

Who Are The Best Coaches?

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July 30th, 1966 is the day that all English Football Fans can look back upon with nostalgia. Although I was not alive, I know it is the only reason we have a solitary star above the crest on our national team's soccer jersey. But it was the World Cups of 1986 in Mexico and 1990 in Italy that I was inspired by some of the world's greatest players.

Diego Maradona of Argentina and Paul Gascoigne of England inspired many youth players such as myself during their respective World Cups. The soccer world witnessed them take the game to another level. Both players had the skills, talents and ability to inspire their own team-mates, but also had young players dreaming and imitating them throughout fields and playgrounds in most of the world. This also turned these great soccer legends, into soccer coaches.

In the 21st century street soccer has largely disappeared, but the greatest game in the world is more popular than ever. So with the FIFA World Cup in Germany just around the corner I am yet again waiting with great anticipation not just to cheer on my native country but also to witness Bruce Arena's US National Team.

Like so many fellow Brits, I am gaining great satisfaction helping develop US youth players to compete at the highest possible level. In the 5 years I have been living in the United States, I have witnessed the game change so rapidly. With nearly 11 million Youth Players playing in the United States, it is easy to see why it is a game for all to be involved with and have fun.

People around the globe know that this country is becoming a force in the world's most popular game. Along with the growth of the game in the African Nations there is a reason why the US Men's National team sits proudly in the top five FIFA rankings. There are many reasons for the growth of the sport in the US, but nobody should underestimate the work that US Youth Soccer, USSF and NSCAA have put in to help raise the level, especially through coach education and grassroots soccer.

A majority of today's youth players have coaches that can inspire them whether their coach is a volunteer parent or a paid professional; they have somebody that has the desire and willingness to shape their life through sport. If you were to ask people that have been fortunate enough to make a career from sports; majority of them will thank a coach that worked with them during their youth. As a child playing the game in England, I never had a professional coach with any qualifications until I was 16 years old.

If you recall back to your own childhood I am sure you will remember playing pick-up games with your friends, or throwing a football or baseball with your parents, I often wonder where did those scenes go? It saddens me that those times have changed and I believe this is because a child's social life is as busy and organized as an adults work life.

Apart from watching great soccer players like Maradona & Paul Gascoigne, the best coaches during my youth soccer career were my parents. Not only did they transport me around from game to game and watch without commenting, but they encouraged and received satisfaction from watching me practice in my own back yard, trying to impersonate my soccer hero's.

The World Cup in Germany offers coach's and parents the opportunity to help our youth soccer players build a real passion for the game. We can all learn from it and build the game to even higher limits. Every, pass, shot, dribble and tackle will be broadcast live on television, and still one of the best ways to learn is by watching the worlds greatest players performing in the worlds greatest sporting event.

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Trying to get your players to watch the game is not an easy task, so as coach's and parents we can encourage this by watching it with them. You can commentate on what the players did and what was successful. Then have the players provide you with feedback and give their opinions on the game.

Have the youth player watch an individual who plays in a position that they like to play. Most children like to score goals and play as a striker, but have them observe more than just the final product. Watch the runs that the forwards make to create these opportunities and then see if they can reproduce the skill in a practice or game. This is a good tip for the older or more skilled player.

All of my life I played defense, but I would watch the bigger picture and was mesmerized by the players who would beat their opponent on the dribble with great skill and moves. After the game my father and I would go outside to play 1v1 so I could mimic the player I had just watched. One soccer ball, a patch of grass and probably 20 minutes was all I needed to have fun as a child.

Many coaches have approached me with the problem of trying to get players to do soccer work at home. Have the players write a report on a game and bring it back to the next practice; this may sound boring to the child, but what will happen is the child will pay greater attention to what is going on and probably end up going outside and start playing with the ball.

Thanks to my parents the game of soccer is in my blood; I live, breath and drink the game. So why not help our young soccer players to become better soccer players not just by coaching them during scheduled practice times but to love the game beyond the field.