



“Devoted to Player Development”

What do we mean by “Devoted to Player Development?”

Player developmental recognizes that:

- (1) Individuals develop (technically, tactically, physically, and psychologically) at different rates and different times. It is therefore important to be patient with each individual to allow that individual to develop at an acceptable and natural pace.
- (2) To develop effectively, individuals need to be placed in an optimal learning environment whenever possible (e.g. it does little to help the development of a classic player to be placed in a premier level environment).
- (3) The goal is to develop all participants in accordance with their commitment level, work ethic and desire.
- (4) Part of learning to deal with a highly competitive environment is learning both how to deal with both success and improvements that may be more gradual. Be patient!
- (5) The Academy functions merely as a vehicle through which we provide the environment for positive individual growth and development.
- (6) The long-term development of each individual should always take precedence over the short-term success.
- (7) Being able to compete in a high intensity athletic environment is more important than winning in a high intensity environment.
- (8) Every participant is entitled to the highest level of coaching regardless of where they are on the learning scale.
- (9) The development of each player is the yardstick by which a coach’s effectiveness is measured- not his/her win/loss record!

Implementing this Developmental Philosophy

Implementing a developmental philosophy is not an easy task. The first obstacle that must be breached is to overcome existing preconceived ideas of ‘what is and is not’ a good player, good technique, tactical knowledge, and understanding of the game. By developing holistically each individual to the best of their abilities the four pillars of the game (technical, tactical, physical, and psychological) can be addressed appropriately and sequentially.

This leads us to the second obstacle: translating the philosophy into practical implementation or action. It is not possible here to provide a specific developmental answer for every question, concern or situation that might arise in the youth soccer arena. However, by far the best guideline is: when facing any issue or decision, the first question a developmentally-based coach should ask is; *“will the consequences of this decision hinder the long-term growth of the individual?”*

(At this point, it is important to understand the difference between short-term and long-term development.) It is a fact of team sports that independent individual development cannot take place continually for every participant on a short-term basis. For example, though one may have 8 forwards (or 8 persons who want to play forward) on a team, one obviously cannot play all 8 in a forward position. It is also not possible to develop in a forward position for an extended period and then rotate positions to allow each participant the opportunity to develop their forward game-play understanding. In a “team” oriented program what usually happens is that the best forward are chosen to play that position and remain doing so until the team disbands! Top professional clubs throughout the world rotate individual players through every position (excluding goalkeeper) so they have a clearer understanding of what is required of that position, and thus, what their team mate in that position expects. Conversely, what their opponent in that position does and doesn’t expect 😊

To answer this question carefully, one must first look at the consequences. For example, if you’re considering getting your U-12 team to play a low risk, direct style of soccer (which many coaches teach) how will this affect the long-term technical and tactical development of your players? In this case it will have an adverse affect on individual development in these areas. Low risk soccer means defending players don’t play with any tactical or technical subtlety or sophistication. They are simply asked to “clear the ball” whenever they can. It’s certainly low-risk, but over the long-term your defenders will end up being the type of players who can clear the ball and do nothing else. After looking at the consequences and if the consequence does not seem to fit into a kind of soccer that develops technical and tactical subtlety and sophistication – do not worry about playing low risk soccer.

The second question asked is “will the short-term negative consequences of this decision have a negative effect on the long-term growth of the individual?” This is not always an easy question to answer, it’s important therefore to focus on how the individual is developing (and to continually reinforce this focus by word and deed) rather than individual shortfalls in the short term.

In short then, the developmentally based coach or program director should continually ask the following questions:

(1) *"Will the consequences of this decision have a negative effect on the long-term growth of the individual or individuals?"*

(2) *"Will the short-term negative consequences of this decision have a negative effect on the long-term growth of the individual or individuals?"*

We know with this developmental philosophy we can provide an optimum learning environment for you or your son or daughter.



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