

Readiness Debate part 2

Stepping Stones

Perhaps the simplest manner in which to illustrate the importance of the “Readiness debate” is by examining the lack of technical mastery of the fundamental skills of the game of those 5 year olds forced to play 11 v 11 on a full sized field when they reach age 11.

Far too few touches of the ball combined with an athletic demand that is simply impossible and a tactical demand that equates well to asking the average soccer coach to split the atom produce a game format which does more harm than good.

Although there are not many examples as vivid as the one given above of how coaches within the game through producing an inappropriate curriculum and game format can completely stunt the growth of the players within their charge. The example given should serve to illustrate how vital it is that coaches and curriculum designers, after all the debates, get it **RIGHT!**

Whilst fulfilling my duties as the Head coach for ENYYSA Girls ODP program or the Technical director of the Long Island Junior Soccer league select program, I have for the last ten years, been responsible for operating and staffing enormous tryouts for players aged u10 through u17. Throughout this entire period of time the most common comments from the evaluators (*all high level or professional coaches*) are ones that pertain to the technical inadequacies of the players attending. Comments ranging from, they couldn't kick snow off a roof” through to the slightly more humorous yet equally brutal “they were as much use as chocolate fireguard” seem to be the norm.

Whereas it may be true that a large number of players attending these and similar tryout across the country are technically challenged it is just as true to state that they are simply ***products of the coaches ,coaching environments and curricula that they have been placed within.***

Two things combine to ensure that a large number of our youth players inevitably end up with technical problems; number one is the enormous emphasis upon winning at u10 and below which typically equates to a very direct style of play and number two is the associated and completely inappropriate coaching sessions that our young players develop within.

Many seem to believe that is only the uneducated parent coach who runs the typical practice where his u10 team run fifteen laps, stretch for 15 minutes, touch a ball twice, stand in a line next to each post waiting for a number to be called so they can take their turn going to goal and then finish with a 7v7 game. Unfortunately this type of session is also a common practice from many “professional” coaches whose only background seems to be, “I played at College”. There are very few concrete statements that can be made regarding either the playing or coaching of the game however it would be safe to state that the average college session is completely inappropriate for the typical u10 team learning the game.

The following matrix can be viewed as viable core curriculum which presents age appropriate techniques for players aged 5-12.

Age Range	Techniques/Concepts
4	Each player will be lead rather than pushed into the world of soccer. Techniques introduced include; dribbling, short passing (inside of the foot), super skills/moves
5 & 6	Body Of work focuses upon teaching the techniques of; dribbling, moves, juggling, short passing(inside of the foot), ball control (<i>pass to yourself</i>) in a manner which leaves players feeling excited about playing soccer'.
7 & 8	A higher degree of technical mastery will be sought of the techniques learnt above. The following techniques; 1v1 defending, instep striking, short passing (outside of the foot), possession (4v1), heading and ball control.
9	The skills taught are as follows; breaking pressure, applying pressure (forcing turnovers), front foot passing, wall-passes, overlaps, turning an opponent, possession, creating space and shooting.
10	The program will focus upon the players mastering the following techniques and concepts; possession (4v1, 3v1, 4v2,) 2 player combinations (overlap, take over/fake over, wall pass, double pass) and individual techniques heading & striking
11	Mastering; possession (4v2, 5v2), 2 player combinations and individual techniques (moves, defending, heading, Instep striking). Game preparation sessions are based around Using; shadow play, set pieces and small sided games.
12	The developmental practices will focus upon; possession (5v2 7v4 and numbers up work), finishing/instep striking, heading, playing with back to pressure, (1v1, 2v2, 3v3) principles of defending.

All should understand that the ability to master techniques at each age is dependant upon the following:

1. The players spending an appropriate amount of time with a ball.
2. Each stage is dependant upon the previous stage, associated time with a ball and related techniques being mastered.
3. There are no shortcuts each step is both a vital one and a prerequisite of the ability to take the next step.
4. The majority of youth players will only continue to play and coach the game into their adult lives if they have youth experiences which allow them to master the fundamental techniques of the game.