

## Cherry Picking

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I had an interesting question from a parent of a youth player that steers us toward a piece of the player development puzzle.

*"Why would a U-9 coach from a top program in this area allow and encourage her players to "cherry pick". There is no offside rule in U-9, but shouldn't coaches be working to educate the players on what is going to happen when Fall League starts? Or is it more important to get the win? Thoughts? Oh, as additional information, the referee is not allowed to instruct or stop the cherry picking from happening because it is a loop hole."*

Telling players to "cherry pick" can indeed win games on the short term but it will delay competitive development in the long term. A forward on a U-12 or older team who "cherry picks" will find that she is often in a poor tactical position. Once the game becomes faster, and is played over larger fields in older age groups, the cherry picking player is disconnected from teammates who will now be unable to find her for passes. The cherry picking forward will often be in an offside position once opponents learn how to play the 'offside trap' as a tactical ploy. The tactical concept of compactness is much more important to present and future performance for these young players than the fleeting gains offered by cherry picking.

Finally, at elite levels of play forwards are required to contribute to defending when the other team has possession of the ball. The cherry picker will be out of position to contribute to the team effort to get the ball back. At elite levels of soccer when our team has the ball all players are expected to contribute to the attack and when the opponents have the ball all players are expected to defend.

**U-10 Age Group - Law 11 Offside:** there shall be no offside called during these games. This rule was put into place for the U-10 age group to make it easier for them to play a fluid game. Furthermore, the typical 9 or 10-year-old does not understand the many situations in which offside may or may not be called. In fact, many adults have a difficulty comprehending the shades of grey within this Law.

For the sake of keeping youngsters in the game for a lifetime, proper development through childhood and the teenage years is important. Taking shortsighted actions such as the "cherry pick" inhibits that development.