Beasley, number two pick in 2008 for NBA, conceded that no one had ever asked him to play defense, particular when he played for his club team. Stan Van Gundy, Orlando Magic head coach, stated: "Our system isn't about developing players. The emphasis is to get exposure and play as many game as you can and show everybody how great you are. If I can win at 11 and 12 years-old league and tell all my friends about it, that is a whole more important

than if my kid actually gets any better or learns anything about the game”.

Van Gudy pointed to the European model of player development, in which the emphasis is on practice and not playing. “Those guys are doing 5-6 practices for every game. They are spending a lot of time in the gym working on the individual skills. It is reversed here in USA.”

It can be argued that this philosophy has been the reason the rest of the world has been catching up to the United States on the world basketball stage, and that an increasing number of players in the NBA come from foreigner countries.

A product of it is the NBA star Peja Stojakovic from Serbia, who recalled spending hours dribbling thru chairs, and working on defense and other fundamental skills. In comparison, Beasley did not recall ever doing defensive drills with his club and commented that defense was not even played in club games.

The reality in USA is that development of players is left to high school and club programs. It appears that the model has a lot of limitations to contribute to the total and complete development of the athletes.

Club soccer has limitation. Club soccer will not provide a complete soccer education. A complete soccer education comes from:

- Real club soccer practice 6-8 times a week.
- Practice outside of club days by yourself.
- Play unstructured pick up games.
- Watch games on TV on a regular basis and emulate soccer players. Have the patience and the PLEASURE

to watch 90 minutes of games and watch how plays develop. Not only highlights.

- Play less official games and train more.
- Less emphasis on winning and more on development.
- Use team mentality to develop individuals that contribute to the team.
- Live soccer. Get to know teams, players, leagues from all over the world.
- MORE

Up until then, parents will be disappointed with soccer experience, because soccer clubs make the best they can with the resources they have. The club next door or the club that has a big name, has the same reality or worse. By the way, way too many soccer clubs around diluting quality.

It is about quantifying success with quality and not quantity.

REFEREES

I have received a letter from AYSA urging the soccer community to respect referees. AFSC will support AYSA on that. Personally, I think the referee level here in Arizona is very poor. Soccer clubs train to get better and referees do not. Most of the time, referees are available people or young children that want to make some money thru it - lets not deny it. The ones available are overloaded with games. They are not overqualified to do the job. But of course there are good referees too.

With all that, I still prefer to believe that they deserve respect no matter what. I can't imagine a game without referees and quite frankly this

could happen pretty soon, because there is a shortage of people that want to become a ref due to the hassle and pressure that they have to deal with at every weekend.

The way to fix that is to make them better and not yell at them! There will be discussions at the State Level to improve their backgrounds with courses and licenses. That is the way to go. In the mean time, please give them a break (players, parents and coaches). The punishment for those that cross the line with referees is a heavy one at a National Level and believe me, it is not either worth it and nor necessary.

VIDEO

Please watch:

<http://www.georgiasoccer.org/multimedia/coaching-videos.aspx>

Thank you,

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