



How to Train Elite Players With No Cuts Before U12

# Keep the Pool Open

# Why be inclusive?

The most robust data tracking the sport participation patterns of Americans on an annual basis is produced through a household survey conducted by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA). In 2007, according to SFIA, 44.7% of youth ages 13-17 were active three times a week in any sport activity, organized or unstructured; by 2014 that number had dropped to 39.8%. The trend was more pronounced among 6-12 year olds, falling from 34.7% to 26.9%, with most sports seeing a dropoff in total participants.

## KIDS ARE LEAVING SPORTS SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN PARTICIPATION AMONG 6-12 YEAR OLDS



The decline is rooted in many factors, and not just screen-time diversions. An ESPNW/Aspen Institute Project Play Survey of Parents on youth sports issues in

September 2014 showed that most parents have concerns about risk of injury (87.9%), the quality or behavior of coaches (81.5%), cost (70.3%), the time commitment required

## 1. Keep players!

Project Play:  
2008: 5.6 million  
2013: 5.0 million

# Why be inclusive?

## 2. Raise the general talent level

“If you want to raise the level of the elite player, then you must raise the level of the average player.” - Rinus Michels, Ajax



# Why be inclusive?



3. Today, remedial.  
Tomorrow, gifted?

# Top youth players, then and now

Player	Now	Then
Julio Gomez	On loan to Coras (MEX 2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Golden Ball, 2011 U17 WC
Souleymane Coulibaly	Kilmarnock (SCO)	Golden Boot, 2011 U17 WC
Jonathan Espericueta	Rarely used at Tigres (MEX)	Silver Ball, 2011 U17 WC
Samid Yesil	Looking for a club	Silver Boot, 2011 U17 WC
Sani Emmanuel	Last seen trialing with Sarajevo	Gold Ball/Silver Boot, 2009 U17
Borja Baston	Rarely used at Swansea	Golden Boot, 2009 U17
Henrique Almeida	Oft-loaned player in Brazil	Golden Ball/Boot, 2011 U20

And you think you can project “elite” level at age 8?

# American Development Model ...

U.S. Olympic Committee, 2014

Based on "Long-Term Athlete Development" (LTAD) theory

Key principles:

- Universal access to create opportunity for all athletes
- Developmentally appropriate activities that emphasize motor and foundational skills
- Multi-sport participation
- Fun, engaging and progressively challenging atmosphere
- Quality coaching at all age levels

## ADM FOR SPORT CLUBS



Sport clubs and organizations are a key part of both the youth and adult sport experience in the United States. By using key ADM concepts, a sport club can focus on growing their athletes and teams into success stories. Use these 10 key recommendations to help maximize your sport clubs' impact on the athlete's sport experience:

- 1) Limit cuts for ages 0-12 in sport programs and focus on developing skills over competition outcomes.

# ... and longtime U.S. soccer principles

## Matches

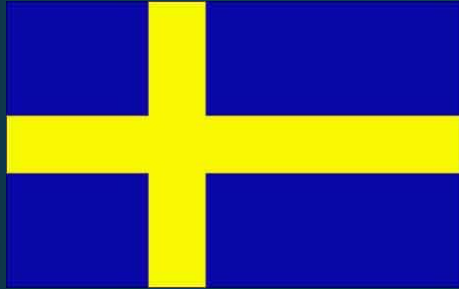
Matches of 8v8 to 11v11.  
Tryouts should not begin until the U-13 age group. Less emphasis on the match results and more emphasis on players' performances.

U.S. Youth Soccer Player  
Development Model, 2012

## Virginia Youth Soccer Association U9-U12 Developmental Travel (date unknown):

**Little or No Selecting Out**--Every player that seeks to participate has a place to play unless the player clearly exhibits extremely poor skills or desire that does not meet the minimum standard set by the technical director. The mere fact that the player seeks to participate expresses motivation, character and the player's desire to play at a level that is more challenging. It would be expected that ninety to one hundred percent would be accepted. As a result young players do not see themselves as failures and the development base is broadened. It has been shown time and again that except in rare cases, the player pool picked as "the best" at U9 is very different than that picked at U13. ... Players may easily move in and out of travel soccer without the stigma of failure.

# Based on programs elsewhere



Swedish hockey players play on travel all-star teams *after* puberty.  
Successful hockey club Skelleftea cuts no kids before age 17.

*Source: Tom Farrey, ESPN*



Icelandic pro football clubs have open door policy through age 18.  
Walk in, pay small fee, train with UEFA B coach.

*Sources: The Guardian, These Football Times*



Doesn't have U12s in Academy every day. Players are expected to go home and have free play with neighbors.

*Source: ECA Report on Youth Academies in Europe (see next slide)*





One of the elements of training in 'De Toekomst' which is very beneficial for young players is the lack of overtraining; 12-year-old boys only train three times a



the football equipment at AFC Ajax

week and on weekends they play a match. AFC Ajax coaches believe that even this is a lot for such young players. The coaches believe that children have their

with confidence on the ball always the priority

#### Age Category: 8 to 12 years

##### Team spirit building

##### 4-3-3

12-year-old boys train three times a week.

