

Weston AYSO Region 644



February 3, 2005

Welcome to the sixth edition of the AYSO Region 644 bi-weekly newsletter.

In this week's edition, Section 1 is designated as the AYSO Region 644 roundup which will highlight what has been going on in our region over the past two weeks and what is up-coming.

Section 2 has an article written by Dr. A. Craig Fisher titled "The Perils of Criticism". In this article, Dr. Fisher points out that considering all the barriers that athletes face in their search for success and all the ways coaches assist them in reaching their goals, there is something that doesn't fit; the major form of giving feedback to athletes.

In Sections 3-6 we have four articles outlining different aspects and activities related to the game of youth soccer. In the Keepers Corner we discuss punching vs. catching the ball. We discuss the technique of punching the ball and the decision-making process as to when to punch the ball and when to attempt to catch it. In the article titled "Safe vs. Creative Passes" we discuss the differences in both types of passes and the risk vs. reward of making these passes. In our soccer activities section we continue in our defensive progression with a final activity that teaches the player to stay behind the ball and maintaining proper defensive shape. Finally, in Section 6 we discuss calling for the ball both verbally and non-verbally. Verbal communication tells the potential passer where you are; non-verbal is putting yourself in a position to receive a pass.

Section 7 is our Soccer News Articles From Around The Country. The first article from MISL.Net is about the signing of Lindsay Kennedy by the St. Louis Steamers of the Major Indoor Soccer League. With the signing, Lindsay became the first female player ever signed by a Major Indoor Soccer League Club. The second article is titled "U.S. Team To Play Qualifying Opener in Birmingham". The U.S. opens the home portion of the final round of World Cup qualifying on March 30, 2005 in Birmingham, Alabama. In the final article, Greg Lallas from MLS.Net takes a humorous look at some new year's resolutions by Major League Soccer teams for the upcoming 2005 season.

Section 8 we have an article titled "Caught In The Intensity Web and Experiencing "Tunnel Vision" on the Soccer Sidelines. Dr. Keith Wilson discusses a hypothetical situation which we have all found ourselves in at the soccer fields. He explains how we gradually get pulled into what he calls the Intensity Web and we become more likely to do things and say things on the sidelines we more normally would not do.

I hope that you enjoy this edition of the AYSO 644 Newsletter. Everything we do here in AYSO is ever evolving. If you have any comments or suggestions, please do not hesitate to email to me at Strikersoccer1@aol.com.



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Section 1- AYSO 644 Roundup

On Friday January 21, 2005 we held our annual referee appreciation party at the Incredible Ice arena in Coral Springs. Over 50 youth and adult referees came to the party where they skated and ate pizzas, chicken wings and had soda for over 4 hours. We appreciate all our volunteer referees and thank them for a job well done.

In the next week our board of directors will be voting on this year's Hall of Fame recipients. Over the past two years we have recognized five former volunteers for their service to our region during the past sixteen years. In 2003 we inducted Steve Ziegler, Ken Sandbank and Don Roberts and our 2004 inductees were Penny Scheff and Dan Rossano. We will announce our Hall of Fame inductees in our March 3, 2005 newsletter.

Can you believe that registrations for the fall 2005 season are coming up? As a subscriber to the newsletter you will receive first notification about registrations as well as have the opportunity to be the first to receive your registration packets. Registration information and regional dates will be announced in coming newsletters.

This coming weekend is our annual section meeting, this year being held in Atlanta, Georgia. At this meeting regions from around the east coast meet to discuss issues related to AYSO Soccer. We will attend seminars ranging from coaching to refereeing to management etc. This year our region will be sending 9 people to the section meeting.

AYSO Region 644 is proud to announce that in September 2005 we will be beginning our initial VIP program. AYSO VIP Program provides a quality soccer experience for children and adults whose physical or mental disabilities make it difficult to successfully participate on mainstream teams. VIP Teams may include those who are blind or visually impaired, amputees or conditions that impair mobility, mentally or emotionally challenged, autistic, downs syndrome and cerebral palsy. Kids with special needs are estimated to make up approximately 10% of the school-age population. Special schools and classrooms can isolate these children so the VIP Program has been structured to integrate the children into the rest of AYSO by using "buddies" to help the player both on and off the field. Our goals for every participating player are: 1) Have fun playing soccer, 2) Understand the fundamentals of the game, 3) Learn teamwork and fair play, 4) Increase positive self-esteem, 5) Become more physically fit, and 5) Meet and be comfortable with new people.

