

Winning vs Development

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By Adrian Parrish

I start with the retirement of probably the greatest manager to ever grace the game, Sir Alex Ferguson. Love him or loathe him, you can have nothing but respect on what he has accomplished during 27 years in charge at Old Trafford. As he bowed out with a 5-5 draw versus West Bromwich Albion in his final game very few people noticed that the Red Devils U21 team were also crowned League Champions.

Of course nobody could expect such a victory to make front page headlines and even though the club is about to enter a major transitional period, I doubt the philosophy in the younger age groups will change. Warren Joyce who currently coaches the U21's seems to put so little stock in to winning games or trophies and as several people look negatively on the Academies within the English game, how can you argue with the fact that clubs such as Southampton, Aston Villa & Liverpool have all given Academy players the opportunity to represent the first team during the 2012-13 Premier League campaign?

As youth teams from grass roots to professional clubs end their season in England the same is for many of the grass root teams in the United States. However the focus for many of the clubs/team stateside may be blindsided by how successful they can be at winning State Cups or major tournaments. Obviously the difference between the two professional leagues is chalk and cheese but the more I observe teams play in major tournaments such as state cups the more a see the quality of soccer depleting. A fear of losing, at a fear of losing players is not something I would suspect from teams in Europe.

During a conversation I recently had regarding club structure and the possibility of two teams from the same organization having to face each other, I was shocked to hear the childish antics that were taking place between the two sets of parents to try and prove that the teams their child played for were better. No club cohesiveness, no concerns for player development and worst of all no long term vision for the players. I started quoting that parents "Parents pay to play, therefore they think they have a say" so do clubs and coaches buckle under the fear of not winning over developing players for the long term?

With social networking becoming such an important daily part of our life's I find it interesting to see coaches talking about the importance of player development but hours later they are posting results. Is it to please parents, is it used as a tool to entice other players to join their team or perhaps it is self-promotion? But if more clubs and coaches stuck to their hearts and not their pockets we could be helping more players move to the next level which is surely more important than winning trophies

Perhaps it is none of these reasons and possibly I should not be judging coaches for doing this, but it seems we have a serious lack of understanding about the long term player development model. If our youth programs took more pride in moving players on to the next level like they do in Holland perhaps we could see more unity. So like or loath this article, I am not writing it to try and have a Jerry Maguire moment because I will stick to my belief and help players do everything I can to move on to the highest level they want to and/or can accomplish. So who's with me?

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