

US Women's National Teams Program

POSITION STATEMENT

'The Economics of Soccer:
An Impact on Player Development in the Game'

Issues

An urgent problem for youth players in America is covering the cost and expenses that are associated with competitive soccer. The cost to the individual player has become increasingly more prohibitive when including the cost of registration and expenses such as equipment costs, coaching fees, and attendance at a myriad of tournaments. The increasing cost of participating in competitive soccer threatens to limit soccer participation for girls who **cannot** afford to play, yet possess the talent.

A great amount of money spent by the players is spent on team equipment. Today, society stresses appearance to such a high extent, that it has filtered into sports as well. When this happens in excess, the priority shifts from furthering player development to the player's appearance, which, in reality, does not correlate. Appearance, more than the actual game, can become a competitive issue between teams. A common misconception that comes along with affluent clubs is that the quality of the team equipment is equivalent to or ensures high level playing performance.

Money should be a blessing – a resource used to create opportunities to develop and improve players. However, affluence also has the capability to distort one's sense of hard work, achievement, and accomplishment. Money and resources can generate a sense of comfort and can be taken for granted. Players can easily become isolated in their 'comfort zone' and insulated from challenges that will prod and stretch them to grow and develop. With many of our youth soccer players coming from upper to middle class backgrounds, many things in their lives have come easy and the ability to struggle through hardships to attain something has not been a natural part of their development. If players receive material goods and opportunities without working for them, the connection between effort and reward is not established. This missing connection can lead to lack of motivation, passion, and enthusiasm. Likewise, when adversity strikes, it is unfamiliar territory for the players. It becomes difficult for them to overcome temporary setbacks, disappointments, and hard times. True colors come out in adverse times, and it is important that players are prepared and taught to rise in these situations, not fall. Success or excellence is the result of aspiration combined with perspiration. Players must learn that lesson early.

Lastly, more and more parents begin to perceive their children's youth soccer experience as a prelude to their career possibilities. Because parents have invested so much money in their child's soccer experience for years, they feel and demand that their child deserves opportunities, such as a college soccer scholarship, because they want a return on their investment. This mentality contributes to fueling undue and unhealthy pressure on players and coaches.

Recommendations

Make it an important focus at the local, state, and regional levels to both control cost and expenses. Look to implement or develop sponsorship and/or scholarship programs. It's always a wonderful learning and personal development opportunity to have the players partake in this venture. Have players participate in some fund raising activities, which will also give them a sense of responsibility and accomplishment.

Administrators, coaches and parents have a responsibility to identifying, recruit, and socially support players that are financially challenged, and seek out avenues to help them.

Adult leaders who make the decisions regarding how money is spent must have a vision. Equipment is important, but should not be more of a priority than player development and offering a positive soccer experience. Make sure money is spent in the players' best interest.

Players must be held responsible for how they perceive their material situation. Teach players to appreciate what they have by giving them responsibility for the equipment – getting it where it needs to be and maintaining it properly. Coaches can implement short-term goals for the players that upon achieving their goals, they receive their equipment. Players have earned their rewards from their hard work, which is one life lesson that needs to be taught.

The adult leaders must take an active role in creating an environment that teaches and fosters the intangible qualities of work ethic, commitment, motivation, competition, passion, and dealing with adversity. These qualities for success in life cannot be bought and sold, but must be instilled. Adults must lead by example in this area and stress the importance of these qualities. They must set the standard for the players to follow.

It is unfair to the player and often times unrealistic to assume and demand that the money parents invest in soccer should and will come back automatically to them in future opportunities. This thinking actually stunts maximum growth and serves as almost an insurmountable obstacle that the player must hurdle. The investment is in the growth and development of their child through the experiences and people that the sport has provided them!

Rationale

Adult leaders must make responsible decisions regarding finances and stress inclusion as a priority. If there's a will, there's a way; there must be a desire to help absorb reasonable costs in playing soccer, and there must be action. China, a third world country, has one of the best women's national teams in the world. It is not because of money. Money does not guarantee success, but if used the right way, it can aid in personal and player development, which is our cause. Spend it in creating a positive environment that fosters optimal growth. There is an entire player pool out there that is 'excluded' from playing our great sport. Help us find them, encourage them to play, and support them in their efforts to continue playing soccer by limiting the out of pocket expenses required to play soccer in American today.