

## Girls vs. Boys: A Difference in Social Dynamics? (Part 3)

By Mike Voitalla

The Youth Soccer Insider continues its series on the differences between coaching boys and girls.

A common response we've gotten from coaches – especially male coaches -- is that girls place a greater importance on their relationships with teammates than boys do.

“One of the most interesting things I've noticed over the years is the difference in the social dynamics of the two genders,” says Wes Hart, a former MLS player who is the Director of Coaching at Colorado Rush and has worked with the club's U.S. Development Academy (boys) and ECNL (girls) teams.

“Girls typically need to like a player in order to accept her on their team,” says Hart. “I've seen good players not work out on teams, because she did not fit in socially. On the boys side, that does not seem to matter as much. A good player typically will be accepted on the team, regardless of how he fits in socially. I find this very interesting and frustrating.”

Jon Nishimoto, coach of Bishop O'Dowd's girls varsity team in Oakland, Calif., and the assistant coaching director for East Bay United/Bay Oaks, has a similar view.

“My experience has been that the female players have to get along really well,” says Nishimoto, who's coached both genders at youth and high school levels. “The better the female athletes get along, the better the team will be. If they're connected off the field, it really translates on the field and makes a difference in those tight games. ... Whereas with boys, I think they care more about your ability. They don't care if they like you or not, as long as you do the job with their team.”

Christian Lavers, the ECNL Director at FC Wisconsin, says that regardless of gender, a team that gets along is going to typically outperform one that doesn't, but ...

“Just as the game differs in some ways between boys and girls, the team dynamic is also a little different,” says Lavers, whose 2011 FC Milwaukee U-18 girls team became the first Wisconsin team ever (boys or girls) to win a USYS National Championship. “And while we can talk in generalities, there are always individual players that break the stereotype. But on average, I think girls are more attuned to each other's personalities and the relationships between them have a lot more impact on the way they play, and boys are more likely to separate personal relationships from soccer performance.”

Nishimoto says he does more off-field team-bonding activities with his girls teams than with his boys teams.

“Success I've had with girls teams -- I personally believe they've won games because of the stuff we do outside of soccer together,” he says. “The boys you have to do more on the field to gain that connection and trust.”

“The team-bonding activities I do for the boys are ones that relieve tension and tries to get that extra energy out. That would be something like bowling. Something active. With the girls, they like doing the scavenger hunt, the movie night, hanging out with each other at the hotel.”

Theresa Echtermeyer, the Director of Coaching of Highlands Ranch Soccer Association/Colorado United, is also boys and girls varsity coach at Mt. Vista High School.

“Overall I don't see big differences between my boys and girls teams,” says Echtermeyer, who's also an NSCAA staff coach. “I actually see it from team to team. Teams take on certain personalities and tendencies. ...

“The main thing, whether they're boys or girls, is be consistent and send a clear message. For me, getting the players to buy in, take ownership of their team and their team's goals, that's how I get the most out of my boys and my girls.”

Echtermeyer, with more than two decades of experience coaching boys, does accept the generalizations about gender differences.

“In general, yes, I think it's true that it's more important for girls to get along than for boys,” she says. “But I have had a team with guys who had a tendency only to pass the ball to the ball to their buddies – a boys team. ...

“And I would say that for both genders, the more cohesive a unit they are off the field, the better they'll be on the field.”