

Coaches Corner: Player Selection

by Mike Cullina, Director of Coaching, Nebraska State Soccer Association

Because this issue of the newsletter is covered in try-out advertisements, it seems fitting to write about the player identification/selection process.

What activities should I use? How many players should I select? How many evaluators do I need? What are the most important traits in a player? How many forwards, midfielders, defenders, and/or goalkeepers should I take? These are among the many questions coaches are in search of answers to.

Coach/Team Philosophy

Before you begin the identification/tryout process, it is vital that you, as the head coach, determine the philosophy of the team. Are you are Premier team in search of a Snicker's Nebraska Championship? How important is winning versus player development? Are the two mutually exclusive? How important is the social aspect of your team?

I encourage you to write out your coaching philosophy. To see mine, go to the coaches' page at www.nebraskasoccer.org and click on articles. By writing it out and reviewing it prior to and following each season, you will have a more tangible explanation for the decisions you make with your team.

Selecting Players by Position

In youth soccer, the only position that should be specialized is goalkeeper and even then only in the teenage years. Instead of searching for a particular number of defenders, etc., select soccer players. If you believe, as I do, that players should be exposed to all positions through their developmental years, then picking players to fill specific positions in a pre-determined system of play is counter to that position.

As coaches, we have a tendency to look for a certain "type" of player. Each player will have unique traits. None will do everything perfectly, so look for the one or two things they do great!

Evaluators

In the end, the head coach should make all personnel decisions on player selection. Player selection is one of the responsibilities you accepted when you became a head coach of a Select team.

Evaluators can aid in the process, but their input is for the information of the head coach only and should not be used as to "bail out" the head coach. (E.g. head coach to parent- "I had [your child] rated pretty high on my list, but didn't select [him or her], because the other evaluators had them rated lower.)

Tryout Activities

Understanding that the tryout process is often as much about the "production" for the sake of parents, your activities should replicate the game and not cater to the "needs" of a parent.

A 40-yard dash time, for instance, is an indicator of how fast a player can run from one point to another in a straight line- one rarely made in soccer. It does not measure a player's ability to decide when or why to make such a run or if they can do so with a ball under the pressure of an opponent.

The same can be said to activities such as dribbling through cones, lining up and shooting on goal, etc., which can't measure a player's ability under pressures of time and space, emotional strength to handle adversity/mistakes, and/or a player's ability to "read" the game and make appropriate decisions.

Instead, use a mixture of individual/small group (1v1, 2v2), small-sided (4v4, 5v5), and larger-sided (8v8, 11v11) games.

Individual/small group- player's ability to solve the smallest soccer equations; tests their mental strength and speed endurance.

Small-sided games- player's ability to solve small group tactics; short bursts of speed with and without the ball; leadership skills.

Larger-sided games- player's ability to work collectively with teammates; leadership skills; flat speed and endurance.

Using Hard Data

The use of hard data (e.g. 40-yard times, number of goals scored, number of juggles, etc.) is nice and neat, but can not adequately measure a child's ability to play soccer. Activities that can be measured look good for parents and give a coach tangible "proof" of why a particular player is are selected. They also do the job of the coach, which is to identify and select soccer players.

Summary

The best way to identify/select soccer players is to put them in situations that replicate that which you would like them to do- play the Game!

To view this or other articles on the selection process, go to the "Article Page" in the Coach's Section of www.nebraskasoccer.org.