
what is best for my kid?

Posted by rziegler - 2008/03/26 23:07

This forum can be a really big help for parents of young players just starting to look into the elite level. There is so much enthusiasm for the game and yet so little authoritative guidance on what really works. Parents tend to learn as they go, but as they have also learned, this makes some early decisions a bit perilous.

I'm hoping folks can log on here and share their own experiences in order to help the next wave of youth players, especially as our system is going through so many changes or even convulsions just now.

What do you think?

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Re:what is best for my kid?

Posted by melissa - 2008/04/05 17:02

What is the consensus on small sided games for the younger age groups? I have one who started playing 11v11 as a U11. The other is just about to graduate to 11v11 next year as a U13. As a U11 and U12 it has been 8v8. It works well and there are definitely more ball touches in the 8v8 games. I remember watching a team from the same age group play 11v11 in a local tournament (both formats were offered), and there was much more kick and run on the 11v11 field. On the 8v8 fields there was more ball control and passing.

I confess I have been pleasantly surprised at how easily the team has adapted to playing 11v11 on the bigger field during scrimmages and in a pre-season tournament playing up an age group. It will be interesting to see how the team competes against teams that have been 11v11 for a couple of years. When they played a team that normally plays 11v11 on the small field with the 8v8 format, they were able to out-possess the other team and generally looked more comfortable on the ball. Who knows if we would see the same thing on the big field.

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Re:what is best for my kid?

Posted by Monkey Boy - 2008/04/09 12:27

melissa wrote:

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I'm a strong believer in small sided playing. I have coached U9-U12 travelling teams playing 11v11, but my practices consisted mostly of small-sided concepts and drills.

You will not be able to get all 11 players working together on a field, there will always be subsets of 2-5 players working together at any one time. Young players need to first learn how to work with a smaller team. From there, those lessons can be directly applied to the full-sided games. Also, it's very difficult for a coach to teach off-ball movement and teamwork when the players don't get an immediate reward for their work. Many times that doesn't happen in full-sided games.

I would have preferred to coach my younger teams with small sided games, but it just didn't work out. Still, teaching those lessons in practice turned out to be a big advantage for the full sided games.

Another bonus is that a coach has less players to teach and therefore can focus more individual attention on them. I always found it very difficult to balance teaching/improving the individuals and improving the team. The younger players need more because they are learning technical and tactical concepts along with a playing philosophy of the coach. I know that US Soccer doesn't like teaching tactical play to younger kids, but I think it's a big part of learning to dribble with

your head up while also learning what to do without the ball. The most important players in any pass is not the one with the ball, but those without it. Learning that part of the game (off-ball movement) improves the individual and the team.

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Re:what is best for my kid?

Posted by sburleigh - 2008/05/16 14:19

A common thought in this thread seems to be the concept of "off the ball movement" and as a player and coach this is such a crucial aspect of the game that is so difficult to teach to younger players. I've always been a believer that what you do without the ball is just as important as what you do with it. Making cuts, creating space, taking a defender with you rather than to the ball - these are so important and younger players have much harder time grasping this (understandably so) - but small sided games are great for this type of teaching.

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