

**Parent Handbook: 2016-2017**



Competitive Soccer Program  
of the  
Clovis Junior Soccer League

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**Clovis Junior Soccer League**  
**50 W. Bullard Ave. #109**  
**Clovis, CA 93612**  
[www.cjssl.info](http://www.cjssl.info)  
**(559) 325-2575**  
**Fax: (559) 298-6997**

### **Clovis Crossfire Committee Members**

Executive Director – Robert Stewart  
Assistant Program Director – Chad Moran  
Secretary – Kristin Hernandez  
Boys Technical Director – Danny Amparano  
Girls Technical Director – David Selecky  
Youth Technical Director – Shawn Grieco  
Finance/Registrar (Younger Teams) – Elba Gomez  
Finance/Registrar (Older Teams) – Orlando Ramirez  
Fields – Greg Alavezos  
Uniforms – David Gomez  
Manager Coordinator – Vacant  
Player Advocate – John Gross  
Volunteer Coordinator – Vacant  
Webmaster/Marketing – Elba Gomez

### **Clovis Junior Soccer League**

Gold Vice President – John Hancock  
Director of Coaching – Tommy Alioto

## **Mission Statement**

Clovis Crossfire will strive to be the best program in US Club, Cal-North, and the Nation. We will offer training that will help our players reach their full potential. We are genuinely interested in educating the players and parents and will not compromise our ethics or integrity, in the name of profit.

Clovis Crossfire will change the way people perceive a competitive soccer program and build into each team a level of quality, performance, and value that will earn the respect and loyalty of the players and parents.

## **Introduction**

The Clovis Junior Soccer League (CJSL) has been bringing soccer to the kids of Clovis for almost four decades. Over four years ago, we developed a competitive program to complement the Recreational program, as more and more kids seek the opportunity to substantially hone their skills.

The Clovis Crossfire Competitive Soccer Program (Crossfire) is managed by a variety of individuals who serve on the Clovis Crossfire Committee. Some are paid contractors because of the expertise needed in attending to specific functions needed by Crossfire. The majority of the policy and organizational implementation are handled by both the contractors and volunteers serving on the Committee. These dedicated people spend thousands of hours bringing soccer to your children. We hope you will consider joining us in this venture as a volunteer.

An important purpose of this Handbook is to explain our basic philosophical approach to the teaching of soccer. We will attempt to take you through a typical year:

- General Guidelines for competitive soccer
- Placements (evaluations/tryouts)
- Practice Season
- Tournament Play
- Player and Coach/Program Evaluations
- Cup Play

Another purpose of this Handbook is to provide answers to many of the questions players and parents might have during the course of the year. A considerable number of policy questions will be discussed in this Handbook. Please use this Handbook as a reference before going to the trouble of sending e-mails or making phone calls.

We do value your opinions. If you find an answer to a question in the Handbook or on the web site which does not satisfactorily address your specific concerns, or if you believe the suggested resolution is incorrect, please send an e-mail with your proposal to the appropriate Committee member (Addresses may be found on the web. They are not included in this document as they may change frequently and the web site will have up-to-date information). Crossfire will hold about eight to ten Committee meetings annually. You are encouraged to attend and participate. You will find dates and location on the web site.

### ***Chain of Communication (problem escalation process)***

We place this topic first for a reason. You have begun to read this Handbook with the best of intentions, but we realize that its length and complexity will lead most, if not all, of you to read a little, then scan a lot. We know that during the course of the year, everyone will see things that are not right, that seem unfair to your child or other members of the Program. We want you to make us aware of these issues so we can correct any wrongs or injustices or, at least, offer explanations. However, we have established, based on years of experience, a means of handling these issues more efficiently.

1. E-mail the source first (probably the coach or trainer). *This is not always easy, but it must be the first step.* Please communicate in a respectful tone, and if you have not received a reply within 4 days or you are unable to resolve the matter in this manner, you should proceed to the next step 2.
2. E-mail Technical Staff (Directors & DOC). If you have not received a reply within 4 days or you are unable to resolve the matter in this manner, you should proceed to the next step 3.

3. E-mail the Assistant Program Director. If you have not received a reply within 4 days or you are unable to resolve the matter in this manner, you should proceed to the next step 4.
4. E-mail the Executive Director and allow 4 days for a response.

Email addresses can be found here:

<http://www.cloviscrossfire.com/crossfire-committee.html>

We will distinguish between the Recreational Program and the Competitive Program, as they are largely distinct in many of their goals. But there are some similarities. If there is a soccer-related issue, the coach is always the first person for a player or parents to approach. If there is a financial need please discuss that directly with the Team Manager first. If the Team Manager has not responded to you within seven (7) days, contact your Financial/Registrar for your age group, whose e-mail address is [registrar@cloviscrossfire.com](mailto:registrar@cloviscrossfire.com)

Not everything will run smoothly. A player or parent may feel uncomfortable or ill treated by some event. We know there may be problems on every team and the Program wants to hear all sides of any issue, but many problems are easily resolved when discussed in a respectful way. The suggested method of communication is e-mail, unless time is a critical factor (if safety is involved, for example). Email allows one to compose one's thoughts and to think of the merits of what may be a spur-of-the-moment reaction to an event. The respondent also has time to think before giving an off-the-cuff rebuttal. Follow-up questions may be posed in a thoughtful manner when an email response is sent.

### ***Parent/Coach Communication***

#### **Communication You Should Expect From the Coach (can be conveyed through team manager)**

1. Coaching philosophy
2. Expectations for all players for the season
3. Location and times of all practices, tournaments and games
4. Discipline policies/procedures for your child should this become necessary

#### **Communication Coaches Expect From Parents**

1. Notification of any schedule conflicts well in advance
2. Any specific medical problems that could adversely impact your child's performance and/or safety
3. Specific concerns about coaching philosophy and/or expectations

#### **Appropriate Concerns to Discuss With Coaches**

1. Specific concerns regarding how to help your child improve or in what areas your child should focus on improving
2. Family concerns that may have an emotional impact on your child and participation in practices and/or games

#### **Issues NOT Appropriate to Discuss With Coaches**

1. Playing time
2. Lineups
3. Substitutions
4. Other players
5. Items outside of official team functions (i.e. practices, games, team dinners, team parties) such as social media, posting of pictures to public sites open to anyone to post

It is difficult to accept that your child may not be playing as much as you would like but you must respect the coach's decisions. The coach is making these decisions based on what they believe to be best for the team as well as the players.

### ***Ways to Contact a Coach***

1. It is never acceptable to contact a coach, prior to, during or immediately after a practice or game.
2. If there is an issue, a 24 hour cooling off period will be in effect in which you must not contact the coach or others involved in the situation.
3. Following the 24 hour cooling off period, contact your coach via email with any questions or concerns.

## ***Program Expectations of Players***

We ask all players to understand and abide by the specific commitments that they need to make to be a competitive player. You can find more information and resources under the 'player's corner' on the Crossfire website.

Crossfire is all about you, the player. Everything we do is to make your soccer "experience" the best it can be. As a player you should...

- Play for the fun of it, not just to please your parents or coach.
- Play by the rules.
- Never argue with or complain about the referees calls or decisions
- Control your temper and most of all, resist the temptation to retaliate when you feel you have been wronged.
- Concentrate on playing soccer and on affecting the outcome of the game with your best effort. Work equally hard for your team as for yourself.
- Be a good sport by cheering all good plays, whether it is your teams or your opponents. Treat all players as you would like to be treated.
- Remember that the goals of the game are to have fun, improve skills and feel good. Don't be a showoff or a ball hog.
- Cooperate with your coaches, teammates, opponents, and the referee.

