

Why do we play?

By Aaron Roy, MHYSA Director of Coaching

After recent game with a newly formed girls' team, I started re-evaluating my player-centered approach to training, games, and developing team specific goals. Why do *I* play? I play for the intensity and range of emotion experienced during live action. I play to win. I at one time experienced a loss in high school in which the core of a team embraced each other, sobbing the whole bus ride home. But it doesn't matter why *I* play. I needed to find out what keeps my players coming back to the field for more.

It has been said, that, "Most soccer players will at one time experience more range of emotion in one game, than some human beings will in an entire lifetime."

As coaches of youth athletes we have to remember that our own experiences and inspirational stories heard from outside sources can not become a general label for the proper development of our own players. These are children who all play for different reasons. Some do play to win, while others play just for fun. Some like the exercise and some may even be out there against their own will (God forbid).

Find out why each player likes to participate. What does each player like most about soccer? When you do this, then try to set up your training sessions so that every player has a chance to experience what they are there for. For example, Johnny likes the fitness end of soccer so we'll warm up with a fun activity like leap frog. Sally loves competition, so we'll add a competitive twist and turn leap frog into a game with a common goal for two teams. Bobby is there because Johnny is, so while keeping teams as even as possible, we'll try to pair Bobby and Johnny together on the same team.

It is our job to make training fun for every one of our players, and it is very important to have a player-centered approach in trying to accomplish this. Until these players start looking forward to going to practice, they will never develop a *true love* for the game. Practices must be competitive and fun or the matches will never be that for them. At a recent meeting with 2 coaches, Michigan Wolves coach Sam Chaeib said "Compete first at practice, and then they will compete in games. Enjoy practice, and then they will *love* matches. Failure to prepare is preparation for failure." Ann Arbor coach Mounir Blibeche added, "Show them how fun the game can be every time they show up, and then you've got them for life."

We have to help them develop a love for the game if we ever intend to help create **great** soccer players. Until this happens, they will only remain decent players who lack competitiveness. Make soccer fun again and unlock the door so each player has the opportunity to reach their full potential.