

BEST PRACTICES

Excerpts from the publication of Best Practices.

This document represents a series of recommendations that have been compiled and reviewed by U.S. Soccer's Coaching Education staff and the Men's and Women's National Team staffs. It presents a compilation of what U.S. Soccer considers to be an appropriate, comprehensive and responsible approach to developing sound soccer players.

A Discussion on Winning and Losing at the Youth Level (ages 6-12)

- Competition is a central element in a player's development. At the youth level, however, a competitive environment should not be a result-oriented environment.
- A competitive environment at the youth level encourages decisions from player and coach alike that focus on performance rather than outcome (favoring skill and inventiveness as the means to find success within the rules and spirit of the game).
- The result is just one indicator of performance and at this age, not the most important one.
- Competition can be positive and healthy. Scoring goals and winning the game are fundamental parts of soccer. Allow the children to enjoy this aspect without making it the focus.
- Set up other skill based objectives as the focal point.
- Let the children compete. In youth and junior level (13-17) soccer, the emphasis and manner of the coach will often determine if the competitive environment is healthy or not.
- At the youth level, matches are important as a means to player development (enjoyment, ball skill, insight, and fitness), not as the aim.
- Competitive situations are a series of tests for kids. In this respect, the usefulness of the game can occur in many different forms.
- Focus on the process and performance rather than the outcome, but be prepared for the possibility that your team may lose some games in the short term with this approach.

In the end, it is the responsibility of the coach and the parents, to manage how competition is addressed and managed among his or her players.