The VIP program helps more than just the players. Buddies and other volunteers increase their appreciation and understanding of individuals with special needs. They find their lives greatly enriched by their involvement with their new VIP friends. For parents thinking that they would never see their children playing a sport or making new friends, VIP gives them joy and hope. They are able to relax and enjoy watching their children having fun like other kids, perhaps for the first time.

It is our goal to make this program free of charge beginning in September, 2005. We will be looking for sponsors to offset the costs of the VIP program. Please contact our AYSO Region 644 hotline for further details and sponsorship opportunities. Our hotline number is 954-349-9786 and ask for Valeska.

Coaches, do you want to lock in your practice times and days? Avoid the long lines for picking your practice days at the coaches meetings and don't get locked out of coaching next year by not getting your volunteer application in on time by just emailing me at Strikersoccer1@aol.com . Please indicate your child's name, birthdate and the days and times you would like to schedule practices for. I will email back to you a confirmation of the time and field location, and you are all set. It is that easy.

Our region has grown to an amazing 2,475 players. But with this growth is a need for more volunteers. If you have the time or can make the time available and want to help the children in our community, please contact me at Strikersoccer1@aol.com and we will get you on the road to the most satisfying thing you can do in your life....volunteering.

Finally, we are always looking for sponsors. Our sponsors help defray the cost of running the program. Everyone in our region is a volunteer, however there are a lot of costs such as instructional books, uniforms, trophies, medals, city fees, etc. Please consider being a sponsor. Sponsorship packages can be sent to you if you are interested. It is great exposure for your business and the 3,000 children and families from AYSO and Weston Soccer Club that will see your banners, website listings, t-shirts, newsletter designations will greatly appreciate it.

Section 2- The Perils of Criticism

The Perils of Criticism

Positive reinforcement can do more than negative feedback

By A. Craig Fisher, Ph.D.

When you consider all the barriers that athletes face in their search for success and then think of all the ways coaches assist athletes in reaching their goals, there is something that just does not fit: That is the major form of giving feedback to athletes.

Negative feedback, commonly and accurately called criticism, far outstrips positive reinforcement as many coaches' major communication style. Add a sarcastic flavor to the criticism and what you have is one of the prime factors destroying athletes' self-confidence. The real tragedy is that no coach intends to be destructive and would surely argue that this is not the case. Let me suggest that you withhold judgment on this matter until I have completed my essay on the perils of criticism.

Allow me to get you personally involved in the discussion by asking you to respond to a series of questions.

- Does being criticized ever leave you angry, resentful, belittled or feeling rejected?
- Do you sense you ever make others feel this way, even unintentionally?
- Do you ever hesitate to offer helpful correction for fear of offending someone?
- Have you ever heard an athlete claim, "Coach is on me"? In your days as an athlete, did you ever say that?
- Right now, can you recall three times in your life when you really appreciated being criticized?

These questions begin to put a different slant on criticism, I hope, because you can see the picture from the receiver's side rather than from the myopic view of the giver of criticism.

Criticism was originally conceived as a neutral, objective appraisal of ideas and actions. To criticize meant that you communicated in a way that enabled others to use the information to their advantage and benefit. Criticism, then, was a tool to enhance personal growth and relationships. Does your experience match this description? Or might it be valuable to consider just how criticism works?

Sid Simon, prominent growth therapist, suggests that people are connected by thin gossamer threads along which communication passes. When a person (the giver) sends along some critical comment such as, "How many times do I have to tell you," the barbed arrow is acknowledged by the receiver who immediately sends back an equally caustic reply: "What gives you the right to talk to me that way?"

