WHO ARE THESE YOUNG PLAYERS – ZONE 1

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“We need to focus on the root of the game. There continues to be nationwide a reliance on results rather than development at the younger ages. In particular, Zone 1 is an age group where there continues to be too much travel. There continues to be too much focus on the competition without attention on the individual player.”
The existing paradigm of youth soccer being adult driven by adult interests has to change. We need to address the short-sighted, immediate gratification culture and approach that is causing future generations to miss out on the joys and benefits of soccer.
A Lifetime of Participation

Zone 1: Children — Best Coaches Here

Zone 2: Pubescent Players

Zone 3: Adolescent Players

Adult Players
What talents must be developed to achieve the previous pyramid goals?

- Passion
- Commitment/drive/dedication/determination
- Tactical awareness & understanding
- Ball skills
- Athleticism/health/physical fitness
Player development is multilayered, interactionist and emergent. This means that player development is highly individualized, non-linear and unpredictable. There are significant difficulties detecting talented players. Programs and coaching need to be highly flexible, adaptable and realistic about what they can control regarding player development.
Player Development Model

S.A.I.D.
Principle in adolescence.
Variability & generalization in childhood and puberty.
Components of the Game

- Fitness
- Psychology
- Tactics
- Technique
Priority Order of the Components of the Game by Age Group

- 6-U: fitness, technique, psychology, tactics
- 8-U: technique, fitness, psychology, tactics
- 10-U: technique, psychology, fitness, tactics
- 12-U: technique, tactics, psychology, fitness
Player Development Pyramid

Zone 1

- Compete 19-U
- Technical/Tactical Functional 16-U
- Applied Skills General Tactics 14-U
- Ball Skills – Fair Play 10-U & 12-U
- Passion – Fun – Play 6-U & 8-U
Player Development Model

Psychomotor Development

Cognitive Development

Psychosocial Development

Never be a child’s last coach.
The fascination for the ball, the desire to master it and the thrill of scoring goals provides the launching pad into a lifetime of soccer participation. The joy and pleasure of the game are best nurtured by encouraging freedom of expression and organizing children’s play in small groups. The activities are best fostered by allowing freedom of expression within small group situations.
8-U thru 10-U Flux Phase (The Critical Transition Period)

- The motivation to learn basic skills is very high at this age level. Children gradually begin to change from being self-centered to being self-critical and develop the need for group and/or team games. The game itself should be central to all technical training. Eleven a-side soccer is too sophisticated and complicated for young players. Small-sided games, which provide the right amount of pressure for the child’s level of development, are more appropriate.
10-U players should -
• Not be exposed to tryouts
• Not be labeled 'rec' or 'competitive'
• Not be allowed to attend outcome-based tournaments

**Beware of Too Much – Too Soon**

NO 10-U players should be involved in competitive tournaments or tryouts. Play days, Jamborees or Festivals where 10 & Under’s all get a participation award would be fine.
The effect of the role model is very important at this stage of development. Hero worship, identification with successful teams/players and a hunger for imaginative skills typify the mentality of this age. This is a time of transition from self-centered to self-critical. Players of this age have a high arousal level in relation to the training of basic skills. **This is the “Golden Age of Learning” and the most important age for skill development.** Demonstration is very important and the players learn best by doing. This is also an appropriate time to introduce and teach basic principles of play. It is important to establish discipline from the beginning.
The execution of ideas that requires awareness and decision making (cognitive/psychology), ball skills (technique), athletic ability (fitness) and composure/emotional control (psychology).

The progression to this level of tactical competence is: individual, group, team.
Player Development – Tactics

- Tactically teams end with four lines in the team...forwards, midfielders, backs and goalkeeper. These lines in the team are introduced gradually to grow youngsters to the complex adult version of soccer.

- At 6-U & 8-U there are no lines in the team per se, but at 8-U children can understand forwards and backs.
8-U Front & Back Lines  2-2

4 vs. 4 without goalkeepers for the U8 age group. A 2-2 lineup facilitates pairs play.
Player Development – Tactics

- At 10-U introduce the goalkeeper.

