

The key is playing soccer and having fun!

The main thing lower-level 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, physical fitness, relief from work pressures....



What are lower-level amateur players looking for?

It's not just about soccer

Week after week, hundreds of thousands of amateur athletes compete in soccer matches at levels as different from one another as city league and semi-professional. Some large and ambitious upper-level clubs strive to match the professionalism of the major-league organizations. Other players, at the local level, are just looking for something to do on the weekend, which makes it hard to be sure everyone will show up for the next match — not to mention the next practice. When practice times conflict with work, personal life or other priorities, practice usually ends up losing out.

These are the two poles of the world of amateur soccer, and the athletic objectives and attitudes associated with each are radically different: One is clearly oriented toward competing and winning; the other sees club soccer as nothing more than a hobby. Many amateur clubs, coaches and players have trouble figuring out exactly where they belong on the broad spectrum between competitive soccer

and soccer just for fun. Those who fail to take a clear position, who fail to communicate clearly and reach consensus with all involved, are bound to encounter problems and conflicts. Coaches and players need to agree on realistic athletic objectives **before the season begins** and decide on guidelines and methods to reach these objectives.

One thing is clear: The more ambitious your objectives are, the more clearly competitive you have to be. This in turn has an impact on your attitude, your approach to the game, the frequency and intensity of your practices, the amount of playing time you give younger and less skilled players, etc. You need to consider these factors first, discuss them, agree on them and ultimately formulate them as general guidelines.

Naturally, when it comes to practice and match play, there's no such thing as a magic formula or model that fits all lower-level amateur teams and clubs. The differences from club to club — in terms of athletic objectives, ability level, practice condi-

tions, enthusiasm, financial situation, etc. — are just too great. Often you can observe major differences among the various teams in a single league.

So it's all the more important for clubs and coaches to match all the factors involved in practice and match play to the unique characteristics of their own team as precisely as possible. That includes athleticism, motivation (is it just about fun, or does competition play a role too?) and how much your players are willing to practice during the season and the preseason.

Nonetheless, there are a few **fundamental principles** that apply to all lower-level amateur clubs and coaches:

- Encourage players to be actively involved: Ask regularly for their suggestions, ideas and desires regarding practice, match play and other team activities —and act on them!

- Give players responsibility for their team whenever possible.
- Encourage social contact, open communication and a comfortable atmosphere free of any pressure to perform.
- Be sensitive to each player's personal life and career. Playing soccer should be a relief from daily stress!

Lower-level amateur soccer players regard their clubs primarily as a chance to “switch off” from the daily stress of work while staying fit and healthy, engaging in casual conversation and enjoying the game of soccer. However, these desires don't necessarily mean practice can never be focused and systematically structured. After all, every team also wants to win on the weekends. When players realize that a well-rounded training program that goes

Info: Standards and expectations in lower-level amateur soccer

