

About TOPSoccer Programs, in General

Q) What is TOPSoccer?

A) TOPSoccer (The Outreach Program for Soccer) is a community-based training and team placement program for young athletes with disabilities, organized by youth soccer association volunteers. The program is designed to bring the opportunity of learning and playing soccer to any boy or girl, age 8-19, who has a mental or physical disability. The goal is to enable the thousands of young athletes with disabilities to become valued and successful members of the US Youth Soccer family.

Q) What is the purpose of TOPSoccer?

A) The TOPSoccer program was created to train young people with disabilities in a caring coaching environment to play soccer; to serve as a feeder program to recruit, assess and train players to participate in competitions offered by existing sports organizations for people with disabilities; and to mainstream higher ability players onto regular youth soccer teams.

Q) Can you describe the program?

A) TOPSoccer was designed not as a competitor to the programs run by other sports organizations for people with disabilities, but rather as a complementary program that works hand in hand with organizations like Special Olympics to expand the overall training and competition opportunities for young people with disabilities. The TOPSoccer program often works as a feeder program: recruiting, assessing, and training new soccer players who would benefit from opportunities sponsored by these sports organizations. Many of the sports opportunities currently offered to young people with disabilities are school based. However, many parents of these young people would like their child to participate in the same community sports program as their non-disabled brothers and sisters - to wear the same club uniform, play at the same fields, go to the same awards banquets, and if appropriate, play on a non-disabled team. TOPSoccer can fill this need.

The TOPSoccer program has also helped introduce the Unified Soccer Camp in many areas, a concept developed by Special Olympics. The Unified Soccer Camp brings together disabled and non-disabled soccer players in a positive and fun environment, hopefully breaking down social barriers through a common love of the game.

A basic TOPSoccer program consists of two vital components. The first is a field site where soccer players with disabilities can receive high-quality training to help develop their soccer skills. Training sessions could include activities such as scrimmages, small-sided games (3 v 3, 4 v 4) and tournaments.

The second component of the TOPSoccer program is an ongoing player assessment process that places participants in the most appropriate playing situation, including placement on non-disabled, intramural and club teams, or involvement in programs established by other sports associations for people with disabilities (i.e., Special Olympics).

Q) How is the program financed?

A) Through a generous grant from the Soccer Industry Council of America (SICA) and the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (SGMA) U S YOUTH SOCCER is able to provide mini-grants to new and existing TOPSoccer programs, through their State Association. Grant applications are reviewed and a limited number awarded based on the applicant's outline, goals, objectives and ability to meet the guidelines and criteria set forth by US YOUTH SOCCER.

Q) Who is eligible for TOPSoccer?

A) Any youth player between the ages of 4-19 years old having a physical or mental disability that limits their ability to perform at the level of play they have chosen to participate. Emphasis of this program is on development, training, and providing meaningful participation rather than on competition.

Q) How can this program be a great success?

- A)**
1. Placement of players by ability, not age.
 2. Highlight players' abilities, not disabilities.
 3. Allow players to have a meaningful experience
 4. Allow players to achieve desired goals without assistance
 5. Fun, Fun, Fun!

Q) Why do we need the TOPSoccer program?

A) TOPSoccer was formed to perpetuate the US Youth Soccer mission statement, which is, in part, "to foster the physical, mental, and emotional growth and development of America's youth through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition." There are thousands of children with disabilities who need, and can be provided with, the opportunity to play soccer through the TOPSoccer Program.

Q) What are the TOPSoccer program's objectives?

A) The program provides an opportunity to children with disabilities to play soccer through rule or equipment adaptations. We will place equal emphasis on socialization, playing soccer, and physical fitness.

Q) How is the program set up?

- A)**
1. Coaching workshops and meetings are offered throughout the year.
 2. Mailings, concerned with trying to gain interest in the program are sent to special education teachers throughout the area.
 3. Participants are placed on teams depending on their needs and abilities, not age.
 4. Involves participants who are unable to participate due to medical reasons.
 5. Rules are created to fit specific needs.

Q) What are the program's benefits?

- A)**
1. Development of motor skills and improved physical fitness.
 2. Promotes social skills by teaching teamwork and cooperation
 3. Provides safe participation and fair play.
 4. Develops positive self-concepts through experiences in discipline, initiative and achievement, which encourage children to fully realize their potential.
 5. To have FUN!

Q) How do I coach or help recruit coaches?

A) Coaches can come from universities, the community, and from within the club. Coaching training will be provided by the VYSA or other qualified institutions. No special training is required; however, it is helpful.