

Girls vs. Boys: Should they be coached differently? (Part 1)

By Mike Voitalla

The first time I heard the question, it took me by surprise.

“Coach Mike, can I have a Kleenex?” the young girl asked.

I had a well-stocked first-aid kit, but it never occurred to me to keep Kleenex on hand. I’d never used one on the soccer field as a player and had never seen a male of any age require a tissue to blow his nose on a sports field. Apparently, though, the snot rocket is not a popular method among the other gender.

So, if you’re about to coach a girls team, make sure to have plenty of Kleenex in your bag. But what other differences should coaches expect between boys and girls? And is it necessary to adjust one’s coaching style when moving from one gender to another?

Considering different approaches to teaching based on the students' gender has become a hot topic in the educational world, so perhaps it’s also an issue in youth soccer.

For sure, in the early history of girls soccer in the USA, girls were generally coached by men whose entire background in the game had been with boys. In today’s youth soccer scene, it’s common to have coaches move from one gender to another during their careers.

In Part 1 of a [YouthSoccerInsider](#) series on this issue, we consulted **Sam Snow**, the Technical Director of [US Youth Soccer](#).

“On the one hand, when coaching either boys or girls a coach should approach training sessions and matches thinking of them as soccer players primarily, and considering their gender secondarily,” Snow says. “Coaches will need to make more adjustments based on the age group and the level of play -- and therefore the level of expectations -- than gender modifications for soccer development.

“On the other hand, coaches must be aware that the psychological, social and emotional approach to coaching boys or girls does differ slightly. Necessary adjustments will likely increase as the players age.”

“Girls want the coach to show caring about them as individuals above the team dynamic. Boys do care about the team first, but the coach giving them individual attention is still important. Girls will need social time within the team, boys less so. Individual and group relationships are an important part of team culture with both genders. Off the field, treat them as young ladies and gentlemen and expect them to behave like ladies and gentlemen.”

Snow says there are physical differences to consider.

“Prior to puberty there are more differences in athletic capability within the genders than between them,” he says. “Boys and girls in the U-6 and U-8 age groups are all quite similar in height and weight. In the U-10 age group the girls are now leading the way in physical maturation.

“Generally girls grow 1 to 2 years biologically faster than boys. Once the players reach adolescence, then the tables turn in regard to height, weight and power. The difference in the teenage years of strength and speed will have an impact on some tactics, but still there will be more similarities in their tactical play than not.”

On how coaches should adjust their approach, Snow says:

“The coaching style must be within the coach’s personality. The coaching methods, though, will change with the age group and indeed to some degree with the gender.

“It has been noted, as an example, that if a coach states at halftime that the team must do a better job of marking up, a girl will feel the coach is talking specifically about her, not the entire team, and a boy will be sure the coach is talking about his teammates, not him.

“Given the differences in learning styles, a coach must vary the means of communication regardless of the gender. Some players need to hear the coach's message in a blunt and direct manner and others need the sandwich approach.”

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