Overcoming Barriers to Participation in TOPSoccer

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TOPSoccer – Overcoming Barriers

• This presentation or resource is for you if you want:
  – To become involved in TOPSoccer
  – To grow your TOPSoccer program
    • Recruit more athletes and volunteers
  – To improve your program based on the needs of your athletes and parents
  – To learn basic principles for adapting activities for athletes with disabilities

• Or you:
  – Coach recreational and travel teams and may have athletes with “invisible” disabilities
Importance of Overcoming Barriers

• Physical activity is arguably more important for people with disabilities than for those without disabilities
  – 66% higher rate of obesity
• Additional benefits of physical activity
  – Increased self efficacy and physical confidence
  – Opportunity to connect with other youth with disabilities
  – Reduced stress, depression, and pain
Why TOPSoccer?

• Allows integration with typically developing “buddies” while eliminating:
  – Anxiety of being teased by peers
  – Uneasiness about own perception of lack of ability
Why TOPSoccer?

• Youth with disabilities are empowered through physical activities with:
  – Individualized goals
  – Opportunities for success
  – Supportive peers
  – “Important” adults
  – Family involvement
  – Opportunities to make own decisions
The Buddy System

- **Ideal** TOPSoccer Environment
  - Consistent buddy base with training

- **Real** TOPSoccer Environment
  - Head coach plans session, introduces activities, and adapts activities for each athlete throughout

- *How can we bring the real world closer to the ideal world?*
Recruiting Buddies

• Partner with universities to recruit students pursuing degrees in education or health sciences
  – Special Education
  – Physical Therapy
  – Occupational Therapy
No Soccer Experience? No Problem!

• Head coach plans and leads sessions
  – “Buddies” can echo the coach’s instructions, motivate, celebrate, and help manage behaviors

• Incentives of service learning with TOPSoccer
  – Volunteer hours
  – Apply classroom knowledge
  – Develop leadership skills
  – Gain a new perspective on working with youth with disabilities
  – FUN!
Involving Club/Recreational Teams

• Team Building
  – Identify leadership qualities in athletes

• Life Lessons
  – Experience is the best way to promote mutual understanding and acceptance

• Tip: Consider when your sessions are held
  – Conflict with league play and tournaments
  – Research Special Olympics schedule because athletes participate in multiple sports
Recruiting University Teams

• 56% of male and 67% of female student-athletes believe in their social responsibility to participate in community service
• Over 80% of student-athletes volunteer at least once a year
• 44% serve at least a few hours a month
Recruiting University Teams

• NCAA Division II
  – Encouraging community engagement versus community service
    • Bringing the community to campus to “experience Division II”
    • Building lasting relationships and community partnerships

• NCAA Division III
  – Official partnership with Special Olympics
The “Greyhound” Model

• St. Francis SC (Indianapolis, IN) partners with University of Indianapolis Women’s Soccer
  – 4 year partnership

• All players volunteer on a single Saturday and host the TOPSoccer athletes at the next day’s game

• Individual players come to Saturday sessions when not traveling for league play
The “Greyhound” Model

- UIIndy Women’s Soccer hosts “TOPSoccer Day with the UIIndy Greyhounds” annually
  - Free admission for athletes and discounted admission for families
  - Recognition at halftime
  - UIIndy gear for each TOPSoccer player and volunteer
  - Autographs and a meet and greet with UIIndy players
The “Bulldog” Model

- Dynamo FC (Indianapolis, IN) partnered with Butler Women’s Soccer to form a TOPSoccer Academy
- One hour sessions are held on 6 consecutive Sunday nights
- Butler upperclassmen coach activities during “station practice”
- Participation from Butler coaches, athletic trainers, and community volunteers
Tips for Involving University Teams

• Be proactive!
  – Research their schedule and see what days they will be available to help

• Find a team contact
  – Are there players on that team from your club? Are players special education, pre-PT, or pre-OT majors?
Overcoming Environmental Barriers

**Barriers**
- Lack of accessible restrooms
- Inconveniently located facilities
- Gravel parking lots
  - Prevent access of wheelchairs and walkers

**Solutions**
- Hold sessions at local colleges/universities
  - Comply with ADA standards
- Pick fields close to paved parking lots
- Practice on turf if possible
Overcoming Financial Barriers

