



NEWSLETTER

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Playing for the joy of it: Pick-up soccer By Caroline Kostecky

I slipped on my David Beckham soccer jersey, threw my hair up in a messy ponytail and quickly tied my cleats. I needed to be there right away. I wasn't late, I just already felt like I was missing it, the field, the goal, everything.

I met my friend halfway, (not even talking), we sped to the fields, we were both anxious to play. Kids all of ages were there, some younger, others older. ...

We're all different, play differently. Most of us aren't even friends, but that's what brings us closer.

In soccer, it doesn't matter who's who. We don't care if we have pinnies or not, even goals don't matter. Sometimes you just have to improvise because you don't always have everything you need.

If you don't have a goal, use two shoes as posts instead. All you need for soccer are players and a ball. The more the merrier.

Sometimes, groups of people show up, other times, very few. But that's the game; you can't expect things to happen, you just play through it.

Here is where I belong. It's my home. The sport isn't something I do for exercise, I play for the joy of it.

Goals are what everyone loves. Sometimes, I score a couple of goals, other times very few. But it doesn't matter, because I'm playing, and that's the best gift. We aren't sad when the other team scores, because it's just for fun, and here nothing else matters.

Here, it's about making mistakes, and learning to grow from them. When the younger kids get frustrated, it's our job (as the older kids) to help them, and give them pointers. I practice my skills that I'm not comfortable doing in games. I try them out here. Soccer is different. When I play I get the best feeling in my stomach, because this is where I belong and I am comfortable.

This isn't like a game on my travel team, or a hard soccer practice, this is pick-up ... where we can try out new things, and laugh and sing while we're playing. It's where all who show up have to be comfortable, or there's no point in playing.

Sometimes, we don't have enough players, but it's OK, because we can still play. While we play, we become closer, like a real team. We switch around players when one team is dominating so that it's fair.

This is where I can try out new things, and help others along the way as well, because this is pick-up soccer, not some physical, rough game.

It's just for fun. But it's the best, because here, on the field, is where I belong, and I can do anything.

The best food for the young athlete

By Dev K. Mishra, M.D.

Here's a revelation: eat the least processed food you can find.

Right, that's not a revelation. You've heard it before but it's not an easy thing to do when feeding the typical American teenage athlete. But it can be done, especially if you try to stick to the 80/20 rule that I'll outline below.

There are a lot of different diets and recommendations around but the number of choices is very confusing, and frankly, I'm not sure all of them are safe for young athletes. What we're trying to do with a young athlete is make them as healthy as possible to improve their sport performance -- but more importantly I believe that we can set them up with good habits for a lifetime of healthy eating.

What I'm talking about here is eating as close to natural and minimally processed foods as possible. Some nutritionists call this "eating close to the ground" and other call it "eating clean," etc., and it means stepping back to the old days of eating the most nutrient-packed and least processed foods you can find.

It means shopping on the edges of the grocery store and not down the middle of the store in the pre-packaged frozen foods section. The nutrients, vitamins, and minerals found in natural foods will almost always lead to an improved health profile, improved performance, decreased body fat if the child is overweight, and increased energy levels.

Examples of good food choices for the young athlete

It's hard shopping for young athletes because they can be pretty set in their ways and are heavily influenced by their friends -- who may be eating poorly. Here are just a few examples of what you should aim for in the food choices:

Fruits and Vegetables

- * Apples, bananas, berries, kiwis, oranges
- * Dried fruits as snacks
- * 100 percent fruit smoothies from places like Jamba Juice
- * Leafy greens such as kale, spinach, collard
- * Beans and lentils
- * Avocado

Meat, Fish, Nuts, and Dairy

- * Lean meats: chicken, turkey, lean beef
- * Fish: tuna, salmon
- * Nuts: almonds, walnuts, macadamia, pecans, cashews
- * Dairy: low fat milk, low fat yogurt, eggs

Bread, Cereal, and Grains

- * Bread: 100% whole wheat or whole grain, rye, sourdough
- * High fiber cereal such as Kashi or Cheerios.
- * Oatmeal
- * Couscous

Let's get real, kids will be kids: the 80/20 rule

The guidelines above represent the ideal situations but the practical matter is that it's impossible to have a young athlete follow these suggestions all the time. That's where the 80/20 rule comes into play.

The 80/20 rule means that 80 percent of the time you stick with the healthy eating rules and 20 percent of the time you're allowed to "cheat" and stray from the ideal. When one of your teammates has a birthday and cupcakes are the post-game "snack"-- go for it and enjoy it with your friends! Having a (very) occasional burger, fries, and soda? OK, then do the best you can with your other meals that week.

Be realistic and do the best you can, when you can. You'll live a healthier life for the effort and it will allow you to perform at your best during games.

Sleep well, play well (The teenager's challenge) By Dev K. Mishra, M.D.

I'm sure anyone who's raised an adolescent or teenager can attest to the idea that teenagers don't get as much sleep as they need.

For the adolescent or teenager a number of outside influences take place: more demands on time for homework, socializing, sports, music, or any number of other activities. Let's take a look below at some reasons why sleep patterns change, what the proper amount of sleep is, and how it can affect sports performance.

