

QUALITY VS. QUANTITY

By

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All experts in the fields of soccer education, player development, physiology and psychology attest to the importance of balanced activity in which rest and recovery are as vital to optimum performance as to the quality of work itself. Therefore, it is amazing in the United States there is the prevailing thought that “more is better;” that players will improve with more training, more games, more tournaments, etc. Are the experts wrong?

There is a fear in some clubs that they need to do more in order to keep pace with or to exceed their rival clubs. This fear of being left behind has also prompted some clubs to identify and train players at eight and nine years of age. Certainly kids of this age need to play the game but they do not need to be over coached or unduly structured to experience the joys of the game and to attain their own passion. Eight and nine year olds must be allowed to be kids.

Soccer is a game of skill, imagination, creativity and decision making. Coaching at youth level is all about enhancing those elements of the game. Practices must be stimulating, challenging and economical. They must also be well planned and realistic to the game and realistic for the age/abilities of the players e.g. a dynamic one-hour practice is much better than a static ninety- minute practice.

Games must motivate players to want to improve performance. The size of the fields, the size of the goals, the length of game time and the length of the season must also take into consideration the age/ability levels of the players and substitutions must allow for quality playing time.

Soccer is not meant to be played for more than forty weeks a year even for the more serious players. It should be less for players’ U-11 to U-13. The seasons must have rhythm and balance where rest is considered equally to work. Players must be prepared for a purpose e.g. for league play or cup play and players should be at their peak during those competitions. They should not be burned out through too much unnecessary activity.

There is a temptation for teams to attend too many tournaments. Tournaments must be researched so that they provide the appropriate preparation for players e.g. like competition that will challenge players at their levels or showcase events where older players may exhibit their skills for college opportunities. Tournaments must also be tests of skill and not tests of endurance e.g. tournaments that schedule two games per day should not have games lasting more than forty minutes (20 minute halves) and tournaments scheduling one game a day should play no more than thirty minute halves.

Tournament games should also start at a reasonable hour to enable players to eat at an appropriate time before the game to create the energy for optimum performance.

A yearly playing calendar must provide an opportunity for players and coaches to recover sufficiently from one activity to another. Programs must provide a much better balance to a yearly schedule and will enable coaches to provide quality activities for their players.