US Youth Soccer

Developing “Thinking” Players:  
-The Role of Cognitive Growth in Player Development-

Paul Shaw: VYSA Coaching Education Director
Introduction

- Why is this topic so important?
- Do we want players to think for themselves?
- How do we facilitate the development of “thinking players?”
What is a “good” youth player?

- Technical ability
- Tactical application
- Meets the physical demands
- Enjoy playing, passion for the game
- Confident and takes risks

HOW DO WE DEVELOP ALL THIS?

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT?
“Tell me, and I will forget!
Show me, and I will remember!
Involve me, and I will understand!”

Laozi
Cognitive Development

“Cognitive development is the construction of thought processes, including remembering, problem solving, and decision-making, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood.”

(Encyclopedia of Children’s Health)
Cognitive Development U6

• Preoperational stage (Piaget)
• Play consists of a high degree of imagination and pretend activities.
• Beginning use of symbols to represent objects in their environment.
U6 in Practice

• Tend to only one task at a time in problem-solving situations.

• Types of activities that promote U6 cognitive development.
  – One ball per player
  – Single task oriented activities
  – Use your imagination, it can become real
U6 VIDEO

• This will be a video of a U6 activity
Cognitive Development U8

- Concrete operational stage (Piaget).
- The limited ability to tend to more than one task at a time leaves little or no capacity for “tactical” decision making.
- Begin to put things into categories (things are alike and ordinal, things differ, some relationships that ‘do’ exist are not recognized and some relationships that ‘do not’ exist are assumed)
U8 in Practice

• Concept of time and space relationship is just beginning to develop and will be limited by the capacity to attend to multiple tasks.

• Limited experience with personal evaluation; effort is synonymous with performance.

• Types of activities that promote U6 cognitive development.
  – Try to not get bigger than 2 players per ball
  – Activities that promote players working together to solve problems
U8 VIDEO

• This will be a video of a U6 activity
Cognitive Development U10

- Some children begin moving from concrete operational to formal operational stage.
- Lengthened attention span, ability to sequence thought and actions.
- Pace factor becoming developed – they are starting to think ahead.
- Intrinsically motivated to play.
U10 in Practice

• Demonstrate increased responsibility:
  – bring ball and water to practice
  – tuck in jersey & pull socks up
  – “carry own stuff”

• Types of activities that promote U10 cognitive development
  – Starting to recognize fundamental tactical concepts such as changing direction of the ball.
  – Repetitive technique very important, but it must be DYNAMIC not static!
U10 VIDEO

• This will be a video of a U10 activity
Cognitive Development U12

- Formal operational stage of cognitive development (Piaget).
- Beginning to think in abstract terms and can address hypothetical situations.
- Changes in thought processes are the result of an increased ability to acquire and apply knowledge.
U12 in Practice

- A systematic approach to problem solving appears at this stage; the game of soccer must present the ability to think creatively and solve problems while moving.

- Types of activities that promote U12 cognitive development.
  - Tactical issues presented
  - Groups of 4, 5 are optimal
U12 VIDEO

- This will be a video of a U12 activity
Cognitive Development U14

• Fully into the Formal Operational Phase (Piaget).
• Self-critical.
• Have a sense of belonging, status and recognition.
• Has ability to stay focused over a longer period of time.
U14 in Practice

• More responsive to coop activities and their role in being an individual.

• Types of activities that promote U12 cognitive development.
  – Problem solving and allow creative solutions
U14 VIDEO

• This will be a video of a U14 activity
How do we create this environment?

- Practices must be fun
  - Age appropriate
  - Simple to complex
- Look like soccer
- US Soccer Coaching Toolkit
- Player centered vs coach centered
  - Role of “Guided Discovery”
Guided Discovery Video
"I use a global method. Yes, I use direct methods when preparing our organisation, but I also use guided discovery where I create the practice, dictate the aim, and the players come up with difference solutions."

José Mourinho
Final Thoughts

• Age appropriate activities
  – Use activities that promote “soccer thinking”

• Practice should look like soccer and bring out soccer problems to solve

• Use Guided Discovery

• Keep the practice flowing
  – “Coaching Toolkit”

• The game is the best teacher

• Make it fun! It is a game!
Discussion
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