- U 9: 6 v 6 (5 + goalkeeper), 40 X 30 m, 4 X 2 m
- U 10: 8 v 8, 50 x 40m, 5 x 2 m
- U 11: 9 v 9, 60 x 50m, 6 x 2 m
- U 12: 11 v 11, 70 x 50m, 6 x 2 m
- Focus on positional play

#### Age Category: 13 to 16 years

##### 4-3-3

- 15-year-olds train three times a week.
- The training focuses on running exercises or training in passing the ball over short distances. In the AFC Ajax academy, most important is training with the ball. It is a Dutch style. Accurate and aggressive.
- Focus on positional game play (functional training), and games with many variations.
- Player Evaluation starts.

#### Age Category: 17 to 20 years

##### 4-3-3

When they are not training, young academy prospects should play on the street with their friends; this can be crucial to a player's development both as a person and a football player.

# Keeping the pool open to all

## Pros

- Delay cuts at least until puberty, when you *might* be able to project future level
- Give players a chance to catch up if they fall behind at age 6-11
- Build a community soccer culture of well-trained players and educated fans
- OVERALL: You're giving more players a chance to be "elite" in the long run, which means you'll have a large talent pool

## Cons

- Advanced players might not be challenged in games with lower-level players
- Serious players want serious training; a lot of less-serious players can drag things down
- *Some* signs of aptitude are evident at younger ages
- OVERALL: Elite players need elite training and elite challenges

# What are your objectives?

## Clubs/coaches

- Develop players at all levels (“elites,” potential high school players, rec players, special-needs players) to reach potential
- Retain players

## Players/parents

- Reach potential
- Get exercise
- **FUN!**

# Idea 1: The baseball model

## Vienna Little League

- T-Ball: Age 5-6. First-graders can skip it.
- Rookie: Age 6-8, mostly 7.
- A: Age 7-9, mostly 8.
- AA (players pitch): Age 7-11, mostly 8-10.
- AAA: Age 9-12, mostly 10-11.
- Majors: Age 10-12.

## Vienna Youth Soccer

- U4 Cubs
- U5
- U6
- U7
- U8 (older kids try out for U9 travel thanks to birth-year mandate)
- U9, U10, U11, U12 (House or travel)

# Idea 2: The “crossover” model

All players participate in recreational games.

Players may sign up for supplemental training and occasional games (maybe a postseason festival) against peers in other clubs.

Selected players get advanced training and more frequent, higher-level games against peers in other clubs.

These “selections” are fluid throughout a year.



# Idea 2: The “crossover” model



# Idea 3: Three fluid tiers (U11 or so)

## Elite

- Full-fledged travel schedule
- 2-3 serious training sessions per week
- Some winter commitment (but still flexibility to play another sport)

## Developmental

- Local travel
- 2 serious training sessions per week, maybe 1-2 combined with Elite
- Optional winter and supplemental programs

## Recreational

- Play within club (or combined with a couple of neighboring clubs)
- 1 session a week with team, 1 optional session with trainers

## ALL

- Free play with open invitation to all players: every week or every other week
- Small rosters. Developmental players fill in for Elite players when they miss games. Rec players fill in for Developmental.
- Tournament (maybe indoors) with mixed-up teams.

# Why is fluidity so important?

1. Keep your top players challenged from within





# Why is fluidity so important?

## 2. Keep your promising players engaged

### Germany, Iceland:

Top coaches work with young players, using open clubs or a blanket of regional training centers to identify and develop talent whenever and wherever it emerges.

### USA:

Top coaches select young players who shine at cattle-call tryouts (in other words, athletes) and think themselves too good to work with anyone other than the A teams.

# Why is fluidity so important?

## 3. At older ages, you're going to need more players

### 12-player U9 pool:

1. 3 players move
2. 2 players get fed up with coach and leave
3. 7 players remain
4. Have fun poaching 9 players from other clubs to get a 16-player roster at U14!

### 48-player U9 pool:

1. 12 players move
2. 6 players get fed up with club and leave
3. 30 players remain
4. You can probably find 2 players who've moved into your area to have two 16-player U14 teams.

## Tear down the wall!

Sunil Gulati, at 2013 USSF Annual General Meeting, citing former U.S. and MLS coach Bob Gansler ...

Bob Gansler, who spoke last night, who said -- he said to me a number of times -- I don't understand this division between competitive players and recreational players, because all players, when they start to play, play because they want to have fun, and every player wants to compete. So none of us know who, the 6-year-old that's going to be Leo Messi or Claudio Reyna or John O'Brien or Cobi Jones, all of whom are here. None of us know who the 7-year-old is that is going to turn out to be Alex Morgan or Hope Solo.



# Other ideas?

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