

10 Point Checklist for Successfully Managing A Youth Soccer Team

I. Ensure Good Coaching

Whether you're a team manager, a coach or both, this is your most important responsibility. Good coaching develops children as players and maintains their excitement about the sport. Poor coaching leaves kids with limited skills and may even cause them to quit playing. Take coaching seriously by doing the following:

- Attend clinic and licensing programs. Read books and magazines on the subject of coaching, review instructional videos and attend local high school, college or professional matches.
- If you're never played soccer yourself. Find a way to play the game to get an insiders view of what the sport is about. Many towns' recreation departments sponsor adult soccer programs for all ages, genders and skill levels.
- If you're a team manager charged with finding a coach, try to find someone who is a natural educator and who is willing to learn. A second choice might be someone who played the game. Do not choose a coach whose motivation is to win games or relive the glories of his youth, especially at the younger ages. He will likely slow the development of his players. Similarly, avoid selecting a parent whose primary goal is to create a stage upon which his or her child can star.
- Once your team's players reach 13 or 14 years old and if the decision is made to play in a more competitive environment, consider upgrading the level of coaching. Depending upon your budget, you might even consider hiring a pro to do as little as one or two clinics preseason, or as much practice and match. Local college's soccer programs are great sources of help. If hiring a pro, be sure and check references, and make sure the pro is properly licensed and has coaching experience.
- U.S. Youth Soccer, the youth division of the U.S. Soccer Federation, offers several coaching manuals and other coaching aids for various levels of coaches. For more information, call 1 (800) 4-SOCCER.

II. Delegate responsibility to team parents

The worst thing you can do as a team manager is to try to do everything yourself. First of all, there is a lot of work to do, and it can be overwhelming. Second. If you don't delegate work with other parents, they will not understand all that goes into running a team. And if they don't understand it m misunderstandings may arise.

Here are some suggested ways to divide the workload:

- Field and referee scheduling - If you are managing a travel team this is your most critical job. Give it someone who is willing to make dozens of phone calls and who has access to a photocopier. Recreational teams usually do not have to worry about field and referee scheduling.
- Phone Calls - Managing a team requires lots of phone calls. Information about games times, locations, cancellations and other administrative matters must be conveyed to all team members quickly and accurately. Give the job to someone who can make calls during the day, as well as in the evening. This job can be split between two or three people. Phone trees also work well.
- First Aid- Assign one family to bring the first aid kit and a cooler with ice to each game and practice.
- Tournament Coordinator - Choose a soccer-savvy parent to look into tournaments you may have to enter. Ask your coordinator to pool parents to see what sort of tournaments they're interested in (e.g., competitive or recreational; local, overnight, out-of-state; indoor or outdoor) and to arrange for travel and accommodation.

- Water, juice and snacks - Ask one person to make a schedule so that there are plenty of refreshments at every game.

III. Set guidelines for the sidelines

Parents, fans and coaches' behavior can make or break a kid's soccer experience. Just imagine how you'd feel if your every move put you at risk for an unpleasant scene! Spare the kids and you'll all enjoy the game more. Some things to make clear before the season begins:

- Encourage parents to cheer for all the players. But be sure parents know the difference between cheering and the impassioned urging that sometimes takes place. Parents who try to instill "the will to win" by screaming at their miniature gladiators only make kids tense and confused about the goals of the sport.
- Discourage parents from coaching from the sidelines. Coaching is not their job and, again, confuses the players.
- Point out that refs, especially young ones, are doing a difficult and thankless job, are allowed to make mistakes and deserve their support.
- Point out, too, that criticism of the ref often leads to frustration and reprisal against the protesting team. If there is to be any discussions with the officials, it is the coach's responsibility - never the fans', parents' or captains.
- Legitimate grievances will be received if a team doesn't get a reputation as "complainers."
- Never allow a spectator or coach to abuse or malign a player, referee or other personnel. Ever.
- Set a good example yourself, by showing good sportsmanship, and cheering positively. It will catch on!

