

LSC Coaching Notes Vol. 2, No. 4 - Dave Gosselin, LSC Coaching Director.

How Do You Define a Successful Season?

We have all just completed another soccer season. Personally, I think I may be going through soccer coaching withdrawal. I am already looking forward to next season and I am thinking about my goals for our team next season. Every year about this time I think about the extent to which we were successful. Of course, the first thing that comes to mind is the win-loss record. My U-14 team was 3-4-3 and my U-17 team was 3-4-1. I guess from the win-loss perspective, we were not successful. However, I have learned over the years that there is more to being a successful youth coach than my win-loss record. It is more fun to win than it is lose as my softball buddies use to say, but if we just focus on the outcome of the game which is winning or losing, we are going to miss all the great things that are going on in front of us. These things include: players being successful at something that they had been working on for weeks; seeing one of your less gifted players strip the ball from the best player on the other team time after time; watching your outside back commit to a run down the sideline and getting the ball from your midfielder in space; seeing new friendships form between players that you would have never expected to become friends; and watching boys and girls turn into young men and women knowing that you have helped them along the way. Although the quote below is focused on girls, I think it gives us all a little bit larger perspective than win and losses to consider when assessing how successful we are as a coach.

“As the coaches of adolescent girls (boys), we have a great responsibility, beyond coaching soccer and winning games. We need to work hard to increase self confidence and improve self esteem. Their participation in youth soccer should be a stepping stone to becoming self assured, confident women.” Dr. Jack Levine, Pediatrician and Youth Coach, Great Neck, New York

Understanding Why Children Participate in Soccer

The following article is from Dr. Colleen Hacker, NSCAA National Academy Staff Coach and Professor of Sports Psychology at Pacific Lutheran University; Tacoma, Wash. It appeared in the November issue of the NSCAA soccer coaches newsletter and it is from the Philosophy of Coaching Soccer is taken from Appendix A of the NSCAA State Diploma Course.. Enjoy - Dave!!!

A majority of the reasons children participate in sport are intrinsic reasons. The top priorities are:

- To learn and improve their skills
- To have fun
- To be with friends
- To experience the excitement of competition
- To enhance their physical fitness
- To demonstrate their competence

Notice that the extrinsic goal of winning and beating others is not at the top of the list.

Similarly, when children drop out of soccer, their withdrawal can be traced to the inability of the sport experience to meet their primary motivations for participation. The common reasons are:

- Failing to learn or improve their skills
- Not having fun
- Not being with their friends
- Lack of excitement, improvisation and creative opportunities
- Lack of exercise, meaningful movement and fitness improvements
- Lack of optimal challenges and/or consistent failure

Practical suggestions for coaches:

1. Encourage players to measure their performance by improvements in their own, personal levels of proficiency and ability rather than by comparing themselves to other players or to other teams based on the game outcome.
2. Because children have several reasons for participation and not just one, design practices to meet as many different participation motives as possible (i.e. learning, fun, friendship, fitness, challenge, etc.).
3. Utilize the K.I.S.S. principle (Keep It Short and Simple) when introducing new skills:
 - Give short effective demonstrations while briefly explaining the new skill or concept use picture cues liberally;
 - Focus only on one or two important aspects critical to performance success (avoid "paralysis by analysis");
 - Decrease time spent in transition between activities, drills and games. Keep practices short, clear and well planned.
4. Utilize a positive approach to skill instruction by focusing on what the athlete did correctly ("catch them being good").
5. Make practices meaningful, fun challenging and exciting
 - Avoid static line drills;
 - Encourage creative improvisation by players;
 - Optimally challenge all athletes throughout the full range of abilities (avoid coaching only the mid-ability performer
 - Eliminate "elimination games" because players most in need of improvement and repetitions are usually the first to be eliminated;
 - Be fully focused on the players and the activity (coach the players as well as the game).
6. Plan time for the children to meet and make new friends (ice cream stops after practices, pizza parties, watch a video, free time before and after practice).
7. Focus on teaching players the active, ever-changing game of soccer rather than the static, predictable soccer drills.
8. Utilize dual function fitness activities that concurrently enhance fitness and also improve soccer skills (i.e. soccer tag with a ball) and/or psychological dispositions (players are having so much fun they don't realize that they are conditioning too).
9. Provide competitive challenges for athletes that can help define success not only by comparison to others but also by improving one's own standard of accomplishment.