• Parents have identified financial barriers to participation in physical activity
  – Grants for uniforms, equipment donations from community
    • Liberty Mutual Insurance Play Positive Campaign
      https://www.playpositive.com/pledge/
      – Earn $2500 to support your team
      – Register your team and recruit people to “pledge” to promote good sportsmanship in youth sport
    • U.S. Soccer Foundation Grants
      http://www.ussoccerfoundation.org/our-grants/
      – Safe Places to Play Grants
      – Program Grants
    • U.S. Soccer Foundation “Passback” Program
      http://www.ussoccerfoundation.org/our-programs/passback
      – Request equipment
Overcoming Social-Level Barriers

### Barriers

1. **Lack of access to information about the program**
   - Solutions: Reach out to local schools or pediatric PT/OT/SLP providers
   - Solutions: Information on club website

2. **Fear of child’s physical and emotional safety**
   - Solutions: Advertise if you have the TOPSoccer Coaching Certificate or have relevant education

3. **Rejection from previous gatekeepers**
   - Solutions: Solicit help from other TOPSoccer coaches or the child’s PT/OT
   - Solutions: Parents are experts on their kids
Adapting Activities

• Almost any activity can be modified or adapted
  – Modify equipment or rules
  – Have well defined boundaries
  – Reduce playing area
  – Encourage players in wheelchairs to dribble using their chair
  – Use a deflated soccer ball, lightweight ball, beeper ball, or an oversized ball
  – Use target that makes noise when hit

• An example session follows on the next slides
  – Focus on the adaptations than can be applied to any activity rather than the activity itself
Warm-Up

• Greeting game
• Athletes dribble around a grid; coach yells “freeze!” and gives directions
  – “Find another person and give them a high five”
  – “Tap the top of your ball four times with your feet”
  – “Get back to back with a buddy”
• Adaptations: Incorporate visual demonstrations, give a few options with each “freeze!” to allow inclusion, have pairs come up with next instruction, facilitate social interaction with peers and buddies
Gate Game

- Passing or dribbling through gates with a buddy
- **Adaptations**: Make athletes competitive with themselves, add cognitive tasks (i.e. dribble through only certain color gates)
2 Square Possession

- Keep away in your square with 2 of the opposing team’s defenders
- Defenders win the ball, play it back to their square, and possess with 2 of the opposing team’s defenders
- Adaptations: Mix defenders (2 athletes, athlete and buddy), add challenges (i.e. score a point per 5 passes)
Transition to Game Play

• Teach positions with matching pinnies and cones
• Play a game of keep away requiring players to remain within 5 steps of the cone
• **Adaptations**: Color matching, can also be applied to small sided games (i.e. have teams in same colored pennies trying to score on goals of the same colored cones)
“Big Game”

- Small field, mixed teams of buddies and athletes
- “Bumpers” on the sidelines
- If a single player is dominating game play, offer them an additional challenge (i.e. “can you help Jason score a goal?” or “try only using your left foot”)
- **Adaptations**: Buddies facilitate game play (i.e. provide opportunities for less involved players and challenge dominating players), rotate who initiates play on a dead ball, involve siblings
“Invisible” Disabilities

• No outward characteristics to suggest a disability
• Challenges with:
  – Attention
  – Impulse control
  – Language processing
  – Motor skills
• Affect >10% of children in the United States
  – Likely that these athletes will be on your teams
Coaching Tips – “Invisible” Disabilities

• Tip: Incorporate station practice
  – 1:1 small group instruction with a coach
  – Allows those who have mastered a skill to continue to independently practice

• Tip: Provide structure and predictability
  – Invite parents to practice
  – Provide an overview of practice
    • Wipe off board with practice plan
Coaching Tips – “Invisible” Disabilities

• Tip: Provide a visual demonstration
  – Give relevant cues

• Tip: Prevent challenging behaviors
  – Allow for successful challenge and exploration
  • “Dribble as fast as you can, with the ball as close to you as possible, from one cone to another”
Thank you for being involved in TOPSoccer!

Questions?
TOPSoccer – The Role of the Buddy

- Be one of the first 25 attendees and take home a Slow Motion/ Sensory Soccer ball
- Taught by coach Auke Wiersma in the Grand Ballroom of the Marriott Hotel TODAY from 2:15 to 3:15 PM
References