IV. Teach basic safety

Be sure to devote part of your first team practice to safety rules. Here are the most important:

- Absolutely no swinging or climbing on goals. And be sure that all goals are anchored to prevent them being blown or pulled over.
- Never allow kids to move a portable goal.
- Keep warm ups areas clear of gear bags and other items players might trip over.
- Move benches at least five yards away from sidelines.
- Insist that kids bring filled water bottles to every game and practice.
- Use corners flags made with flexible rods.
- Check fields before you play. Look for broken glass, storm drains, raised sprinkler heads, holes, protruding bolts, hooks or nails on goal posts or crossbars - anything that can cause a gash, fall or sprain.
- Require your players to wear shinguards under long socks. Do not allow kids to play soccer while wearing jewelry.

SOCCER JR. magazine, the soccer magazine for kids, has published a fun safety quiz that gets youth players to think about safety. It's free if you write to SOCCER JR. safety program , 27 Unquowa Rd.,

Fairfield, Ct 06430. Indicate the number of quizzes you would like.

V. How to handle injury and illness

Your team has taken every precaution, but sometimes kids still get hurt. Often, teams have nurses and physicians among the parents. If so, it would be helpful to make sure that one is present at games and practices. If that's not possible have someone at games and practices who knows basic first aid. At the very least, make it policy to have someone at games and practice who knows basic first aid. At the very least, make it a policy to have at least two adults at every practice. That way, one is always available to call for help or bring an injured player to a medical clinic or hospital. In addition:

- Check that away-teams have someone available with first aid knowledge in cases where your "medic" won't be traveling.
- The adult who is supervising practices should keep handy the name, address and telephone number of the nearest hospital or rescue service.
- Tape several quarters inside the first aid kit, for telephone calls.
- Encourage coaches and parents to take first aid courses, or better yet, advanced first aid.
- Ask your physician, ambulances squad, or emergency medical facility to suggest a list of supplies for your medical kit - anything from sun block to an airway. Check frequently that the kit is restocked.
- Prevent many injuries and sprains by teaching, and allowing time for, warmups and cooldowns.
- Don't take chances; kids who are injured should be removed from the field. Injuries shouldn't be "worked out" or "run off."
- Teach team parents the basics of RICE for minor injuries:

REST : Stop exercising. Continued motion forces blood into the damaged area.

ICE : Use ice continuously for the first 15 minutes, then 10 minutes on and 10 minute off for the first hour.

COMPRESSION: To prevent swelling, wrap the injury with an elastic bandage.

ELEVATION: If possible, raise the injured body part above chest level.

RICE should be employed for 24 to 48 hours, depending on the severity of the injury.

- Real ice works well, and is easier on skin than chemical cold packs. However, instant cold packs are easier to keep handy. Use a towel to keep cold packs off the skin, as they are colder than real ice.
- Discourage parents, and coaches, from seeking a player's early return from an injury. Returning too soon will often lead to reinjury.

VI. Give kids straight advice about soccer shoes

Most kids buy shoes based on how they look. They may find out later that the shoes are not the ones they want to play in. Take a few minutes to discuss the importance of shoe selection with your parents and players. Here are some things to cover:

- Match the type of shoe to the field conditions you play on. Suggest turf-style shoes for hard-packed, dry

fields. Rubber or polyurethane molded cleats are good of normal or soft, wet turf.

- If kids complain of aches and pains in the knees and feet, advise them to play in turf shoes or rubber molded cleats. Screw-in cleats are overkill for youth players.
- Let parents know that it's penny wise and pound foolish to buy oversize shoes in order to stretch the life of a shoe through an extra season. A loose shoe will cause blisters and make it difficult for a child to play well. And chances are, by the next season, the shoe will be too tight. Allow no more than 5/8 inch between the tip of your child's big toe and the tip of the shoe.
- Wide soles with widely spaced cleats give more stability than narrow soles. Similarly, the more cleats, the greater the stability and the better distributed the impact on the child's foot.

VII. Inform about good nutrition

Soccer players need energy, which comes from food, to achieve and maintain top-notch athletic performance; young athletes need even more energy to fuel growth and development.