The reply might be verbal or nonverbal, depending on the equality of power in the relationship. The athlete typically would not throw verbal darts at the coach following critical feedback, but the nonverbal signs can be just as obvious. The important point is this: The receiver of the criticism loses a little chunk of self-confidence because of the negative message and immediately responds by sending an equally harmful reply. Not surprisingly, criticism begets criticism and soon threads are so stretched or torn that communication ceases. But consider who loses the most in this exchange of criticism.

It is well known that success tends to beget success, whereas failure tends to beget failure. Equally well known is the adage that sugar attracts more flies than vinegar. The cost to the receiver of criticism, basically negative feedback, is a loss of self-confidence, the opposite of what the coach intended.

But this is only the beginning of the criticism cycle. When the athlete's self-confidence is threatened, a protective strategy (albeit subconscious) is to send the return message to the coach to "right the ship." Overtly or covertly, the coach is bound to receive emotional backlash, either in the form of anger or silence. The critical coach ends up the big loser because he or she is labeled a critical person who may see how such an innocent and maybe nonthinking comment gets blown out of proportion (from at least the coach's perspective). The intention is to be helpful but the criticism achieves just the opposite result.

Why is criticism so destructive? First, criticism tends to close paths of communication, not open them. Coach criticism is intended to be a one-way street; no acknowledgment is called for, only the idyllic hope that the athlete will internalize all that the criticism entails and be grateful. Interestingly, it is the coach who labels the criticism constructive because "after all, that's my job and I want my athletes to achieve their potential." Need I belabor the point by asking you to consider if the majority of athletes see constant streams of criticism as helpful. Very few athletes believe that constructive criticism is that beneficial.

Second, as stated earlier, coach criticism is usually followed by the particular athlete's self-justified emotional response (shouting back, denial, silence, moodiness). If you think about your past experiences, my guess is that you have seen all of these responses. Adding this emotional layer to the failure experience prevents athletes from being able to sort out what might be helpful to them.

Third, most criticism offers no suggestions for improvement. Where is it written that athletes tend to perform better when they are told what they are doing wrong?

Where did we learn that highlighting athletes errors results in performance changes? Or, if it does sometimes, is it the best approach? Are we so naive that we believe athletes will thank us for our reasoned criticism and vow to be better next time? What little I know about the complexity of human motivation and behavior change suggests that athletes tend to be motivated more with positive reinforcement (e.g., praise, recognition) than by punishing criticism.

Last, criticism overlooks the larger performance picture. In reality, most athletes do more things right than wrong, but coaches often tend to focus on the errors. If we get extremely critical, we can even begin to criticize the random and inconsequential errors always present in imperfect performances. We end up criticizing and trying to correct mistakes that rarely repeat themselves in the same week or month.

Is it possible to recast performance feedback in positive rather than negative directions? More specifically, is it not possible to reinforce performance when it is correct or approximates correctness instead of constantly pointing out what is wrong?

Why is criticism used so much? With all the obvious drawbacks of a critical communication style, why would reasoned individuals continue the practice? It clearly is not because it has been well thought out and systematically planned. And maybe that is what makes it so unfortunate.

We are slaves to the power of models unless we recognize and learn to break the cycle. Everyone has heard it prophesied: We will teach as we were taught, coach others as we were coached and raise our

children as our parents raised us. What have we experienced and what behaviors do we now model? For a large number of us the answer is criticism.

I am not suggesting that any of us intentionally set out to destroy our athletes' self-confidence and place unnecessary emotional hurdles in their paths, but nonetheless that is the reality. Coaches have their athletes' best interest in mind when they direct critical comments their way. That is what makes the outcome so unfortunate; we mean to help but often we hinder.

On a more castigating note, there is a certain inherent cheapness to criticism. It is possible to use perfection as your frame of reference and judge each of your athletes against that standard. The reality is that there is no perfect performance; therefore every performance that you observe affords the opportunity for your critical comments. I refer to this as cheap shot coaching because almost anybody can do it; it takes no talent at all. If, indeed, you sense you must always offer some feedback, then you will always have material for your evaluation. But, then, that is the mark of the mentally lazy coach, one who cannot see the big picture of emerging success for the egregious performance glitch.