### ***Player Responsibility***

Being a competitive player now requires that you take on another level of responsibility for yourself as a student-athlete. It is no longer enough to admit to your coaches that you are not fully ready for training, and that you have not made any investment in your own development besides the formal training time set aside by the team. What follows are some practical suggestions that you can adhere to in order to make the most of your individual or team training times. It is most fun to be playing the game, so we need to do everything in our power to make sure we are ready.

### ***Ready To Play***

Players should bring with them to every training session the following:

Inflated Ball	Emergency phone numbers
Their own water bottle	Training uniform
Shin Guards	Mini ball pump
Cleats/indoor/running shoes	Keepers – bring your gloves
Tape	Extra shoelaces
No jewelry, including watches	

In short, you should be ready for anything! Put these items in your bag the night before your session so that you do not have to hunt them down and thus be late for training the next day! Try to be at practice 10- 15 minutes early, in time to get your gear on so that you are ready to start on time. Remember, if you have a flat ball or no shin guards...fitness!

### ***Practicing On Your Own***

The best thing that you can do is get your friends together, set up a field, choose sides and play. Sometimes, invite players that are older than you, and better. The most important thing is that you play, whether it is 1v1, 2v2, 4v4, or even 2v3, it doesn't matter, just play. You can play games or work on the skills you do at training. If you can't get others to join you, spend as much time with the ball as you can. Find a wall to kick against, invent juggling games for yourself, try to chip a ball into a garbage can from various distances, be creative, and have fun. Above all, realize that

it is not up to your coach or your parents in order for you to get better. You have to claim responsibility for your own development. Once you realize how fun it is to play the game with skill, you may never want to stop!

### ***What Does It Take To Be An Athlete?***

Being an athlete does not imply merely wearing the uniform and being just a member of the squad. There are many more important phases to think about if you want to be a winner not only in soccer but in life as well. Your coaches want to impress upon you with the importance of the following qualities absolutely necessary for every good athlete.

Are you "coach-able"? Can you take coaching? Can you take criticism without ever looking for an alibi?

Are you possessed with the spirit of competition, which fires an intense desire to win?

Do you want to win with a passion - never taking "no" for an answer when there is a job to be done - a tackle to be made - a shot to be taken - a pass to make?

Does it bother you to lose?

Are you willing to practice? Not just reporting and putting in the necessary time but working every day with the same zeal, speed, and determination you use during a ball game?

Do you have two speeds: a practice speed and a game speed? The great athletes have one speed, and it is the same speed every day, every practice and every game. If you loaf and cheat in practice you will loaf and cheat you and your teammates in the game.

Are you willing to make sacrifices?

Conditioning to play is not fun. It is not easy. It is time-consuming and demanding. Training is designed to accomplish specific objectives; the responsibility is heavy. It is rough and includes personal denials in order to remain in match condition, but it has its rewards. The only way for you to remain in good shape is never to get out of it.

Do you have the desire to improve?

Are you willing to practice the things you cannot do three times longer than the things you can do?

Are you willing to put in long grinding hours, concentrating on skill until you perfect it?

Are you eager to work diligently at the skills you lack until they eventually become your strongest assets?

Do you have the ability to think under fire?

Can you concentrate on the work to be accomplished at the moment? Can you shut out from your mind a previous failure, success, rule infraction, or personal insult in order to give undivided attention to the offensive and defensive maneuver in the here and now? Games are not won by yesterday's score, but by what is happening now, at this moment. Good athletes play every play up to their best ability never depending on past success to aid them.

Are you willing to be impersonal toward your opponents?

Do you shut out all personal feelings about your opponent except to take the ball from him as often and as quickly as you can in accordance with the rules? Our experiences have taught us that the moment a player becomes personal he plays only to release individual grievances and ceases to play soccer as a team member.

Will you strive daily to improve your muscular coordination and speed?

Soccer is a game of movement. Daily activities will speed up your reaction time and improve your technical speed. Speed and coordination are necessary ingredients for a winning combination. Only through hard work can improvement take place. Players who lack these two physical qualities can help themselves and their team by improving in other attributes.

Do you believe in your team, your coach? Your team is as good as you make it. Your coach has the responsibility of coaching, not his team, but your team. Are you willing to work toward the spirit of oneness so that everyone possesses the feeling of belonging through his or her contributions to the team?

Are you willing to study as hard now as you did before coming out for soccer?

Soccer was never meant to take the place of studies. This involves realignment in your time schedule. If soccer will consume two hours of your day then you must draw time not from scholastic program but from hours previously devoted to personal pursuits. If you must eliminate something from your schedule it must not be study time. First thing comes first, and your academics are of a paramount importance.

## ***Program Expectations of Parents***

Parents are vital to our organization. Support your child, your coach, and the referees. Encourage your child to respect the referees, coach, and 'honor the game'.

### **Parents' Code**

#### ***Parental Support - The Key to Your Child's Performance***

The role that the parents play in the life of a soccer player has a tremendous impact on their experience. With this in mind, we have taken some time to write down some helpful reminders for all of us as we approach the upcoming season. If you should have any questions about these thoughts, please feel free to discuss them with your technical director, or with your team manager.

#### ***Let the coaches coach:***

Leave the coaching to the coaches. This includes motivating, psyching your child for practice, after game critiquing, setting goals, requiring additional training, etc. You have entrusted us with the care of your player and we need to be free to do our job. If a player has too many coaches, it is confusing for them and their performance usually declines.

#### ***Support the program:***

Get involved. Volunteer. Help out with fundraisers, car-pool; anything to support the program.

#### ***Support and root for all players on the team:***

Foster teamwork. Your child's teammates are not the enemy. When they are playing better than your child, your child has a wonderful opportunity to learn.

#### ***Encourage your child to talk to the coaches:***

If they are having difficulties in practice or games, or can't make a practice, etc., encourage them to speak directly to the coaches. This "taking ownership/responsibility" is a big part of becoming a big-time player. By handling the off-field tasks, your child is claiming ownership of all aspects of the game - preparation as well as playing the game.

#### ***Understand and display appropriate game behavior:***

Remember, your child models the behaviors you set forth for them. If you are a distraction on the sideline, your child (and others) may display the same type of game day behavior. If possible, be quietly enthusiastic and supportive. However, for those of you whose participation in and familiarity with other sports (football, basketball, baseball and so on) have ingrained in you an irresistible need to yell and scream during a sporting event, then we make the following suggestions.

#### ***List of Approved Cheers***

"Win the ball!" The team that is aggressive in gaining and keeping possession of the ball usually wins.

"Let's go Crossfire – you can do it!" A good, general purpose yell for a parent who feels compelled to yell something. It fits almost every occasion

"Nice pass (or "shot", or "throw-in", or "save", and so on)" A nice, short yell, for a parent concerned that if too much is said, ignorance of the game may be revealed.

"Keep hustling, Crossfire!" Another good, all purpose cheer.

#### ***List of Prohibited Cheers***

Any sentence or phrase, which starts with, ends with, or includes the word, "Referee" or

"Linesman" For example, "Are you blind, Referee?" or "She's offside, Mr. Linesman--get in the game!"

"Kick it hard!" Possession of the ball is a primary goal in soccer. We are not playing "kickball." We try to teach the kids to pass the ball to teammates or to open space where teammates can win the ball. At times, because of defensive pressure or the proximity of the ball to our goal, we coach them to clear the ball long. But, unbridled encouragement of the kids to "kick it hard" can often be confusing.

"Go get the ball!" Be careful with this one. Winning the loose ball is important. But, we do not want to play "bunch ball," where all of the players run all over the field chasing the ball in a pack. Maintaining space, trusting your teammates to do their jobs, maintaining positions of support and attack are important.

