

Kindersoccer Thoughts, Concerns, Evidence & Recommendations

Dr. Ronald W. Quinn, Associate Professor
Department of Sport Studies, Xavier University
US Youth Soccer National Staff Instructor



USYOUTHSOCCER.ORG

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.

Prenatal

READINESS

From Zorba the Greek by Kazantzakis

- *“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.*

READINESS

From Zorba the Greek by Kazantzakis

- 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?

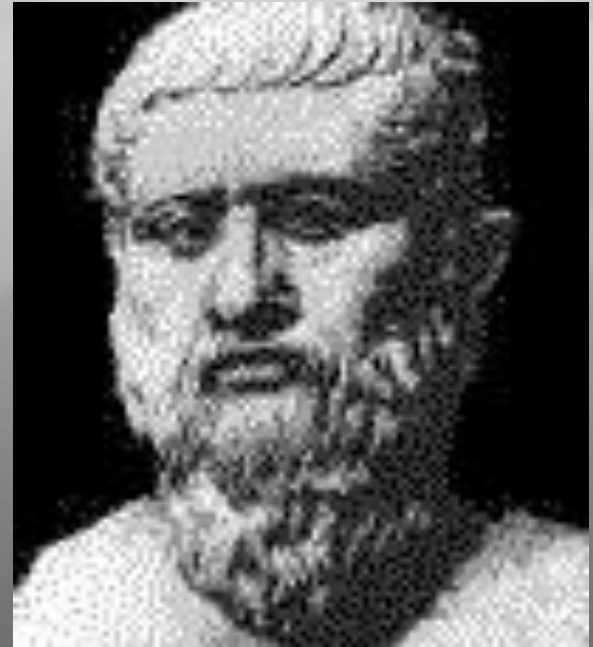
Which path should we take?

- 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).

Stage	Age	Markers	Soccer Implications
Sensory-Motor	~0-2	Reflex learning / Motor learning / Sensual learning / Extreme egotism	Motor Skills Curiosity
Pre-Operational	~2-7	Symbolic Representation Highly Egotistical Parallel Play	Boundaries Sharing the Ball Learning to Play Basic Rules
Concrete Operations	~7-11	Develop Friendships Cooperation & Competition Improved Spatial Awareness Onset of Abstract Thought	Learning to Train Formal Rules New Game Forms Self-Training
Formal Operations	~11+	Abstract Thinkers Deal in the Hypothetical	Strategic Thought Mastery Learning

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



Half-Time

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?

- Nelson, M.A. (1991).
 - *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?

- American Academy of Pediatrics.
- 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?

- Belka, D. (2004).
 - *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

Torbert, M. (2005)

- 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.
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House: New York.
- Elkind, D. (2007). *The power of play: How spontaneous, imaginative activities lead to happier, healthier children*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books Group.
- Epstein, D. (2013). *The sports gene: Inside the science of extraordinary athletic performance*. Penguin Group: New York.
- Farrey, T. (2008). *Game on: The All-American race to make champions of our children*. ESPN Pub: New York.
- Pink, D. H. (2006). *A whole new mind: Why right-brainers will rule the future*. Riverhead Books: New York.
- Singer, D. G. & Revenson, T. A. (1996). *A Piaget primer: How a child thinks. (revised edition)*. Madison, VT: International Universities Press.
- Smoll, F. R. & Smith, R. E. (2002). *Children and youth in sport: A biopsychosocial perspective*. (2nd ed.). Kendall-Hunt Pub: Dubuque, IA
- Stafford, I. (2011). *Coaching children in sport*. Routledge: New York.
- Tomporowski, P. D. (2003). *The psychology of skill: A life span approach*. Praeger Pub: Westport, CT.

References

- American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Sports Medicine and Fitness and Committee on School Health. *Pediatrics*, Vol. 107 No. 6, June 2001.
- Belka, D. (2004). Substituting skill learning for traditional games in early childhood. *Teaching Elementary Physical Education*. May, p. 25-27.
- Chak, A. (2001). Adult sensitivity to children's learning in the Zone of Proximal Development. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*. 31:4.
- Elkind, D. (2007). *The power of play: How spontaneous imaginative activities lead to happier, healthier children*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books Group.
- Mooney, C. G. (2000). *Theories of childhood: An introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget & Vygotsky*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.
- Nelson, M.A. (1991). Developmental skills and children's sports. *Physicians and Sportsmedicine*, Vol 19 Issue 2.
- Torbert, M. (2005). Are we ready for the challenge of universal Pre-kindergarten? *Teaching Elementary Physical Education*. May, p. 36-37.
- Torbert, M. & Schneider, L. (1993). *Follow-Me Too: A handbook of movement activities for three to five year-olds*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: MA: Harvard Press.