PSYCHOLOGY OF YOUTH SOCCER

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PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF YOUTH SOCCER

Competitive Readiness

Perceptions of ability

Soccer Motivation

Children only play

Coaching ramifications
“Most children are not psychologically ready for competitive sport until they are 10-12 years old”
This perspective *does not* mean children cannot learn soccer skills, enjoy soccer, and develop fitness and health.

However, it *does* mean that children *do not* understand the competition process the way adults do.

Thus, adults should help children define and understand their soccer experience.
COMPETITIVE READINESS

- Cognitive maturity
- Spatial ability
- Understanding ability
- Effort vs. ability
- Realistic appraisal of ability
SOCCER MOTIVATION

- Being with friends
- Playing
- Excitement
- Learning
- Improving
“Sport psychologists believe that the major underlying reason for participating in and leaving sport are perceptions of ability.”
PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY INFORMATION SOURCES

- 8-14 yrs vs. 14-18yrs
- Evaluative Feedback: 1 vs. 3 dimensions (coach, peer, spectators)
- Internal information: 1 vs. 3 dimensions (effort, skill, ease of learning)
HOW CHILDREN PLAY WHEN THEY ARE IN CHARGE

◆ Potential evidence about how coaches may want to structure practice and games.
CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN ONLY PLAY

- Lots of action
- Lots of personal involvement in the action
- Close scores – no blowouts
- Challenges strongly match skills
- Opportunities to affirm friendships
RAMIFICATIONS FOR COACHING
COACHING PHILOSOPHY

◆ Professional model vs. Educational and Developmental model
PROFESSIONAL MODEL

- Entertainment
- Success = winning
- Failure = losing
EDUCATIONAL MODEL

- Multiple definitions of success
- Success = learning, improvement
- Success = love of physical activity, health, fitness
- Success = developing desirable personal qualities (e.g., confidence)
- Success = friendships, fun, good memories
EDUCATIONAL MODEL

- Fewer definitions of failure
- Failure = not trying hard, not persisting, giving up
- Failure = poor sportpersonship, unethical behavior
TEAM GOALS

- Think short and long term
- The practice, the current season, next season
- A lifelong love of physical activity and sport
- Create an atmosphere so that children want to come to practice
COACH CREATED CLIMATE

- Create a performance (vs. outcome) oriented atmosphere
- De-emphasize winning: It's often uncontrollable and unrealistic
- Children will be exposed to plenty of information stressing the importance of winning (e.g., fun, attention, rewards, etc.)
COACH CREATED CLIMATE

- Emphasize controllable and realistic performance goals such as skill development, fitness improvement, learning, etc.
- Create opportunities for fun and socialization
A FEW PARTING EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS

◆ One of the strongest predictors of stress in youth sport is the child’s sense of how important winning is to adults.

◆ Coaches who became more positive (e.g., encouraging) drastically reduced children’s drop out rates and increase their self-esteem.
Thank You