

DEVOS: THE TRUTH ABOUT LONG-TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

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There have been a number of articles published recently, questioning the logic behind the Canadian Soccer Association's Long-Term Player Development program (LTPD), the soccer-specific adaptation of Sport Canada's Long-Term Athlete Development program (LTAD).

The most recent article appeared in the [National Post](#) and questioned the wisdom of removing scores and standings from youth soccer below the age of 12. To quote some of the critics:

"I'm not into the philosophy of not keeping score, because it does matter and anyone who says it doesn't matter is full of it..."

"Sports, by nature, is competition. Life is competition.... It's a good lesson for them to win and it's a good lesson for them to lose."

What these critics fail to understand – in all likelihood because they have never taken the time to actually read about LTPD and the science upon which it is based – is that LTPD actually promotes the teaching of winning and losing. The only difference is, LTPD teaches kids these life lessons when they are emotionally and psychologically mature enough to understand the concepts.

Do kids need to learn that life is competitive? Absolutely.

Do kids need to learn that there are winners and losers in sport, and by extension, in all walks of life? Of course they do.

Do kids need to learn those lessons when they are 8, 9, 10 or 11 years old, by putting them in a win-at-all-costs development system before they have even acquired the skills through which those lessons can be taught? Absolutely not.

The unspoken, unwritten truth about the changes being made to youth soccer in Canada is that they are the result of your failures. You – the coaches who are out there criticizing the principles of LTPD as political correctness run amok – have failed.

You have failed to understand that your primary role as a coach is to educate; to teach your players to master the fundamental skills needed to succeed in the game over a lifetime.

You have failed to understand that winning is the byproduct of correct player development, not the source. You have put the outcome ahead of the process; in doing so, you have done your players – your students of the game – a monumental disservice.

You have put your own desire to win a \$5 trophy ahead of your responsibility to create a safe, enjoyable learning environment for your players, one in which they can all be challenged to maximize their potential as soccer players.

If anyone should be 'outraged', it should be your players; you have put your own goals ahead of their development.

LTPD needs to be implemented because you were unable, or unwilling, to teach your players the fundamentals of the game under the current development system, one that rewards those that win and punishes those that lose.

You were unable, or unwilling, to put the development of your players ahead of your own personal quest for 'glory'.

While people like you - critics masquerading as coaches - are blatantly obvious to those with a professional background in player development, the implementation of LTPD will now expose you to unsuspecting parents, as well.

The 'Joystick Coach', who barks and screams at his players in an attempt to control their every move. You do nothing but confuse your players, often leading them to quit the game due to a lack of enjoyment.

The 'Nearly Made It Coach', who is trying to revive his own failed soccer career through the lives of his players. You spend all of your time telling your players that they aren't good enough to 'make it', when in reality it is you who failed to make the grade.

The 'Dynasty Coach', who spends all of his time looking for and recruiting better players from other clubs or academies. You want to build a team that can 'win it all', and you do a marvelous job of convincing parents that their child is the missing ingredient that will be the difference between failure and glory. Your actions cover up the fact that you simply cannot teach the players currently in your team.

These coaches, and others like them, will be exposed when the focus in youth soccer shifts away from the current win-at-all-costs system to a progressive LTPD-based, child-centric development system.

Still don't agree? Still think that winning is the key factor that needs to be taught to 10-year olds in order for us to turn Canada into a competitive soccer nation? Here's a challenge for you then, critics.

Find me one Canadian professional soccer player, or one Canadian National team player that will tell you that the most important factor in their development as a youngster was winning trophies. Find me just one player who will tell you that the box of trophies they won as a child - now collecting dust in their basement - is the reason they 'made it' to the highest level of the game.

Because I will find hundreds who will tell you that the most important factor in their development as a youngster was a coach who taught them the importance of mastering the fundamentals; a coach who inspired them to put in the countless hours of repetitive practice needed to master those fundamentals and to be the best; a coach who sacrificed his or her own personal ambition in order to put the development of his or her players at the front of the line.

LTPD is not about the removal of competition from youth soccer, nor is it about the abolition of winning and losing below the age of 12. It is about giving more kids the opportunity to learn and master the fundamentals required for lifelong enjoyment and success in the game of soccer.

And if you don't understand that by now, I don't think you ever will.

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