



COMPETITION – GAME OF TRANSITION - TAKING CHANCES

(excerpts from a 2008 email to GU12 & GU13 parents)

I was very happy to get out from behind my computer and all the NK Select Admin for a few hours to attend your scrimmage yesterday and I am glad I did.

The match between the two teams was a wonderful example of the meaning of competition. The teams were closely matched and challenged each other many times both on offense and defense. Despite Coach Kurt and Coach Kellie moving players around to get ideas for new found player “roles” the teams kept battling each other. It was quite entertaining and rewarding for me even though they are very young teams just learning the game.

I spent time on both sidelines and found very supportive and positive parents which are exactly what teams need. I have to commend you as I heard cheers for good plays even for the other team when they made them. I also heard some screams from one parent on each sideline that I thought for sure came from bull horns! Ah that soccer passion even for 10 year olds!

COMPETITION & LEAGUE PLACEMENT – Speaking of competition, this is just a reminder that at NK Select our league placement goals are based on trying to match a team with their best competition level regardless of where that is played. Especially at younger ages our goal is to place teams where we think they will have as many wins as losses, in order to maximize competition. This is done with the goal that most of the team’s games are competitive battles like the one played yesterday. That’s where the learning comes which maximizes team and individual player growth.

If a team learns the lessons their coaches are teaching they will do better, rise to the top of their league and get promoted to the next most competitive league the following year. In doing so we find that most of our teams are playing at the highest levels of District and State competition by the time they are older. This varies slightly as teams just have to “bake” for different times. We don’t make distinctions if the team plays in leagues locally, in Seattle or statewide leagues. We just try to place them correctly, which means COMPETATIVELY then allow them to grow and progress through the system.

SOCCKER IS A TRANSITION GAME - Some of you may have noticed me walk out on the field to talk with players. I was reinforcing what Coach Kurt and Coach Kellie are trying to communicate. I was telling them that the back players need to move up the field aggressively when their team is in the attack, so they and the players near them can be in the attack too (notice I didn’t say “defenders” which suggests these players just play defense). I was also telling them that when their team lost the ball they needed to tell their teammates to immediately try to get it back....all of them.

This game is NOT like football or baseball where there is an offensive team and defensive team. Rather it is a TRANSITION GAME like hockey or basketball where EVERYONE ATTACKS and at the moment the ball is lost EVERYONE DEFENDS. The team that can transition the fastest from attack to defend to attack usually wins. These are lessons that need to be learned at the U11-U15 ages and implemented consistently at the older ages. If it’s



played otherwise the team will rarely be successful especially in the vast ocean of statewide competition that awaits them.

Think back to yesterday and you will notice that when the back players for both teams started pushing up and being involved in their team's attack, that's when the game got interesting.

TAKING CHANCES – Transitions do not come without risk, however. That is why this is such a challenging game. Sometimes teams get caught and goals are scored by a quicker counterattack and you saw that yesterday too. I was telling the players this on the field making sure they understood that even though they pushed up on the attack the other team might be quicker on the transition, win the ball then counterattack and score. I told them this was ok and they needed to continue to push up as this is all about practice and learning. They needed to continue to **TAKE CHANCES**.

We should encourage the players to take chances not just with transitions but with dribbling, passes, shooting, trying to steal a ball etc. It is best that they make those attempts, take those chances, as they first are learning the sport. It is easier later to rein them back as necessary. Initially, we don't want to stifle those attempts.

Our coaches are putting players in roles they might not initially feel comfortable in to stretch a player's comfort level, get them to see the game differently or even to find a better player for that role. Some players take on these roles without a flinch, others battle coaches. At younger ages this may actually come at the expense of winning. But we believe this is how players grow and really learn the game.

Players and parents must realize that as players mature in the game their "position" is actually where they end up on the field not where the coach tells them to stand. When the game becomes fluid they had better know the responsibility they find themselves in as they switch in and out of "positions" during the natural flow of the game. For example a midfielder may find herself in the back, front or side of the field and better know what to do when she is there.

At younger ages (and even for older players that have not seemed to learn this yet), we all need to encourage players to **PLAY** first as opposed to executing exactly. We need to allow the "light bulb to come on" recognizing that this happens at different times for different players. Their "bulbs" will come more quickly and successfully when we adults realize that players have to experiment and just play.

Again, the real goal is to get these guys to try new moves, make runs up the field screaming for the ball, coming off the goal line to try to stuff a play, etc; to be comfortable in expressing themselves openly within the rules. We want to reward their taking chances and encourage their creativity and thinking for themselves.

Soccer is not a coach/sideline controlled game like baseball, football or basket ball. Rather it is a continuous game like hockey with little coach/sideline intervention during the match. The faster we can get our players to take chances and make their own decisions and corrections on the field, independent of constant sideline direction, the more successful they will become.



Keep up the support for your player, her teammates, your staff and even opponents and refs and this game. It's a great way to spend some fun family time watching our young players grow.

I look forward to watching your teams play again. They are becoming very skilled and are fun to watch.

Have fun!

Ed Skelly
NK Select