Why sleep patterns change in a teenager

Each of us -- no matter how old -- has an internal clock that follows roughly a 24-hour cycle. The internal cycle has a wide range of effects on many different body functions such as body temperature, release of hormones (human growth hormone is released in larger amounts during sleep than wakefulness), and amount of sleep required.

In younger children the normal body clock would have them fall asleep around 8 or 9 each night and wake up in the morning when they've had enough sleep. But in puberty the surge in different hormones produced by the body changes all of that and it becomes very difficult to feel sleepy often until after 11pm. Throw in the required time on Facebook and you can see where all of this leads.

How much sleep does a teenager need and how many teens actually get that?

Most sleep researchers tell us that the typical teenager should have 9 hours of sleep per night. Right now many of you are saying to yourselves "get real, that's impossible" for most teenagers.

As the father of two teenage boys I'd have to agree. Several studies of teens have shown that about 90% get less than 9 hours of sleep per night and unfortunately 10% said they typically get less than 6 hours per night. The definition of "sleep deprivation" in teens is not completely clear but generally means that the teen is consistently getting less than 8 hours of sleep per night.

How sleep deprivation affects school and athletic performance

Anyone who's sleepy can be awfully moody but there are many negative consequences beyond that. Being tired during class will obviously make it more difficult to concentrate or even stay awake during class, and there is evidence that being sleep deprived leads to poorer school performance. And most tragically a sleep deprived teen driving a car can lead to disastrous consequences.

In a test of reaction times at Stanford University, people who were tired because of disrupted sleep performed about as poorly as subjects who were legally drunk. The study is the first to show severe impairment in people who have only mild to moderate sleep disturbances. This was an older group of people but it's easy to see that it could be true for teenagers too. Would you like to face a high and tight fastball when you can't react?

As for sports performance, research by **Dr. Cheri Mah** at the Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic has shown that members of Stanford's women's tennis team, men's and women's swimming teams, and men's basketball team improved performance by increasing sleep times.

Some practical tips for sleep and sports performance in teenagers ...

There are many good reasons for teenagers to get more sleep than they do, but once again reality can get in the way of a good plan. So do the best you can to get as close as you can to 9 hours of sleep for your teen.

At the very least there are special situations when you'll want to pay special attention to "sleep preparation" for performance. Do you have an important tournament or championship game coming up? How about a national team tryout? A college identification camp where you'll be traveling east through several time zones? Here are some simple tips:

- * Increase your sleep time several weeks before a major event.
- * Make sleep as much of a priority as technical skill, fitness, and nutrition.
- * Go to sleep and wake up at the same times every day.
- * Turn lights off at night; use bright lights in the morning.
- * When traveling from west to east for competitions try to get out to your new time zone several days in advance to acclimate to the new time zone and avoid jet lag.

(Dev K. Mishra is the creator of the SidelineSportsDoc.com injury management program for coaches. He is an orthopedic surgeon in private practice in Burlingame, Calif. He is a member of the team physician pool with the U.S. Soccer Federation and has served as team physician at the University of California, Berkeley. This article first appeared on SidelineSportsDoc.com.)

Lecture them not By Mike Voitalla

If being told how to play enabled children to master soccer we'd have an excess of great players and superb teams. The game, it is so obvious, is the best teacher. That's not to say the coaches' choice of words doesn't have an influence. The question is how a coach can communicate with youngsters to help them improve, inspire them, and make their soccer experience an enjoyable one.

"Obviously it depends on the age group," says Sam Snow, U.S. Youth Soccer's Coaching Director. "My dialogue with U-6 players is going to be different than with U-19s. But right away, there's part of it. It should be a dialogue not a monologue.

"And that's one of the big issues for a lot of our coaches. They indeed want to lecture the players."

Says Manny Schellscheidt, "Lectures are for the birds."

"Every good coaching manual I see now starts with the three L's: 'No laps, no lines, no lectures,'" says Tony Lepore, a U.S. Soccer Development Academy director whose background in education includes a decade as an elementary and middle school guidance counselor.

Schellscheidt, head of U.S. Soccer's U-14 boys national development program, Lepore and Snow agree that one of the most misguided approaches coaches can take is hold postgame lectures.

"We definitely teach coaches: No postgame mortem!" says Snow. "No match analysis right after the game. After the game, if it's U-12s, for example, the sportsmanship piece comes first. Shaking hands with officials, opposing coaches and players, and my players. Then take care of any injuries and rehydration, and do a cool-down.

"And if I have any wrap-up stuff to say, I want to point out some positives. Then, 'Next practice is on Tuesday, 5 o'clock on Field 7. See you there!'

"If you need to do some match analysis, we've always taught coaches that it's best to do that 24 hours later, at a minimum, where you get yourself on an emotional even keel.

"Right after the game, you got the emotions. I've done it in the past -- we've all made this mistake -- standing there going up and down the players in regard their performance. That's just the coaches dealing with their emotions about the game rather than anything constructive in terms of helping the team improve."

Schellscheidt has coached at every level of the U.S. men's national team program, in addition to winning national titles at the youth, amateur and pro level.

