

# Enjoying Summer Freedom

By Mike Singleton

Summer is arriving quickly and for many players, the soccer season will end with the school year. It is time for children to enjoy freedom and head outside to play amidst the nice weather. No more bells to direct them from classroom to classroom, no more homework to distract them from what they enjoy most - playing.

For some children, however, the soccer season will not end with the school year. In fact, the soccer season will not end at all. These children will not have bells directing them, but rather multiple practices and games dictating where and when they go to fields. They will likely be playing, but it may not feel like play. These children's lives will be scheduled out for them just as it is during the school year. Whether it be due to summer camps, practices, games or tournaments, these children will be busy.

If players love the game of soccer and constantly seek out ways to play, that is a great thing. When players end up with no time away from formal play or training during the summer, it is not a great thing at all.

Whether your child is a recreational player or an ODP player does not matter. All players need some time in the summer to be children without overscheduled practices or formal play. They need time to choose to play whatever game they wish with their friends. They need time to relax. They need time to let their bodies recover from the wear and tear they endure during the soccer season.

Recent years have seen an increasing number of summer opportunities pop up for interested players. A young player could easily play on a formal team throughout the entire summer now ... and the entire year, for that matter. Although it is wonderful that there are so many choices for children, I have talked to an alarmingly high number of children who take advantage of virtually every option in front of them. In fact, over 95 percent of ODP players told me that they did not take a week off from soccer during the entire year. Combined with the fact that they were playing 5-7 days a week, it is clear they are just exchanging one formal schedule for another.

What's more, this new schedule costs them both physically and emotionally. You may be surprised to find out such a high amount of playing does not correlate with performance improvement.

Please, parents and coaches, take a few minutes to think about how much you are scheduling for your children/players. Does your child have at least a few weeks off of formal play during the summer? Does that child have the option of choosing whatever activity he or she desires at the moment? If they choose soccer, great! If they choose to swim, great! If they choose to play football, great! Whatever activity or relaxing hobby they choose is great and a needed respite from an ever-growing grueling soccer schedule. Regardless of how competitive a player your child is or how competitive your team is, these players need this break and it will actually benefit their play to have this time off.

If players would like to go out in the backyard and play soccer by themselves or with a few friends, that is fine and the fact that they are choosing to do this is the most important fact. Not only do they determine what to do, but also how long to play and how hard to play. This is wonderful freedom and needed time away from organized sport.

Please, let us all think twice before over-scheduling players this summer and let us make sure to give them opportunities to enjoy being children. If they do choose to play soccer, here are [some great games](#) they can play to have fun, improve their skills, and spend time with their friends.

*([Mike Singleton](#) is the [Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association's](#) Head State Coach and Director of Coaching. This article first appeared in [Mass Youth e-News](#).)*

