

The Director of Coaching's Guide to Evaluating Game Performance at the Younger Ages.

Buffalo United's approach to player development is unfortunately very unique to other soccer clubs. As the director of coaching I am trying instill in my coaches the idea that they need to coach the intent of our players, not the results. If a player attempts to control and play the ball appropriately, but fails to execute properly we should praise them and fix the technique. If a player doesn't attempt to control the ball and randomly kicks the ball forward for a goal, we should not praise them, but instead demand that they play with purpose.

I recently watched our u10 girls' team and our u11 boys' teams both play games in Rochester against. I was very pleased with both teams' performances. The boys tried to control almost every ball that came to them, they demonstrated good technical ability, above average special awareness for 11 year olds, and tried to make soccer plays (dribble, pass, or shoot) every time the ball came to them. There were a couple of sequences where they strung together five and six passes in a row and finished with a shot. The opponent launched the ball forward at every opportunity and with the exception of one dominant player up top, did very few "soccer things". Our boys were losing 5 to 0 at half time.

The u10 girls' team that I was coaching was awesome. Without fail almost every single player that got the ball, no matter where they were on the field, tried to play with purpose and make "soccer plays". Regardless of the pressure on the ball from the opponent our players were calm, trying to control and either beat the defender by dribbling or making a purposeful pass to a team mate. The opponent hammered the ball forward at every chance and beat us nearly double digits to zero (I am not even sure of the final score).

Try a little experiment if you are having troubles understanding why BUSC takes this approach. Watch your child's team play and focus in on the intent of the players each time they get the ball. At the same time focus in on the opponent's intent each time they get the ball. Block out the result or execution of their intent and the results of the game. Then watch a high level game on TV and do the same with those players. Assuming that over time with training and practice at home your child will get better at the execution of their ideas, which model more closely resembles what the demands are going to be on your child when they are older?

We need to begin to change the soccer culture that currently exists for our younger players. From this point forward I am asking all parents, coaches, and any other adult associated with youth soccer, specifically BUSC, to no longer ask each other if we won or lost. Instead, the casual questions in passing needs to be, "Did you have a game today? How did you play?" Then, require an answer that does not speak to the results of the game but rather some specific details about how the players performed. For example, "We played well, everyone was attempting to control the ball and make plays", or "We played well, coach has been trying to get us to stop diving in when defending and we did that much better than the last game."

Yours in soccer,
Tom Garigen
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