

Parent Education

By Mark Parker, Director of Grassroots Development
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I still regard myself as a relatively “newbie” in Canada when it comes to the understanding of parental involvement within youth soccer. Coming from a country with a firm professional club structure in place, I was somewhat surprised at the level of responsibility parents have here in Canada, and British Columbia.

The parent involvement has such a wide spectrum of activities; many positive and unfortunately, some negative. Sadly the negative aspects hinder player and coach development.

I have come across many families who have dedicated their lives to community clubs. Not only are they responsible for taking care of their own children, but they also “act” as their coach, sit on the club’s board as volunteers, and sometimes they even take on tasks like putting up the nets and lining the fields. There are no words to sum up these kinds of person, yet we have many. What wonderful people.

Then there are the parents who are totally committed to their children’s cause. They are realistic in their children’s ability, they are happy to help out when asked and they enjoy the sideline chatter with the other parents. Most of all they are supportive of the volunteer individual who has stepped forward to offer his or her time to coach the team – many times with very limited knowledge or experience of soccer.

Unfortunately there are the parents that we refer to as the “nightmare” parents. They live through the children’s ability, or lack of it to reach heights they never did as a youth. They instruct (or as I prefer to call it, “they destruct”) players from the sideline. They don’t comprehend or at least are not willing to understand the club or team’s philosophy. They question the official’s decisions and they question the coach’s decisions. Most importantly don’t understand the need for Long Term Player Development and the path as how to get there.

Upon my arrival in BC I was very fortunate to experience standing on the sideline as a parent and then on the other side of the line as a coach. I recall an incident back in the winter of 2003 while watching a U6 girl’s game in Vancouver. The girls were playing 6 v 6 on a mini field – (too many players at this age, but I’m not going to go into the game format, other than saying the format has been corrected). As the ball approaches the goal area, the defending team’s parents shout “kick-it!” subsequently the little girl kicks the ball as hard as she can and as far away as possible and the parents cheer and rejoice that the ball is now “away” from the goal, but in the possession of the opposition. This confused me, but I refrained from any comments.

A few weeks later I was invited to my very first NHL hockey game. What was very evident was that during the power play, when the puck was released up the ice, the fans cheered. The next weekend during my daughter’s game again I heard applause when the ball was released up the field. I politely asked one of the fathers as to why they cheer when the teams kick the

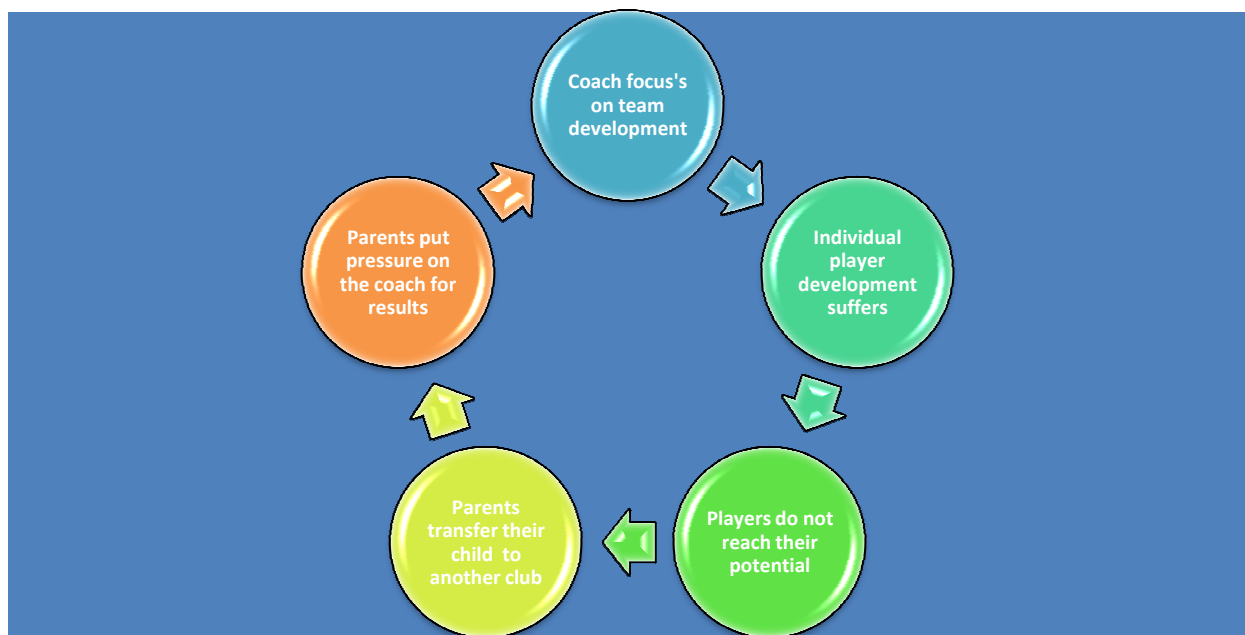
ball up field? His response to me was “Well, they are killing the play” – At that moment it all fell in place- The parents didn’t understand the need for ball retention and skill development. What I did recognize was that we needed parental education.