- From 12-U the midfielder line is incorporated into the team. From this age group to the 19-U age group players are learning how to interconnect between these fours lines into team tactics and cohesion.
6 vs. 6 with goalkeepers for the U10 age group. A 3-2 line up facilitates triangle play.
12-U Midfield Line  2-3-2

8 vs. 8 with goalkeepers for the U12 age group. A 3-2-2 line up allows several triangle options.
Player Development – Tactics

- Desirable tactical traits for 12-U
  - Versatility (exposure to more than one position)
  - Knows roles on both offense and defense at dead ball situations
  - Knows practical application of the Laws of the Game
  - Group tactics

- Desirable tactical traits for 10-U
  - Versatility (exposure to more than one position)
  - Knows practical application of the Laws of the Game
  - Individual tactics … evolving into Group tactics
For a teenaged player to come to this high level of competence requires well developed abilities.

These abilities are acquired over many years of diligent work in an enriching environment.
### Recommended Training Session to Match Ratio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-U</td>
<td>1 day/week</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>1:1 or 0:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-U</td>
<td>1 day/week</td>
<td>45-60 minutes</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-U</td>
<td>2 days/week</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>2:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-U</td>
<td>2-3 days/week</td>
<td>60-75 minutes</td>
<td>2-3:1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Player Development – Technique

Ball Skills ... Ball Skills ... Ball Skills
The experiences a soccer player has or does not have in one age group and/or level of play will carry over into the next age group and/or level of play. Consequently if the objectives for each age group in a player development scheme are not taught methodically by coaches then the players will be ill prepared for the next age group or for higher levels of play. Unless some proficiency is gained in the preceding levels of play, the stage of performance reached in the higher levels may be limited, despite the player understanding what is required.
Player Development – Technique

If a player’s training and match experiences are inadequate or lessons are not taught thoroughly enough then those gaps in the player’s improvement will be carried over into the next age group and level of play. Presently this occurs in the technical component of soccer far too frequently. Players are not trained to achieve ball mastery. Coaches are too quick in focusing on tactics and team formations. Team supporters are too quick to demand wins over learning skills and how to compete.
Player Development – Fitness

The engine for player performance
With pre-pubescent children, muscle innervation is completed by roughly the age of 6 years. Muscle innervation refers to the final expansion of motor nerve endings within a muscle fiber’s interior. The impact of this action on motor coordination is quite profound. At the conclusion of the muscle innervation process (again, roughly by the age of 6, although individual variances occur), children are now able to learn and begin the process of establishing functional proficiency in gross motor skills and movement patterns. It is critical to understand however, that the innervation process happens more quickly and earlier (chronologically) in larger muscles.
With innervation being linked to coordination and motor control, it stands to reason that children gain proficiency in gross motor skills more quickly than finer skills. This remains another argument for why early specialization is counterproductive – every sport requires various degrees of fine motor skills, which can simply not become functional abilities in younger athletes. Global aspects of gross motor skill development are most understandably the crucial component of training pre-pubescent children.
Within a child’s brain (specifically the cortex), stimulation and excitability govern over inhibition. This reality means that young children are prone to poor concentration (especially over prolonged periods) and display indiscriminate reactions when responding to a specific stimulus, particularly those involving sudden changes of direction. In actuality, reflexes become ‘conditioned’ and more permanent around the age of 10 – 12 years.
Reflexes are extremely difficult to develop in the puberty years. This supports the notion that multilateral development and global skill acquisition is crucial to training a young athlete. The inability to develop appropriate and specific reflex abilities in the teenage years supports the need to introduce young athletes to as many athletic stimuli as possible in the young years.
Mental skills training may be the least used tool by coaches in youth soccer, despite the fact that the U.S.A. is a leader in sports psychology.
One of the interesting features in support of multilateral development is the concept of plasticity. Plasticity refers to the ability of the young brain to adapt to new stimulus upon introduction. The plasticity of the brain and nervous system declines rapidly in time, and actually may reach a functional limit (athletically speaking) by the late teenage years.
Brain development is a long process and based largely on exposure. In fact, the ‘brain development period’, which extends through childhood and into adolescence, is characterized by an increased ability to adapt to new stimulus (i.e. high plasticity). However, this process does not continue equally forever. There are critical periods, or windows of opportunity, for different types of learning. IF A SKILL IS NOT ACQUIRED DURING ITS CRITICAL PERIOD, THEN THE ACQUISITION OF THAT SKILL LATER IN LIFE WILL BE HARDER, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE”.

