

Soccer Tournaments: Looking for Play in All the Right Places

by
Rob Walker

Soccer tournament information is all around us. Tournament announcements and registration information run regularly in soccer magazines, through direct mailings and are a major driving force behind numerous websites on the Internet. Soccer teams of all levels seek out tournaments to prepare them for the season, break up a long league campaign or end a season with travel to a tournament to finish the season with a bang. What are some of the “basics” in looking for a good tournament? Here are some of essentials in deciding on a tournament.

Competition

Every team looks for some fresh teams that will provide a new competitive experience for a team. A mix of the “known” and the “unknown” teams help measure the standard of play and help push teams to play their best. Using the tournament’s website and communicating with teams that have attended the tournament in the past is a great way to get an idea of what the competitive standard might be.

Tournament Fee

A good tournament can buttress the yearly revenue for the host organization. Providing a top-class competition is the first part of a tournament’s mission, collecting fees is a clear second objective in answering the question, “Why are there tournaments.” Generally, top-class competitive tournaments charge in the \$400-500.00 range. Tournaments that cater to teams that are not quite at the elite level, host great events with fees between \$300-400.00.

Residuals

For the fee, tournaments guarantee a certain number of games (usually three), complete with referees, tournament participation memorabilia (patches, buttons, t-shirts etc), awards (trophies, medals, plaques or sponsor driven merchandise— watches, bags, etc). There are inherent costs in running a good event and the fee must fully cover field use and referee fees, registration and scheduling materials, website services and equipment (soccer balls, corner flags, goals, nets etc).

Fields

It is rare that every field that is part of the complex matrix of the tournament schedule is of the highest quality. Some tournaments utilize huge complexes that have reasonably good playing surfaces. Generally, fields are also used by the host organization for training and games and may have some issues involved from this type of “multi-use.” Tournaments that are well organized will try to schedule age groups in similar locales (so that travel to and from fields is easy for travelling teams). One problem with tournaments that cater to a wide-range of participating age groups is that some games are scheduled on fields that are too small or too big for the capabilities of the respectively scheduled teams.

Lodging & Transportation

Finding comfortable, affordable hotels, which cater to traveling teams is critical in rounding out the tournament experience. From finding a conference room for a team meeting to a high carbohydrate breakfast bar the choice of hotel is critical. Having clear directions and a transportation plan to get players from hotel to field to restaurant to hotel (and back again). When traveling to and from tournaments by car, families can easily help ferry players back and forth. When arriving at the host city by air, other arrangements (usually vans or buses) need to be reserved. The important concept in getting lodging and transportation “right” is to plan in advance and make sure to involve enough adults in the plan to make sure the kids are well-supervised and looked after throughout the tournament.

Once the basic issues are covered, it is a good idea to think about some critical team management issues:

On the Field

When the tournament begins, each team should have a plan for management on the field. Multiple games in a day bring the issue of playing time into full view. What is the “playing time” policy? Most teams come to a tournament to be competitive and to win “it.” Does this mean that only the “best” players will play a majority of games, or will all players benefit from equitable playing time? Does the team coach wish to use the tournament to try players in different roles and positions in a pressurized environment? In cases where “guest players” join a team for a specific tournament, what is the plan for their inclusion? Since tournaments are generally costly to every team member. It is important that the answers to these questions (and others) are made known to players and parents.

Off the Field

Once the tournament schedule has been announced (and if a team has been selected) it is important to analyze the schedule and plan for its realities. What time to get the players up and out of bed, how should they be fed, how will they spend time after their initial game and what kind of recuperation plan (warm- down, icing, self-message etc) can be carried out. Also, the team coach may want to have the opportunity to meet with the team and give feedback to players in between games. These are all considerations that need to be put in play well ahead of the tournament weekend.

Planning for the Unknown

It’s also important to have a plan to deal with emergencies. How will a player be looked after if the parent of the player is not in attendance? Also, if there is a catastrophic event (like a rainstorm, earthquake etc) can all principles be notified and communicated with (by cell phone and e-mail). When traveling to a tournament, most parents and team personnel plan for what will happen predictably. Thinking about what might happen in case of some sort of “freak” event is an important step in covering the bases.

Tournaments are a big part of the youth soccer mainstream. Teams look for quality. From participating opponents to fields to accommodations is all part of the chemistry in making a tournament selection. Dealing with a wide variety of issues ahead of time can help make any team’s tournament choice a good one.