A Discussion on Winning and Losing at the U10 Age Group (MYSA website)

Competition is a central element in a player’s development. At the U10 age, a competitive environment should not be a result-oriented environment. The differences must be clear. A competitive environment at the youth level encourages decisions from player and coach alike that focus on performance rather than outcome (favoring ball skill and inventiveness as the means to find success within the rules and spirit of the game). The result is just one indicator of performance and at this age, not the most important one.

Competition among kids playing games will always exist, whether adults are present or not. Making soccer “fun” at the younger ages does not mean that competition is removed. Competition can be positive and healthy. Scoring goals and winning the game are fundamental parts of soccer. Allow the children to enjoy this aspect without making it the focus. Set up other skill-based objectives as the focal point. At the same time, recognize that children will find competition in anything you set up. Let them compete. The emphasis and manner of the coach will often determine if the competitive environment is healthy or not.

At the youth level, matches are important as a means to player development (enjoyment, ball skill, insight, and fitness), not as the aim. These competitive situations are a series of tests for kids. In this respect, the usefulness of the game can occur in many different forms. Focus on the process and performance rather than the outcome, but be prepared for the possibility that your team may lose some games in the short term with this approach. Keep in mind that it is actually easier to win games at this age group with teams that are “organized” but lack skill. Placing the more physically mature players down the middle of the field and just asking players to ‘kick it down the middle’ or only allowing players to specialize at one position may lead to more victories. This approach, however, does not effectively teach the players the game and prepare them to continue on in the sport. Instead, a skillful approach to playing soccer should be emphasized, even though this may result in conceding goals or losing games in the short term. During the learning process, ball control and passing can lead to more costly mistakes. At the same time, the coach can manipulate the level and variety of the competition to ensure that players and teams are being given the opportunity to win and to lose games. Valuable lessons can be learned in both scenarios. In the end, it is still the responsibility of the coach and the parents, to manage how competition is addressed and managed among his or her players.