

The Importance of Youth Coaching Education

By Rob Biondolillo

In his interview with US Soccer, national team coach Jurgen Klinsmann discussed youth coaching. He mentions style of play and the importance of coaching education. It is very much true that Klinsmann, Tab Ramos, Dave Chesler and others he mentions are far removed from day-to-day youth soccer at the grassroots level. We will likely never see them even close to our fields, and leadership from a distance and a height can be disappointingly disconnected - almost just theoretical.

Whatever the problems of American soccer and youth soccer - there are many - Klinsmann is not alone in voicing that the key to all of this is what we do while coaching thousands of times over at the grassroots level. We work with kids of all ages and abilities every day during the season. Very often, we work with kids year-round for many years. During that time, players learn each day - for good or bad. The idea that coaches also never stop learning, and need to invest time in themselves is a widely supported one. We have to be equal to the task, and at least equal in coaching ability as the ability of the players' we have with us. It doesn't matter if the players are out for a good time and enjoy soccer recreationally, or are slowly building the blocks of their playing career to last for years, they all learn what coaches have the capacity to help them discover.



ASA Ambush Boys U8 Pre-Travel

Coaches get used to the idea of looking at players and sorting out which ones are more skilled than others. Even at young ages, we often have that natural inclination when we view the field. All of us who coach and teach should also realize that what we see is partially a mirror. Sometimes what we see is a reflection of what we know, and how good we are at teaching it. How things work is also a reflection of organization and leadership - leadership being one thing sadly lacking almost universally in sport coaching education. In soccer, the best coaches are the ones who are good on the ball, AND know the game, AND organize/communicate effectively, AND can lead by drawing people to them. Just as a player can't be "good enough" at fundamental ball skills, coaches can never be good enough at any single one of those traits. There is no such thing as "I know enough." Coaches should have the awareness that they too are viewed on ability level by others.

Soccer coaches are all different. Soccer is universally the one single sport that we can play about as soon as we can walk. We coach an amazing spread of player ages, abilities and outlooks. Its certain that we will not be the players only coach - they will have many over a lifetime. No matter what level we are at, players will universally move up, and move on to higher skilled teams with coaches at a higher skill level. Not only will it happen, that's generally what we're after! It's also true that all coaches effect players differently. It's easy to spot cases where a generally good coach never seems to reach a few particular players and the players suffer, yet another coach comes in and the same players just take off. A coach may be great at U8, effective at U12, and hopelessly lost at U18, or the other way around. Add in the idea that there are coaches who DEVELOP players and other coaches who simply collect them,

and it starts to get complicated.

The easiest way to look at it is where we're mostly the same. We all have our own abilities and our own roles to play. Wherever circumstances happen to find us, we know that we should aim to deliver the best we can to those players - at whatever play level we are at when we wake up tomorrow morning. That's where we're needed. To do that, coaches need the best from themselves.



Go take the coaching courses that come up. They may be two hours at the Rec level, or two weeks at highest levels, but they all are the next step. Learn from materials that are readily available and gather what works for you. Go see games! Especially go watch games that are a few seasons ahead or a few play levels ahead of you. Talk with more experienced coaches and go watch them practice. None of this takes more than a few minutes out of a few days. Most coaches, I expect, hope that their strikers for example go out into their yards or a field somewhere and work on shooting on their own when not in a team practice. One can imagine that the boy or girl striker working in their yard on many days should probably wonder, if they are aware enough, whether their coach has the same spirit.

See the Klinsmann Article at Youth Soccer Insider, <http://www.socceramerica.com/article/55504/klinsmanns-message-to-youth-coaches.html>

For the full interview with US Soccer, see:
<http://www.ussoccer.com/news/coaching-education/2013/12/131219-klinsmann-qa-coaching-education.aspx>

Arundel Soccer supports its coaches by paying for coach licensing from the two hour US Youth Soccer U6 Youth Module and six hour NSCAA Level 2 course, to the multi-day "D" level courses automatically. ASA pays for "C" and higher courses for long term club coaches on approval. Arundel Soccer also provides ASA Soccer 101 lesson plans to all coaches U12 and below free of charge, as well as US Youth Soccer DVD's and booklets, and materials on the ASA YouTube Channel. ASA is beginning to create its own series of video sessions aimed specifically for recreational, developmental and young travel coaches, and holds quarterly coaching continuing education field sessions.

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Klinsmann's message to youth coaches

By Mike Woitalla

Jurgen Klinsmann , head coach of the USA since July of 2011, earlier this month was re-signed for another four years and Technical Director was added to his responsibilities. That, in USSF President Sunil Gulati' s words, formalized Klinsmann's previously informal role in influencing the direction of American player development.

In a USSoccer.com interview, Klinsmann addressed youth development issues. On the style of play he'd like to see at the younger levels, Klinsmann said:

“We would love to see a consistent style of play over time that is defined by being more proactive and more possession-oriented.

“We want more confident players who have the technical abilities to play out of the back and to play out of difficult situations and really take the game to the opponent. We would like to improve the way we play against bigger nations by facing them eye to eye and having a 50/50 share of possession. We want to signal to them that we are here to play; we're not just sitting back and hoping for a counter break. ...

“That's a lot of work obviously, and it also requires special talent. The key to all of this is the work that we do on the grassroots level through our Academies to develop our own players. To transition to a style of play that is more proactive and more dominant is a long-term project.”

U.S. U-20 coach Tab Ramos , who has also been assisting Klinsmann with the senior team, was named U.S. Soccer Youth Technical Director in November.

“The responsibility we gave Tab Ramos is really important because he's the connector to all topics in the youth sector,” said Klinsmann. “He's the connector to our youth coaches, Javier Perez with the U18s, Richie Williams with the U17s, Hugo Perez with the U15s, and Tony Lepore with the U14s. It's important that he becomes like a think tank of topics where we need improvement.

“We need to get more messages out there. He's becoming a very important messenger of many different things that we need to get out to the players, to the parents, to the coaches. Hopefully we can intensify this relationship and use it in a very productive way.”

In the year-end address, Klinsmann encouraged youth coaches to take advantage of coaching education opportunities. The U.S. Soccer coaching schools are headed by Dave Chesler , the Director of Coaching Development.

“I think the topic of Coaching Education unfortunately is often not recognized enough,” Klinsmann said. “Dave Chesler and his team of instructors are really building the foundation for the future of knowledge in our coaching education. That foundation will benefit everyone involved in the game based on the knowledge they spread to coaches in the licensing courses. His role is priceless. It's so important and it's something that we have to build on more and more.

“We have to have regular get-togethers with Dave and his team in order to always question if we are giving out the right information to coaches.

“What is the best way to communicate with kids? What are the main issues coaches have to think about? What additional information can we give coaches to pass on to the kids, to the parents, and to other coaches?

“I think it's the highest priority for every coach to get his licenses upgraded, one step at a time but as quickly as possible, because it's the highest sign of credibility. If you do not have your coaching license you do not have credibility. If parents send their boy or their girl to school, and the teacher doesn't have the highest teaching

license, they would question the school. They would probably change schools and take action right away. It's the same with soccer."