

Is Winning Everything? **John Thomas-US Youth Soccer**

Is winning everything? Who remembers who came in second? If winning is not the point of the game then why do we keep score?

I'm sure you have heard these clichés. When discussing youth development, how important is winning a game? If kids are playing the game, they will most likely want to win. You don't even have to tell them, they will just be competitive. What does winning mean to young players? It depends on coaches and parents and what winning means to us. I don't know any coach that doesn't try to win or teach their players to do their best when playing any sport. However, one of the major issues with youth soccer today is that winning has become too important and the development of players has gone by the side.

Success in some soccer leagues across the United States are being based on weekly results or standings. What team wouldn't want to be on the top of the league standings or become the team to beat? So, with results being used as the measuring stick of the team, the last game played becomes what your training session will be all about. This is not to say the game shouldn't be one of the tools you should use to help train your players. As we know, the game can be one of the best teachers but it shouldn't be the only method used to assist with player development.

We can't forget that the technical and tactical parts of the game must still be emphasized in training over the season. Long-term development of players is sometimes sacrificed for the quick fix. Here are a few notes to remember when discussing winning as a coach and being a winner for your players:

- How much time is everyone playing in a match? Is it equal or fair?
- Are the players able to take chances in the game or are they structured?
- What happens to the players with less skill? Are they taken out in close games?

If you want to have a positive impact in youth player development and players having a winning attitude, you should consider the coaching methods stated above. Players need to learn to play all positions or at least be given an opportunity to play them and yes, even the goalkeeper position. Coaches should encourage players to express themselves and make decisions without fear - fear of being criticized or fear of losing. Coaches should think long-term when it comes to winning.