



## Development of a Soccer Player

In this FSA manual we focus on the motivational factors which influence a player's desire to participate and realize their potential. FSA has developed a process in which to turn the standard player onto the game of soccer.

FSA has come up with four broad phases of development which players progress through in order to acquire maturity as soccer players.

Phases are as follows:-

1. **Fun Phase**- 4 to 8yrs- "The Turn On"
2. **Foundation Phase** -9 to 12 yrs- "The Romance"
3. **Formal Phase** -13 to 15 yrs- "The commitment"
4. **Final Phase** -16yrs + - "The turn off or fulfillment"

**Motivation within soccer can be considered by examining the following influences:-**

- a) **The Game:** Competition, incentives, drama and excitement.
- b) **The Player:** personality, ambition, creativity and motives.
- c) **The Team:** friendship, leadership, discipline, creativity, communication and selection.
- d) **The Coach:** use of powers, charisma, enthusiasm, knowledge, selection.
- e) **The Training:** equipment. realistic practices, efficient organization, standards set, individual feedback, maximum ball contact, quality of performance rather than results.
- f) **The Environment:** the community, infrastructure, models.

Above mentions the phase throughout a player's growth, each phase of development must be structured to cater for the specific needs of the young people within a particular stage.

### **Fun Phase (4-8yrs old)**

#### **The Game**

Fascination for the ball, fun education games, maximum number of touches on the ball and 1v1 up to 4v4. No goalkeepers.

#### **The Player**

Self centered, fun seeking, need to satisfy curiosity, desire for fun and adventure.

#### **The Team**

Strong bond of friendship, small group support, a working unit.

#### **The Coach**

Friend, Mentor, Motivator, Hero, Educator, and a fun person to learn the game from.

#### **The Training**

Fun Practices, ball skills, small games and creative games to stimulate the players mind.

#### **The Environment**

Goals, community, encouragement, safe facilities and good playing conditions.

"I remember dreaming that one day I would be famous"

"First be a man, Second be an athlete, and thirdly be a Football Player" (Pele)

The fascination for the ball, the desire to master it, and the thrill of scoring goals provides the launching pad. The joy and pleasure of the game are best nurtured by encouraging freedom of expression and organizing children's play in small groups.

### **Foundation Phase - 9-12yrs old**

#### **The Game**

Individual skills combined with group play in the context of 6 or 8 a-side soccer festival rather than league competitions, modified rules, the need for group involvement.

#### **The Player**

Strong sense of affiliation, developing a self-critical attitude, desire to copy the model.

#### **The Team**

Critical of each other, need for discipline, strong identity with the group, pride in the team.

#### **The Coach**

Sensitive teacher, soccer enthusiast, organizer, soccer awareness, demonstration ability.

#### **The Training**

Basic skills practice, introduction of key concepts, small sided games, fun activities, and mobility work, high level of motivation.

#### **The Environment**

Club/school infrastructure, equipment, star identification, good playing conditions.

### **The Romance Stage**

"You see a good player and it rubs off" (Franz Beckenbauer)

Effect of the model, is never stronger than it is at this stage in a youngsters development. Hero worship, identification with successful teams, hunger for imaginative skills, and an overwhelming need for adventure typify the mentality of this age.

"Imagination is more important than knowledge" was once said by Einstein.

However, the transition from the self-centered to the self-critical also means that young players of this age have a very high level of arousal in relation to the practice of the basic skill. This golden age of learning is also the appropriate time for the introduction of the games, key concepts and basic principles. It should be noted here that playing 11-a-side at this age is initially stimulating because it is viewed as the real game. This enthusiasm can turn to frustration for youngsters when they fail to cope with the "mob" around the ball, and also the lack of ball contact time, and unrealistic size of the field and goals.

### **The Commitment (13-16 Years)**

"The harder you train the harder it is to give in" (Vince Lombardi)

11-a-side competition, which recognizes adult standards and formal rules, become the focal point during this period. Mental, Physical and technical maturation develops rapidly as the player strives towards competence in the game. Awareness of strategy and tactics becomes an important facet of the learning process. Training loads and pressure activities are both carefully increased in intensity, thus provoking improvement in mental toughness, concentration and diligence.

