

## The Beautiful Game - Age-orientated coaching to cultivate the hidden creative talents of young people



"Nature decrees that children should be children before they become adults. If we try to alter this natural order, they will reach adulthood prematurely but with neither substance nor strength."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

### OPTIMAL YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

By Horst Wein and Dermot Dalton of The Beautiful Game

#### PARENTS SHOULD BE PARTNERS

Parents obviously contribute an enormous amount to the wellbeing and development of their children, taking care of them and helping them to adjust to the world around them.

When it comes to sports, parents also have a major part to play - helping their child to choose, partake in, enjoy and possibly make a career in sport, but if not, then at least to have a lifelong enjoyment in that sport. Parents can have a positive or negative influence on their child's sporting life, depending on their attitude and behaviour.

#### The Coach/Parent Relationship

Often there are conflicts between parents and clubs which can be avoided with the right approach. Many coaches and clubs see parents as a problem and make the mistake of excluding them to the detriment of the child, family and community.



Parents, coaches and players should realise that they are all on the same team. Enjoyment and success can be assured if this is a harmonious 3-way partnership. When all three are working together for the benefit of the player and his development, there is a much greater chance that this young talent will reach his full potential.

To nurture healthy relationships with parents, clubs/coaches should:

1. In monthly meetings, **coaches should communicate their values, goals and procedures to the parents** and also keep in regular contact through SMS, email or other means, so that parents feel “in the loop.”
2. At such meetings they can **educate parents** about the need for development rather than winning-at-all-costs and what the club is doing towards this end.
- 3. Parents should be given the opportunity to help out** with some of the tasks associated with managing a squad of players, whether logistics, providing refreshments or looking after game statistics, (e.g. shots on goal, ball losses etc.) so that they feel part of the team, just like the kids.
4. Encourage parents to understand and provide a healthy nutritious diet, especially on the days their children play football

### **The Parent/Child Relationship**

There are some critical factors to be considered by parents if they really want the best for their child and to help them reach their full potential, whatever that may be, and to develop in a holistic manner, becoming not only a good sportsperson, but a good human being.

#### **1. Let your child live as a child first, before making adult demands on him.**

- Recognise the needs and rights of children, which are often neglected in organised sports
- Look for a club that respects the natural order of development with an age-appropriate progression of competitions and training for your child. It should have a holistic environment where the wellbeing of your child is valued more than prestige for the club.
- Recognise that the football field should be a natural “escape” for young players, where they are allowed to express themselves without being constantly limited by the rules of home and school.
- Football can be a wonderful tool to create a common interest for parent and child, bringing families much closer together, for a lifetime. Make sure that it is a positive social experience, avoiding conflicts.

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## **2. Teach your child to value sportsmanship**

Football can make a huge contribution to help children communicate and collaborate in a group who share the same passion. Making friends in this way offers a much better social life, not only for the children but also for the parents who meet at the games. The Beautiful Game will continue to attract more and more participants and fans as long as there is fair play and respect for others.

- Respect the rules and officials involved in the game.
- Teach your children the value of fair play in sports and in life.
- Teach your child to respect others.
- Teach your child that winning is not everything, and besides, can never be guaranteed. Their focus should rather be on continual improvement and effort, measuring themselves against themselves, not others, as there will always be someone better.
- Football teaches children that the way to success is full of obstacles, it is good to strive for and enjoy achievements in the game, but when disappointments come around, and they should be recognised as stepping stones towards further improvement. Parents should use football to teach children to persevere in the face of adversity.



### 3. Encourage their involvement, participation and ongoing effort in the game

- Try to encourage them to take up the game when they are young. 5 or 6 years of age is fine for multilateral activities and 7 upwards for more formal football activities. Some kids need a little push from their parents getting involved in group activities, but always make sure that they are ready.
- When possible try to spend some time playing with your child yourself, many football players have valued the time spent with Dad, or Mum in the street or park with a ball, especially when they were very young.
- Watch them play whenever you can.
- Praise your kids, but also all other kids on their team and even on opposition teams if they play well.
- Be generous with your praise, always looking for positive things and be careful not to be too critical. Mistakes are a necessary part of learning and players should not be discouraged from taking chances especially when it comes to making their own decisions on the pitch and also to showing their creative side.
- Encourage them to complete their football homework tasks.
- Support their coaches through your attitude and also through practical help.



#### 4. Beware of pressurising them

Take the pressure off the kids. It is a huge buzz for parents to see their child being successful in football, but being too pushy to achieve this can be counter-productive.

TheFA  
Respect

I want to be captain  
I want to score the winner  
I want to play at Wembley  
I want the crowd to chant my name  
I want Dad to stop shouting at me.

- Try not to live out your own dreams through your kids, allow them to follow their own.
- Respect your child's autonomy as a growing, developing young person who must make their own choices in football and life and who benefit more from a gentle guiding influence rather than being constantly told what to do.
- Be patient. Not all kids progress at the same rate. And learning the game of football takes more time than most people realise. Allow them to be children, enjoying all the FUN elements of the game, so that they can mature into the adult game gradually and naturally.
- Be a role model for your child. Exhibit generous sportsmanship in defeat as well as in victory. Show them that you have the maturity to cope with losing, bad performances and disappointments and that you, like them can persevere, in the face of adversity and injustice. Often the game of football is very unfair, but that is the nature of sport and many times of life itself.
- Parents' behaviour on the sidelines can be either positive or negative. It is better to give positive encouragement, refrain from criticism and leave the instructions to the coach.

***"I am grateful to my father for all the coaching he did not give me!"***

Ferenc Puskas

### **The Parent-Coach**

For better-or-worse, many coaches in youth football today tend to be the parent of one of the players, usually the father.

Some people would advise to never coach your own child, but in many cases this is unavoidable. Up to 11 years of age, should not be too problematic, but from the age of 12, as they approach puberty, and seek more independence from their parents, conflicts often arise.

Some dangers for parent-coaches to be aware of:

- Being over-critical of one's own child's performance.
- One's own child may tend to hide to avoid difficulties from his peers, especially those being "disciplined" by their parent as coach.
- Showing favouritism to one's own child, quite often the team captain, who plays

more than other kids. This could cause a major conflict with other players and/or their parents.

For more information check out [www.thebeautifulgame.ie](http://www.thebeautifulgame.ie) or email [dermot@thebeautifulgame.ie](mailto:dermot@thebeautifulgame.ie)

Kind regards

Dermot Dalton and Horst Wein

The Beautiful Game

Visit [www.thebeautifulgame.ie](http://www.thebeautifulgame.ie)