I suppose by this point you have decided either that my arguments have some validity or that I am out of touch with reality and know nothing about coach-athlete communication. Because, after all, constructive criticism is the backbone of sport skill improvement. For those of you who are going to continue to use criticism, hopefully not as unthinkingly as before, I offer some guidelines.

Periodically, you need to remind yourself of the main purpose of your criticism — to get athletes' attention and motivate them to change their behavior. Criticism then, being as sensitizing as it is, needs to pass some particular tests. To be effective, criticism needs to be filtered before and as it is given.

Following are suggestions to you as coaches as you consider the application of criticism in the coaching process:

- **IS THE TIMING RIGHT?** Is the athlete in emotional shape to hear the criticism? Athletes who are frustrated with their lack of success are not good consumers of negative feedback; they have enough negative thoughts of their own to process.
- **DO YOUR ATHLETES NEED MORE PRAISE?** Positives are more powerful agents of behavior change than negatives.
- **IS YOUR CRITICISM NOVEL?** Or is it the "same old, same old" harangue? The latter is ineffective because you have heard yourself say too often, "How many times do I have to tell you that?"
- **ARE YOU POSITIVE THAT THE ATHLETE CAN MAKE THE CHANGE?** Is the behavior primarily under the particular athlete's control or are others involved (e.g., a bad pass needs both a passer and a receiver's participation). Does the athlete have the skills and confidence to make the change? Is the performance error due to inadequate skill or a lack of effort? The latter is perhaps correctable; the former demands time on task. Do not dismiss the significance of self-confidence because it lies at the heart of behavior change. Only self-confident athletes will be able to internalize performance feedback if it is layered with negative evaluation.
- **IS YOUR CRITICISM CLEAR ENOUGH TO BE ACTED UPON?** Does the athlete know what needs to be changed? Nothing is more frustrating than being criticized and not knowing what to do to make the criticism go away.
- **CRITICISM OFTEN FORECLOSES THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPROVEMENT BECAUSE THE COACH CRITIC DOES NOT LISTEN TO THE ATHLETE'S RESPONSE.** You must process how the information is being received to assess its effectiveness (e.g., frowning brow, gritting teeth, no effort made to change). Be quick to recognize any changes made in response to your criticism.
- **NO HIT-AND-RUN BEHAVIOR IS GOING TO WORK.** Unless you are prepared to be systematic with your criticism and commit yourself to the length of time it takes to change old behavior and consolidate new behavior, it's very doubtful your criticism will be effective.

Editor's note: This article appeared as a reprint in the March/April 1998 issue of Soccer Journal. At the time, Craig Fisher was a professor in the Department of Exercise and Sports Sciences at Ithaca College (N.Y.), teaching sport psychology courses and conducts workshops. This article first appeared in Performance Edge, Volume 5, Number 3, 1996

Section 3- Keepers Corner

Today's topic is on catching versus punching balls. I would like to start off by talking a bit about the technique of punching. There are two types of punches. The first one is the two fisted punch. This is used primarily when it is your intention to return the ball in the same general direction that it came. An example would be a ball served in from the midfield into a crowded box. Assuming the ball is dropping in front of the keeper, she would want to punch it with two hands and return it high and far back to where it came (although ideally at a different trajectory). The proper technique is to ball your hands into fists with the middle joints of each hand touching (I assume there is a better term for this but hopefully everyone understands what I mean). Have your elbows close together (within six inches) and your wrists straight. A very important thing to do is make sure your thumbs are not tucked into the fist, as that is a great way to break them. By taking this position, you will be able to maximize the area of your hands to make contact with the ball. As the ball approaches, you would go to meet it and then extend your forearms making contact with the ball as squarely as possible. A common mistake made in punching is to take a hard swing at the ball. The reason this is unnecessary is you will use the momentum of the ball to take care of the power and your main function is to make solid contact and change the trajectory of the ball.

The second type of punch is the one fisted punch. This is used primarily on crossed balls from the side served into the box. If the ball were served in a way that will cause it to be over your head, you would use the one fisted technique to continue the flight of the ball in the same direction that it is coming but with a different trajectory. To do this, you would use the near fist (if the ball is served from YOUR right side, you would use your right fist). Again ball it up with the thumb on the outside and the idea is to make contact with the ball while turning your upper body in the direction you are punching the ball. The idea is to try to maintain contact with the ball as long as possible. This will also prepare you to receive the next cross since the ball will most likely still be live.

