

# Klinsmann Q&A: Parents can set an example

Interview by Mike Voitalla : Friday, Nov. 4, 2011

**Jurgen Klinsmann**, whose playing career included winning the 1990 World Cup title with Germany, took a keen interest in American youth soccer when he moved to California upon his retirement in 1998. He became head coach of the U.S. national team in July and took time before the USA's November friendlies against France and Slovenia to discuss American youth soccer issues, including the parents' role, pay-to-play, differences between European and American youth clubs, college ball -- and he offers some advice to youth coaches.

**SOCCER AMERICA: You have spoken often about the value of unorganized soccer for children -- and you helped found an initiative (FD21) to promote that in Germany. Is there a way to increase the amount of soccer children play in the USA outside the club structure?**

**JURGEN KLINSMANN:** The keys for soccer development are for children to enjoy kicking a ball and enjoy playing soccer types of games. It does not take a soccer field or an organized team training to do this. But we may need to help our children learn what they can do on their own or with a few friends to enjoy kicking a ball and playing soccer.

In other words, youth soccer training should include lots of fun -- "you can do this on your own" -- activities, including showing examples of how to have soccer-related fun in a backyard, the driveway, the schoolyard, a park, against a wall, or anywhere there is a small amount of space and a ball -- any kind of ball.

In the USA, basketball is part of the culture. So young basketball players grow up learning how to play types of basketball games -- like 1-on-1, 21, H-O-R-S-E --- on their own and with small groups. We need to help our young soccer players to be able to do the same thing -- play on their own or with their friends or with their parents wherever they are with whatever ball is available.

**SOCCER AMERICA: A big change in children's sports is the declining role of schools' physical education and sports programs. Can you speak to that issue?**

**JURGEN KLINSMANN:** Of course I think it is too bad that physical education and sports programs are declining in schools. And I understand though do not necessarily agree with some of the reasons, primarily around setting priorities and budget cuts. So, as parents, we have a choice -- sit back and do nothing in the face of this decline or create alternative opportunities for our children.

Actually, I do not think that we do have a choice. I think we *have* to create alternative opportunities for our children. It is part of their life-long education. We hear constantly about the problems of obesity and other health-related issues arising from a lack of exercise. What can we -- as parents -- do about it?

Set an example. Be active with our children. Don't let them automatically watch TV or go into their rooms to play video games or go online. Encourage outdoor activities year round. Kick a ball in the backyard. Walk or ride a bike to the store instead of driving.

Participate in a local community event instead of going to the movies. There are many active things we can do with our children and that they can do on their own, if we make this type of active lifestyle a family priority.

**SA: If a coach of an under-8 team came to you for advice, how would you respond?**

**JURGEN KLINSMANN:** Have fun! Let the children enjoy themselves! Help them learn the excitement they can experience kicking a ball and playing soccer-type games on their own, with their friends, and with their parents wherever they are with whatever ball they have available.

*(Mike Voitalla is the executive editor of Soccer America. His youth soccer articles are archived at [YouthSoccerFun.com](http://YouthSoccerFun.com).)*