

DEVELOPMENT BELIEFS

Before setting out a blueprint for development, it's important to have a proper context of the game that we are trying to play. Soccer is a foot-eye coordination sport. That is very unique in American culture, given that the vast majority of the sports we play involve hand-eye coordination. Everything from basketball, baseball, football and lacrosse are all hand-eye coordinated sports. These sports tend to come more easily to us given that we use our hands every day. We routinely use utensils, tie shoes, type on a keyboard, write, and the list goes on. What do we do with our feet? We put one foot in front of another. Not very challenging. So, when we want to manipulate a ball with our feet with the same proficiency as our hands, the demands placed on us are far greater, and therefore the amount of practice and commitment required is far higher. Soccer requires a great deal of commitment just to reach a level of proficiency. Excellence is a whole other matter.

***“Players must develop their own drive and desire to be the best they can be.
They must put in extra time and work on their own” Phil Avison***

UNSTRUCTURED PRACTICE

The truth is that BIFC alone cannot give a young player all the tools required to become a player of substance. Most players are training 1-3 times a week plus 1 game. That's roughly 6 hours of organized soccer per week. It sounds like a lot, but it isn't if the objective is to achieve excellence as a soccer player. The solution is not to necessarily increase the amount of structured practice however as adult-organized structured practice is taxing and can lead to burnout.

Unstructured play, on the other hand, is entirely different. This involves a player simply playing on their own or with friends. Unstructured play is a time for skill refinement, a time for exploration and dedicated repetition. A player seeking excellence can never get enough of this kind of practice. We encourage coaches, parents, teachers and our community to make the time for players to get outside and play with the ball.

SOCCER AGE vs BIRTH AGE

Many soccer federations around the world have identified stages of learning for young players. In doing so, they have identified the technical, tactical, physical and mental areas that need to be developed as a player progresses through those stages. It is also a necessity given that there are key ages when learning is not only optimal but critical for certain skills to take root. BIFC fully supports this progressive approach to development.

However, some players joining a BIFC program have not passed through these stages and received appropriate instruction. Unfortunately, they may have bypassed learning and development stages in their technical progress as a soccer player. In these circumstances a player's current birth age does not match what we would refer to as their "soccer age". A BIFC coaching curriculum must focus into a player's soccer age as well as their birth age.



SOCCKER AGE EMPHASIS



Teams with a young “soccer age” should be encouraged to play the game in a way that is appropriate to their development stage. We don’t believe that players with a young soccer age should be playing the adult version of soccer, such as 1-2 touch passing with an emphasis on attacking the opponent’s goal. BIFC believes they should be playing the game in such a way that brings out the skills required to eventually play the adult version.

The younger teams at BIFC will be encouraged to dribble the ball and take risks. That can be difficult for adults to watch at times because these players will make far more mistakes when approaching the game in this way. However, it is important that we allow this process to take place.

The BIFC way means we encourage our players to score goals using their skill and their brains. We don’t encourage our players to simply create chaos by launching the ball aimlessly into the opponent’s penalty area in the hopes of it generating fortuitous bounces. This style of play does not help our players see the game or solve problems in a thoughtful and skillful manner. Coaching young players to go to the goal with skill and intelligence can be a frustrating development process because it is much harder for them to score that way. However, in the end, it will benefit their overall development as a player.

SKILLS FACTOR

A fully developed team will secure the ball through a combination of both passing and dribbling. At BIFC we believe that securing the ball as an individual is a fundamental building block for player development. There are so many moments in the game when a pass cannot be made. It may only last a second, or several seconds. The player on the ball must have the skill to get out of trouble, evade an opponent, change an angle, find a pass or create a shot on goal.

Having an ability to evade or get beyond an opponent in a variety of different ways also allows players to achieve a high level of composure on the ball, and ultimately results in better decision making. A player can only make those decisions within the boundaries of their technical ability.



“Concentration on dribbling and ball mastery needs to take place in the early years of development or these critical skills will never take root” Phil Avison

Thus, if a player has a bigger technical toolkit at their disposal then the potential of decisions at their disposal will also increase.