Any negative comment directed at any player, especially your own daughter. This is the rule that separates the "All-Star Parents" from the also-rans. When the votes are counted, into which group will you fall?

## ***Game and Practice Etiquette***

### **Games:**

Parents should sit on one side of the field appropriate for the league the team plays in. Remember that it is our intent for your child to have a fun, rewarding team experience playing soccer. They cannot do this if you are talking to them during the game or at halftime. Please let the coaches handle the team (game strategies, instructions, etc.) during game time, parents should bring a chair, sit, enjoy the excitement, cheer and be fans. After the game your child will love to hear how well they played and tell you how much fun they had.

### **Practices:**

The Program recognizes and respects your desire/need to attend practice sessions, especially when your child is younger (U9-U12). At the same time, we would like to maximize the short amount of time that staff has with your child. We would like to provide a practice environment free from as many distractions as possible.

It is the Program's position that parents can be a distraction for players during training. In an effort to partner with parents in creating the best possible experience for your child, we have come up with the following practice definitions (to be decided upon by coach - may vary from practice to practice):

Open Practice: parents may sit and watch practice as they wish. Please give the coaches enough space to conduct practice without being a distraction or hindrance.

Closed Practice: parents may sit and observe practice from a distance.

# **Crossfire Player Development Philosophy**

## ***Four Pillars of Soccer – The CROSSFIRE Way***

Physical, technical, tactical and psychological are the legendary four pillars of soccer. Every program or club, to a lesser or greater extent, tries to teach its competitive and recreational players the fundamentals of these concepts.

### ***Physical Pillar***

Most clubs, in our experience, put an emphasis on the "physical". In some ways, that is easiest. It is pretty simple to identify the strongest and fastest player who can boot the ball. A girl who can clear the ball a significant distance can be very important if the offense is trained to run at full speed down the field to collect the ball and move it toward the goal. In fact, strength is an important ingredient in a fully developed soccer player. The facts are that most players will be of fairly similar stature and strength when they are in their mid-teens. We do not rely on physicality of our players and even discourage the type of play other clubs employ, often just to win games.

### ***Technical Pillar***

At Crossfire, the development of the technical side of soccer is of the greatest importance at the younger ages. The basic skills seem to be most readily learned at young ages. This program puts a huge emphasis on juggling, for example, at U9 through U12 or so. The purpose of being able to juggle hundreds of times is to become familiar with the feel of the ball and what can be done with it. An ability to juggle plays a major role in how a player traps a ball. You may have seen a player receive a very long ball, sent hard, collected at the player's foot as if it were a sponge. That is a technical skill learned through many thousands of touches of the ball. It is just another way to "juggle". At Crossfire, the development of the physical movements, such as speed and agility, will be incorporated into training sessions with the use of a plyometrics. We focus on agility, an ability to move around the opponent. We will spend hours on evasive moves, rather than spending hours on kicking the ball thirty yards, especially at younger ages where accuracy is highly suspect. 1 V 1 and 2 V 2 games give our players an opportunity for many touches on the ball and force a player to develop her moves. Quickness is another technical focus. A player needs to be first to the ball. We practice short-sided games (small fields) because this gives our players many more touches than playing a full field. Besides, a full field forces young players to kick the ball hard, rather than with control and accuracy.

### ***Tactical Pillar***

We will only lightly touch on the tactical aspect of soccer until around U13. Tactics involve so-called set pieces, like corner kicks and free kicks. At young ages this seems less productive because players are not able to place corner kicks with much accuracy and those at the net are very reluctant to make headers. They hurt! Other tactical elements of the game are combination plays such as various passing strategies, like overlapping, wall passes, switching (sides of the field). All of these tactics require strong kicks with accuracy, which is highly unlikely to be a skill at young ages. See for yourself. Ask your child to kick ten balls to you in the air 20 yards. Be prepared to do some jogging. Around U13 or U14 Crossfire players will become immersed in tactics. By that age, they should have developed the physical strength to kick the ball hard and receive the ball with finesse. They will have a good foundation in basic skills to move the ball themselves in a run or to pass the ball while seeing the field. After a year or two of admittedly catching up with other teams, which have taught tactics without skills, you will see Crossfire teams often dominate the field of play.

### ***Psychological Pillar***

Crossfire works on the psychological aspect of soccer as well, the mental make-up of the player. How do they handle failure or adversity? How quickly will they recover and try again or to fix?

Ability to focus...use their resources? We employ special coaches to assist individuals and teams in goal-setting, leadership, team work, visualization, positive thinking, etc.

## **WHAT IS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT?**

### ***THE PHILOSOPHY OF CLOVIS CROSSFIRE SOCCER PROGRAM endorsed by USSF***

Our younger ages represent the most influential period in forming a sound fundamental base and a love of the game. Continue to make training fun while at the same time keeping it consistently challenging and competitive.

Playing to win games becomes increasingly important but should never be at the expense of playing well.

Avoid the temptation to have your players **BOOT** the ball long and far in the hopes that one of your fast forwards can win a foot race to create a breakaway. A ball that is aimlessly kicked forward into a sea of opponents with the idea of gaining a territorial advantage is, at best, hopeful soccer. The style of playing of incessant “direct” soccer, when a team always plays the ball forward regardless of whether or not it is appropriate to do so in that situation, does not develop players. Moreover, that approach has consistently been proven ineffective at the higher level of the game.

The “direct” approach should also be discouraged because it replaces skillful and creative play with an environment in which aggression and size becomes disproportionately important. While we want to encourage players to be “direct” by going to goal when the opportunity presents itself, there is a huge difference between being constructively direct as opposed to whacking the ball forward all the time.

Playing well means playing intelligent, patient, controlled game in which skill, mobility, and precision are emphasized and applied at speed. A precise pass to a well-timed purposeful run that culminates in a shot on goal is one of the most exciting actions in any sport.

Only if we teach and give our young players the freedom to make choices during the run of play will they be able to fulfill their potential.

Hard though it may be, refrain from bellowing at your players to “shoot it” or “pass it.” A wrong decision by a player is better than a “right” decision. After the game is the time to discuss why a player made a specific choice in a specific situation. But during the game it must be left to the players to think for themselves.

### ***Player Development vs. Winning***

Did you win your game today? What was the score? Did you play the entire game? These are the type of questions our kids, still in uniform, hear when they are in line at Vons or Save Mart after games or when they get home. Are we sending our youth the wrong message? It seems that youth sports is obsessed with winning, not learning how to play the game

The Crossfire philosophy is to make sure that our younger teams (U9-U12/U13) develop extremely sound technical skills (dribbling, trapping, passing, heading, etc.) - this is what we commonly refer to as player development. Players are encouraged and rewarded for attempting to use the technical skills taught in practice. We school our coaches that it is alright for their players to make Coaches (and parents) are discouraged from shouting orders...shoot!, don't bunch!, pass!, look at Tim!, boot it out!!! (often even conflicting orders) to players on the field. Our hope is that our players become extremely comfortable with the soccer ball at their feet. So comfortable, in fact, that they can and will have the confidence and ability to get out of pressure situations using their newly-learned technical abilities - no matter where they are on the field. By the time Crossfire players reach the U14/U15 age groups they are technically ready to focus on the tactical and psychological aspects of their game. Then they can begin to think about the win-loss record.

The Crossfire technical staff believes that we are “right on the mark” by placing the emphasis on player development rather than winning at the younger age groups.  
([http://www.socceru.com/winning\\_soccer.htm](http://www.socceru.com/winning_soccer.htm))

## **Age Specific Development Programs**

### ***Crossfire Youth (U8-U12) Development Program***

If your child is going to be in these age groups, we have some exciting news for you.

