



John Gaspar's Philosophy Regarding Player Development

It's all about Training and more Training

- There is no magic formula for success. Developing young soccer players is a lengthy process and it is about working hard with players to improve their performance so that they can aspire to a higher level of play.
- A young soccer player must go through years of training before he or she can begin to imitate top-flight soccer.
- It is generally accepted that for a player to progress all the way to either a National Team or Professional player that they should have spent 10,000 hours with a soccer ball in a comprehensive and progressive training environment as well as playing top level competitive games.
- Between August 1st and end of November, the average traveling player will have attended one or two summer soccer camps, played in 9 tournament games, and attended between 20 and 30 team practice sessions.
- This will amount to somewhere in the region of 75 to 100 hours per half season of "soccer time". Even if we double that number, it still takes 25 years before that player will reach 10,000 hours.
- Instant gratification cannot be expected from this situation, and yet coaches and ultimately the players are under constant pressure to produce results.
- Once the decision has been made to join and play for an Academy traveling team, how much time is the player and parents willing to invest with that team? The reality is these days youth soccer is an investment of time, effort, energy and yes, money. Involvement and improvement will vary based on the age group. Patience and understanding are the keys for age groups U6 – U12.
- The Academy's Developmental program is devised on a long-range plan so our players can play in an environment conducive to the development of the wide range of skills soccer demands.
- The Academy staff through the years has had players coming into our program at the age of 13 & 14 years old just when parents and players realize that they want to play soccer at their high school. These players usually have not had the proper training to prepare



them to compete to their high school team. My advice to all parents and players is do not wait until the age of 13 or 14 years old or HS age to get the proper training if you want to compete for YOUR FUTURE HIGH SCHOOL TEAM, in most of the cases it is too late.

- Each player has different needs and potential. Each will play for a variety of reason and will succeed at vastly different levels of play. The Academy Developmental Program, will over time, allow some player to reach the highest standards. At the same time, the soccer experience must be a positive and rewarding one to all those who participate.
- It is important that players become competent with both feet and can perform technical functions with a variety of their body surfaces.
- Obviously, I and the Academy coaching staff do not expect beginning players to possess all the following qualities. However, as they develop, these are the qualities that the players should aspire to:
 - Players need “skills” to attack and the “tenacity” to defend
 - Soccer’s “free flowing” nature demands that the John Gaspar Soccer Academy product players with the following:
 - Great mobility on and off the ball (Pass and Move)
 - Lethal finishers who possess outstanding judgement, confidence, and skill
 - Players with three (3) varieties of speed
 - Tactical Speed – recognizing what to do, reading the game situations
 - Technical speed – being able to instantly apply the selected skills
 - Physical speed – quickness and speed
 - Players who excel in “transition” from offense to defense and vice versa.
 - Players with “personality” and “flair”, not “robots” technically correct but lacking creativity.
 - Players who can consistently strike a ball cleanly and accurately with either foot over both short and long distances.
 - Tactically sophisticated individuals who watch and analyze top level games to acquire a better understanding of the game.
 - Players who are as comfortable functioning with or against a zonal defensive scheme as with or against a player-to-player marking system.



- The John Gaspar Soccer Academy coaching staff is always looking for players to develop with: Technique – Intuition – Personality – Speed
- All around players are ideal, but there is also room on our teams for the “role” players who do one thing “exceptionally” well while being proficient in other phases of the game.

YOUNG BEGINNING PLAYERS

- Parents must understand and be aware, just as I have mentioned here previously, that at the early ages (beginners) players with more athleticism will get involved in competing much quicker, but this is normal.
- It is at this stage that other players need and must have all the support and understanding from everyone involved. Parents do not need to put pressure on their kids. I will do it when necessary and when the players personality and playing level dictate the same.
- In my experience “developing young soccer players,” I have trained beginners with advanced athleticism and for that reason only, they are top players on the group. Parents sometimes make decisions on behalf of their 6-, 7- or 8-year-old player(s) that will derail the progression of their soccer development, by not explaining the importance of staying involved with the full training program.
- They, for “different reasons,” will allow their players to miss most if not all of development training at the most important stages of their formative years.
- These players eventually will lack skills and confidence to progress or even keeping up with the group soccer skills demand. Some players will quit playing soccer, because “they” can’t understand what has happened to them. “They” competed easily within in the group, now “they” feel unskilled and unconfident.
- If these players are rostered on a traveling competitive team, parent will not or try not to understand the reason that their players are not able to perform (not much playing time) in highly competitive games. These situations are not fair to the player or teammates and especially not to the coaching staff.
- Regarding players playing other sports. I understand that at this young age children want to try out and participate in other sports. I encourage these activities; however, these players should also remain committed to keeping their foot on the ball.



LOSS OF TRAINING TIME IS LOSS OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- It is at this stage that parents look at their players ability and “think” my son or daughter is beyond his/her group level of play so that they can take some time off and do other activities. In my vast experience in developing soccer players, I have noticed in most cases that these players, when coming back to the group, are not able to compete with the “new top player” in that group and the friction and problems with parents/players and the coaching staff starts. Please avoid this situation.
- Parents and players must always keep in mind to teach and correct individual soccer technique take a lot of time, patience, and repetition. Parents, give your players a chance to feel good whenever they play soccer

Full, commitment is essential in the following:

- Physical ability, individual technique, individual tactics and work ethic

MEASURING PLAYER PROGRESS – IN THE BEGINNING SOCCER PLAYER AND THE OLDER PLAYER

- Judging performance beyond trophies is a matter of seeing progress.
 - There should be recognition for
 - A player trying to control a ball
 - A player trying to pass a ball
 - A player trying to make a move, even if it doesn't work
- Parents must appreciate the developmental stages player go through instead of valuing in most cases the final score.
- Watching individual progress is how to judge development
- When a 6- or 7-year-old begins to look up from the ball, it is a sign that he or she is advancing as a player.



- **Young players** will try to adapt and interpret the information that the game gives them.
 - The first thing is it's ME and the BALL
 - The second thing is it's ME and the BALL and where is the OPPONENT?
 - The third thing is it's ME and the BALL and where is the OPPONENT and where are my TEAMMATES?
- Players are taking in more information and that is how developing occurs.
- **At older age groups** these are the things that basically you should look for:
 - Are they creating scoring opportunities? And score?
 - Do they possess and can they keep possession of the ball?
 - Are they having fun?
 - Are they becoming more skillful?
 - Are they able to understand each other's movements in relation to each other?
 - Do they have individual skill and flair?

I have developed players and teams in the Peoria area for over 40 years and have had tremendous success, so when I see over and over the frustrated expressions on a players face, I know how they feel. I wish I had the chance to explain the "Truth" about player development to their parents at their early stages.

Egos, politics, unqualified people and unaware parents are some of the forces holding back player developmental in this area. Parents make sure whenever you get your young player started in their soccer career, "Shop Around" just like you would for their elementary or high school. Do not go by false rumors, investigate look at the "Quality Product Produced" and compare.

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