Dr. Harold Klawans in his insightful book, Why Michael Couldn’t Hit.
Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson describes the physical, emotional and psychological stages of development and relates specific issues, or development work or tasks, to each stage.
The goals of any trainer or coach working with a young athlete (pre-pubescent) should include increasing proficiency of motor ability, developing functional versatility (from a strength, movement and biomechanical standpoint) and lastly, inhibiting the potential negative effects of specialized training. Upon reflection, these points, both individually and collectively, lend to the credence that when working with young, pre-pubescent aged athletes, the mandate should be one of global, all-encompassing development rather than specialized ventures into a single sport.
Player Development Model – 6 & U

- **Technique**: dribbling; shooting

- **Psychology**: sharing; fair play; parental involvement; “how to play”; emotional management

- **Fitness**: balance; running; jumping; introduce the idea of how to warm-up; movement education

- **Tactics**: where is the field; which goal to kick at
Player Development Model – 8 & U

- **Technique**: ball lifting & juggling; block tackle; receiving ground balls with the inside & sole of the foot; shoot with inside of the foot; toe pass & shot; introduce the push pass & throw-in

- **Psychology**: working in pairs; sportsmanship; parental involvement; “how to play”; emotional management

- **Fitness**: agility; eye/foot & eye/hand coordination; introduce the idea of cool-down; movement education

- **Tactics**: being exposed to all positions; 1 v 1 attack; introduce the names of positions
Player Development Model – 10 & U

- **Technique**: running with the ball; passing; instep drive; receiving ground balls with the instep & outside of foot; receiving bouncing balls with the instep (cushion) and sole-inside-outside of foot (wedge); throw-in; fakes in dribbling; introduce heading & crossing. For goalkeepers ready stance; how to hold a ball after a save; W grip; catching shots at the keeper; punting & introduction to goal kicks & throwing

- **Psychology**: working in-groups of 3, 4 or 5; stay focused for one entire half; sensitivity; how to win or lose gracefully; sportsmanship; parental involvement; “how to play”; communication; emotional management

- **Fitness**: endurance; range of motion-flexibility; proper warm-up & cool-down are mandatory now

- **Tactics**: 1 v 1 defending; roles of 1st attacker & defender; 2 v 1 attacking; man-to-man defense; introduction to set plays
Player Development Model – 12 & U

- **Technique**: feints with the ball; receiving ground, bouncing & air balls with the heel, shins, thigh, abdomen, chest & head; heading to score goals & for clearances-standing & jumping; chipping to score; outside of foot pass; bending shots; crossing to near post & penalty spot space; heel pass; kicking & receiving with inside of the instep; introduce half volley & volley shooting; introduce slide tackle. For goalkeepers footwork; bowling; low dives & forward diving; angle play; near post play; saving penalty kicks; introduce parrying & boxing

- **Psychology**: teamwork; confidence; desire; mental rehearsal; intrinsic motivation; handling distress; how to learn from each match; sportsmanship; parental involvement; emotional management

- **Fitness**: speed; strength; aerobic exercise

- **Tactics**: 2 v 1 defending; 2 v 2 attacking & defending; roles of 2nd attacker & defender; combination passing; verbal & visual communication for all positions; commanding the goalmouth for the goalkeeper; half-time analysis; corner kick plays-defending & attacking; kick-off play; wall pass; beginning to identify potential roles for players-goalkeeper, defender, midfielder &/or forward; introduce the principles of defense
## Player Development Model

### Preteen Modified Soccer
- 12-U: 9 vs. 9
- 10-U: 7 vs. 7
- 8-U: 4 vs. 4 – no goalkeepers
- 6-U: 4 vs. 4 – no goalkeepers

### Teenaged Modified Soccer
- The previous SSG in younger age groups allows a stair step approach through individual to group to team play.

