

Youth Soccer News: How Do We Measure Success in Youth Soccer?

By: Diane Scavuzzo

Tuesday, July 3, 2012

Youth Soccer in America: How Do We Measure Success?

"Winning isn't everything, but trying to is!" – Rainer Martens, sports psychologist

Sam Snow, US Youth Soccer Coaching Director, recently sent me their **Vision** document, saying, "The Vision document provides to club and state boards a strong direction for their mission statement. With the support of that leadership, team coaches can confidently implement the key points from Vision. As that work takes hold at soccer's grassroots then a fun, healthy and productive youth soccer experience will grow nationwide."

Americans have always been competitive.

Even back in 2007, the world of youth soccer realized that measuring success in youth soccer by the wins and losses on the field was a problem. Regardless of the numerous articles explaining that winning and losing are the wrong way to measure success in youth soccer, America's inbred desire to win at all costs, even at the expense of turning a child's love of soccer into a disdain for the sport, still prevails.

Kids are competitive by nature. Adults need to inspire standards other than winning as a way to judge success.

How should we measure success in youth soccer?

Perhaps it would be best for parents, players and all coaches to realize that developing soccer players is a journey, not a race to a youth trophy which will collect dust on a shelf.

While coaches coach teams, they are ultimately responsible for player development, which is the development of the individual soccer player.

US Youth Soccer Technical Department wrote [VISION](http://anbfutbol.com/Youth%20Soccer%20in%20America.pdf) -- <http://anbfutbol.com/Youth%20Soccer%20in%20America.pdf> -- an article that opens with **Cary McCormick** saying success should be measured by the development of the youth soccer players with the follow-up question of, "How do we measure the development of a single player?"

VISION explores the importance of players doing their best as the crucial key to success. "The determining criterion of success is whether a player gave his or her best that day."

In general the benefits of youth sports for children include character building, dealing with obstacles, dealing with losing, humility in winning, dealing with competition, leadership growth opportunities, cooperative skills, social skills and so on. We employ soccer to develop well adjusted, good citizens.

Citing the facts, from a study by the Youth Sports Institute on what players want from their sports experience, the FUN FACTOR emerges as crucial and blatantly obvious.

- Fun is pivotal - if it's not "fun," young people won't play a sport
- Skill development is a crucial aspect of fun - it is more important than winning, even among the best athletes
- The most rewarding challenges of sports are those that lead to self-knowledge
- Intrinsic rewards (self-knowledge that grows out of self-competition) are more important in creating lifetime athletes than are extrinsic rewards (victory or attention from others)

While the definition of success can be intensely personal, in general, success can often be defined by reaching one's goal.

US Youth Soccer has long been aware of the pitfalls of America's overly organized youth soccer system and wrote VISION to help inspire a more effective player development program.

One of the ways success can be measured is by commitment and dedication.

According to the VISION document, "Scientific research has concluded that it takes eight-to-twelve years of training for a talented player to reach elite levels. This is called the ten-year or 10,000 hour rule, which translates to slightly more than three hours of practice daily for ten years."

How many players are dedicated to becoming an elite player? Coaches should help players diligently work to improve their performance on the field, and not to focus on winning the next soccer match.

While many people believe that success breeds success, VISION clearly states that success does not; it often breeds failure. If winning comes too easily and too early, youth soccer players can fail to appreciate the importance of the hard work required for player development. It is often failure which breeds success and the desire to keep trying to improve.

VISION points out many famous winners who at first failed:

- Babe Ruth struck out 1,333 times. In between his strikeouts he hit 714 homeruns.
- Martina Navratilova lost twenty-one of her first twenty-four matches against archrival Chris Evert. She resolved to hit more freely on the big points and beat Evert thirty-nine out of their next fifty-seven matches. No woman tennis pro has ever won as many matches or as many tournaments, including a record nine Wimbledon singles titles as Navratilova, who retired from professional tennis at age 50.
- Abraham Lincoln failed twice in business and was defeated in six state and national elections before being elected president of the United States.
- Michael Jordan was cut from his junior high school basketball team, before becoming a sports icon.
- Theodor S. Geisel wrote a children's book that was rejected by twenty-three publishers. The twenty-fourth publisher sold six million copies of it---the first "Dr. Seuss" book---and that book and its successors are still staples of every child's library.

Coaches have always been influential in the lives of athletes. Movies and books are filled with triumphant experiences laced with appreciation of a particular coach who, along the way, inspired the athlete to reach hard for success.

Coaches share their love of the beautiful game and can keep soccer fun for their players. Great coaches can go further and inspire passion in their players to always try their best on and off the field.

The question often arises "how do we measure player development" and having clear vision is important. Click [VISION](http://anbfutbol.com/Youth%20Soccer%20in%20America.pdf) -- <http://anbfutbol.com/Youth%20Soccer%20in%20America.pdf> -- to read the full PDF which came out in 2007 and is as valid today as it was five years ago.

Related Article: [2013 US Youth Soccer National Championships Open to U13s](#)