

September 25, 2007

Impact United Coaches and Parents,

A troubling trend is growing at our recreation soccer games. We want to share this with you now to return the focus of our program where it belongs - a learning experience with soccer that is fun.

Most parents wouldn't think about attending school with their children to decipher assignments or give answers to tests, telling them exactly what to write down on the paper. Neither do Mom's or Dad's go to a daughters dance performance and yell out instructions if she looks like she may have forgotten the next set of steps or openly criticize if she misses a few. However, this type of behavior is exactly what I am seeing on the soccer fields as I am out watching on Saturdays. I am finding coaches and parents yelling out every move to every player step by step and often verbalizing dismay when it isn't followed as "designed". Not only does this cause a bunch of commotion, confusion and unnecessary pressure, but it also shows a complete lack of faith in our children's ability to make their own decisions and choices. I mentioned my observations to one father and he replied "That's OK, the kids have learned to ignore it anyway". That comment put me into a higher level of concern. After having their fill of parents yelling (mostly bad) advice and stressing them out, they will simply tune us off and do what they want. This is a bad strategy for soccer and a disastrous one for life.

With school and dance, we send our kid's to class/practice, having prepared them as best we could before hand and trusting the instruction of the teachers. During homework or the recital we show support, encouragement, applaud politely and give a hug or a pat on the back when it is over. The same should be for soccer. Feel free to cheer, to compliment, to encourage. Abolish the step by step instruction (like "Pass it to John", etc.) and worthless advice (like "Just boot it", etc.) and criticism of any kind. Do not focus on winning or losing. Ask your player afterwards if he had fun playing today. Under pressureless and stress free conditions, he will say that he did... and that is all that matters.

The following is the recommended strategy for teaching soccer from the publication "Best Practices for Coaching Soccer in the United States" pages 8-9 from US Soccer Federation. (This can be found at ussoccer.com or at ImpactUnited.com > Recreation > Coaches Page.)

"A primary focus for the coach at the youth level, through the U-12 age group, is to provide an environment that comes close to simulating the "pickup" games of our youth. In this setting much of the creativity and personality of kids developed naturally, without the involvement of adults. Kids need to be allowed to play freely, develop their skills and use them in a creative manner. Coaches should organize only so far as it helps to create this environment."

"The fact that younger children are placed into team environments is not their fault. Coaches should avoid the impulse to "coach" their players from "play to play" in order to help them win the match. Coaches should not be telling their young players to "pass rather than dribble," to "hold their positions" or to "never" do something (like pass or dribble in front of the goal)."

"Remember that making mistakes at these early ages is a very important part of the player's learning and development. Encourage risktaking and applaud effort."

Also, here is a link to a very timely article (Sept. 24, 2007) from Amy Donaldson, Sportswriter for the Deseret Morning News.

PARENTS SHOULD LET KIDS BE KIDS

Shaun White loved soccer, but there was a moment when he learned it wasn't for him.

FULL STORY: <http://deseretnews.com/article/1%2C5143%2C695212661%2C00.html>

The purpose of our club is for the players to have fun through the game of soccer. We encourage you to share this message with all parents and spectators from your team. Adults must step back and return this program to the kids.

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Loren Mott
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Impact United Soccer Club