

Bridging the gap between fun and serious soccer

In mid-level amateur soccer, having a positive attitude to competitive play and training is a must. At the same time, though, players and coaches have to be able to make compromises between soccer, career and family.



What do mid-level amateurs expect of their club?

The diverse world of amateur 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 semiprofessional. 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.

Between fun and serious soccer

Mid-level amateur clubs, coaches and players, from district leagues on up, have a very hard time 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 discuss these factors, 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 mid-level amateur teams and clubs. The differences from club to club — in terms of athletic objectives, ability level, practice conditions, enthusiasm, financial situation, etc. — are just too great.

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

- The fundamental requirement for coaches and players is a positive attitude to competitive play and training. This includes, among other things, a set of rules and responsibilities such as attending practice regularly, informing coaches in a timely fashion of important personal and work obligations, being prepared for matches, etc.

- Every practice has to be fun! Many players have highly demanding jobs, and they don't want to feel like they're still at work when they're on the soccer field. They want to "switch off" from work and have fun — they want to play soccer!
- Combining fun with achievement is especially important for coaches at this level. It takes focused, systematic training to meet the challenge of keeping players constantly motivated.
- Everybody wants to win on the weekend. Nevertheless, you can't let yourself start thinking exclusively in terms of scores and standings. Always remember that your players are individual adults with legitimate needs and desires, who sometimes have problems at home and at work.

Info: Standards and expectations in mid-level amateur soccer

