

Reach Down for Success

Over the past month or so, I have spent a week in Denver (Regis University), another week in San Francisco and last week 7 days in Pennsylvania at Bloomsburg University. All of these were a part of the National Soccer Coaches Association America's residential academies for the development of coaches.

During the course of the summer, the NSCAA runs 7 weeks of courses and something under a 1000 coaches go through the courses.

The United States Soccer Federation is about the same.

The candidates are high-level, obviously greatly-committed coaches who are the lifeblood of the game and one major reason why so much progress has been made with the development of soccer in the United States. But we have to do better.

Most of the coaches coming through the academies and the coaching schools will spend the majority of their time working with the more gifted, elite players.

We have to do more for the 95% of coaches who do not take certification and diploma courses. And I am talking about the Moms and Dads.

Not nearly enough is done for these people who are the foundation of our game. As well, they are working at the grassroots level, not the elite level.

Giving them a bag of balls, some pinnies and cones, a pre-season one-hour clinic and a manual is not good enough.

I guess I'm making a case for our Byte Sized Coaching program which provides ongoing help for the Parent Coach. And to a certain extent I am.

But I'm more concerned about the elite and professional coaches who go through the NSCAA and USSF courses. They must be encouraged by the club executives to develop programs for their parent coaches and the younger players.

More often than not a "club" Director of Coaching is employed to work almost exclusively with elite players. It is no coincidence that the Club Board of Directors - the Club Executive - is often made up of a majority of people whose children have graduated to the elite category. While their children were doing so the parents of those players also moved up the ladder and graduated to the club board.

Self interest or genuine concerns about their own child receiving the best opportunity are not necessarily bad traits. Or at least, they are understandable. But who is looking out for the grassroots development of our younger players and the people who coach them?

If the game in the United States (and Canada) is to further progress the "clubs" need to recognize that if they don't put in the proper development program for the youngest players the elite players won't be much better than today 10 or 20 years down the road.

Early learning, as the educators know, is the most important and the longest lasting. Community soccer organizations have to recognize that and so do the excellent coaches that the NSCAA and the USSF are developing.