There are many soccer clubs in the Fresno/Clovis area which field fall soccer leagues. The emphasis at these younger age groups is to introduce the players to the fundamentals of soccer in a fun, yet more challenging, environment than traditionally has been the case. We are convinced that players at these ages show very rapid physical, mental and psychological growth, and can absorb information and develop skills at a remarkable rate if provided with the appropriate environment for learning. Below is a brief description of the individual programs:

#### ***U8-U9 Program:***

##### **Competitive-**

This is a Crossfire player's first experience with competitive soccer, which can sometimes be intimidating. The Crossfire U9 Program is designed to completely immerse the players into a soccer environment, while maintaining the goal of having fun with friends. The purpose of the program is to provide players the individual ball mastery of soccer to instill confidence with a ball at their feet. Using small-sided activities, each participant will be provided an environment to create a magician on the ball (1v1 / player versus opposition) and the understanding of cooperative play (2v1 / teammates versus opposition, 2v2 etc...). The environment is structured so that the players are strongly encouraged to try the skills taught in practice without fear of consequences. Winning and losing becomes secondary. Teams train twice a week for the entire season under the direct supervision of Crossfire professional technical staff and volunteer parent coaches. Volunteer coaches also receive more comprehensive coaching education, which reinforces the skills and principles being taught. Players and coaches will emerge from the U9 program with a more sophisticated awareness of the game.

Competitive soccer is very different than recreational soccer in many ways, specifically time and financial commitment. Before you agree to your child playing on a competitive team, please read the applicable sections of this handbook. A thorough understanding will reduce (probably never eliminate) the number of potentially unpleasant surprises. ASK QUESTIONS. And, yes, there will be many pleasant experiences.

#### ***U10 Program:***

##### **Competitive -**

The focus continues to be on individual skill development rather than winning and losing. Teams train at least twice a week with Crossfire technical staff and paid or volunteer coaches. Games will be played against teams from neighboring cities (Fresno, Madera, Kingsburg, etc). Players are still strongly encouraged to be creative with the ball at their feet without fear of consequences. Winning and losing, at least for our teams, is secondary to skills mastery and enjoyment of the game.

**NOTE:** If this is your first experience with competitive soccer, please see the paragraph above (U9 section) regarding competitive soccer.

#### ***Player Development Ages U13-U15***

As the progression of the development of players is a continually ongoing process, these age groups should be at the beginning of group tactics. These should consist of wall passes, give and goes, take-overs, overlaps, and third man runs, along with all of the variations that go with each one of the tactics. Our coaches are continually being educated in the teaching and training methods to best teach players these tactical skills.

Strength and conditioning also becomes a major factor in this age group. The ability to have the

strength and aerobic power to play for a longer period of time against opponents that are of different sizes and abilities is a must. We have instituted a conditioning program for the teams/individuals to have the opportunity to come to on Wednesday evening to push themselves to their limits if they want to perform at their peak performance. This is a program above and beyond the team's regular trainings.

The last area players at this age level need work on is psychological, the ability to stay mentally tough the whole game. The ability to not lose that quick thinking and decision-making when the brain is telling the body that it's tired. The brain is saying those little aches and pains that you have are feeling like they are giant aches and pains but can be played through if one is physically and mentally tough.

### ***Player Development Ages U16-U19***

At these level, players should now have all the skills needed to play long and hard for great periods of time. A coach's job at this level must be to coordinate the players in being able to work together and adapt to situations that may arise in games. Communicate with players that are having tough decision in what they want to do in their future of the sport, and support them in the good and bad times that they will go through at this age, but keep them focused on the job that has to be done at hand.

## **Competitive Level Team Guidelines Overview**

Selection to a Crossfire competitive Premier/Gold or Silver team may require a full year commitment. Players and their families are financially responsible for and expected to participate in the fall season plus all of the team's scheduled tournaments (through State/Regional/National Cup). Crossfire competitive team selections are accomplished through a combination of spring placement (evaluations/tryouts), and coaching assessments throughout the year. For Crossfire players, placement is a year-round process. Players who are new to the area or who believe they would like to attend placements may ask the programs Director of Coaching for the opportunity to participate in team training sessions prior to placements. If the Director of Coaching and the appropriate coach agree, those players will be welcome as guests of the team at practice, as it is in everyone's best interests to more fully evaluate a prospective player. Placement (evaluations/tryouts) is open to all players, including players from other clubs, and each team will go through the tryout or re-selection process every spring.

### ***Placement Process:***

At the beginning of the placement (evaluations/tryout) sessions, the Program will hold an orientation session for those parents who are not familiar with the Program or with select soccer. The tryout sessions will be divided by age group, and will consist of drills, exercises and scrimmages designed to allow the Crossfire Placement Committee to evaluate the skill, desire, attitude and potential of each player. As teams get older and more established, individual team try-out procedures may vary according to the needs of the team. Final player selections are made without regard to race, religion, creed, color, national or ethnic origin. Selection to a team one year does not guarantee that player a place on the team the following year. Additional information on placements is detailed in the following pages.

### ***Playing "Up":***

CROSSFIRE believes that it is best for players to play in the age-appropriate level. It is very, very rare that a player has developed the technical skills and emotional sophistication to compete and benefit from playing up a year. However, there may be exceptions, but the most important question we would ask the parents and player is "Why"? Regrettably, ego can figure in the equation, so please be very sure of motivations before asking for an exemption from club policy. The Technical Staff will evaluate any requests, and will use a metric of having to clearly perform among the top eleven players of the target team.

### ***Open Boundaries:***

Our philosophy as a club is to train our local players effectively so that they can compete for and maintain a large number of spots on our competitive teams, especially at our older age groups. In fact, one of the criteria is that the Director of Coaching's performance is measured on is this very statistic. That being said, any player wishing to play competitively for CROSSFIRE will be welcomed to tryout and play in the Program.

### ***Olympic Development Program (ODP):***

At age U13 and older, each D1 player has the option of trying out for the District VII ODP team. You may find details at the CYSA-North (CYSAnorth.org) web site. Crossfire encourages players to try out, if only for the experience. At any given age group, several Crossfire players may make the District team. Those players may try out for the State team, but the competition is more intense. State team players may progress to Regional tryouts and then to National tryouts. The time commitment seems to be geometrically greater, as is the demand for skills. Throughout this process, the ODP coaches are likely to apply a different set of selection criteria than Crossfire would apply for club team selection. ODP seems to focus much more on individual performance as distinct from team-oriented play. Crudely put, selfishness appears to be a factor in ODP selection. Still, this can be a tremendous learning experience and the club endorses the effort.

We want to make something very clear. Whereas we recommend that players participate in ODP, the ultimate responsibility of the ODP player is to the program and then to the team. If there is a conflict between ODP play, camps, even holdover camps, the team comes FIRST. There are unlikely to be many conflicts, but soccer is a TEAM sport, not a ME sport. Rest assured, though, we will not be arbitrary. If there is a choice between something very routine that is club-related and a significant ODP event, the Staff or your coach will be fair. Please give as much lead time as possible so the Staff may be as circumspect as possible. Your coach, in conjunction with the Director of Coaching, will determine which engagement is more appropriate. Prepared to be told that ODP will be secondary.

### ***Team Organizations:***

The organization of soccer teams is necessarily built around the coaching staff. Crossfire coaches, unlike coaches in some clubs, are considered part of the Club support structure, and they will change teams from time to time to meet the overall Club needs. This "Team of Coaches" approach to soccer is a major asset of the Club. All Crossfire coaches are there for the support of all Crossfire teams. For this reason, we use a club-wide coaching concept, applicable to all ages, that is described in our Crossfire Coaches Manual. Team play is a major objective, and individual players are trained within the team framework. Each team should be organized as follows:

### ***The Head Coach:***

A Head Coach will be designated for each Crossfire team. That Coach will have overall responsibility for the team, and he or she should be your first contact in the event of a problem. The coach is responsible for team discipline, player substitution, and game tactics. Other Crossfire Coaches/Staff will participate, from time to time, in your team practices and games. The Crossfire Soccer Program is proud of its Coaches, and we have made every effort to provide your players with the best-available teachers of the game. Please give the Coach your support and assistance.

