

Avoiding the Three Ls of Youth Soccer

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Anyone who has attended a coaching clinic has probably heard of avoiding the three "L's"- Lines, Laps, and Lectures. Unfortunately that was how many parents experienced sports as a participant. Modern methods of coaching youth place emphasis on "game activities" rather than "drills". Game Activities are easily understood childhood games that have the element of a ball added.

Avoiding "lines" in coaching soccer is not difficult. "Tag" games while dribbling a ball are valuable in that every player is forced to dribble and chase others in an effort to tag them. Since directional changes occur quickly and in an unpredictable fashion tag begins to resemble the real game of soccer. Opposite to this method would be to arrange several cones in a row and have players dribble through- zigzagging through the cones. Not a horrible activity, but predictable and it definitely does not resemble the "real" game.

When we have young players standing in line "waiting their turn" we are wasting valuable training time. Kids like and need action in their activities and who likes to wait in line? True, "drills" with lines are sometimes easier for the novice coach to organize, but often behavior problems occur when young players are idle.

Take a lap. Almost every athlete has heard that phrase from his coach. Why? Well for one, long slow distance training is regarded as excellent conditioning for endurance sports. And it's quick and easy for the coach to organize. Many coaches think of soccer as an endurance sport so it figures that lap running is an ideal warm-up. Unfortunately good lap runners do not equate good soccer players. A far more effective method of training soccer players would include the ball and game activities as the warm-up. As fitness training lap running is not ideal because soccer is not played at a consistent pace throughout the match. Soccer is a game with periods of standing, walking, jogging, and all out sprinting- training should replicate this type of action.

When do we get to play? I heard this at one of my first soccer camps nineteen years ago. I thought I had just explained and demonstrated some brilliant aspect of soccer skill to a group of seven year olds and asked "any questions?" The demo was brief- less than a minute. But a minute sitting down is FOREVER to a child. This "want" to play coupled with a shorter attention span requires coaches to use activities that are "action packed" with brief (10 seconds) instructions. Lectures and detailed explanations have no place on a youth soccer field. Let the game be the teacher.

The "L" that coaches must use- "LAUGHTER"-if the players are silent, odds are they're not having fun. Laughs, screams, giggles and noise are what coaches need to hear, that way you know that the activity is FUN. And that's the object of sports.