

MYSA THROW-INS: April 2010

Question: How do you balance the short-term desire for team results with the long-term goal of individual player development?

Nathan Hampton

Individual player development is a teaching process where the player has to be told/shown how and why to do certain things. Some of that is skill (technical) some is tactics (strategy) and some is personal (showing up on time, practicing on your own, eating and sleeping well, etc.). However, short-term desire for team results is a group phenomena, not an individual one. A successful team is more than the sum of its parts. Team work requires all players to be on the same page, and what page they are on is up to the coach to teach and explain. In addition, team bonding or chemistry, though difficult to teach, is something that can be facilitated by the coach. To be a successful coach takes both teaching skills -- to the group so they perform as a team, and to the individual so they perform to the best of their ability. (Personally, I will take a well organized and cohesive group of questionably-skilled individuals over a set of selfish yet highly skilled individuals any day, but others disagree thinking getting the selfishness taken care of is easier).

Anonymous

The relative importance of short-term success (i.e., wins) vs. long-term goals (player development) depends on the age. At the younger ages (let's say 12 and younger, just for the sake of argument), the focus should be on player development and team concepts (not team results). Make everyone aware of these goals at the beginning. The other way to look at it is to redefine what you mean by team results. If you define results for a team as number of passes, number of tackles, combination plays, etc., rather than number of goals scored, you will eventually end up with a better team, and will probably score more goals in the process.

Brent Brehmer

We are a smaller club (just 11 total teams). Therefore, at the beginning of each year of summer soccer, we are able to hold a "kickoff" meeting with all players, coaches and parents at a local school to talk about the upcoming year. At this meeting, I will inform everyone in the gym that our ultimate goal is to get these kids prepared to be able to eventually compete at the High School Varsity level. I will tell the same message to whatever team I am coaching that summer - whether they are U9 or U17. If they are U9, I tell them to be patient and to keep working so that by the time they are in high school, they are ready to compete at that level. I will stress that I am not concerned about our summer record. Instead, I want to develop the "players" so they are ready for high-school play. This has helped them to see the "big picture" - and to not get discouraged if they have a bad year.

Patrick Townley

Remembering the long term goal is essential. In order to strike a proper balance you need to set expectations of yourself and the team early. Make it your goal to win the state championship - but not this year! - When your athletes are in high school - perhaps a decade away. You can shut an athlete down by one harsh word if you are not careful. Resolve - Never to yell, never to criticize. If you resolve to do what is best for the player and long term development - the short term goal of winning will most likely just happen as a consequence of proper motivation and encouragement.

Andy Coutts

Coaches who focus on player development do get results, often delayed for a future coach to get credit. Wins are an immediate and tangible measure of success but if overemphasized can hinder indiv. development and lead to player attrition. Players don't quit because they lose; they quit because they have a bad experience and the time spent isn't valuable to them. That's more likely if they're not improving rather than if the team has a losing record. Coaches at all ages/levels should focus on development and educate players and parents on add'l indiv. and team measures of progress, e.g. # of wall passes, looking around before receiving a ball, switching fields, etc. Playing to win is important, and so is making progress at other meaningful challenges. Tips: Play small sided games, encourage creativity and mistakes, train players in all roles and positions and no positions at youngest ages, use the bulk of training time for development and the last portion for game preparation.