"After the game, we do nothing," Schellscheidt says in regard to coaching the U-14s, "because they're way too charged up, way too emotionally wound up, be it positive or negative."

When the time comes to discuss the game, Schellscheidt says, "It's very much a back and forth -- asking the players what it was like and how it felt.

"How did we succeed? What were the problems? What could we do? What could we not do? It's all about engaging a soccer conversation. A lecture? Forget it.

"In these long-winded, drawn-out speeches -- after the second sentence, they've lost us already. I'm at the point where I don't give answers anymore. I only ask questions. Because it doesn't matter how much I know. It doesn't matter how much I can tell them. It matters whether they involve themselves in the thinking part."

Snow says the US Youth Soccer national youth license course advocates the "guided discovery" approach.

"We're taking it straight from education," says Snow. "That is to pose questions to players to get them to think for themselves and guide them toward the right answers.

Lecture them not continued...

“Get the players where they’re thinking for themselves rather than just being told what to do.”

Of key importance is age-appropriate communication. Avoiding coaching jargon that youngsters won’t understand and focusing on aspects of the game they can comprehend.

“It’s really important to speak their language,” says Lepore.

Snow: “As they get older the questions get more challenging. At U-6 it could be, ‘Can you dribble with your other foot?’ For U-19s, U-18s, it might be, ‘Why are we playing zone defense.’”

Regarding the postgame, Lepore says that players do appreciate some closure – a few words from the coach – but always in a positive tone and in a discussion rather than lecture form. He recommends pointing out things the team did well that are unrelated to the final score.

“They know what the score was and they’re probably going to get that on the way home,” Lepore says.

During practice, all three agree that a coach should introduce one concept at a time, and then let the players have a go before expanding on it.

Schellscheidt says the key to all coaching communication is to be concise.

"If you can't say it in 20 seconds, you probably don't know what you're talking about anyhow," Schellscheidt says. "The coach is really a substitute voice. We want the players to hear the silent voice, the game. The game is actually talking to you."

(Mike Voitalla, the executive editor of Soccer America, coaches youth soccer for [East Bay United](#) in Oakland, Calif. His youth soccer articles are archived at [YouthSoccerFun.com](#).)



To improve their chances in the next World Cup, the American team hires a drama coach.

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The latest coaching recipe By Mike Woitalla

For the second time in six years, the U.S. Soccer Federation has produced a handbook designed to improve youth coaching in America.

Claudio Reyna, the USSF's Youth Technical Director, unveiled the "U.S. Soccer Curriculum" last week. It offers specific, age-appropriate guidelines on how to run practice sessions throughout a season. The aim -- besides turning the USA into the soccer world power it certainly has the resources to become -- is to coach children in a way that helps create an American style of play.

The first sentence of the "Curriculum" addresses what we're shooting for: "All teams will be encouraged to display an offensive style of play based on keeping possession and quick movement of the ball."

And Reyna remarked in his presentation that our nation should strive to play soccer that is enjoyable to watch. Amen.

The key to achieving these goals is how our players are coached at the youngest ages. This too was addressed in U.S. Soccer's "Player Development Guidelines: Best Practices for Coaching Soccer in the United States." That document was produced during Bob Jenkins' tenure as Director of Coaching Education and Youth Development and complements the "Curriculum" perfectly.

The "Curriculum" is full of color-coded graphs explaining how much emphasis to put on which components -- technical, tactical, physical, psychosocial -- at each age group. And includes exercise diagrams and practice plans.

"Best Practices" explains in detail the coaches' relationship to the young players and the perils of overcoaching:

"Coaches can often be more helpful to a young player's development by organizing less, saying less and allowing the players to do more. Set up a game and let the kids play."

This should be a mantra for youth coaches, especially in a country in which so many children are coached by soccer novices so heavily influenced by coach-dominated American sports.

The "Curriculum" includes the statements, "Players must learn to find solutions without constant coaching" and "Keep the essence of the game in the majority of the practices."

The diagrams in the "Tactical Terminology" section and the "Technical Terminology" glossary should serve the novice and intermediate coach well.

Indeed, the "Curriculum" is supposed to serve newcomers to the sport as well as the elite coach and director of coaching. But when it comes to the novice coach, it's important to realize how difficult it can be for volunteers with little coaching, teaching or soccer experience to run a practice.

Just imagine this situation. After a day of sitting in a classroom and obeying adults, a bunch of 6-year-olds arrive at soccer practice full of energy. The novice coach is placing the 16 cones for exercise No. 1 -- but these cones soon turn into hats and Frisbees. And that's before coach has divided the players into four groups to put on their bibs. So the coach -- being watched by the parents -- gets nervous and starts barking, which makes it worse.

Novice coaches should strive to run practices such as the ones outlined in the "Curriculum" -- but they shouldn't be discouraged if they can't orchestrate a Barcelona- or Ajax-like training session on their first tries. So I would like to see one more statement made to the newcomer coach to preface all coaching handbooks, clinics and courses ...

"If all you do is set up goals and let them play, you'll be doing a good job. As you build up the confidence and skill to incorporate more sophisticated facets into a training session and still keep the kids engaged and active, here's what you can do ..."