

Recreation/AYSO and Competitive/Travel Clubs

Soccer is FUN! Always remember that for a kid to want to be involved, the activity Must be fun for her/him! Metropolitan areas in the USA provide an abundance of recreational facilities and programs for playing soccer, and here, Broward County, is no exception. The only difficulty is figuring out which one is right for your child. Some kids just want a place to meet friends, some kids want to become pro! I have provided you below with some general aspects of recreational and competitive programs to help you through the tangle. Please let me know if you have questions or new information to update an article!

Recreation/*AYSO leagues are geared towards players who want to play sports in a local, social format without the organized competitive emphasis of clubs often referred to as travel. Coaches (mostly parents) join on a voluntary basis, some of which have experience playing and coaching soccer, most of which do not. Every league has its own method for placing players on a team, however as long as openings exist, players are never "cut." Although some leagues do have an avenue to compete against other leagues, most of these leagues last only a few months out of the year. In some areas, AYSO leagues offer 2 seasons, giving more opportunity to recreational players for soccer learning and fitness throughout the year.

*(update 1) - Some AYSO programs have developed a competitive division where players try out for select teams to compete in open tournaments. Players must already participate in the AYSO program to be considered for these select teams. These teams practice and play in the regular AYSO league in addition to representing their local AYSO club in outside tournaments. The select teams can be a good spring board for those players looking to transition to strictly travel programs. Just as well, being able to play with and against more skilled players even within the recreational atmosphere might be just the right proportion of competition in a player's soccer life...individual needs for individual children.

Competitive or "Travel" Leagues are geared towards players who are looking for a competitive atmosphere whether in games or in practice or both and/or for year-round soccer fun. Competitive coaches, some of whom are voluntary, some of which are paid, have more experience than the average "Rec" coach and offer players an in depth view at playing soccer. Many clubs also require coaches to be certified by a national organization. This, although does not ensure, helps provide a higher standard of teaching than recreational settings can offer. To play in these leagues, players generally must try-out for a team and wait for final selection decisions to know if they will play for the club of their choice. These leagues usually play year-round in the warmer states if you factor in division finals, regional tournaments, and state tournaments, some of which depend on season statistics. Northern states can continue seasons indoors as well as offer separate winter leagues indoors, although more and more indoor facilities are popping up yearly in warmer states simply because of the popularity of the small-sided indoor format.

*(update 2) - Some competitive programs have no-cut policies for all players under the age of 12 in order to give opportunity for the early development of basic skills and even offer non-competitive programs for ages 3-12 where the focus is purely technical (meaning how a skill is performed as opposed to tactical, why it is performed).

Ultimately, coaching philosophies, personalities, and approaches are as unique as are those of schoolteachers and not only vary from club to club, but also vary from coach to coach within clubs. Both types of organizations provide a niche appropriate and helpful to many. A child looking to simply get some exercise would be frustrated in a competitive program and might actually lose confidence, just as the kid with a high level of athleticism dreaming of a world cup title would be frustrated in a recreational setting with only a high goal-scoring record to show for her/his talent. The education

at our fingertips can drastically benefit our children if used the right way. It is the responsibility of the coaches and programs to help educate you, the parents, and kids, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the You, the parents, to search for the right fit for your family's and child's needs. Remember, this is about the kids, not us.

You're better than you think!

Keep Playing, Keep Sharing!

Coach Vicky (CV)