

# Clash of Coaching Philosophies in Youth Soccer – Winning vs. Development

Posted by [Ivan Kepcija](#) on Oct 8, 2013 in [Education](#)



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*In "Clash of Coaching Philosophies in Youth Soccer-'Winning' vs. 'Development,'" Ivan Kepcija examines the inner workings of youth soccer. In this piece, he explores today's predominant youth coaching philosophies and attempts to realize the best philosophy to implement.*

*This summary article, the first of a two-part series, analyzes the differences between the winning philosophy and the developmental philosophy, examines the problem by identifying the underlying motivations, and the parents' impact on the game as hurdles to be overcome.*

*You can download and read the Kepcija's entire master's article in the [Online Resource Library](#).*

"Sports are a phenomenon designed in such a manner that a win/lose result as the consequence of the action is not only natural, but desired and sought for. Some sports allow for a draw to be the outcome of the game, but the main idea is still to engage in a challenge to test one's own skill and come out as the winner of the competition. On the other hand, sports are also games that provide sheer enjoyment by participation. This autotelic, self-rewarding effect of the game is what gets people involved in the first place most often. These two elements and motivations intertwine to create a mix of emotions associated with sports on all levels and it is almost impossible to expect people staying interested in the sport without both of them. It appears to be normal to expect that the people, who enjoy playing the game, look to win every competition they engage in. Even though this is essentially true with all sports, it is argued by some that focusing on winning games at the youth level can stifle the long-run development and skill acquisition. The issue investigated is the clash of two major coaching philosophies in youth soccer – should the primary focus be winning games or development of players?"

This is a very important issue present in the world of youth coaching, not only in soccer. For every coach that has the long-run interest of the players at heart, the development philosophy is a natural way of thinking. It is more important to "supply" the player with the skill (i.e. give it time to develop) that will allow

them to play successfully for the rest of their life rather than looking for victories today neglecting the future. It is usually that the parents of players and uneducated coaches, who do not have the big picture in mind, get tied to the “winning” mentality. Not seeing or understanding that this philosophy may be detrimental for the player’s future, this influence may severely alter the culture and goals of the team. The problem for the team is greatest when the coach itself doesn’t understand the concept of development and doesn’t put winning in the appropriate place. Developing a developmental philosophy is important as it provides a frame-work for decision-making and guidance in setting and achieving goals.

The problem is omnipresent in today’s world, as there is no patience for long-term results. In all the clubs in the world at the professional level, coaches are not given time to build something and results are expected to come – immediately. Being flashed by news that show only the best, such a culture developed around soccer and sports in general. Fabio Capello, one of the best coaches in the game, during the 1990s signed a three-year contract with Real Madrid, the Spanish super-power. He said at the time that in the third year of his contract, the club can expect to get results from his work, not sooner than that. It is a question whether Mr. Capello would have been Real’s coach in the third year if he hadn’t won the Spanish league title in the first year."

## The Problem

The US Soccer Federation has identified the problem of American soccer as poor development in the youth categories. Most people in the soccer community can agree that from the U15 stage and below, developing a young player’s skills should take precedent over winning games. Yet despite this common agreement, by studying the behavior of coaches and parents, it is quite clear that results are still of the same importance as development in most environments.

Kecija identifies the problem to be on a much broader platform than the game of soccer itself and explores the problem as that of a cultural issue. Taking into consideration the differences between youth and professional models of sport.

According to Smoll and Cumming (2006), the problem occurs when adults impose the professional model on the youth arena. The motivation for youth participation in sports has been clearly identified since the 1970s. The result of the study identifies the top five motivations for youth athletes in order of importance and to win came in fifth place. These findings should set the path for goal-orientation in the youth arena that parents and coaches should follow.

The problem of comparing the youth arena to the professional model in America is that we only observe the first team at the highest level of professional soccer clubs. When we take a deeper look into these clubs abroad, we recognize that their youth programs are vital to the club’s first team, as the goal of their youth coaches is to develop players to eventually join the first team. Success in these clubs is determined by how many youth players eventually find their way onto the first team, not by how many wins they accumulate as a youth. There, we can see a successful attitude that understands the foundation in the developmental philosophy.