



Talent Is Only a Starting Point



This is the second lecture that Bill Beswick, the team psychologist from Manchester United gave at the NSCAA convention. I am thrilled that a lot of you have bought the book "Focused For Soccer" written by Beswick. I am just going to give some highlights of the lecture that took place in Indianapolis last January.

"Talent is only a starting point". He stressed that at Manchester United they remind the players that it is **talent that gets you to the door, but it is character that gets you to the other side**. He talked how it is so tough to get to the first team, then they have to stay there. Sure they are all talented, but are they mentally tough and confident to stay on the first team? **If you are weak, you are forced out**. Beswick then talked about Beckham and how he has become mentally tough. He says that Beckham just smiles when things don't quite go his way in training.

In our club, do we feel that our kids are mentally tough? Do they complain at each other in training? Do our kids feel that it is an honor to play for our club? Right now, I would say that some do, but most take it for granted. Do they ask the referee for how much time is left? **At Manchester United, they don't let the players ask for time**. They want their players to stay mentally focused until the final whistle does go. Just reply the Bayern Munich-Manchester United Champions League final from 1999. When in extra time, Man U snatched victory from the jaws of defeat by scoring two goals at the end of the match and in extra time.

After observing some of our teams in matches, I would say that I teams stay composed for the most part, but I am not convinced that our mental toughness is where it needs to be. **The true sign of a team is when you are 0-1 down, not 1-0 up. Bravery is wanting the ball when your team is down**. I have observed many matches this season and have watched the body language of our kids when a goal is scored on them. I have seen some teams fold, but I have seen others rise to the occasion and keep playing and eventually end up winning the match. How many times have we seen a player with a load of talent not being able to produce during matches?

So what does Manchester United do to get their players mentally tough so that they realize that Talent is only a starting point? Besides the above mentioned, they also do the following:

1. Recruit Well-Look for talent and other factors such as mental toughness, confidence.
2. Create a challenge on the team.
3. Make everything competitive. We can do this with our teams. With the younger ages, make things competitive, but instead of competing against an opponent, they are competing against themselves. For example, can they beat a player 1v1, can they stop the player with the ball from penetrating. With the older players, they need to compete. Right now, we are a social club, not a soccer club.
4. Put systems into play that makes your team play. A good coach will find the right system for his/her team that enables their team to play and to not hide.

What is Manchester United trying to get out of their players? Courage, Commitment, and Desire.

As a coach, I would like to see my players be Courageous, Committed, and Confident.

As a director, I would like to see a blend of artists and warriors that the game has to offer.

How many times have we seen a match change because of a call from the official, a goalkeeper error, a breakdown in the defensive third of the field? Many times! All of these are part of the journey. Now what we need to do is work with our players on their mental toughness in training and in matches. For more ideas on this subject, again, I would read Beswick's book and take notes!