Since the real subject of this newsletter was the decision making of when to catch Vs cross, I will now move on. I apologize if this has not been very clear but without pictures this is very difficult to describe (especially with my limited writing ability) you will just have to wait for my book to come out to get a clearer description with pictures!

The basic rule of thumb for deciding whether to catch or punch is if you think you can catch the ball, then you should punch it. Only when you KNOW you can catch the ball should you actually attempt to catch. The reason for this is if you try to catch and are unsuccessful it most likely results in a great scoring opportunity for the opponent. If you punch a ball that you should have caught, it most likely will result in loss of possession but not a great scoring opportunity for the opponent. In other words, the general rule is to err on the side of safety. Having said this, I feel far too many balls are punched without a good reason. While I stand by the belief that you should only catch when you are 100% sure you can, the truth is that not enough time is spent on receiving high balls and with proper training you should be able to expand your range and catch many more balls than are being caught currently.

Keep in mind, keeping the ball out of the back of the net is just a small part of goalkeeping. Keepers are also required to initiate the attack and the best way to do this is by getting the ball in your hands. The only way to improve in this area is through constant repetition first uncontested and then gradually going against attacking and defending players. Think in terms of safety first but also see what your comfort level is and then work on expanding your comfort level. Each keeper will have a different range and different comfort zone and only you can know what you can punch and what you can catch.

It is very rare that I see keeper's train enough in this very important part of the game. It's actually one of the easiest things to work on outside of an organized training session because all you really need is a field player to serve balls in. This is the best time to remember the adage from the first newsletter that Proper Practice Prevents Poor Performance.

Section 4- Safe vs. Creative Passes

Welcome to the Soccer Newsletter. Today's subject deals with safe passes vs. creative passes. Most people don't think about what kind of pass they are making and that is pretty apparent by the total lack of regard they have for the safety of some of the simplest passes. When this concept was first explained to me a long time ago, I thought it was so simple that it was stupid to even talk about. The longer I am involved in coaching, the more I realize just how important this belief is in terms of the overall quality of play.

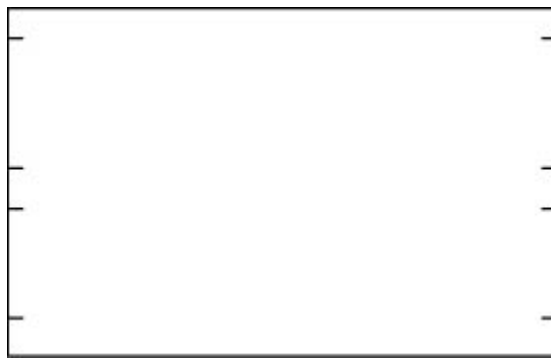
To start with, let's define the two terms. A safe pass is any pass that simply is designed to maintain possession. This might be a pass back to your sweeper to get the ball out of pressure in the middle of the field, or maybe a square ball from the outside midfielder to a center midfielder to switch the ball through the midfield or anything of this type. A creative pass is one where you have chosen to take a chance with the thought that if this pass is successful; it will result in an extremely positive situation. An example of the creative pass might be an attempted through ball to an overlapping runner on the far side of the field.

In talking about these two types of passes, you start to factor in the risk vs. rewards of each. The safe, back pass to the sweeper can be a very valuable pass, however, it will almost never directly result in a goal scoring opportunity, so while it might be valuable, the minimal probability of rewards (goals) does not justify any type of risk at all. On the other hand, if this pass fails (goes to the other team), there is a great chance of the other team getting a goal scoring opportunity. Since you can't take a chance on failure of this pass, it **MUST** be hit perfectly every time. No mistakes can be tolerated with this type of pass. It must be hit to the correct foot at the correct time with the correct amount of pace on the ball at all times. No exceptions. This is where perfection must be demanded. On the through ball to the overlapping runner, if this pass is successful, it has a great chance of resulting in a goal scoring opportunity. If the pass is unsuccessful, there is **NOT** a great chance of a goal scoring opportunity be created for the opposing team and therefore it is worth taking a chance.