### ***Team Manager:***

The Team Manager is an invaluable member of the team organization. At the Crossfire level, the Manager handles or delegates responsibility for many of the administrative aspects of the team, such as uniform orders, team telephone list, tournament travel plans, and other items to help the Coach with all of the time-consuming administrative details. If you are interested in becoming a Team Manager, or assisting the Team Manager, please contact your Coach.

### ***Team Financial Coordinator:***

The Team Financial Coordinator is also invaluable to the team organization. This person will assist the Team Manager in collecting the monthly training fees, tournament dues, and turning these in to the Crossfire office to make sure their team's account is up to date.

### ***Other Volunteers:***

The demands of running a successful soccer program are tremendous. If you have a skill, or no skill but a desire to serve, we have an opportunity for you! Some of the Crossfire teams keep team statistics and a parent is "trainable" as a team statistician. Help in securing a team banner, responsibility for keeping and setting up a team tent, assisting with transportation, organizing game refreshments, volunteering as a chaperon during tournament trips, are just a few of the many ways in which a parent can make a very important contribution to a child's Crossfire team...

## **Coaches/Trainers List for the Current Season:**

Trainer/Coach Profiles are listed here: <http://www.cloviscrossfire.com/crossfire-committee.html>

Boys Coaches:

## **Program Expectations Regarding Absences, Injuries, and Playing Time**

In order to communicate expectations more clearly, consistently, and effectively, this document outlines CROSSFIRE program expectations regarding player absences, injuries, and playing time, and associated communication.

For the purposes of this document the soccer season will be broken down into three pieces:

League Season:

- August – November or December depending upon age group
- Post League Season:
  - November through to State Cup/Association Cup elimination or completion for U9-U13.
  - March (or post high school season) through to State Cup/Association Cup elimination or completion for U14-19
  - Spring Season (Optional Season):
    - March – June for age groups U9-U16.

### ***League Season (August– November/December)***

- Players and their families should take vacations prior to the beginning of League Season.
- Coach will outline their training schedule for the League Season at the beginning of the season in order to help families plan.
- Voucher systems for Excused Absences – 5 days of missing training, scrimmages, and/or games.
- Excused Absences include illness, academic functions associated with school's academic curriculum, family functions, etc. Voucher can be used with no repercussions at all.
- Must have approval from coach/technical staff
- Parents should email coach allowing as much notice as possible.
- It is recommended to also follow up with a phone call.
- Missing more than the allotted days will result in the consequences specified under playing time guidelines (see below)
- It is expected that CROSSFIRE competitive players place soccer as their first priority during the league season. It is always at the coach's discretion as to decisions on playing time after training time missed with respect to fitness, strategy, etc. even with the use of a voucher.

### ***Post League Season – State Cup/Association Cup prep and State Cup/Association Cup for each associated age group)***

- Coach will outline their training schedule for the Post League Season in order to help families plan.
- Christmas/New Year Winter Break (applies to U9-U13)
  - Preferably no vacations during this critical Cup prep time (may be looked at on a case by case basis with coach/trainer)
- Spring Break (applies to U14-19)
  - Preferably no vacations during this critical Cup prep time (may be looked at on a case by case basis with coach/trainer)
- Illness/Academic Functions – All absences must be cleared through the coach. (Physicians note or school note is not required, parent verification and communication is sufficient.)
- Disciplinary action shall be up to the coaches discretion

- Coaches must outline their specific disciplinary actions at the beginning of the season (parent meeting)
- Injuries
  - In order to protect the player, serious injuries (head injuries, broken bones, etc.) will require a doctor's note clearing the player before they are able to return to training, scrimmages, and/or games
  - The program and its coaches would rather see a stronger player return later, than a hurt player trying to come back to soon.
  - A player does not need to use a voucher for serious injuries. If the player is able, they should attempt to attend as many sessions (training, games, etc) as possible.
- The Program reserves the right to permit coaches to introduce their own program of excused absences. These programs will be subject to Technical Staff monitoring.

### ***Playing Time Guidelines***

Playing time is determined by a combination of many factors:

- Effort at trainings, scrimmages, and games
- Impact the player has on the game
- Discipline on and off the field
- Improvement at trainings, scrimmages, and games
- Commitment to trainings, scrimmages, and games
- “Coachability” – a player’s ability to carry the information to the game and make an impact
- Missed trainings, scrimmages, or games. These consequences apply during League Season after 5 vouchers have been issued.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> misses session: sit one half of one game
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> missed session: sit one full game
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> missed session: sit two full games
  - 4<sup>th</sup> missed session: meeting with parent, Director of Coaching, and Associate Program Director. Disciplinary action will be taken that can include removal from the team or dismissal from Crossfire soccer

### ***Communication***

- If a player is going to miss a training, a scrimmage, or a game (voucher or no voucher)
- Parents must email allowing as much notice as possible
- It is also recommended to also follow up with a phone call
- The Program understands that people can't predict illnesses. If a player is ill, please err on the side of caution by emailing the coach early. If the player feels better by practice time, and can participate, great.
- Coaches and Technical Staff are open to and encourage any and all questions by parents and players concerning their place on the team.
- If a parent or player wishes to meet with the coach, they should call or email to schedule a time
- It is inappropriate to discuss issues before, during, or after games, without scheduling a meeting with the coach/technical staff.

### ***Player evaluations (2 written evaluations per year)***

- U9-U14: player and parent must be present at evaluation with coach
- U15 and up: parent has the option of being present at evaluation with coach
- A coach is responsible for the team's development, not only technical training, but also team building and “team chemistry”. Team functions will be decided upon the coach, not the team

manager. The team manager and other volunteers should help implement the plans. So as not to place team manager in an awkward position, the team manager should be a conduit for passing along the information.

## **Placements (Evaluations/tryouts)**

Placements are among the most stressful days in the life of a competitive soccer player. In a week or so after placements, you will know whether you made the “team”. Although we hope to maintain lots of players on all our teams, the facts are that we hope that the talent pool which come to our placements gets bigger and bigger every year. Please realize that in Competitive soccer, unlike Recreational soccer, Crossfire has a commitment to field the best Competitive team possible.

Crossfire devotes considerable resources, financial and personnel, to our Premier/Gold and Silver Programs. We have aggressively sought well-respected coaches to train our Premier/Gold teams and to serve as trainers for the mostly volunteer coaches in Silver. We believe there is a great future for all players in those programs, with opportunities to play soccer in high school and colleges, if the proper training is provided and the players make the commitment At Crossfire, we hope to offer the best program we can, not a second class program. If you are a Premier/Gold and Silver player, rest assured that we WILL do everything reasonable to give you the right program, which will motivate you to exceed your expectations.

Parents, while your child is at placements, the Technical Staff and others are available to answer questions about our program. One of the important questions which people want to ask but often seem afraid to ask has to do with costs. Competitive soccer is expensive. Please understand that the average will vary depending on the team. It is also important to understand that the final costs of tournaments and coaches fees are a team decision and that parents are encouraged to fully participate in team meetings to have a vote in final costs and participation in tournaments home and away. At younger ages, we try to limit the number of tournaments and the distances traveled, so that those travel-related costs will be low for these teams. Silver teams will mostly play nearby, so tournament costs will almost certainly be less than \$600 annually per family.

