PSYCHOLOGY OF YOUTH SOCCER

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PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF YOUTH SOCCER

Competitive Readiness

Perceptions of ability

Soccer Motivation

Children only play

Coaching ramifications

COMPETITIVE READINESS?

"Most children are not psychologically ready for competitive sport until they are 10-12 years old"

COMPETITIVE READINESS

- This perspective *does not* mean children cannot learn soccer skills, enjoy soccer,and develop fitness and health
- However, it *does* mean that children *do not* understand the competition process the way adults do
- Thus, adults should help children define and understand their soccer experience

COMPETITIVE READINESS

- Cognitive maturity
- Spatial ability
- Understanding ability
- Effort vs. ability
- Realistic appraisal of ability

SOCCER MOTIVATION

- Being with friends
- Playing
- Excitement
- Learning
- Improving

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY

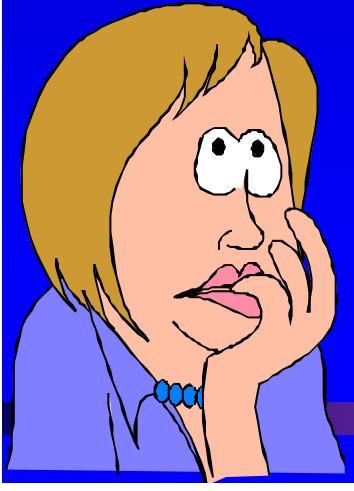
"Sport psychologists believe that the major underlying reason for participating in and leaving sport are perceptions of ability."

PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY INFORMATION SOURCES

- 8-14 yrs vs. 14-18yrs
- Evaluative Feedback: 1 vs. 3 dimensions (coach, peer, spectators)
- Internal information: 1 vs. 3 dimensions (effort, skill, ease of learning)

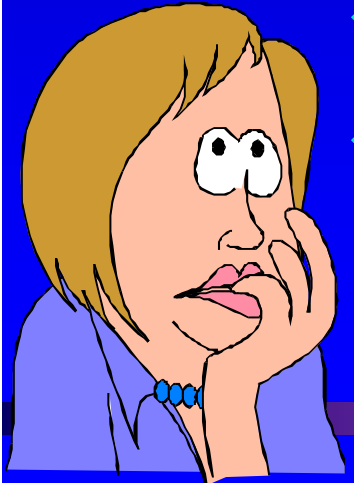
HOW CHILDREN PLAY WHEN THEY ARE IN CHARGE

- Potential evidence about how coaches may want to structure practice and games.



CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN ONLY PLAY

- Lots of action
- Lots of personal involvement in the action
- Close scores – no blowouts
- Challenges strongly match skills
- Opportunities to affirm friendships



RAMIFICATIONS FOR COACHING

COACHING PHILOSOPHY

- Professional model vs. Educational and Developmental model

PROFESSIONAL MODEL

- Entertainment
- Success = winning
- Failure = losing

EDUCATIONAL MODEL

- Multiple definitions of success
- Success = learning, improvement
- Success = love of physical activity, health, fitness
- Success = developing desirable personal qualities (e.g., confidence)
- Success = friendships, fun, good memories

EDUCATIONAL MODEL

- Fewer definitions of failure
- Failure = not trying hard, not persisting, giving up
- Failure = poor sportpersonship, unethical behavior

TEAM GOALS

- Think short and long term
- The practice, the current season, next season
- A lifelong love of physical activity and sport
- Create an atmosphere so that children want to come to practice

COACH CREATED CLIMATE

- Create a performance (vs. outcome) oriented atmosphere
- De-emphasize winning: Its often uncontrollable and unrealistic
- Children will be exposed to plenty of information stressing the importance of winning (e.g., fun, attention, rewards, etc.)

COACH CREATED CLIMATE

- Emphasize controllable and realistic performance goals such as skill development, fitness improvement, learning, etc.
- Create opportunities for fun and socialization

A FEW PARTING EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS

- One of the strongest predictors of stress in youth sport is the child's sense of how important winning is to adults
- Coaches who became more positive (e.g., encouraging) drastically reduced children's drop out rates and increase their self-esteem

Thank You