

# Tournament Time

from Direct Kick

Many of you are preparing for end of the season Tournaments. It is an anxious time for you, the players, and, of course, the parents. The team has worked very hard to get to the Big Show.

One idea to make the transition into the weekend a positive one is to write a short letter to the team (for both the players and parents) to summarize your feelings on the season and hopes heading into the upcoming tournament(s).

Some recommended points of emphasis:

- You have enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to work with the group of players.
- There have been highlights to the season. Point out a few examples.
- There have also been some tougher times, as there will be with every challenge. Yet the players have continued to stay positive, while continuing to learn and improve. Point out a few examples.
- There has been growth both as individuals (provide a couple to each player) and as a team (point out a few examples).

The letter may also outline a few key elements for the tournament.

- Don't emphasize winning at all costs. Play quality, aggressive, enthusiastic soccer and positive results will occur.
- The tournament is an opportunity to showcase the team's talents.
- Each player is a special part in the puzzle. Everyone can contribute in a unique way.
- Display good sportsmanship to represent the team and the club in a first class manner.

Let's review some basics to team management for the weekend to insure the players are physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared. There's going to be a lot of playing, and the time outside the matches needs to be relaxing and reinvigorating.

## Thursday Night

The biggest night of sleep is two nights prior to the first match (Saturday). Make sure the players and parents understand this point.

## Friday

Of huge significance on Friday is lots of water. The players need to hydrate themselves with as much (and then some) water, juices, and isotonic beverages as possible. No sodas or ice cream from Friday on. Fruits, salads, cereals, and pastas are recommended fare.

If the match is over three hours away, traveling to the site and staying in a hotel is suggested. It's expensive, but could you wake up before dawn, drive in a car for hours, and then jump out and play a quality match? A short meeting with the team in the hotel lobby in the late evening will guarantee everyone has arrived and gets to bed at a decent hour.

The coach should go to see the field for the first game to report on the size and playing surface quality to the players and directions/driving time for the parents.

Players should have packed their bags before going to sleep.

## **Saturday**

Breakfast is required by each player. Cereal and fruit are better than bacon and eggs.

Be at the field early. The coach does not impress the players or parents by rushing up at the last moment.

Be sure the balls are all pumped up and water/cups are ready.

Establish a time for the players to meet on the field (i.e. 45 minutes prior to kick off) to put on their shoes and shin guards and to establish positive morale. Start warming up 10 - 15 minutes later.

Create a warm-up that sufficiently establishes mental focus and physical preparation. The colder the temperature, the more active the warm-up needs to be. Playing small-sided keep away or to small goals will get the players moving and competitive.

## **Between Matches and Evening**

Players should take off their cleats, shin guards and jerseys immediately following the game. The players' feet and legs need to air out; flip flops will help.

Rehydration is extremely important. If possible, rotate the parents as the suppliers of isotonic beverages and fruit ready at the sidelines when the final whistle sounds.

Try to encourage all of the players to eat together between matches. This will emphasize a healthy meal (no fried foods), where the coach can know that each player is eating well and not running around. Plus you don't want families splitting off from the group which depletes team camaraderie, especially after a loss.

Encourage a night time activity that is both fun and relaxing. Going to a movie satisfies both. Walking around a shopping mall is just more time on the player's feet and not recommended.

Above all, emphasize that the tournament is an opportunity to have fun and play some great soccer. Every coach has those few parents that will be yelling non-stop. Keep an eye on this and correct it quickly. As the coach, be a fountain of enthusiasm and understanding the players look to for support and confidence.

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*Article contributed by [Direct Kick](#), a monthly coach's newsletter.*

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