The expectation is that of attendance at all games, all practices and all team- bonding sessions. Please re-read the Program Expectations section just above "Placements" if you doubt you understand the level of time commitment expected.

Please regard placements sessions as opportunities to ask all of your club- related questions. We are amazed at how few questions are actually voiced, given the complexity of the Crossfire organization. Ask them separately or through e-mail if you prefer, but ask them. Please do not place yourself in an uncomfortable situation by failing to ask. You need to know what is expected of you before you make the commitment.

Within a week or two of placements, the roster will be announced. The Technical Staff and the coach have reviewed in depth the qualifications of all players and have selected those who show the most promise for a successful team. Skill, speed, agility, endurance, decision-making are all important components of the selection process, but so also are commitment, coachability, team compatibility and dynamics, enthusiasm and other more subjective criteria.

Soccer is a team sport and for that reason selection may be based on player attitude and team needs more than individual skills.

Whatever the outcome of placements, Crossfire appreciates the time you have taken to attend our placements. We hope the process has been educational and that you will enjoy the coming season.

## **Playing Leagues**

### **Leagues**

Our teams currently play in the Clovis Junior Soccer League, which is affiliated with Cal-North and NorCal (US Club). The younger teams U9 and below are placed in the League based on location and several other factors. Older teams, U10 and above are grouped based on the prior season outcome and level of play.

At the conclusion of League play, teams are adjusted for the next season dependent on the outcome of how the team finished in the current level of play. The level of play beginning with U10 teams starts with the White level.

## Tournaments

Tournaments are a very complex subject. Much time goes into the selection of which tournaments a team may attend. The Crossfire philosophy differs from that of many clubs in Northern California. In our case, we are convinced that more is not better. Tournaments do provide the opportunity to play against different teams, many of which are highly skilled. It is essential that players see other styles of play offered at the best clubs on the West Coast. They are fun for players and families, as they are often strong team-bonding events, with some offering the opportunity for add-on family vacations. However, tournaments are an expensive competitive venue, many costing as much as \$750 for team entry fees alone. Teams will absorb the travel costs of coaches and Technical Staff. Travel costs can easily approach \$500-1000 per family for tournaments in Southern California. A single three or four game tournament may cost a family nearly as much as an entire season's worth of training. Of greater importance, tournaments are largely a less, well-controlled environment, with injuries more likely than at practice sessions.

Some of our Premier and Gold teams will participate in NorCal and Cal-North State Cup (U13 and up). Most of our teams will play in a State Cup (Other tournaments, or jamborees (for youngsters) will be determined by the Technical Staff and the coaches. Depending on age, prior success and the benefits seen by the coaches, a team may participate in two to four or more tournaments a year. At older ages, more tournaments offer the opportunity to be seen by more college coaches. Travel costs may become considerably greater as the best tournaments often are hundreds or thousands of miles from home. For example, among the best tournaments are those in Pleasanton, San Francisco, Dallas, Las Vegas, and the Los Angeles area.

The club believes it is very important for all families to stay in the same hotel while traveling, thus eliminating any logistics considerations. Team travel coordinators will block enough rooms for the team. It will be up to families to individually guarantee rooms with personal credit cards. Although it violates club policy, there is a possibility that extenuating circumstances might preclude a family from staying at the "team" hotel. Please communicate those circumstances to the coach. "I want to stay at a nicer hotel" is not justification. We do the best we can to find above average accommodations, but at a reasonable price for families on a budget.

A team is at a tournament for the purpose of playing soccer games. Coaches will clearly define their rules for those days, such as curfew, meals, rest periods, use of players' cell phones and acceptable forms of entertainment. Appropriate behavior by players is expected. Needless to say, appropriate behavior is expected of all in attendance.

At no time should any player be alone in a coach's room. This is for the protection of players and coaches alike. A coach will not transport a player to or from the field.

It is expected that ALL players will participate in EVERY tournament. There will not be an a la carte methodology for attending these events. If a family cannot commit to attending all selected events, we suggest before a team is formed, or as soon as possible thereafter, the family communicate with the coach or Technical Staff to resolve this issue.

## Evaluations

The Player Evaluation is a formal communication between a player and their coach. They also are an opportunity for parents to hear what a player needs to do to perform to expectations. The club provides coaches some guidelines to follow, suggesting that more information provided in a thoughtful manner is best, but as with most communications, coaches will approach this sort of thing very differently and more or less effectively.

The first evaluation may take place prior to the start of League season with the second some reasonable time before State Cup. The timing is largely up to the coach, but ample time to improve on shortcomings is a goal of this process. Evaluations should not be scheduled instead of practice.

It has been known that coaches usually allow five minutes and give essentially glowing reviews to everyone. That is unsatisfactory, but, again, the club and Technical Staff cannot control all means of communication. And, we hasten to add, there may be a confrontational element to some of these meetings, which is uncomfortable for everyone. Good preparation by coaches, but also by players, will produce better results. Players, in advance of the meeting we urge you to take some time to ask yourself what you want to know about your performance.

Player evaluations serve an important ingredient in determining the following year's placement process. A player unhappy with an evaluation should discuss details with the coach at a later time, to be sure of her position on the team. If a player thinks she might be on the bubble, it is incumbent on the player to ask the appropriate questions. There is no reason why a player should be surprised if they do not make the team at placements. This is a two-way street and the player needs to assume responsibility for knowing their status on the team. You should expect to be replaced if you are among the bottom players on a Premier, Gold, or Silver team.

Player evaluations are turned over to the Director of Coaching for review and retention in team files.

My child is a bubble player. What can I, as a parent, do to help them? In many ways, hearing that one's child is on the bubble may be very difficult for parents to accept. We all want our players to be successful in everything they attempt, but as with schoolwork, the business world, even cooking soufflés, there are successes and failures. You may choose to meet with the coach to find out why they are on the bubble and what the coach expects of them going forward. Perhaps contracting for extra training is a solution. We will help arrange for such sessions, but extra training will not assure your child of continued placement on a Premier, Gold, or Silver team. Possibly physical training sessions at Crossfit or elsewhere will help agility and quickness. You may seek the assistance of a sports psychologist who is expert at goal setting. Most importantly, parents need to provide emotional support.

During the season, the club will ask players and parents to participate in an important survey about the coaches, trainers and club operations. The sources of input are confidential. We encourage parents and players to participate, as this is a critical way for the program to improve. It is also a means for the Technical Staff to hear and analyze the satisfaction of players in their coaches.

The Board makes decisions about the direction of policy in part based on several open-ended questions contained in the survey. Participation is actually pretty broad-based and we are thankful to those who give considerable thought to the process. The Board is not privy to specific questions about coaches.

## **NorCal & Cal-North State Cups**

Crossfire believes the NorCal and Cal-North State Cup tournament(s) are the focal point of our yearlong effort at player development. At the younger age groups, U9-U13, we place little importance on the results of individual tournaments and only passing emphasis on League results, but we do believe that the Cup's are an event we expect to experience success, especially at older ages (U14-U18).

For Crossfire teams (U9-U13) who participate in a NorCal State Cups -sanctioned events that begins in September for younger teams and continue through January depending the level of competition. A Successful State Cup performance leads to inclusion in a Regional championship tournament held in mid-December thru early January.

For Crossfire teams (U14-U18) who participate in a NorCal State Cups -sanctioned events that begins in September for older teams and continue through May depending the level of competition. A break usually happens during school sports. A Successful State Cup performance leads to inclusion in championship tournaments held in mid May.

For some Crossfire teams (U13-U18) who participate in a Cal-North State Cup sanctioned event that begins in January for younger teams and March/April for older teams. A Successful State Cup performance leads to inclusion in a Regional championship tournament held in mid-June, followed by a National competition in mid-July.

