

Creating a Better Environment

On November 20th, Indiana Youth Soccer held its second annual Coaching/Referee Symposium. Over 93 people were in attendance at Warren Central High School where the symposium was held. The day primarily consisted of field clinics but in the evening, some of the attendees that stayed, participated in group discussions. One of the group discussion topics was how can coaches, referees, administrators, spectators (parents), leagues, and Indiana Youth Soccer create a better environment for our children? As people from all corners of the state sat together in small groups the dialogue brought out that education is primarily the biggest area that is necessary to create a better environment.

One of the hopes of Indiana Youth Soccer's Coaching Committee is that coaches will have to receive a minimum level of licensing before taking the field with children. We ask for it in the classroom with our children. Why not on the field with children? Well for years, parent coaches have existed in youth sports. Soccer, however, is quite different than other sports. It isn't basketball, football, or baseball. Those sports all have someone on the sideline that can make a difference in the game by calling a timeout, making a pitching change, or setting up a last minute play. Soccer, however, is chess in motion. A coach in this game needs to be more the guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage. This is the same way that schools are teaching our children. Schools use more of a guided discovery approach in getting responses from children. If you think about us and how we learn I would venture to say that most of us learn either by doing or by answering a question. Granted the question may be guided but we are more likely to remember us answering a question than being told how to perform a task. Example: When a player passes a ball that was meant to be played on the ground and it goes up in the air that is a technical problem. One way is to tell players where their foot should be when they pass the ball. Some will get it, most will not. Another way is to ask them where the foot should strike the ball. Ask them "Does your foot strike the ball on the bottom, the middle, or the top part of the ball to keep it on the ground". If you can demonstrate it, that is a double bonus. By simply asking all of them, you can get a bigger response and constantly repeat those questions as the practice continues. Our children for the most part have a very good base, now it is up to teachers/coaches to bring it out. One way is to use guided discovery instead of the autocratic style which is offers the lowest efficiency of retention. Oh, coaching isn't the same thing as teaching. Sure it is. When you are coaching, you are teaching. It is how people are coaching that needs to be educated and addressed. I strolled many sidelines this year and observed many coaching/spectator behaviors during a match. The moment we all realize that young players in particular are primarily concerned with controlling the ball, the better the stress level of those coaching/watching on the sidelines will be. As an adult how many of you can type an email and talk on the phone on the same time? I am sure not many. So, let the kids play. Do you remember what happened when an adult showed up during one of our pick-up games (in any sport) and then tried to coach us? We left!

From the spectator's side do we know that in a simple 4v4 match there are 56 available levels of communication available on the field alone? In a 6v6 match, there are 132 available levels of communication available. The full 11v11 match, there are 462 available levels for them on the field. Then these young players have the added factor of trying to listen to the spectators and/or coaches. The point? Why yell or tell them what to do with the ball. It is tough for these players to process it. Educate them in training and let them do the playing. Players need their own confidence. They need to know that they are able because they think they are able. The only way that can happen is if we allow them the opportunity to be play.

How about referees? Don't we all need educated with the simple laws of the game? We all need reminders. We also need reminded that these referees are usually young teenagers/adults. About 75% of our referees are under the age of 16 who officiate matches in our state. So what happens when lightning is a threat and an adult wants the match to continue? Think about when you were 16 or younger. Would you have enough in you to call a match due to bad weather? These are just some of the pressures that are even related to calling the match itself. Hey, what happens when an adult angrily confronts a referee? Nothing really except the person that was angered feels better. In the end though they are contributing to the drop out rate of referees. Heck they can work in a department store maybe earn more money and definitely take less verbal abuse. Do they make

mistakes? Absolutely. Do we? Definitely! Guess what happens when the referees don't show up for a match? Everyone goes home!! So whether we want to admit it, referees need a better and more positive environment just as much as our players do. For those of you who thank the referee no matter what the outcome, thank you!!

The need to educate all who work with our children is vital. How can we expect adults who volunteer their time to come to a coaching course? By next fall (possibly this spring) of 2005, you will not have to worry about that. We will have online coaching education specifically for that first time or novice coach. The idea is to bring coaching education literally to the fingertips and minds of those who will be working with children. The online coaching courses will offer more than just activities and games (not drills). These online coaching courses will offer everything from methodology, care and prevention, risk management, and laws of the game. Parent coaches can sit at the computer and take a course at their own leisure in hopes to be armed as much as possible before taking the field with children. This is just an alternative to attending the actual coaching courses themselves. Indiana Youth Soccer educated 644 coaches with Youth Modules. Overall over 1,000 coaches were educated. That is a lot. We can do much better! After all, Youth Modules are FREE! As the director of coaching for your state I am well aware how challenging it is to get parents that are volunteering their time to get them to volunteer. We are hoping that providing online coaching courses for the first time or novice coach that they will have no excuses but to be educated. Then it is up to the Associations and clubs to make them accountable. The idea is to also allow for more experienced coaches that would like to take an E Certificate Course in one day as opposed to one whole weekend. To take a D License class in one weekend as opposed to two.

Then there is the other end of the spectrum? People who have been working with players for many years and has never had the desire to get educated. The good dilemma is that there are many adults that played the game who are coaching than ten years ago. Just because someone has played doesn't mean that they can coach or paint a picture. Not only do you have to be able to paint pictures to children, but know what physically, cognitively, and emotionally a young child can handle. For example, one of the reasons why quarters make sense for a player under the age of 8 instead of halves is that their core body temperature is the same as an adult. Their sweat glands haven't developed yet. So when they heat up, the heat can't escape like it does with us. Adults have a little more body mass for the heat to escape. So we have to give them breaks. That is just one reason why the recommendation to play quarters instead of halves only make sense for those players. For those who coach the older player do you know that dynamic stretching has somewhat replaced static stretching? Dynamic stretching are basically movements or activities that improve a players range of motion. Static stretching should be done after training. For years I also had players move around then stretch the upper to lower body. That was until I became educated with the benefits of dynamic stretching as opposed to static stretching. There is definitely still a purpose for static stretching but at the end of a training session. Duke University's men's basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski offers a valuable coaching tip from his book "Leading With The Heart". That tip is "When you stop growing, you start to decay." As coaches of younger and older players getting new ideas, being refreshed, and getting recharged is crucial to our children's development in this game.

The overall point is that we all do a great job with our game, but we can still grow. Soccer is the number one most participated youth sport in our country. We need to keep players, referees, administrators, and coaches in this game though if we are going to continue. In order to have this happen, we all have to adjust and change. Remember when Bill Murray said "Dogs and cats living together"? That is what is needed to create a better environment for our children. Everyone that is involved in a match from the players, coaches, parents (spectators), referees, clubs, and leagues need to all get along. Without all of us, there is none of us.