

Comparing the US Soccer Environment to the World's Soccer Environment

It is staggering to think about the differences between our "top" youth player's development and those in other Countries. Even more staggering is the lack of communication (maybe awareness) or leadership from our federation about the amount of work (hours spent training), the manner of work (hours of training the proper content), and the necessity to keep players playing into adulthood (you never know who has the mettle, the desire, the mentality, the ability, the luck).

Our "top" youth players compete against "elite" youth players in "elite" Clubs, who must be required by the US Federation to train three days a week.

Our "top" players play high school soccer or College soccer, sometimes pitting 14 year olds against 18 year old players (in high school soccer) or 18 year old against 22 - 23 year old players (in College soccer).

Their top players train almost double the hours of most of our players with trainers committed to their profession, committed to learning and committed to the advancement of their players.

Our "top" youth players must pay \$4,000 - \$8,000 per year to play in the US Academy League. Their top youth players pay nothing.

Our "top" youth players look up and see shrinking MLS rosters, College programs which are limited to 5 months of soccer a year, and a Federation that all but ignores players once they have left youth soccer.

Their top players see five divisions of professional soccer in Italy, two professional divisions in Germany (with significant money being made into the third division and some money earned into the sixth division), two divisions in Holland and federations recognizing the importance of continued development of players from 17 - 23 years of age - and beyond.

Our "top" players stay in their age group or are kept in their age group, to win State Cups or other events. Their top players are pushed up, from an early age, to ensure they are developing their ability - not succeeding due to size and athleticism rather their "footballing" ability.

Our "top" players often play for Clubs with little vision or plan for youth development, and are dependent on the qualities of their individual coach, they often play in Clubs with little or no cooperation between coaches, teams and age groups - sometimes with decisions concerning travel and training made by parents or managers.

Their top players compete in Clubs, who have a vision on youth development, with a boss - who ensures the coaches are placing individual over team development, with an emphasis placed on training enough times (yearly, monthly, yearly) to allow players to develop specific areas of their game.

Our "top" players have little or no exposure to top level live soccer, with youth clubs placing little or no emphasis on encouraging youngsters to attend College, PDL or NPSL, or MLS games.

Their top players are required to attend their first (professional) team games, allowed to be ballboys for these matches and thereby encouraged to dream of playing in the stadium.

Our "top" youth players, compete against their age group peers.

Their top youth players move up age groups to challenge and develop or into the adult ranks, when ready, to compete against their "ability" peers.

Our "top" youth players are selected at age 14-15-16-17 to compete in National Teams by coaches, with some interest in the players development, but also the results of the team - in order to keep their job.

Their top youth players are selected at all ages, by Clubs who possess the vision to develop the players, into professional players when they mature physically, mentally, tactically and technically, with coaches who will be fired if they place victory over development development before victory to keep their job!

Our "top" 30-40 players are selected at 15-16 years of age, for residency in Florida, in order to develop them for the National Teams, the professional game or colleges.

Their top players take up hundreds of spots (40 professional Clubs in Holland, with 18-22 spots per age group, 36 professional Clubs in Germany with 18-22 spots per age group, 60 + Italian Clubs, and so on) offered by the professional and top level amateur Clubs that are committed to developing the talents of their youngsters both as a philosophy and a business model. (the Italian U15 National team was together 5 days in 2008).

Our "top" players, with exception for the "lucky" draft picks, fade away after high school or college, with those trying to continue to play the "beautiful game" facing a nomadic existence moving from A League Team to PDL/NPSL team to indoor team or playing for an adult league team in an anonymous league.

Their top players are offered opportunities to play in well structured adult leagues, run by the Federation, which allow those who do not make it at 18 to continue play into their thirties, while pursuing a career - and just maybe reach a professional level, through promotion with their club - or through excelling at their level. — If not, they can enjoy soccer close to home in a well structured Federation run league.

Our "top" players play in "top" clubs who are generally well intentioned, but who either lack the awareness, the willingness or the desire (it requires a lot of patient work) to offer the program or demand the work necessary to really create top level players. If they do a superior job they receive little reward - with even colleges listing high schools, not clubs on the players history.

Their Clubs are professionally run, clear in their mission, handsomely rewarded, often cutting edge in their approach, totally committed to developing the talents of their players for their first team and with the ability to be patient with their players.

Our “top” players compete in the Federation's academy league with estimated costs per players ranging from \$4000 - \$8000 per player*.

Their top players play in a league which gives them sufficient competition, one game per weekend, and they attend a few tournaments chosen to give the players the experience necessary to reach the next level.

A club recently estimated the cost for two teams to be \$250,000. Subtract \$75,000 from this number — to make up for exaggerations and/or varying costs according to travel needs - and you still have the federation providing a program costing the soccer community conservatively \$17,500,000 - yes, seventeen million dollars - with much spent on travel.

There are actually Academy Clubs that have to leave players at home because they cannot afford the travel. They have travel teams and home teams dependent not on soccer skills, but on family income.

Our “top” players compete in Clubs that offer nothing for them after they graduate from youth soccer - waving good bye as they part for College soccer or an unknown adult league - most not even offering a Club membership program as away to stay connected to the club they grew up with - emotionally or financially.

Their Clubs offer soccer for most players from 10 to 50 years of age, a shared connection to a Club (often shared through generations of families), a social group, a clubhouse and friendship or for the top players a cutting edge professional organization committed to developing the soccer talents, education and character of their players.

Something has to happen in this country. Coaches need to slow down the player/coach/parent frenzy to travel to be “seen” or to “win” - at what cost?

It is much less expensive to have a coach travel to a Central location to watch 100 players than to have 100 players travel a far away places to be seen by coaches who have also traveled.

As coaches lessen their concerns about competing at events around the country, they can begin to create individual development plans for 3-5 years, and finally follow the world's model for developing the talents of their players.

The Soccer Boards and the DOC's need to insist!

If you want to be a “top” club offer the number of trainings offered by top professional clubs in Europe:

- 2 - 3 per week ages 8 - 11
- 3 - 4 per week ages 12 - 14

— 4 - 8 per week ages 15 - 18

If you want to be a top club insist your younger coaches emphasize technical, physical and individual tactical development, insist they educate themselves, insist they attend coaching courses, read books, open up and learn. Insist they put the player before the win and the training before the game!

If you want to be a soccer club of any level make the development of a “soccer culture” a priority. Schedule college games, NPSL and PDL games, MLS and National team games into the training plan as professional clubs do. Form adult teams, over 30 teams, coed teams and become a soccer club in the World’s sense of the word.

It does little to invest time and energy into a player who quits by age 14. It does little to offer a program of any level which does not encourage or stimulate an involvement with a wonderful sport — for a lifetime. Create a culture of playing year round, playing on your own, watching the game, supporting the game and playing the game for your entire life.

It does little to invest so much time and energy into a player who does not train enough on their own, does not train enough in their club and eventually will lack the ability to compete at a high level.

It is wrong to ignore the example offered up by the World's Soccer Community year after year!

The world has done it and does it - today. Why shouldn't we here in America?

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