- Carbohydrates provide the primary source of energy for the high intensity nature of soccer; insufficient carbohydrates can result in fatigue and decreased performance.
- Carbohydrates can be found in both starchy and sweet foods, such as rice, breads, cereal, pasta and vegetables, as well as, candy, fruit juices, frozen yogurt and sport drinks.
- Players should eat at least a small meal 2 to 4 hours before the game to prevent "starving" the muscles of the fuel they will need.
- Bring foods and drinks for a snack break during the game to supply energy for the second half of the game.
- The after-game celebration should include carbohydrate-rich foods to replenish and re-fuel tired muscles.
- Carbohydrates-rich foods should make up 55-65% of the total calories in the diet.
- Young players need 200-300 grams of carbohydrates per day; teens need 300-400 grams or more, depending on the level of activity.
- Amounts of carbohydrates in some common foods:

Bagel – 35-40 grams
SNICKERS bar – 36 grams
Sport drink (8 fl.oz.) – 15-20 grams
Granola bars – 10-20 grams
Orange – 18 grams
Frozen yogurt bar – 10-20 grams
Toasted oat cereal (3/4 cup) – 12 grams

For more information on nutrition. Please submit your request on a postcard to M&M/MARS, Consumer Affairs-10P, 800 High Street, Hackettstown, NJ 07840

VII. Prevent dehydration

If you saw any World Cup action, you may recall that players were given water from the sidelines during the games. Young players can learn from this example. Adequate hydration is one of the simplest but most

important things players need to feel and perform well.

- Kids dehydrate easier than adults. A 90-lb child can begin to feel ill after losing as little as a point of fluid; and can approach life-threatening heat stroke after losing a quart. In hot weather that's easy to do.
- Thirst is not a good indicator of the need for fluids. Often, kids don't feel thirsty until after they are dehydrated.
- Kids should drink fluids frequently, and in small amounts, during play-especially in hot or humid weather.
- Water, sports drinks and diluted fruit juices are all good choices for fluid replacement during play.
- Sodas are okay to replace fluids after play. Caffeine, found in some sodas, removes water from the body, and should be avoided for immediate fluid replacement.
- Care should be taken that kids do not contaminate common drinking containers by putting their hands into water containers to scoop out or ice, or by passing around a common drinking bottle.
- NEVER withhold fluids from kids; thirst won't make them tough, it will just endanger them. DO not tell kids to just "wet their whistle" or "take a sip!"
- There is no magic to orange slices at halftime, especially since some kids don't like them. Plain, cool water, in whatever amount they want, will do players the most good.

IX. Develop a team philosophy

It's up to you, as a team manager, to develop a team philosophy about why you are playing soccer. Currently, there are two basic philosophies in youth soccer. One is dedicated to producing the best possible players through the highest levels of competition. The success of these programs is measured by goals scored, wins and trophies.

The second is a more development philosophy, where the goals are to foster lifetime love of the game, individual player progress, and sportsmanship. Here are some questions to discuss with your team parents:

- Should the best players play the most of the time, even at the expense of benching weaker players for entire halves or matches, or should every player play at least a significant portion of every game?
- Will the coach allow players to make on-field decisions, or will he make all the decisions from the sidelines?
- Should players specialize in a particular field position, or should they be allowed to experiment with several positions?
- Is winning more or less important than sportsmanship?

Most experts on soccer and youth development believe that a development philosophy will allow pre-high school children to get more enjoyment from soccer and prevent the "burnout" syndrome often present in youth sports. Some parents, however, have not had the opportunity to think about or discuss these issues. Do it early in the season to prevent misunderstandings later.

X. Understand the game

The parents of many of today's players never played soccer themselves. Therefore, there is a good possibility that nobody in your groups knows the finer points of the game. Encourage parents to take the time to look over the laws of the game. Better yet, hand them out at the beginning of the season. It could

very well short-circuit many disagreements and complaints. Soccer specialty shops and sporting goods stores carry FIFA Laws of the Game. Some other ideas for educating kids and parents about the game:

- Kids learn by seeing. Encourage teams to watch soccer as well as play it. Check out whether there are local professional, semi-pro, college or high school teams. Ask for their schedule, and distribute the information to your team.
- Ask your public or school library to stock soccer-coaching books and videos, as well as soccer literature and periodicals. Make a list of the material available, and hand it out to parents.

Information was compiled from US Youth Soccer's brochure titled, "10 Point Checklist for Successfully Managing a Youth Soccer Team."