## **Formal Phase**

### **The Game**

Carefully monitored 11-a-side competitions, the rewards offered by the game.

- a) Symbolic- praise, status, recognition.
- b) Material- money, trophies, medals.
- c) Psychological- sense of belonging, sense of achievement, sense of improvement.

Most desirable of these rewards are psychological ones. Other incentives: affiliation, handling stressful situations, and displaying independence, aggression and power.

### **The Player**

Self critical, rebellious, strong commitment to the team, recognition of adult standards and rules, desire to attain maturity, rapid growth in mental and physical development increases the need for exposure to adult situations.

### **The Team**

Need for common goals and leadership- also need for team unity.

### **The Coach**

Strong personality, soccer knowledge, enthusiasm, motivation & organizational ability.

### **The Training**

Basic skills under pressure, strategy and tactical play in an 11-a-side context, tactical, structured games, increase in mental and physical demands, the setting of training targets, providing individual feedback, reinforcing positive behavior, explaining the purpose of the practice, stimulating the imagination.

### **The Environment**

Visual impact through kit, flags, nets etc. Good training and playing facilities, the presence of spectators-coach, friends parents, etc.

## **The Turn Off (16 + Years)**

“Unhappiness is best defined as the difference between talent and out expectations”

(Sir Alex Ferguson- Man Utd)

The 16-18 years period in a young players life can be critical. Many stop playing, some struggle on but fail to achieve their aspirations. There are some successful players that satisfy the expectations of themselves, their coach and the community. The turn off years can be the result of various influences:-

Unrealistic Expectations

Other attractions- personal, educational, sporting, environment

Lack of Success / Injuries / Shortage of playing opportunities

Poor Leadership & Motivation / Peer group pressure

In the professional game, the coach uses fear in order to motivate players.

This of course, could be very damaging to young developing players.

## **Fulfillment 16+**

“It’s amazing what you can achieve when nobody cares who gets the credit”  
(Jock Stein-Ex Scotland Manager)

Fulfillment of a player's potential, depends upon their own efforts, the support of teammates, and the unselfish guidance of the coach. The player himself must overcome outside pressure. He/she must be exposed to a playing and training environment, which extends their mental, physical and technical capabilities to the limit. They also need to manage in a sensitive and positive manner. The advocate, the self fulfilling prophecy thesis that suggests that the quality of performance is often in direct relation to the level of expectation, which the teacher/ coach has about the soccer player. If the coach believes in the ability of a player and radiates their confidence, faith and ability, the high hopes for the future, assuming they have talent, the player will try to achieve the standards expected.

## **Final Phase**

### **The Game**

Demanding, challenging matches on a regular basis, adult rewards and incentives must be available, trophies, status, money, etc.

### **The Player**

Mental toughness, self- confidence, emotional control, avoidance of fear and external negative influences, personal, club and nationalistic pride, ability to relate to others, need for attention, security, understanding and importance.

### **The Team**

Desire for common cause, need for team spirit, leadership, key players, understanding, displaying confidence, concentration and will to win, accepting responsibility.

### **The Coach**

Charismatic status, well informed, experienced, knowledgeable, articulate, disciplinarian- no doubts about their power, managerial know how, thoughtful persuader.

### **The Training**

Specialist work, simulations of the real thing, tactical and team organization, mental rehearsal, intense pressure practices, varied program, need to satisfy player's urge for competition, bursts of maximum intensity, setting a lively tone in warm-ups, demanding excellence, training self motivation, players encouraged to contribute suggestions.

### **The Environment**

Good training and playing condition, impressive physical surroundings, portable goals for training, enthusiastic public interest- officials, crowds, press, TV, etc.

### **Weil Coerver (Founder of Coerver Coaching)**

“Anyone who does not know what it feels like to be an opponent, to see a solo run capped with success, or to do more or less anything with the ball, automatically lacks specific qualities needed to train footballers”

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