

Keep the focus on playing soccer!

The main thing U16 and U18 players want is to have lots of fun at practice and to play serious matches. At the same time, most of them are also looking for other things: social contact, nonathletic activities and an active decision-making role.



What do advanced youth players expect of their club?

Promoting individual development

U16 and U18 players have a clear idea of what they want from a club (and not just in soccer!), because at this age they are already young adults, with well-defined desires, opinions and attitudes. And they have specific ideas about which sports they want to play — in their free time with friends, in school or with a club.

Those players who still faithfully show up to play soccer at this age represent a relatively stable resource for the future. So it's all the more important for clubs to be and to remain attractive to this core group. Players who have “caught the soccer bug” may be able to handle short-term lows and motivation-killers (e.g. consecutive defeats, bad practices, field closures), but in the long run it takes state-of-the-art training methods to keep them motivated.

And it's not just motivational practice sessions and matches that make a modern club attractive. Personal contact with teammates and coaches is just as important. A positive team environment, including a

full range of nonathletic activities (e.g. field trips, excursions to professional games, parties, discussion groups) makes a soccer club more popular with young players.

Another point that cannot be overemphasized: Young players want to actively make decisions as responsible adults. Therefore youth coaches should regularly provide opportunities for self-determination, taking the interests and desires of 16- to 18-year-olds into account.

Coaches at this age level must avoid thinking solely in terms of points and standings and categorizing their players only according to their athletic qualities, strengths and weaknesses. They must stay focused on the whole person, remaining open and sensitive to problems.

Preparing players for the next level

U16 and U18 soccer, unlike other age levels, involves another set of challenges that can be critical to maintaining a club's athletic and human resources

for the future: Working closely with coaches and players from the adult level, youth coaches must prepare their players to make a smooth and uncomplicated transition from youth to the adult level when the time comes. This includes not only soccer-specific preparation for the demands of the adult game, but more importantly a rapid interpersonal integration of players into their new setting.

Keep the focus on the fun of playing soccer!

A functional team environment and a coach who is competent, committed and a good role model are the cornerstones of any forward-thinking club philosophy. But the heart of every club will always be competitive play in official matches and an interesting training program that prepares players for those matches.

The biggest motivator for advanced youth players is the fun of playing soccer. This is true for all players, no matter whether they're playing for a professional club, in a district league or at the regional level. This foundation is essential at the U16/U18 level for developing a realistic training program that's appropriate in terms of individual athletic ability and players' desire for a full range of competitive practice activities.

The *Success in Soccer Practice Planner* concept will help you create a flexible, systematic training program that fits your team!

Info: Standards and expectations in advanced youth soccer

