



Are they having FUN (and you)?

Tom Condone, U.S.S.F. 'A' License; U.S.S.F. 'Youth' License
Director of Coaching
TN Soccer

Over my career, I have observed various clubs, instructed 'D', 'E', Youth Modules, and watched "a day in the life of a recreation program." It has been awesome to connect with the many different people involved in the 'beautiful game.' The focus of this short article is to emphasize the word 'enjoyment' in our children's training. The main reasons for boys and girls (ages 10-14) dropping out of soccer are; 'they were no longer interested' and it was 'not fun.' How can we change this?

1. Most important, the coach must be positive, helpful, and happy. An enthusiastic coach equals an excited player who can't wait to come to the next practice!
2. Avoid the dreaded three L's—Lines, Laps, and Lectures. Lines mean they are waiting, which translates into boredom, and less touches on the ball. Laps are good if they participating in track. Adults do not like lectures so an 8 year old certainly does not want to hear a coach talk for 5 minutes. Organization is the key. Plan ahead with lots of activities of short duration. Start with a brief explanation and get them going as quickly as possible. Let the game (activity) do the teaching!
3. The 'Session'. Your practice should include a warm-up, where you are preparing them mentally and physically, plus introducing the skill that will be taught. The body of the practice should emphasize skill development though games. The final part is the 'The Game' where you allow players to play with no restrictions. Let them play (that is what they came for!)

4. Positive Corrections. Is the picture you are painting clear and simple? When correcting, do not be negative! I have always like the version of "that was good. Let's try it this way, too, ok? Your point was made, the player understood, and at the same time, there was some self-worth by letting him/her feel good about her initiative. Try to 'touch' each player at every practice. A smile and a compliment go a long way (and they deserve it!). Lastly, keep to the topic. If the topic is dribbling, don't talk about defending.
5. FUN. Our young players must be enjoying what they are doing. We want them to 'play' soccer, not 'work' soccer. I like 'show-offs'. If they are 'showing-off' with the ball, I know I have done my job.

In conclusion, we need a games approach to the practice; avoid drills. Keep the players active and involved at all times. There are three ideas important in learning; feelings are important, learners must be permitted to make mistakes, and improvement must be recognized! If we as coaches can incorporate these philosophies into our program, we will decrease the amount of players dropping in their pre-teen years. Remember, enjoyment=learning=development!

If you have any questions, feel free to call me at 615-590-2200 x130, or email at coach@tnsoccer.org.

Have a great soccer day!