In general, and at younger ages, there is an effort to give every player roughly equal playing time, especially in League. That may not be the case if a player does not satisfy practice attendance and effort expectations. However, at State Cup (and any tournament or scrimmages leading up to State Cup), it is possible that only the starting eleven will see considerable playing time. State Cup and Association Cup is the culmination of the year's efforts. It is, in some ways, a reward to those who have shown commitment and success in proficiency. We admit that hurt feelings may result from this emphasis on different playing time during the State Cup games, but we want everyone to know this is the case. No one should be surprised by the different approach toward playing time at State Cup.

## **Resources and Articles**

### ***CROSSFIRE Calendar***

The program keeps an extensive calendar of club events and tournament activities on our web site. Please visit the following link for more information:

### **Articles**

#### **Stop the Tournaments**

Playing in a lot of tournaments and games is not the answer to player development. Below is an article originally written by Jay Martin, Ph.D. and published by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA).

Tournaments, tournaments, tournaments. They are overwhelming youth soccer in this country. Everyone wants to play in tournaments. Soccer America has an entire issue devoted to tournaments. Every soccer publication in this country lists pages of tournaments for our children to attend! Every year the biggest decision a club team makes is "which tournaments do we attend?" Most clubs have a person or three who do nothing but prepare for tournaments.

Stop the tournaments, I want to get off.

Tournaments are hurting America's soccer playing youth.

Soccer tournaments started in this country as a way for clubs to raise funds to pay the bills. Great idea. Clubs would sponsor a tournament early in a playing season or in the summer when league play was suspended to make some cash. Now these tournaments rule youth soccer. It is now very important to participate in these types of events. Many clubs recruit players based on the tournaments they attend. Many coaches entice U-16's, U-17's and U-18's to their club by promising attendance at tournaments where college coaches will attend. Many players (and their parents) choose a club solely based on attendance and success in certain tournaments. Today, the main focus for teams, clubs, parents and players is tournaments.

The weekly league game (or two) is secondary to tournaments. And maybe games are even eliminated from the busy tournament schedule. In Central Ohio where club teams must participate in a sanctioned league in order to be allowed to play in tournaments, some clubs have a team for the weekly league (usually a weaker team) so the A team can compete in tournaments all over the country. If you don't get into the tournaments of your choice? Change clubs or create your own tournament. It works. Try it.

These tournaments allow our soccer playing youth to play a variety of teams in a variety of states all year long. But they are expensive. It costs the average family a weekend, car mileage, hotel expense, entertainment for between games, food and video game money.

Why? Because everyone plays in tournaments. The kids will become better players. The college coaches can see them play. Yes, everyone plays in tournaments – except youth teams in other soccer playing countries.

The weekly game is the most important game in most other countries. The teams have one week of training. One week of learning. One week to prepare for the game on Saturday or Sunday. The most important aspect of learning the game happens in well-founded training programs. The habits necessary to become a complete player are developed in training.

Revised 10/28/2016

Training is important. Training is critical to the success of these soccer-playing nations.

Why is training important? It allows a supervised and progressive means to learn the game, if done properly. It allows the player, coach and team to focus on the areas of the game that will influence performance. What are those areas?

- Fitness
- Constant technical improvement
- Improvement of technical understanding based on problems in the previous games
- Improvement of the mental aspects of the game by applying stress in the training situations
- Team building

Do any of these things happen during a tournament? Not very likely. The very nature of tournaments prevents this from happening.

Maybe in America we are uncomfortable with training. It is still a fact that some of our youth soccer coaches still do not have the background in the game as a player to feel confident in the design and execution of a training session. The obvious solution is play games. So, we play games and don't train.

Soccer teams in Germany, England, Holland, etc. do play in tournaments, but those tournaments are usually during a holiday break or serve as an excuse to go to Madrid for a week. During the season it's the league games that count. The entire focus is on the league game. Promotion, relegation and rivalries all depend on the weekly game. Only in America do the players play in tournaments to collect patches for their bags or to add a medal to their collection or to spend Memorial Day in Lexington, Ky. Play, play, play. What happened to training?

Tournaments are killing soccer in this country. Young players can't learn how to play in these types of situations. Everything about these tournaments is bad for the development of American soccer players.

Tournaments allow players and teams with slow pace or no pace to succeed. Teams play three games in a 24-hour period and, if they are lucky, play two more and win a trophy. Assuming we accept the fact that minimum recovery takes 24 hours, it is physically impossible to play that many games in a short time. In a recent tournament in Central Ohio, for example, a U-18 team played at 4:45 p.m. and 6 p.m. Saturday night and at 7:30 a.m. Sunday morning. What can a coach expect to get from the players in these games? Nothing. It's not possible to play soccer in these situations. These tournaments breed Underwater Soccer. Nice and slow, no change of pace, no defending.

Soccer is not meant to be played this way. Soccer is a game that is played when the player is uncomfortable, when the player closes in on fatigue, when the player runs, works and defends for 90 minutes. The very early laws of the game of soccer stressed a physical component by not allowing a lot of substitutions. Fitness is a part of the game. Ah, so you think there is a fitness component when playing in a tournament? No, there isn't. There is an energy conservation component, not fitness. American youth players stop running when they are uncomfortable. Since they're playing so many games in a short weekend, they just don't run at all.

When the players try to move on to the next level (college), they are shocked to realize they cannot make the team. They don't know how to play. They don't know how to run and they don't know how to work. They don't know how to defend. They don't know what the physical aspect of soccer is all about. They have never been taught what it takes to play this game at a high level.

Technical development in a tournament situation? No chance. The games do offer a variety of

opportunities to cultivate technical improvement, but because the games are so slow and there is very little defending, the time and space available for players is not realistic for a real soccer game. In fact, it's counterproductive. When a player does get into a "real game" where time and space are limited he/she cannot play.

Tactical improvements? Don't look here. There is no time between games to either discuss any tactical problems or work on them before the next game. If your team faces a "formation" or "tactic" you haven't seen before, what do you do? Hope you don't see it again. As a rule, there is very little teaching going on in regards to tactics in many clubs. The prevailing mentality is simply "find the best players and let 'em play!" Not a bad strategy. But as players move on in their soccer career, an understanding of tactics is very important. Even a constant teaching/review of 1 v. 1; 2 v. 1; 3 v. 2, etc., is essential to complete the maturation of a soccer player. This tournament mentality does not allow this teaching to take place.

A player who relies only on athletic ability without learning the game will hit a "soccer plateau" and not get any better. This happens far too often in the United States. There is too much emphasis on the athletic ability of a player at the expense of soccer ability. In addition, tactics are important in the development of the whole team.

If you agree with Alan Wade that the most difficult aspect of coaching a soccer team is "getting all the players on the same page," then you will agree that teaching tactics is very important. To accomplish that, the team must have time to train together and learn about tactics after each game.

And the problems do not end there. The mental aspect of the game is lost. Soccer is a game where the mental aspect is so very important. In fact we delight in selling the game as a players' game and as a mental game. But we do nothing about it. No less an authority than former German international Jurgen Klinsman believes that working on the mental side of the game is lacking right now in soccer all over the world. There is no mental preparation during tournaments at all. "If it's 2 o'clock it must be Vardar. Let's go play." The young players do not learn that a warmup prepares you to play physically and mentally. Rather they show up, perform some cursory warmup (or no warmup at all) and play. As a result they simply go through the motions of the game and never get any better.

Preparation is important for the individual and for the team. The game of soccer is both physically and mentally demanding. It is the responsibility of the coach to prepare for both. In tournaments preparation does not happen.

