

Critical Factors in Player Development

by

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Critical Factors: Understanding The Player

- During the U-11 through U-14 years, a player's phenotype (environment) is critical to advancement. Technical and tactical development (physical and mental functioning) is greatly affected during this time because of the onset of the growth cycles involved in puberty and adolescence. Practice makes permanent, not perfect." (US Soccer "C" Curriculum).
- Players acquire soccer essentials by passing through a prolonged series of repetitive experiences For example, optimal growth comes from repetition with no pressure, pressure of a teammate in training, pressure against less able opposition, against equal opposition and then against superior opposition. (Daniel, Jacob, League Operations Manual).
- Youth players need to increase the number of touches per week, not the number of games. Top-level youth players should practice between 3 and 4 times per week and intermediate teams should practice between 2-3 times per week. (Daniel, Jacob, League Operations Manual).
- The average, top class player makes 1100 changes and covers 6.5 miles in a full game. (US Soccer "C" Curriculum)
- The average total distance of a top-flight youth player playing in Holland is 8030 meters (5.34 miles) for defenders, 10683 meters (7.12 miles) for midfielders and 9317 meters (6.21 miles) for forwards. (FromConditioning for Soccer).
- The difference in total distance covered between the youth player and that of a 1st division pro in Holland is 5% less distance by a defender, 2% less for a midfielder and 6% less by a forward. (FromConditioning for Soccer).
- There is little difference in the training demands for males / females; accept where extreme (prolonged) physical exertion and poor nutrition can result in a change in a female's menstrual cycle (over-training and competing in this particular circumstance can lead to osteo-arthritis and a condition called "the Female Triad." (US Soccer "C" Curriculum).

Critical Factors: Preparing The Team

- US Soccer recognizes the principle: Specific Adaption to Imposed Demand. (S.A.I.D.) in preparing players for the recognized demands of the game. (US Soccer "C" Curriculum).
- Team training revolves around the specific preparation for the demands of one game a day (the S.A.I.D. principle should not be misapplied as is the case when a majority of players play more than one game in a given day.) (US Soccer "C" Curriculum).

- Following competition, all players need 48 hours (minimally) to restore glycogen stores. (US Soccer “C” Curriculum).
- “A period of 36-48 hours of rest is usually necessary after intensive work. This gives the time that the body needs to repair all kinds of damage to muscles and connective tissue. The energy systems also need time to recover.” (From Conditioning for Soccer).
- Players need to have the opportunity to take part in “recovery training” following a match (low-level aerobic activity that stimulates muscular regeneration). (US Soccer “C” Curriculum).

Critical Factors: Structuring The Game

- US Soccer recommends 1 full game per week for all youth age groups. (US Soccer “C” Curriculum).
- Teams U-11 level should play between 25-30 games per year; U-12 through U-14 should play 30-35 games per year; U-15 and 16 should play 35-40 games per year and U-17 through 19 should play 40-45 games per year. (League Operations Manual)
- Playing time should equate itself with ball contact. Players need time in “blocks” to be exposed to multiple situations on and off the ball and to develop match fitness. US Soccer National Staff and state directors recommend “that top-flight players and coaches must learn to compete under International substitution rules. This group also advocates a ‘no reentry per half’ policy for players aged 13-16, and the FIFA no reentry policy for players above age 16 (All players can play in a match, but no player can re-enter after leaving the field).
- In Cases where multiple games need to be played (i.e. tournament play) players under 14 and below should play no more than 100 minutes a day and players under 15-19 should play no more than 120 minutes per day. (US Soccer Staff and state DOC Policy statements).