

Volunteer Soccer Coaches: Every Player Counts

Mon, 04/23/2012 - 11:37 Dr. Dina Gentile

Development First: Every Player Counts

“I realize what I am managing and cultivating is the spirit and desire of each individual player.” says Dr. Dina Gentile on What Really Matters.

Soccer has been called the “beautiful game” for so many reasons and by countless fans of the sport. I have been reminded this weekend, that youth soccer is the “beautiful game” because this is where we as coaches, parents, and youth sport administrators can make sure every player counts.

At the U6, U8, U10 levels all players have the chance to learn and develop at their own pace and in their own way – if we foster those opportunities. As I examine the personalities and skill abilities of my teams (U6 and U8), I realized that what I am managing and cultivating is the spirit and desire of each of my players.

Personalities for each youth player will surface at the first few practices or games. As coaches we will have a group of individuals with their individual needs, individual issues, and an individual identity.

What coaches must do is to spend time getting to know each player and what makes them “tick.” *Not an easy task for a volunteer coach.* But, when we can demonstrate to the individual player that we care about them and we can use activities to prove to them that we will help them get better – we will create a team that will be motivated to try new things and to play with a little more confidence.

Everyone has to count on our teams.

It should not matter who can score the most goals or who can dribble in and out of defenders.

What does matter is that the player who has difficulty dribbling away from pressure or the player who cannot figure out how to play defensive effectively feels like they contributed to the team effort and they feel worthy.

It is the responsibility of the coach and even the sideline parents to stay positive and celebrate the small actions and improvements of the players because the team benefits when all players count.

Beautiful can be defined in so many ways and perhaps we all have our own version of what beautiful means. For me watching first grade teammates congratulate each other after a good play or watching that shy, passive player have the game of her life is what make soccer so beautiful.

Soccer has the power to give our youth players a voice and a purpose. Coaches are the greatest facilitators of confidence and self-esteem building. In the end, coaches and parents must be the agents of positive talk and positive cheers so that all of our players, from the least skilled, to the most athletic player feel like they have made an impact on the team.

GoalNation’s columnist Dr. Dina Gentile is a Professor of Sport Management at Endicott College. A volunteer youth coach herself, Dr. Gentile understands from both practical and theoretical experience what happens on the soccer field. Gentile has also coached the Endicott College Soccer Team for 11 years. Gentile is also the owner/director of Precision Soccer, LLC, which operates camps, clinics, and coach education training throughout the year. She is a former All-American and Academic All-American at Adelphi University. Gentile has been inducted into the Adelphi University and Endicott College Halls of Fame. In addition, she is a trainer with Positive Coaching Alliance and the Girls Program Director with New England Premiership Club – Benfica USA. She is the proud coach of her daughter’s and son’s soccer teams in her hometown. - See more at:

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