Am I saying that no passes should be hit backwards and everything should be played forward and long with the idea being that the long ball is always safer than the short pass? Of course not. All that I am saying is when you play a shorter pass; it must be successful every time. Someone at some point decided it was acceptable to make any mistake on a soccer field as long as it is followed with the term "my bad" or something of that sort. All I am saying is demand that players take some responsibility and know when chances are appropriate and when safe passes are needed. In the same way that I **DEMAND** perfection and success for all safe passes, I also am extremely tolerant of creative passes that are not successful. Too many youth players are hesitant about taking chances because of the coach or parent on the sideline that yells at them for having taken a chance and it not having worked when the risk was minimal and the potential reward was huge. Encourage risk taking in the proper situation and you will start to see the game of soccer played at a much higher level.

Section 5- Soccer Activities

The last step in this defensive progression requires a field set up like the diagram below:



The end lines are 30 yards long and the side lines are 40 yards long. On each end line are three goals (each are three yards wide).

Two teams of three participate in this drill with each team attacking an end line. Since they are allowed to score in any of the three goals, it requires quick shifting and support since all three players have to defend all three goals so the shifting must be done in unison and quite quickly.

The neat thing about all of these drills is that while they are working on defensive positioning, they also work on so many other things such as conditioning and offensive spacing.

The next step in this progression is to remove the 3 goals on each end line and now the rule is that a goal can be scored anywhere on the end line with the one requirement being that the ball must be stopped on the end line by the offensive team in order for the goal to be counted. By expanding the area that the defense has to protect, it forces them to concentrate on getting behind the ball (or get scored upon). You can revert to the rule from an earlier drill and if a team scores a goal, they retain possession of the ball and now attack the other end line.

The last step in this progression is to add two full sized goals and keepers and simply play soccer with the emphasis on getting behind the ball

By reminding the players how each of these drills tie together, they should be able to concentrate on getting behind the ball and maintaining proper defensive shape.

Section 6- Calling For The Ball

Today's subject will deal with how to call for the ball.

Too often, when a player wants for one of her teammates to pass her the ball, they stand with their hand in the air as if that is an effective way to ask for the pass. To make matters worse, this person with their hand in the air often is standing behind a defender (meaning that there is a defender between the player with the ball and the player who wants the ball making it very difficult for them to receive the ball). How is the player with the ball supposed to be able to find a stationary teammate waving her hand???

The other thing you see is the player wanting to receive the pass and the way she indicates her interest in getting the ball is by screaming, "I'm open, I'm open". What players don't seem to realize is that yelling something like that isn't very helpful at all. How much more effective would it be for the player to call for the ball by telling the player with the ball "look square right" or something like that. The more specific you can be to let the player on the ball know exactly where you are, the more likely she will be to find you.

However, an even better way to call for the ball is to do it in a non-verbal way. The first thing you want to do if you want to receive the ball is to put yourself in a position where it's in your teammates best interest to pass you the ball. A well-known college coach uses the term "run to ask". What this means is that if you want the ball, make a good run to put yourself in position to receive the ball. A player is much more likely to play the ball to a teammate making a run than they are to a player who is standing still. This is a form of a non-verbal way to communicate your desire to get the ball.

To sum up this quick pointer, if you want to call for the ball verbally, be specific. However, if you really want to receive the ball, ask for the pass by making a hard run for the ball. Ask for the pass with the run and call for the ball as specifically as possible and you are more likely to receive the ball

Section 7- News From Around The Country

Steamers Acquire Rights To Lindsay Kennedy

Thursday Jan 20, 2005



The Steamers have acquired the rights to Lindsay Kennedy, team President Michael Hetelson announced at a press conference at Savvis Center today. Kennedy will begin working out at team practice sessions next week. Like any other new player, she will need to prove herself and earn a spot on the team; a challenge Kennedy says she is looking forward to.

