

An open letter to parents:

Instead of trying to get too creative in speaking to some of the issues I've been made aware of, I'll opt for pulling it together in a "Q & A" format - except for the final point, which for me is the most significant by far and for which I will get on my soap box...

You should think about doing something about our players being called for offsides...

I have thought about it, and I've decided not to worry about it.

While in possession of the ball, forward play (toward the opponents' goal) is encouraged. Generally speaking, the player that finds herself offside is filling the role of what we call the 3rd attacker (1st attacker has the ball, 2nd attacker is in direct support even with or behind the 1st attacker). The 3rd attacker plays an important role of getting into dangerous scoring positions should she get the ball, or serving as a distraction to and hopefully pulling defenders out of good position - providing space to exploit.

Our players being called for offside shows me that the girls are not afraid to get in on the attack in hopes of influencing scoring opportunities for our side.

As this is our first full season dealing with offside being in effect, I'm happy if players develop the ability to merely understand what this often confusing element of the game is - and the nuances surrounding whether or not it is called or waived off.

Lastly, there are more important things for this age group to be concerned about - continue reading...

Why don't we pass more?

This age group is just now on the verge of being able to pass the ball with any reliable and consistent accuracy and weight (speed or power of the pass).

Passing, or attempting to pass, is absolutely not discouraged. We often discuss and train on the finer elements of this skill. Sometimes we enjoy great success moving the ball about the pitch by doing so. Other times our passes seem intentionally delivered to the foot of an opponent (which by the way is a great opportunity for me to reinforce one of many potential coaching points, if - and only if - the time is right for it).

The importance of being a dynamic passer of the ball will become greater with each future season for this age group, when their size, structure, and muscle development allow for it naturally. For now I'm content with this age group being dynamic dribblers of the ball - to the point of them perhaps opting to not pass the ball. It is far easier to teach an older child to pass the ball well than it is to teach them to dribble the ball well. Passing will come, the window for learning how to dribble is quickly closing at this age - I intend to take advantage of it while there is still time!

What are you doing to build teamwork during match play?

Generally speaking, the concept of 'team' is only just now becoming significant to this group. In the mind of 6-10 year olds, the game is very "me and the ball" focused. Teamwork has up until now been a largely vague and incomprehensible idea. They are quickly gaining insight to how this concept can benefit them, and how their contributions to it can benefit the whole. There will be an increased focus on training exercises and activities that encourage and reinforce team concepts this season. However - it would not surprise me to see an ebb-and-flow of impressive 'team centered' play and equally impressive 'me centered' play this coming year, I have no problem celebrating both.

Can we get full time / defined goalies?

Yes. If your daughter is interested in exploring the position more, please let me know. We have an amazing goalkeeper coach on staff at EPSC in Cat Parkhill (former MN Gopher and U-20 US Women's National Team goalkeeper), who would love to work with your player.

I will not however nominate a player for goalie myself. It is a highly specialized position and requires the interest and dedication of the individual player.

Why aren't the girls assigned specific positions?

A player should have an understanding of every position on the field. Assigning a player a specific role at U-11 is simply wrong. A very well respected coach and former international player recently told me that a soccer player has no business having a “position” much before their 25th birthday. That said, it is natural to eventually gravitate toward a specific role that one enjoys or excels at. Everything else being equal, I may default to playing a player at that preferred position from time to time. The rest of the time, your daughter will get exposure to each role and position on the field.

I thought we'd be better than we were last year / last fall...

We are. The teams we are playing against have also improved.

To win is the object of the game, but it is not the reason we play it. We will play to win, but we will not do so at all costs. The only reason to play this game should be for the enjoyment you get from doing so. I'll count it as a great achievement if I can play a small role in helping anyone learn to play well, play hard, lose, and still say 'that was fun'. I have and continue to be more interested in the development of the player than the wins and losses.

Coaches soap box

It has been made known to me that there may be an increased willingness on the part of parents to make comments or give advice to the players on the field. Specifically, I'm referring to negative comments and criticism. Fortunately, given that I am on the opposite side of the field as parents, I have not been able to hear this first-hand. If I do happen to hear such comments or criticisms in coming games, and I'm able to pinpoint the source, I will be reaching out to you to assist in developing a plan that more closely adheres to PACT expectations. Please don't let it come to this.

I hope this provides you with a clearer picture of how I see things at the moment. As always, I don't claim to know everything there is to know about the game, and I'm willing to be wrong - if there is anything that you've read that you just plain don't agree with, I'd love to hear about it. The only thing I'd ask is that you be prepared to provide substance to your viewpoint, as my views are rooted in research and study of the game - both my own study, and more significantly that of experts and masters of the game. For what it is worth, here is a link to the United States Soccer Federation Best Practices document that I have taken the liberty to highlight – it speaks to just about every point I have attempted to make here: [USSF Best Practices - Highlights by AM](#)

For the love of the game,

-Adam