Kindersoccer
Thoughts, Concerns, Evidence & Recommendations

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Discussion Points

• Ages 2 – 5
• Caution – Children at Play
• Is earlier better?
• How did we get to this point?
• What are the benefits?
• What are the dangers?
• Child-centered goals vs. Adult-centered goals.
Dedicated soccer moms Gail and Linda were determined to give their unborn children a jump on the competition.
“I remember one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the bark of a tree, just as a butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited a while, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help with my breath. In vain.
READINESS
From Zorba the Greek by Kazantzakis

• It needed to hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear all crumpled before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand.
That little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm."
How did we get to this point?
Which path should we take?

• Tiger Woods – Starts before the age of 2
• Greg Norman – Begins at age 15
Plato (427 – 347 B.C.)

• From 3-6 years of age children should be absorbed with play, in games of their own devising.
What are the perceptions / expectations when this child show up?
Would you expect this?
A Child’s Changing World

- Over the past two decades, children have lost 12 hours of free time a week, including eight hours of unstructured play and outdoor activities. In contrast, the amount of time children spend in organized sports has doubled, and the number of minutes children devote to passive spectator leisure, not counting television but including sports viewing, has increased fivefold from 30 minutes to over three hours (Elkind, 2007, p.ix).
A Holistic – Developmental Approach

• Physical
  – Growth & Maturation
  – Motor Development
  – Motor Learning

• Cognitive / Psychological
  – Brain development
  – Information processing
  – Motivation

• Social / Emotional
  – Self-concept
  – Self-competency
  – Relationships
Physical Development

• Head to toe & proximal to distal
• Sitting, Creeping, Crawling, Standing
• Locomotor Movements
  – Walking, running, skipping, galloping, hopping
• Non-Locomotor Movements
  – Bending, stretching, twisting, pulling, pushing
• Manipulative
  – Catching, throwing, kicking, striking.
• Balance
### Social / Emotional Development

- **Erikson’s Psychosocial Development (Mooney, 2000)**
  - **Age** | **Stage** | **Strength Developed**
  - 0-1 | Trust vs. Mistrust | Hope
  - 2-3 | Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt | Willpower
  - 4-5 | Initiative vs. Inferiority | Purpose

- **Parallel Play**
  - Don’t share well
  - Don’t do well in large groups
Cognitive/Psychological Development

- Piaget (Mooney, 2000).

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Cognitive/Psychological Development

• Vygotsky – Environment shapes learning

• Zone of Proximal Development
  – ZPD is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86.)
Cognitive/Psychological Development

- Vygotsky – ZDP and the Coach
- Adults hold the responsibility to tune into the child.
  - Today’s potentially challenging high-order level of thinking can become tomorrow’s actual level (Chak, 2001).
- Soccer as a conceptual, abstract game, is an ongoing problem-solving activity. Problem-solving skills can be learned through a coach-athlete interaction that allows players to gain control over their own thinking.
  - (i.e., they will begin to think for themselves – becoming anticipation players).
Play – Games - Competition

• Key Concepts
  – Expansion
  – Equalization
  – Progressive Challenges
  – Interactive Challenges

• Torbert (1993).

• Trust
  – Feeling safe & secure
  – Allows the child to explore and take risks

• Autonomy
  – Becoming self-reliant and self-governing, building self-confidence

• Initiative
  – Willingness to try new things
Play – Games - Competition

• Games
  – Simple as a having a catch.
  – Focus should be on body control.

• Competition
  – Should be in the form of environmental challenges.
    • How many goals can you dribble through?
    • Pathways rather than relays.
  – Even low-organized games may be difficult.
  – Cooperation before competition.
What does the evidence suggest?

  – All children should be allowed to participate in sports. However, a child’s mastery of developmental skills has a significant impact on his or her potential for success. No relationship has been found between skill training in early childhood (3 to 5 years old) and later development in sport skills. Infants should have an unstructured, safe play environment. . . . It is enough for children to master basic motor skills without thinking about complex game strategy and a win-at-all-cost competition (Abstract).
What does the evidence suggest?

- Organized Sports for Children and Preadolescents, selected statements:
  - Basic motor skills, such as throwing, catching, kicking, and hitting a ball, do not develop sooner simply as a result of introducing them to children and at an earlier age (p. 1459).
  - Teaching or expecting these skills to develop before children are developmentally ready is more likely to cause frustration than long-term success in the sport (p. 1459).
What does the evidence suggest?

  
  - Providing developmentally appropriate movement activities designed for individual success, self-esteem, and more control of one’s movement should be the goal in elementary school movement programs. The developmental approach, with its emphasis on learning skills and learning to move skillfully, is needed in early childhood more than traditional, low-organized game approach (p. 27).
Potential Benefits


- Learning to listen for clues
- Following verbal instructions
- Learning from observation
- Having impulse control and self-regulations under challenge conditions
- Maintaining focus
- Generating alternatives

Basics to the basics (p.36)

- Being self-determining
- Making choices & decisions
- Evaluating choices
- Solving problems
- Adapting and adjusting based upon evaluation and further input
- Developing perseverance
What do you see in this picture?
Recommendations
Stay at home and play!

- But if not:
- Single age groups;
- Multiple balls
- Multiple small flexible, portable goals
- Length of game
  - Four quarters, no longer than 10 minutes each
- Number: 2 v 2 or 3 v 3
  - Do we really even need separate teams?

- Field dimensions
  - 20 x 30, but should be extremely flexible based on the available area.
- Ball size
  - Size 2 or 3
  - Also use colorful nerf and beach type balls.
To Conclude

• “That little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm.”
Recommended Reading List

- Critchell, M. (2013). *Play to learn, learn to play: A fresh approach to coaching young players 5-16 years of age*. Reedswain: Spring City, PA.
References