

US National Teams Program

POSITION STATEMENT

‘Quality versus Quantity’

Issue

Ten to fifteen years ago, an obstacle in youth player development was the lack of events or tournaments in which to compete. It was an issue of quantity. Today, there are numerous events and tournaments. Youth players now have the opportunity to play and train on several teams throughout the year, including Club Teams, High School Teams, Indoor Teams, State Teams, Regional Teams, and National Teams. Often times, these teams compete simultaneously. Now, the issue is one of quality, rather than quantity.

Recommendations

“Leaders begin with the end in mind.” Administrators, coaches, players and parents should plan ahead and prioritize the events and opportunities that are presented to them. Consider the overall schedule of all the players to help ensure more quality and possibly less quantity during peak times. Before the year or season begins, set team and individual goals for ‘winning,’ ‘player development,’ and ‘team development.’ Know before you begin where you want to be at the end of the year. Map out your plan for how you will get there.

Coaches must consider their team’s ‘training to game ratio’ and use it as a guide when making decisions on practices and tournaments. A tilt too far in either direction-too many games or too much training-can deter development. Players below the age of ten want to, “play” soccer. They’re not ready yet for ‘learning.’ Let them fall in love with the game. Between the ages of 10-16, players need repetitive touches on the ball. In order to get this, structured training sessions are required. Players that do not learn ‘how to train’ or, do not ‘spend quality time alone with the ball,’ will not develop into their own best self. Half of the training session should be spent on developing the ‘technical’ skills required in our sport (Remember economical training from your coaching course?). An age-specific ‘training to game’ ratio helps keep players excited to train and prepare for games, and likewise, players are excited to translate what they’ve done in training into games. Games should be highlight moments and should never get old.

Recommended *training to game* ratios over a calendar year are as follows:

- U - 10 1:1
- U - 14 2:1
- U - 14+ 3:1

Using the above ratios as a guideline, be selective in which and how many tournaments the team attends. Balance tournaments to focus on “winning,” and tournaments to approach with a, “learning” mentality. Tournament attendance should be, ‘coach-driven’ rather than parents pushing coaches and clubs to attend tournaments so that their daughters can be seen.’ Coaches (and by virtue parents), must ask themselves if attending a particular tournament will provide growth for their players and their team or will it be counterproductive. Is “less,” actually “more?”

Tournament organizing committees should schedule in a way that allows the best opportunity for each team and each game in the tournament to be of the highest quality. (See “Tournament-itis” position statement.) This might mean fewer games, shorter games, accepting less teams into the tournament, and/or alternative bracketing philosophies so that the theme is one of quality rather than quantity. We recommend attending more ‘showcases’ rather than winner take all ‘tournaments.’

Finally, league organizers must recognize the importance of team training times throughout the season. Restructuring the bracketing of the teams and factoring in unforeseen postponed games and alternative plans will help prevent the scheduling of frequent multiple game weeks and thus, allow for adequate training time.

Rationale

Today’s challenge is to balance the quantity of playing and training opportunities to ensure the player has both a healthy and workable schedule and quality, competitive experiences. A dangerous trend is showing itself in youth soccer. Player’s schedules become overloaded when multiplied by the number of teams on which he or she plays. There becomes a tug-of-war between various coaches, and the player gets caught in the middle of a battle over loyalty. An overloaded schedule can easily lead to frustration, stress, burnout, over training, and injury.

On our player’s calendars today, are too many tournaments, most of which are scheduled with ‘winning’ as the sole objective. The length, and number of games in each tournament can be detrimental to the quality of the experience. Simply, the demands are too high and the quality suffers. Due to the number of tournaments and events involving multiple teams for several players, the training to game ratio is completely out of balance, with the amount of training time diminishing greatly. Frequently, when teams have an opportunity to train, the time is spent on non-taxing activities in order to minimize fatigue for the upcoming tournament, thus hindering quality time spent with the ball.

In summary, more is not always better! Activities must be purposefully scheduled and balanced to provide appropriate training time, challenging competition in a non-fatigued state, individual and team developmental opportunities, as well as sufficient recovery periods. Attaining and maintaining a balance between quantity and quality must be a cooperative effort between coaches, administrators, parents, and players.