Fields? Are you kidding? So many teams want to attend tournaments that most tournaments don't have the space necessary to supply good fields. Fields are created on any space possible. The grass is too long, the holes are too big, the field is too narrow and very bumpy. The fields create problems with injuries and bad soccer. Narrow, bumpy, heavy fields are not the surface to learn how to play. These fields contribute to a very direct style of play and don't allow for any creativity or any positive dribbling. The fields at most tournaments are simply unplayable.

Officials? There is a shortage of officials all over this country. Any fall weekend will see many officials working a high school game in the morning and a college game or two in the afternoon and evening. As the hours on the job increase, the quality goes down. This is exactly what happens with tournaments. Officials will do four, five or six games each day.

Officials have been known to eat lunch while working a line. And, how about that six o'clock game? What can anyone expect from an official who has been on the field for six or eight hours? These long hours for officials can cause real problems in tournaments.

Some parents and coaches argue that they "cannot get better" playing the same old teams, that tournaments allow better competition. Every other league in every other country plays the same teams

each year. The concern for these teams is to make themselves better. There is very little concern about who they play. The teams train hard all week to put what they learned on the field on the weekend. They learn how to play the game systematically and with a sound progression.

Our "tournaments kids" miss out on a lot of necessary soccer information. Traveling eight hours to play three games in 18 hours does not make a team better. Quality of competition is important, but the quality of each team's effort each game is what counts in the end. The time spent traveling would be better spent training at an intense level and preparing for the game on Saturday.

Some tournaments have addressed some of these problems. The Cincinnati Blue Chip Classic each April allows each team to play only once each day. The teams play three games in three days. Not great, but better than the usual five games in two or three days.

Recently adidas began an Elite Soccer Program (ESP), which brings some of the best male and female soccer players to a site for five days of training and games. Each of these programs allows the players to "be seen" by college coaches while playing only one game a day. The players have a chance to play the game at a higher level than the weekend tournaments. The college coach can see if the kid has a game.

A tournament now and then is fine. It can be fun for the club, the players and the parents. Maybe they can travel to some cities that are fun. A tournament can bring a team "together" and build some morale. But too many tournaments will prevent the natural progression of learning that will take place in well-organized and thoughtful training sessions. Training sessions that use the last game as a learning situation to build on and training sessions that prepare the team for the next opponent. The old coaching expression that "the game is the best teacher" is not true. Games used as a laboratory and supplemented by systematic and progressive training sessions are the best teacher.

Stop the tournaments!

## **My Kid is going to Make It To The Big Leagues**

### **Pushing kids equals kids pushing back**

You have seen children who have been told what to do their whole lives. From 8 to 15 they appear talented and motivated. They comply with heavy parental influence until they are 16 and then with dramatic defiance, quit the sport they have loved all their lives. It's a common occurrence and many parents are baffled at their children's choice. Every year children leave sport environments in staggering numbers. Why such a high drop out rate? One-third of all participants drop out because of the following factors: 1) constant criticism or disapproval, 2) over competitive emphasis from adults, 3) little playing time, 4) an environment of fear, and 5) inappropriate full game structure. The key here is that the child has not learned to internalize motivation like we talked above, and this is a key to constant development and enjoyable participation. There have been great strides in training theory, technical analysis and nutrition. The results have been beneficial to everyone. The Youth Soccer world has overwhelmingly accepted the principle of small-sided games that allow for development and enjoyment on the technical side of coaching. The family unit is also a contributing factor in a child's development. It has always been a factor of success in school, sport and community and is now a hot issue in the soccer community.

### **Helping a Child's motivation; playing in the Zone**

You have heard of the concept of flow or playing in the zone. Musicians, athletes and scientists all report profound feelings of engagement when they are in the Zone. This is a strong motivation but the key to get in the Zone is for the player to feel in control and ready for the demands of the task. Children will come to activities that are challenging and enjoyable. In some cases, young athletes are doing huge amounts of work but only if the demands are right for them. The key is the

work must be internally rewarding. Internally rewarding means that they have the knowledge, goals and skills to make personal choices and regulate effort. When these choices are removed by an overbearing coach or parent, the joy of playing is removed as well.

You have heard this before, players dribbling the ball, making perfect moves. Players talk about this great feeling, playing without pressure, skilled and strong. It's called playing in the Zone. Players talk about the zone in similar ways:

"I was mentally clear, my body pumped and I felt like a wizard"

"Physically, everything came to a peak. My play just flowed."

"It was fun and felt good"

"I was in the zone, I wasn't thinking of anything "

"I was completely focused, like my body and mind were in perfect harmony"

You have probably experienced this feeling yourself, while you were driving from Seattle to Spokane. Have you ever been driving and thought, "I don't remember passing that store", because driving is easy for veterans and when you have a routine task your mind can engage in pleasant thoughts, putting you in the Zone. The key for our children is for parents and coaches to try and set the conditions for players to play in the zone daily. This is a difficult task but new scientific research indicates that we can teach and recreate the conditions for playing in the Zone. This is a really important concept for everyone, especially children. When people feel skilled and in control, they are motivated to continue that particular activity. This is how human motivation works. If children are matched to the right level of skill and focused upon the task they will have some degree of control and competence. If the skill is too difficult, the child chokes; too easy a skill and they are bored. Playing in the Zone does something important, it gives motivational control to the child. That's what we want, to help players to maximize intrinsic motivation.

### **The Athlete Family: the Keys to Success**

Have you ever totaled up the cost of all your kids soccer experiences? The fees, travel, meals, equipment and time really add up. If you wanted a return on that investment, then get yourself a broker and play the stock market. If the rationale for investing your time and money is for the health and the development for your child, then the logical extension is to make the home environment conducive to success as well. Healthy development for young athletes requires the family to function at high levels. When we sample and do research with successful people, we find similar patterns in their learning. Yes, families from music, politics, art, science, and education all have similar patterns of function. Successful athletes usually have family support systems that are complex. Complex means their families are stable. Stable families are found in both single parent as well as traditional family systems. A stable home is one that allows the child to be safe, disciplined, cared for supported and loved. The child needs to feel wanted and encouraged while in the home. But wait, the athletic family is also a family that encourages curiosity and allows the child to seek out and experience new challenges. Further it is a family that discusses values of achievement, support and progression. The child is encouraged to risk with the blessing of the athletic family. This allows the child to test, play and explore without fear of punishment or failure. The complex home life allows the child to experience control and encouragement in a family safe environment. Having experienced this feeling, the child is then encouraged to test their outside experiences to match their skill, and experience Flow (playing in the Zone) outside the home in activities of their own choice. This is where you hear stories from great athletes talking about training and playing as a profound source of joy. Read the stories of Wayne Gretzky and Mia Hamm, and you will recognize the contribution of stable and encouraging families.

### **When Good Parents Go Bad**

Perhaps the most common pathway to destruction of a young player is to assume they want the same goals as their parents. Do you remember what the number one motivational factor is for children? It's not winning or gaining a scholarship, it's to be with their friends and have fun. The family can run

into problems when the parent's authority crosses over by defining their children's motivations. The parent unconsciously usurps control and motivation away from the child. It backfires. You see this often as soon as the game is over and parent begins to coach a child in the car on the drive home. "You should have shot lower", explains the father. The child's head lists to the side and their eyes roll back and they can't wait to get out of the car, "I know Daddy." This interchange may seem harmless but think about the child's motivation. If they receive enough adult criticism they will lose control and motivation and the pathway to quitting is established. This is not allowing the child to play in the Zone.

*Dan Freigang Ph.D. is a sport scientist working with the U.S.S.F. in Sport Psychology. Dan was an international athlete and national team coach and he presents his workshops as a unique blend of scientist and coach. He is currently in private practice and invites your comments and inquiries. Caldan@Earthlink.net (801) 392-4762.*