The previous SSG in younger age groups allows a stair step approach through individual to group to team play.
Player Development Model

- Extracurricular options to enhance player development:
  - Footworks
  - Clinics/camps
  - TOPSoccer
  - Soccer Across America
  - Club & State Academies
This is a program run by the local soccer club to foster the development of ball skills for players’ seven to ten years old. FOOTWORKS is open to any and all players and participation as a “team” is discouraged. Instead the emphasis is put upon the children playing with the ball to acquire a passion for playing skillfully and intelligently with the ball.
Clinics are supplements to the club’s player curriculum. Stupidity never has a place in the curriculum.
Player Development

TOPSoccer is one of several player development programs in addition to mainstream recreation soccer.

Soccer is a game for EVERYONE.
Soccer Across America is designed to introduce the sport of soccer to youngsters living in communities not yet served by existing clubs and leagues. Focused on making soccer available to lower-income children in underserved communities, Soccer Across America provides soccer training and administrative guidance to players and organizations who might otherwise not be exposed to the sport.
Coaching with mastery of the age appropriate abilities in mind is vitally important! Taking the time to teach in depth for the level of play and the age group is an investment that will pay off well for the players in both the short and long terms. Meticulous player development is the key to winning. There are no secrets to winning matches; only player development can win matches.

However, a person who is stymied in an attempt at task mastery may go on to the next state but carries with him or her the remnants of the unfinished task.
Factors that impede development:

- Too much too soon
- Too many matches and not enough training in a year
- Tournamentitis
- More is better syndrome
- Early specialization
- Unrealistic level of expectation
- Bad coaching, officiating, administration or sports parenting
Not only the caliber of the officiating, but also the understanding of what the players are experiencing helps referees to provide a match environment that is healthy for the players, thus allowing them to grow within the game.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ages 4 to 9 Childhood</th>
<th>Ages 10 to 14 Puberty</th>
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<td>Mostly technical repetitions, psychologically friendly and positive, simple combinations, decision making activities. Individual basic skills with an emphasis on keeping ball possession. Lots of balance and coordination exercises.</td>
<td>More combinations on offense and defense. Many decision making environments. Psychologically positive with correction. Advanced competitive skills against match opponents. Tactically work on the roles of attack and defense and the basic principles of play. Exercises should focus on endurance, flexibility and speed.</td>
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**MATCHES**

- Matches of 4- to 7-a-side. No leagues or standings! No tournaments – festivals instead. Many fun and competitive games. Gain technical skills and game insight by playing in simplified soccer situations.

- Matches of 7- to 11-a-side. Selection (try-outs) should not begin until the 13-U age group. Less emphasis on the match results and more emphasis on players’ performances.
Club Curriculum – does the club have a comprehensive and progressive curriculum for player development for all ages?
Periodization must be a part of the annual training scheme. Peaking by Friday does not work for lasting success or a lifetime of participation.
Player Development Model

The Training & Match Environment:

- Decision making (guided discovery)
- Trial & Error (experimentation / improvisation)
- Stair step approach to the adult game of soccer (small-sided games)
- Risk taking (may lose matches while learning the rules, how to apply ball skills and to read the game)
Player Development involves…

Cooperation

Competition
Player Development – Sports Triad

Since parents are an equal influence to coaches in the development of youth players then clubs must invest in positive parenting as much as they do in coach education.
Positive Parenting resource
Clear roles by the adults creates a healthy soccer experience for the players.
Player Development Model

"THE GAME IN THE CHILD"
Player Development Model

PLAYER
Attributes & Qualities

COACH
Attributes & Qualities

ORGANIZATION
Culture & Context

GAME

CHILD

LEARNING

PLAYING

Dr. R. Quinn 1995
Fundamentally true in that the game will show you what you have learned and what you still need to learn. Positive and correct coaching can assist the game in teaching players.
Who Are These Young Players?

Mission Statement

US Youth Soccer is non-profit and educational organization whose mission is to foster the physical, mental and emotional growth and development of America's youth through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition.

The Game for All Kids!