

**Soccer Tournaments, My True Beliefs**  
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Fact, Soccer Tournaments are not helping with the development of youth soccer throughout the US. Not that I have ever had a fear of ever expressing my opinions but I thought expressing them through our blog is better, so that they can be viewed, shared and commented on by other soccer coaches.

There are lots of articles about the nation become crazed on soccer tournaments yet through the whole US Soccer hierarchy we keep promoting and creating more as well as encouraging teams to participate in them. Why? So money can be made? Tournaments are a quick way for clubs or organizations to make a quick buck and the higher the caliber of teams participating the more expensive the entry fee becomes but the focus of player development does not increase.

My loathe of tournaments does not come from one time I refused to take a depleted team to a weekend packed with four games to an event one week before the league started, which probably lead to me finally being fired from coaching the team. Nor does it come from battling to change the mentality of 30 coaches at a club I was the Director of Coaching. It simply comes from I have never been to or seen a tournament that understand that the development of players should come first. Perhaps US Youth Soccer State and Regional Events Tournaments have a better understanding but even I have some concerns about they way this are ran.

Physically I feel I still have a decent level of fitness but I could not ever really imagine myself participating in four, sixty minute games that realistically take place over less than 48 hours. Yet we ask youth soccer players who are still developing physically to do this. When I discuss tournaments with youth soccer coaches I will ask them if they would play in this amount of games during this short period of time and I always receive the same response "No".

The pressure of winning or better yet performing at the highest level tournaments so players can achieve the magnificent full ride scholarship to a division one college has resulted in teams traveling around the country and spending less time on the training ground where the true development should be taking place. Of course you need to compete and play games otherwise that would be like asking professional actors on Broadway to rehearse their entire careers and never perform in front of a sold out crowd. But I am aware of teams with 11 year old girls traveling to **twelve** tournaments a season, so in less then 4 months that probably participated in almost 50 games. When did the practicing and development take place? I know when the burning out of youth soccer players and families came about.

During coach and parent education clinics I will often show the A&E documentary "Playing to Extremes". This program covers several children and adolescents who are involved with youth sports such as hockey, ice skating and soccer. The soccer clip follows a family who spend almost ever weekend of their lives traveling up and down the east coast to tournaments. Winning these events has become part of their expectations yet when they film the young soccer player displaying his trophies won at tournaments; he pulls out a cardboard box from his closet. My conclusion of this footage would be that the child does not care about the winning and would probably enjoy having some weekends of being a child. Further in the filming the father shows his disappointment in way that has become costumed of soccer parents.

Tournaments do offer the opportunity for coaches to put teams in to a team building environment, as well as providing the players the chance to play against some different competition. I don't have too many problems with entering tournaments for this reason but realistically this should probably be limited to three or four tournaments a year and that would not include entering into State Cup, which should not be included as an extra event.

For at lot of teams seasons are made or broken by how successful they are in State Cups and I could question if it is because of this event that the nation has become tournament crazed. At the

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2007 Kentucky Youth Soccer Association I was shocked with the lack of teams who tried to play “attractive soccer” at a fear of losing. Coaches and parents struggling to find other ways of measuring success other than by results, perhaps if a child continues to stay playing then the coach has been successful.

Websites have been created on where youth teams are ranked nationally, and soccer magazines who usually promote the development of the game also create issues that focus on tournaments and which teams are the most successful at these events. During his time as the national team coach, Bruce Arena said “There are only two teams in this nation that need to be concerned about results, the Men’s & Women’s National Teams”. Therefore the only rankings we should care about are those created by FIFA.

Of course we see the top teams at club and the national level participating in tournaments but the players participating experience a lot of rest in between games, and even there are some concerns about these players over playing. Realistically it would be impossible for a hosting organization to set up their tournament in this kind of format, so the best option is to limit teams to playing one game a day.

I may just be one voice with one opinion that will never change a nation, just like we will never bring back the generation of the Sandlot Kids (perhaps that should be my discussion for another time). But unlike some I am pleased that the United States Soccer Federation has created the academy program, it will fit in better with the practice to game ratio which is encompassed by European, African and South American nations. By no means does this mean that the US will now produce a Men’s World Cup winning team but it may make some over enthusiastic coaches, parents and clubs realize that the true development takes place on the training fields.