

Coaches Corner

Player development important in yearly evaluations

By Jimmy Conway

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With the 1998 fall season behind us and young players looking to other sports or playing indoor soccer, it is an appropriate time for coaches to evaluate the past season, if you haven't already done so.

What constitutes a good season? For most coaches it seems to be their win-loss record, and to a great extent that is how most players and parents view a successful season. It is important; however, to recognize where you are in terms of players' technical development, tactical knowledge and individual fitness.

Players should be encouraged to work on their technical skills in the off-season; otherwise they will lose their touch very quickly. As coaches we should look at the shape of our team. Did we have square pegs in round holes? Did we use our good players well, and what did we do with our marginal players? When you start to put your team back together either for spring play or tournament play, make sure you build your team from the back, with the strength of the team up the middle. Your system of play should reflect the type of players you have.

The 4-4-2 is a system of choice for many coaches. Based on this system, I would build my team in the following manner.

The goalkeeper, who is the last line of defense, is your most important player and perhaps the most neglected. It will pay dividends if you spend more time with this key player. Your defenders should be quick, good ball winners and if they are passers that is a bonus. As they get older these skills are a must at a higher level. The sweeper position needs a player who is quick, a good communicator and has good passing skills.

Moving to the midfield, this is the engine room of your team. In the middle you need a ball winner and a technically sound passer who has good passing ability over long and short distances. Midfield flank players are your racehorses; these players must be capable of going touchline to touchline. Up front you need twin strikers who understand each other and can play off each other. Needless to say, if they can score goals they are worth their weight in gold!

If you have players who struggle, don't put them in areas where they can hurt you. The flank or up front are favorite spots for players who are taking a little longer to develop.

Finally, it is always a good idea to do a self-evaluation. How did you deal with players on and off the field? How did you deal with parents and referees? Don't be too hard on yourself. Coaching is an evolving process, there is always something new to learn, be it about the game or player/parent/referee management skills. Sometimes coaches talk and over-coach. Remember, keep it simple, keep the game flowing. The game itself is the best teacher.

Finally, remember the motto of USYSA - **"For The Good Of The Game"**.

Isn't that why we coach in the first place?

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