



A Developmental Philosophy

What is a Developmental Philosophy?

A developmental philosophy recognizes that:

- (1) Individuals develop (technically, tactically, physically, athletically, and psychologically) at different rates and different times. It is therefore important to be patient with each individual to allow that individual to develop at an acceptable and natural pace.
- (2) To develop effectively, individuals need to be placed in an optimal learning environment whenever possible (e.g. it does little to help the development of a classic player to be placed in a premier level environment).
- (3) Given the practical nature of running any organization, it may not always be possible to provide the optimal learning environment (e.g. if there are only 6 players who want to be assigned to a premier level team, the team cannot obviously be formed). However, a developmentally-based organization will strive to provide the best environment it can for all its participants.
- (4) It is natural for everyone involved (players, parents and coaches) to want to win. However, in soccer particularly, you can play much better than the opposing team and lose; or play much worse than your opponents and win. When everyone involved comes to understand this, winning in and of itself, is viewed in the proper perspective.
- (5) Part of learning to deal with a highly competitive environment is learning both how to win and how to lose.
- (6) In the hierarchy of importance, each participant's individual development comes first, then the team, then the club. If you take care to develop each individual in the group the team will (for the most part) take care of itself, and winning won't be a problem. The club functions merely as a vehicle through which we provide the environment for positive individual growth and development.
- (7) The vast majority of games (i.e. those that do not hinder possible future game experiences e.g. participation in an invitation-only tournament) are used to evaluate the training and preparation, which has previously taken place.
- (8) The long-term development of each individual should always take precedence over the short-term success of the team.
- (9) Learning how to win and what it takes to win is far more important than winning itself.
- (10) Being able to compete in a high intensity athletic environment is more important than winning in a high intensity environment.
- (11) Every participant is entitled to the highest level of coaching regardless of whether they are on the so called "A" team or "B" team. (Obviously this does not mean that your most experienced coach has to coach each team at every game-this is not possible. It does mean that your most experienced coach should be training every team as much as possible. With coordinated planning this can be readily accomplished.)
- (12) The development of each player is the yardstick by which a coach's effectiveness is measured-not his/her win/loss record!



Implementing a Developmental Philosophy

Implementing a developmental philosophy is not an easy task. The first obstacle that must be breached is to overcome existing “team” and “winning” oriented philosophies. This should be done primarily at pre-season team meetings (where the information in the above section is explained) and must be continually reinforced. Under most circumstances, coaches and staff members will not be able to convince everyone initially (or even everyone eventually) and it is typically impossible to overcome well-entrenched philosophies with just one meeting. *What leads most people to eventually believe is the philosophy in action* i.e. when people see the individual and team success it brings!

This leads us to the second obstacle: translating the philosophy into practical implementation or action. It is not possible here to provide a specific developmental answer for every question, concern or situation that might arise in the youth sports arena. However, by far the best guideline is: when facing any issue or decision, the first question a developmentally-based coach should ask is; “will the consequences of this decision hinder the long-term growth of the individuals of this team?”

To answer this question carefully, one must first look at the consequences. For example, if you’re considering getting your U-12 team to play a low risk, direct style of soccer (which many coaches teach) how will this affect the long-term technical and tactical development of your players? In this case it will have an adverse affect on individual development in these areas. Low risk soccer means defending players don’t play with any tactical or technical subtlety or sophistication. They are simply asked to “clear the ball” whenever they can. It’s certainly low-risk, but over the long-term your defenders will end up being the type of players who can clear the ball and do nothing else. After looking at the consequences and if the consequence does not seem to fit into a kind of soccer that develops technical and tactical subtlety and sophistication – do not worry about playing low risk soccer.

The second question asked is “will the short-term negative consequences of this decision have a negative effect on the long-term growth of the individual in this team?” This is not always an easy question to answer, primarily because the success of the individual is almost always psychologically attached to the success of the team, and these two components are difficult to separate. It’s important therefore to focus on how the individuals in the group are developing (and to continually reinforce this focus by word and deed) rather than individual losses in the short term.

In addition, a coach may often have to abrogate the development of one or two individuals in favor of the majority of the individuals on the team. Using the State Championship example, it would be unfair to the majority of the group to risk their future and further development so that one or two players, who may not be ready for it, are given the opportunity to participate in the Championship game.

In short then, the developmentally based coach or program director should continually ask the following questions:

(1) *“Will the consequences of this decision have a negative effect on the long-term growth of the individual or individuals on this team”?*

(2) *“Will the short-term negative consequences of this decision have a negative effect on the long-term growth of the individual or individuals in this team”?*

If the answer to either question is “yes” than the coach should find another solution that does not affect the long-term growth of the individual or individuals on this team.