Based on these areas of recognition BC Soccer has created the “Educated Parent” document which focuses on assisting Grassroots Parents with ideas and methods of becoming a supportive parent. In addition it is geared towards parents who wish to learn how to help their child reach his/her potential, given the fact that all soccer players are not created equally. The document is available on the Grassroots page of our website www.bcsoccer.net

In striving to support the education of parents, BC Soccer has entered into an agreement with the online company Sports Path – www.sportspath.com. To view both the Educated Parent document and the Sports Path web page, please see the following link; <http://www.bcsoccer.net/bcsa/COMMUNITY/MemberServices/ParentEducation/tabid/228/Default.aspx>

I would like to highlight an area of player development that I feel is necessary for parents to understand and realize the challenges that face the volunteer coach.

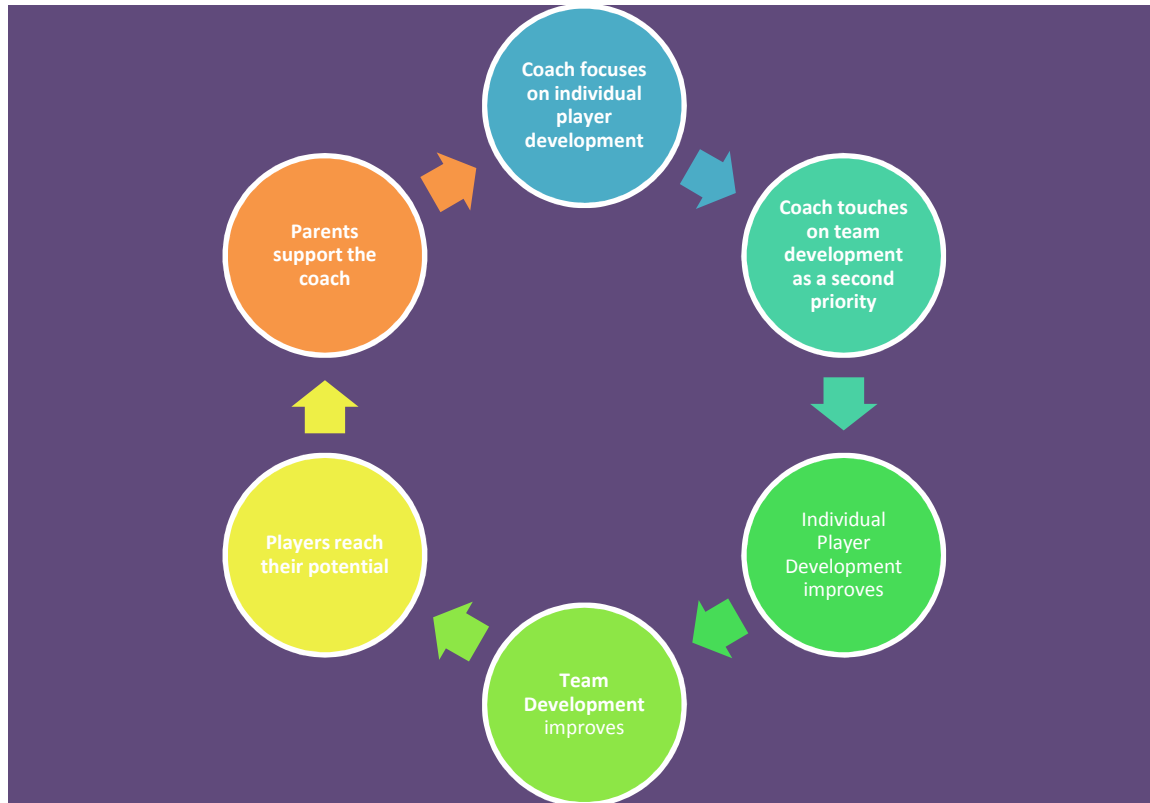
In general at the very young age groups Under 6 – Under 10 the team trains for 60 minutes once, maybe in some cases twice a week and then a game. Game day comes around and the parents are waiting in anticipation for an exciting game. Parental expectations during game day outweigh by far the honest understanding of good individual player development. All parents want to see their precious children on winning teams, hence them being seen as individual winners. However the coach has specific individual player developmental goals in mind to improve individual abilities. This is where the conflict arises; I call it the ongoing cycle of poor individual development.



Coaches in our system do not have the luxury of coaching the club players for five sessions a week, however parents are first to blame the coach when their children are not developing individual skills. Parents want the team to be seen as “winners” from a pure results point of

view. Ironically parents are more than willing to enroll the aspiring pianist into 4, 5 and sometimes 6 lessons per week.

Perhaps the development cycle should take some form or form as set out below, given the need for total commitment and support of parents to the need of player development.



The game in Canada will only improve if there is a total collaboration between all stakeholders, players, parents, coaches, administrators, officials, sponsors, parks and recreational centers to name a few. An additional source of education would be the Canadian Soccer Association's Wellness To World Cup document which should be available on provincial soccer organizations websites as well as at www.canadasoccer.com.

BC Soccer recognizes that it is not enough to just educate coaches. Parental Education is just as important as any other form of soccer development education, since parents are often the least informed stake holders within the soccer circle. Parents need guidance on how to help their child reach their potential, how to be supportive, and how to help their club in its mission to develop players. They also have to recognize that their children at times have limitations.

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