

Characteristics of an Ideal Youth Soccer Club

It is difficult to determine which clubs are most well run and best at developing players. There are many different ways to go about organizing teams and players and there is no one correct method of club organization. However, there are some proven characteristics which can lead to the development of a very successful club. Below are listed some of these characteristics. Please understand that it is doubtful for one club to have all of these characteristics. However, it is fair to ask which clubs have the most integral components to player and coach development. In Massachusetts, we are strapped by the price of land and difficulty finding land, so all clubs cannot have their own fields or an indoor field. In addition, clubs of varying sizes will have varying capabilities. That is reality and it must be understood that what might be hoped for as an ideal is often not feasible in reality. This list is meant to describe an ideal that allows parents and players to better judge what could be expected from a club they are considering joining. This list is also meant to help clubs who are trying to create ideal environments for their players. Whether you belong to a town-based association or a premier club, we at Mass Youth Soccer are dedicated to helping you with player development in any way we can. Just let us know how we can help and we will be happy to do so. We all share the same goals of developing happy and successful soccer players in Massachusetts and helping the players reach their goals. Whether that goal is to become a national team player or to have an enjoyable recreational soccer career, we can help players better by working together and pooling our knowledge and resources.

- 1) Clear mission statement---a mission statement should clearly identify the purpose of the club and indicate what group or groups of players they serve (premier, competitive, recreational, or any combination of the three). Clubs should also indicate what their goals are as a club.
- 2) Progressive Player Development Curriculum---just like in school, a quality club should have year by year standards of expectations for players and their coaches should focus on developing players to reach those standards.
- 3) Continuous coach development program---as does any group of professionals, soccer coaches need continuous development. Licensure courses are great. However, they should be seen as the booster shot. Clinics, discussions, conventions, books, videos, game analysis sessions and more could be part of a continuous program. As educating coaches is vital to player development, clubs should insure that they cover the cost of coaching development for their coaches.
- 4) Minimum licensing standards for all coaches---educators in any field need to continue their education as their field develops and changes. Soccer coaches are educators. A very conservative licensing standard recommendation can be found in the 21st Century Player Development Manual which can be downloaded off the coaching section on our website.
- 5) Within club coaching evaluation---whether you have a coaching director or use coaches to oversee each other, clubs should have coaching oversight. In an ideal world, a coaching director can watch practices of teams and help improve coaching within practices. This person could also watch games and help coaches with game analysis, player analysis, and within game coaching. The more the club coaches show a willingness to learn and to work together as a staff, the better for the club.
- 6) Standardized Player Evaluation Forms and feedback at least 2 times/year.

- 7) Parent Evaluation Form---for parents and players to provide feedback to the club as to what is working and what is not working. It is hoped parents could make suggestions for improvements.
- 8) Regular goalkeeper training---for all interested goalkeepers in the club. (should be free to players)
- 9) Open Practices---to allow players who want to train more or want to challenge themselves the opportunity to do so. This also helps create a club feel.
- 10) Financial support---for those families that cannot afford to pay for their children. No children should ever be prevented from playing because of money.
- 11) A clearly identified development plan with player development as the primary goal above winning. Winning is a by-product of quality development.
- 12) A clearly identified grievance process with a description of who to bring particular difficulties to and what are reasonable expectations.
- 13) A consistent parent education program that includes regular meetings and written information. This should address both parent expectations and club expectations.
- 14) Centrally organized tryouts---these should be run by a coaching director and with independent evaluators. Team coaches should be consulted, however tryouts should be centrally organized to prevent the influence of personal relationships.
- 15) A clear delineation of where your money is spent. Is your club a 501(c)3?
- 16) An appropriate placement for your child---if the club does not have an appropriate placement, the club should recommend a place that does to you and help with placement at that club.
- 17) A referee development program---without referees, this game will not be played and youth soccer has a desperate shortage. It is a good way for players to make some money and learn about the game.
- 18) Regular indoor training---finding indoor time is difficult, however players should be training at least 2/week for 1—1.5 hours/session throughout the winter.
- 19) An association with Speed/Agility/Strength experts---for those players who wish to participate, a club should use its size to help arrange discounted prices for programs. A club should help stress the importance of this domain for injury prevention and help with education of parents and coaches.
- 20) Provide nutritional advice to players.
- 21) Provide simple sports psychology information and mental training tips for players.
- 22) Provide hopeful collegiate players with recruiting help---a club should have a standard college recruit profile form and team profile books, as well as give players realistic expectations as to at what level they can play and serve as a reference for the player. The club should educate players and parents as to the recruiting timeline, financial aid, and how to choose a college (recognizing academics is of primary importance).
- 23) Recommend players for ODP---a club should encourage its' best players to challenge themselves further and help them compete for spots on Regional and National teams.

- 24) Fields---as mentioned, space is at a premium here in MA, so this is impossible for many. However, if a club does not have fields, they can still arrange practices in a way that allows for teams of comparable ability to scrimmage or practice together or trade coaches every so often. It may also provide players on the “cusp” a chance to train with the top team.
- 25) A different coach at least every two years---coaches all have different strengths, different ways of communication, and different views of players. Players should benefit from the strengths of multiple coaches and get a “fresh start” every couple years. Saying “1 plus 1 equals 2” may be understood better by some players versus “1 and 1 equals 2”. Simple things can make a difference.
- 26) Placement of teams in competitive leagues---teams should be competing in leagues in which they win approximately 50% of the time. If teams are going 10-0 or 0-10 during the season, it does not promote development.
- 27) Practices should not include lectures, lines and laps---players should not be standing around, allowed the opportunity to lose concentration, or lectured to regularly. Practices should be fun, dynamic, active, and challenging.
- 28) Game evaluations---other coaches or a coaching director should evaluate teams during games and give the team coach feedback as to what they see as strengths and weaknesses. In addition, team coaches should fill out game reports for every game so the club can keep a binder and track the development of each team from year to year.
- 29) Annual banquet---clubs could have an annual banquet to recognize volunteers and those players who exhibit dedication, sportsmanship, and leadership. It can be a fun time with giveaways to bring the club together.
- 30) Social events---clubs should promote social events a few times each year. Whether it be a parent vs. child 3 vs. 3 tournament, or a ballroom style night for parents or a trip to the beach for players.
- 31) Support of and exposure to professional teams.
- 32) Education on the field and in the classroom---promote classroom sessions and encourage players to watch videos of games and analyze. If done with some thought this can be made a fun competition.
- 33) Be responsive---leadership should respond to concerns and questions and communicate well with membership
- 34) Proper tournament selection---team should be sent to tournaments in which they are competitive. Losing 3 games in a tournament without scoring a goal is not helpful to development. Nor is dominating a tournament helpful to development. A club should also recognize that a team should play a reasonable number of tournaments/year (~3-4 tournaments/year for teams U13 or older).
- 35) Appreciation of volunteers---volunteers are the heart and soul of every club and although many commit their time for the love of the game or the love of children, a club should still make an effort to show appreciation for the efforts of volunteers. Whether it be with thank you cards, verbal thanks, or with gifts (i.e. t-shirts or polos), some sort of appreciation should be shown.
- 36) Be nice---youth soccer can sometimes be stressful and challenging, though a club’s leadership should always be nice and respectful. Of course, parents should be as well.