

# The Intramural Scene

Nick Cirilli was named EPYSA's 1995 Intramural Coach of the Year. The following are from Nick's remarks at the most recent AGM, held last March

## Coaching

I guess if you stir the pot long enough you start to notice what makes up the stew. After twenty years of coaching youth soccer, ranging from four to fourteen, the "real" principles of coaching the young show themselves more and more with each dip of the coaching ladle. I have come to believe there are four key ingredients that are essential to coaching intramural soccer.

### **Listen! Listen! Listen to the Children**

Listen, not only with your ears but also with your eyes. No matter how good a practice you think you've planned, if the kids don't respond what good is it? Some days the children just won't swallow even the most perfectly planned session; the content may be a bit too much for the kids' stage of development or perhaps just too much for that day. Listen to the children and treat them as if they were your customers. You know what they need (soccer development), and they know what they want (fun, games, variety). Listen and give them what they *need* in a way they *want*... and your effectiveness will increase dramatically.

### **Find Success a Little at a Time**

The difference between motivating a child to be the best he/she can and pushing a child to be someone they are not is a very fine line, one which must be observed all the time. Of course we all want to motivate and not push... but how? From my perspective,

motivation to a child is: "If I try, I have a chance to succeed and even get recognition." Remember when your Child was on the brink of taking their first steps? Baby's eyes popping with enthusiasm, family encouraging with positive excitement... and then it



Nick Cirilli

happened. One small step for baby, one giant applause from family. Baby takes step, falls, shrugs it off and tries again. More applause, more effort from baby.

Why would anyone change their coaching style with children who are still just crawling in their soccer development. Measure success one small step at a time. A well-placed pass, a nice collection, a timely run to space... At the younger ages, don't measure performance with the final score. It is disastrous to try to get your crawling baby to be a sprinter.

### **Develop All the Children**

How easy it is to go through a season with the best of intentions to play everyone, rotating them to several different positions, preaching the philosophy of player development... until Sarah gets the best of you with her care-free, who-cares attitude. Suddenly you begin to justify to yourself why Sarah should get limited playing time. Besides, Jane is a much better finisher. Let's lock Jane in at striker and limit Sarah — after all, they're only nine and have plenty of time to develop other skills.

You have just taken the path of least resistance. You let your intellect, and even your own limitations, get in the way of your original vision. If you talk the talk and "believe" that everyone is important and worthy of equal development, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. Besides — at age fourteen, Sarah may just catch fire and, because of that pull-back move you taught her, make that jump to a higher level.

### **Strive to Improve Continuously...**

...in your knowledge of the game and in your knowledge and understanding of your players. Continuously seek new material in the technical areas of skill development and, at the same time, learn about the children. Check out what's happening with Big Bird; if the shape of the day was "circle", guess what the shape of your grid might be that practice. Integrate your soccer plan with your knowledge of the children and give them exactly what they want: soccer coached in their language and on their terms (lots of fun and enthusiasm). You may just find you are giving the kids a lot more than soccer — they may be getting a life-long self-confidence that tells them "If I try, I can succeed at *anything*."

Keep stirring the pot! ☺

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