

Soccer at the age of 3? !

This is my reply to a question I recently received from a State Director of coaching regarding a parents desire for her child to play competitive soccer at the age of 3. Feel free to use it.

Soccer at the age of 3

The main reason young children give for wanting to play soccer is fun. This is the most important aspect of soccer at all ages but especially for young children. So the first question you need to ask yourself, as a parent is "what is fun for my child?" Trust me, at the age of 3 it is not playing a game that looks like Manchester United versus Bayern Munich or our women's national team versus China. Remember a child is not a miniature adult. The first thing you need to do as a parent is drop your expectations of what "real" soccer is all about. Young children love to run, to fall over, to get up and fall over again. They love to chase a ball, to kick a ball ... do they care before the age of 7 or 8 which direction they are going, or whether they are winning and losing? The answer is an emphatic **NO**.

Children between the ages of 3-5 need to learn fundamental movement skills in a developmentally appropriate fashion. What does this mean? Well, whether or not your child becomes the next Michael Owen or Mia Hamm he or she needs to learn how to run, how to stop, change direction and to kick a ball with both feet. Structure play sessions that emphasis these skills. Do not structure competitive games, pick teams, keep score. That is developmentally inappropriate for this age of child. If children before the age of 6 cannot keep score and do not understand skills such as passing and running into space rather than swarming around the ball, why structure games that demand these skills? The bottom line is forget what "real" soccer looks like and participate, yes participate, with your child in learning basic movement skills in an environment that allows your child to feel successful. Not only is this developmentally appropriate, but these activities can really help a family grow together.

Cheers, Darren

[Dr. Darren Treasure, USSF Psychologist](#)