

## Why a Soccer Club and Travel Soccer?

Your kids are important to you. If soccer is a sport they love and enjoy playing, then you want to do good things for them. That generally means giving them time to learn the game, making sure they have good coaches, and finding the best opportunities for them to grow and develop as players. Your kids started out in Rec leagues, like all kids do before age 8. It was fun, your kids learned, and they came away really enjoying playing. They are pretty athletic, and its clear they want to keep playing and have some potential.

## So why Club/Travel Soccer and what is it?

Travel soccer is a general term for teams and leagues that play more than local competition and have a higher level selection process for players to be able to join. It can also be called "Select" or "Classic". Teams are more balanced with capabilities more equal, and there is always an evaluation or tryout process. It is also inherently competitive at all levels.

In our area, travel soccer is distinguished from "in-house" recreational play and from "local" semi-competitive leagues. "In-house" programs most often play against teams within their own organization, and are based solely on sign-ups. If you want to play, you register and get placed on a team. This is perfect for newer players, or kids who just look for fun and exercise. "Local" or semi-competitive leagues will play against other neighborhoods or other nearby towns. These local leagues, such as the Anne Arundel County League, generally take players at all ages based on sign-ups and only at the higher play level divisions is there an evaluation process. Pressures of competition are minimized. This too is great for young players with developing skills who need time - mentally or physically - to reach a higher level of play. Anne Arundel County is very fortunate to have a robust league at the semi-competitive level.

Travel soccer is played regionally, with higher demands on players and parents to meet requirements by the team, club and league. It may or may not cost more, but it does require more time and a higher level of skill, good attitude, and perseverance from the player. Parents have to be more dedicated, able to get kids to practices and games regularly, and sometimes drive farther to do it.

So why travel soccer with a soccer club? What does it do for me and my child? What's different?

1) **BETTER COACHING:** On the whole, coaches of travel teams have longer coaching experience, more training, coach licensing, and more personal experience. Ability, time available and dedication are higher. At the higher travel levels, the coaches may be experienced high school or college coaches, former collegiate,

semi-pro or professional players. They can be nationally licensed coaches with significant education in the soccer business. Some coaches are paid because of their skill and experience as a profession, and others can be equally accomplished and skilled volunteers. There is NO SUBSTITUTE for sustained, long term training that experienced coaches can deliver, and club travel soccer is where those coaches are.

2) **BALANCED TEAMS:** Travel teams normally have a collection of players who don't have a wide disparity of ability. The selection process creates a balance and allows players of similar ability to work together. Kids have reliable teammates, and coaches can run more effective, targeted training that meets players needs.

3) **"TEAM" CULTURE AND SUPPORT:** Players on travel teams often have similar interests and purposes. A typical 11 year old player may have a high interest in playing High School soccer and parents looking for good preparation, or a 16 year old player may anticipate playing in college. Parents have other parents on the team thinking about the same issues, and kids have other teammates they can identify with. People always learn from those around them, and the soccer "culture" is prevalent in travel soccer programs.

4) **BETTER REFEREE'S:** Referee's are also trained and licensed, and as you might suspect, more experienced referees are assigned to higher level games. Novice referees are not assigned to college or professional games, for obvious reasons, and the same is true of youth soccer.

5) **MORE CHALLENGING EXPERIENCES:** The play level itself helps to produce better players. Play is challenging and requires players to go out onto the field and do their best. Skilled opponents will deliver lessons during the game, and your player learns from each small failure or success. The game teaches the game, and in this case, the game filled with good opponents delivers rewards for good play, and quick learning from mistakes.

6) **CLUB STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION:** Soccer clubs have a structure that organizes and supports what they do. Soccer clubs will have specific league managers, a Technical Director, Directors of Coaching, Development Directors, trainers, and a wide variety of people working beyond the individual teams. A soccer club often has more people focused on the technical aspects of what it does than recreational organizations have people at all. A soccer club also has one function – to make better teams, better coaches, and better players.

7) **PREPARATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL PLAY.** Players younger than age U14/U15 who have the desire to play in High School have an obstacle to face. High School soccer is inherently competitive for student-athletes. While High School rosters are normally a little larger, kids still have to compete even to get on a team, and have to be good enough to make sure they have reasonable play time. Players

play based solely on their ability to contribute to their team. In most cases, there are more players wanting to play than space available on teams, and there are player "cuts". Sometimes there are many cuts. There are "starters" and there are substitutes in more defined team roles. In a competitive process, the best preparation for players is in a club travel program. The most successful High School players are those who prepare early and enjoy it!

Travel soccer is not for everyone. Its not meant to be. There are teams, clubs and leagues for all play levels, and whats best for a kid is what matches their interest and their ability. If your kid does enjoy the game and seems to be good at it, parents and coaches should want to provide a match for their players. Parents need to "do their homework" by understanding their kids, researching their teams, coaches and clubs, and building a good path for their players. Travel soccer is a big part of youth soccer and can - in the right hands - deliver on its potential to develop kids into good players in their chosen sport.