

Enjoy the Game

Contributed by Patrick O'Neil, 2009-10 U12B Coach

Research shows that 7 in 10 soccer players will quit playing youth soccer before they reach the age of 13. There is a growing danger in US soccer today.

All too often I see young athletes being taught to focus on short-term winning results rather than on the skill development that sets the foundation for long-term involvement and success in select soccer. This misguided focus on results - results due in part to factors ultimately out of a young soccer players control - sets our players up for failure, decreases their interest and passion, and drives them away from select soccer, robbing them of the benefits of athletic participation.

The toxic environment that an adult-driven, win-at-all-costs mentality brings to a select soccer doesn't help matters for our players. The fear of making mistakes due to adult pressures to perform impedes individual freedom and creativity, hinders true development and makes the game no longer fun for the players. We need to change this culture for our younger players.

Our goals as coaches should be to redefine what it means to be successful in youth select soccer; and empower young players by allowing them to have full control over this redefined success; and assist them by providing tools and ideas designed to maximize player development potential, interest, and enjoyment.

In the end, it's all about the smiles and development at the younger ages. The time will come when all players reach the age of U-14 and the focus will change to match the competitiveness of the game. Players will be pushed to play at high skill levels, and results will matter. Unfortunately if we never give them a chance to make the "game" their own and enjoy it, they will never reach that level.