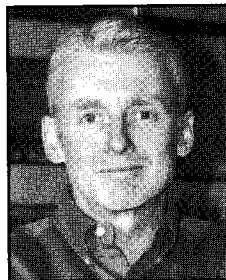


Burnout Feedback

Two coaches respond to the Journal's comments on player burnout

By Jay Martin
Editor



The comments made in this space in the November/December issue regarding burnout seemed to hit home with many members. In fact, the comments generated the most mail in the two years since I assumed the editorship of Soccer Journal. So, we offer the following two responses and, from years past, an article on burnout in Retro Journal in this issue.

This issue also includes a report from Jeff Tipping, NSCAA Director of Coaching, on the annual UEFT meeting in Portugal; Jay Bilas from ESPN offers advice for all youth coaches and Les Reed offers his five favorite restart plays.

Defending the club coaches

I agree that the country's youth soccer situation is holding back the growth of the sport, or should I say the development of our players. However, I don't share your view that the priorities of club coaches are way off. As a club coach myself, I feel helpless and powerless in many respects and have to figure out how best to develop players and teams within the youth soccer system we have. I believe it's the soccer system and the culture of this country that is holding soccer back. We as coaches have to bend over backwards and develop players in spite of the system.

Your editorial, as do practically all other articles on covering the same concerns, doesn't differentiate between coaches of top teams and players and coaches of other teams. For instance, let's look at the top youth players in England. They all belong to Academies and Centers of Excellence that are run by professional clubs. These players have a goal of playing professional soccer. Youth players at these

Academies practice and play ONLY at the Academies. They will never play with their friends on another "rec" team or for their high schools. Those teams are for players who aren't at their level of play. The Academy players have made the decision to focus on their soccer goals, and to do so, have given up the option of playing on other teams or even playing other sports at any competitive level.

So in response to your question "Why should a high school-age girl have to quit softball to play soccer?" the answer is simple. If she is playing soccer without any

playing for the strong club in his town that has a track record of developing college and professional players? This club will play at a higher level and will be scouted by top college coaches. Surely this is a better option for the player than to play on a lower tier team with lesser players who will not play at the higher level or be scouted by the top college coaches. And surely it is within reason for the top club to promote itself by touting its past record of development?

I totally agree that tournaments are the scourge of youth soccer and do about as much damage to player development and

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goal of furthering her soccer career (college or professional) then she should be able to play whatever sports whenever she wants, and most likely will. If she is talented enough to play at the top collegiate level and possibly professionally and that is her goal, then her best chance of succeeding is to focus on soccer like the Academy players do in Europe, and that eliminates other sports at a competitive level.

You say coaches have fostered the belief that playing on certain clubs will enhance their college scholarship chances. I think that can be answered two different ways. If there are two equally competitive clubs in the same city that have good coaches developing their players and they play similar schedules and college showcase events exposing their players to college coaches, then I would agree with your statement. But what about the player who has a choice of

foster the win-at-all-cost attitude as anything. However, playing more than one game per weekend is something we will always have to deal with as long as the player is the consumer and pays for their soccer costs. Top teams simply don't have enough competition locally, or even within driving distance as they get older. This necessitates travel to play games. Teams simply cannot justify a four-hour drive and a hotel night to play one game, never mind a plane ride across the country.

I first heard the term "recreational soccer" when I came to this country in 1991. In England we simply had youth teams. Some were stronger than others. The stronger teams played in the stronger leagues or higher divisions and the weaker ones played in the lower leagues or lower divisions. There was no distinction between the levels. As in the pro leagues there was al

ways a promotion and relegation situation. I don't think the clubs can be blamed for rec soccer; they fit into that and all the silly rules and stigmas it brings.

As I stated above, there should be no conflict with our top youth players. The club situation is where their soccer development occurs, just like the Academy is where Michael Owen and Wayne Rooney developed their games. Neither of those two players, or any other Academy players, ever played for their high schools or would want to. Playing high school soccer was for players like me who weren't good enough for the Academies. The same should apply here. Unfortunately, the culture of our country has been that high school sports (football, basketball and baseball) are an important part of the high school experience and soccer is thrown into the same mix. That and the rules of some states that don't allow students to participate with their club team during high school season are the cause of these unnecessary conflicts.

It's not the club coaches who are making decisions that benefit the coaches and not the players. The system is at fault. I believe that our club coaches are doing an extraordinary job of developing players despite the system.

— Mike Saif, Club Coach
and Editor of World Class Coaching

Why play a single sport

There is no doubt that winning is stressed at too early an age. For example, this spring BPYSL (Ohio South's premier league) will be playing premier travel soccer at U-11. Why is that necessary? In most of the states in the region, the state association allows for premier leagues at U-9 and U-10. Have you ever met an 8-year-old "premier" player?

Unfortunately, at these ages clubs play to win. Pressure on the ball, direct play and early bloomers always will notch a check in the win column. At these ages, emphasizing fun as the No. 1 goal, followed by skill development and not barking instructions throughout the match, which leads to creative and tactically composed players, initially leads to losing.

As a result, we have elected to do two

things. First, we have elected not to play "greater8" at U-8 and play "in-house" 4 v. 4 street soccer. Second, the club decided to play street soccer rather than providing team indoor training for our U-8 to U-10 teams in the first session of indoor. In our opinion, kids today do not play on their own. They need structured time, but not

agree with two of the points that you made.

First, there are certain clubs at the high school ages that can do a better job providing for the kids and increasing scholarship chances. Every player but three on my club team already has verbally committed to a Division I scholarship. I firmly believe that much of this was due to our program. In

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structured soccer. We chose the following format:

- 5:30-5:40 – Fun warm-up skill games/juggling games
- 5:40-5:50 – Teaching technique through fun games
- 5:50-6:30 – 4 v. 4 street soccer – no coaching allowed.

The kids love it, but some of the parents do not. We received an e-mail from a parent who wanted more "bang for their buck" – coaching, coaching, coaching. We are modest enough to understand that the game is a better teacher when guided by instruction.

Not all clubs provide only for the early bloomers. We do age group training with our U-8 to U-11 teams so we can provide for everyone. This way they all get the same training and they can be challenged in games according to their ability at that time.

Finally, it is always refreshing to hear a soccer leader express how bad tournaments really are for development. In my opinion, tournaments exist for four reasons:

1. To make money
2. Convenience
3. Trophy hunting
4. Showcasing U-16 to U-18 players

I felt your article was constructive and necessary, although I do have to say I dis-

regard to scholarship money available for male soccer players, I would have to agree that the money available is limited, although there is a tremendous amount of money available for female soccer players.

Second, there are some high school club teams that should demand a total commitment to their program, because there are a lot of serious players who seek teams which demand a total commitment from their teammates and their coaches. The intent of many clubs, at least my intent with my U-18 club team, is for them to choose to play only soccer because it is not fair to the kids or the coach to have practices with 8-10 players. You have to consider the logistics of your argument, when kids play other sports during soccer season; typically half of the team is away at another practice or another game. It sounds great to be able to say that kids should not have to choose a sport, but the reality is that if they do not focus on soccer the player's tactical development and the team's chemistry will suffer.

Everybody has different wants and different needs. There are a select few kids who love the game enough that they only desire to play soccer. Unfortunately, most clubs aim to serve those upper two percent kids, instead of the other 98 percent.

— Brian Page, Director of Operations,
Lakota Soccer Club, Cincinnati, Ohio