



EASTERN NEW YORK YOUTH SOCCER ASSOCIATION

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The Game for All Kids!

The Players Game - Please Give it Back

America is a wonderful place that I am delighted to call home. I may be British born, but I am enormously proud of my American citizenship. I find American parents, for the most part to be enormously caring and loving, willing to do almost anything for their children.

I find it bizarre how this enormous love for their children affects how they behave in the soccer world. I understand that American culture holds coaches in the greatest esteem. Forever portrayed by Hollywood as Yoda like figures with both enormous knowledge and power. The “coach” can do no wrong. It is the job of the coach to think for all his players, to provide the next play that will bring the goal, to design the magical DRILL (pain and repetition) that will lead to competitive dominance. The player’s job is to simply carry out the plan. I confess to never having played football, basketball or lacrosse and although I enjoy watching sport I remain baffled by how coach centered these sports appear. Coaches think, scream out the next order and the players, robot like, simply follow on.

Soccer is the player’s game. It belongs to them. They have to be allowed to think and yes make mistakes. This holiday season let’s give the game back to the kids. I travel around ENY watching game after game where the players are subjected to both coaches screaming orders at them and of course all the parents as well. Often rather than try and solve the soccer puzzle in front of them the decision they make is, “which order should I follow now?” Rather than figure out calmly where the next pass should be that helps team keep the ball, they react in fear as the volume of the orders gets louder and make no decision but simply launch the ball down the field. Take a moment now to reflect on your performance as a parent or coach this past season. Look back at the number of times you shouted (yes *it’s loud out there*) any of the classic orders below:

1. **Boot it, launch it.**
2. **Kick it.**
3. **Get it out of there.**
4. **Shoot.**
5. **Not backwards.**
6. **Dribble now.**
7. **Kick them.**
8. **Kick it out.**
9. **Not to your goalkeeper.**
10. **Don’t pass to....**



Increasingly the most popular presentation I am asked to give is one based on player development. At the heart of this presentation is the question, when in American culture does development in sport come before winning? When is it okay to put skill development and tactical awareness before WE MUST win? Our youth players must be allowed to think for themselves and play the game in an atmosphere which is not based on “we have to win every game”. Let them think, coaches learn to coach with questions in a calm voice, parents develop the skill of letting the players think, learn to smile, cry and watch without screaming out an order which is typically wrong, and based on how far the ball is away from your goal (even if the other team have it).

At the next holiday party you attend take turns to try and make any decision while 14 other adults scream different instructions at you. Please feel free to make one of the voices more important and therefore louder than the rest. Call them coach if you like. I don't think you will enjoy the process, even for thirty seconds, so imagine doing it for seventy five or ninety minutes. Youth players are leaving the game in droves. Obesity rates in the youth of America continue to climb. How much FUN is it to feel that you have to win every game and not be allowed to think? I ask that we simply give the game back to the kids. Let them think, let them develop skill sets through a possession based game. Let them play in an atmosphere that is calm and healthy. Make it your gift to them this holiday season.

Tim Bradbury
Director of Coaching Instruction