The 24-year old Kennedy (left) played four seasons (1998-2000, 2002) of collegiate soccer for the University of Kansas and Harris-Stowe State College. In her freshman year (1998) at the University of Kansas, she posted 19 points (seven goals, five assists), was named Big 12 player of the week and was named to two all-tournament teams.

Kennedy's 11 assists during the 1999 season at Harris-Stowe marked a school record. She went on to set school records in goals (24) and points (56) during the 2000 season. The 5'10" midfielder/forward was a red-shirt player in 2001 and played her final season in 2002, setting another school record when she scored five goals in a single game versus Avila College on September 25, 2002. Kennedy ended her collegiate career with Harris-Stowe records in goals (61), assists (22) and points (144).

"Lindsay is an excellent player, the game drives her," said Harris-Stowe coach Richard Rone. "She was a pleasure to coach and a pleasure to watch play. This is a tremendous opportunity for her."

The Maryville, Illinois native received numerous awards and honors during her three seasons at Harris-Stowe.



She was named three times to the American Midwest Conference (AMC) first team (1999, 2000, 2002) along with being named AMC Player of the Week twice in 2000.

Kennedy was named AMC Newcomer of the Year in 1999 and was the AMC Most Valuable Player in 2000. She was also named three times to the NAIA Regional V first team (1999, 2000, 2002) and was a three-time NAIA All-American Team Honorable Mention (1999, 2000, 2002).

LEFT: Lindsay Kennedy holds her Steammers jersey as team President Michael Hetelson looks on.

U.S. team to play qualifying opener in Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — The United States will open the home portion of the final round of World Cup qualifying on March 30 in Birmingham against Guatemala.

The game will be played at Legion Field.

The 10-game round-robin CONCACAF qualifying finals will determine three regional qualifiers for the 2006 World Cup in Germany. The March 30 game will follow U.S. trips to Trinidad & Tobago on Feb. 9 and to Mexico on either March 26 or 27.

The other regional finalists are Costa Rica and Panama.

"Birmingham has been a great host to international soccer, from the Olympics to the national team," said U.S. manager Bruce Arena, who coached the American Olympic team that played two matches in 1996 at Legion Field. "Winning home games is essential in this round, therefore the match against Guatemala will be crucial in our efforts to qualify for the World Cup. We're looking forward to receiving great support from the city and our fans."

The Americans hold a 7-4-3 record against Guatemala, including a perfect 6-0 mark on U.S. soil.

View from the Cheap Seats: Cut out cutting out

By Greg Lalas / Special to MLSnet.com

Why are New Year's resolutions always subtractive? Why do people always feel like they need to cut things out of their lives like chocolate and Jack Daniels and John Cusack movies.

It's all very negative. Bad for the soul. I thought the idea was to live a "full" life. At least that's what everyone says. If we're always depriving ourselves, aren't our lives just becoming emptier and emptier? Besides, we all know deprivation never works unless you really want it to work.

And how often is that the case? Ask yourself: Are you really going to miss the next John Cusack movie when it comes out? No way. Do you really want to skip your daily dose of Hershey's Special Dark or, if you live in Canada, your mid-afternoon Coffee Crisp? Not a chance. (Aside: If you've never had a Coffee Crisp, you certainly haven't lived a full life. And, please, if you do live in Canada, could you send me some, c/o MLS, 110 E. 42nd St., New York, N.Y.? I'm dying here, eh!)



There should be a Shalrie Joseph bobblehead doll for every Revolution fan. (Allen Kee/MLS/WireImage.com)

So why don't we just cut out all of this cutting out business? We aren't Trappist monks, are we? No. And they make beer! Quit deluding yourself that you want to "go without." Start going with! Add, grow, stock up, consume. Go ahead, get the big box of Lindt truffles! Buy *The Sure Thing* DVD! It's the American way! And so, in the name of being good U.S. soccer fans, here's a look at some add-conscious MLS New Year's resolutions.

East

D.C. United -- This year, we're adding a new trophy case, a big one with lots of space for more MLS Cups. Because face it, we're everyone's daddy in this league. We're the Cowboys, the Yankees, the Lakers. We're the kid you love to hate, that annoying know-it-all jerk who somehow got the good looks and the bad girls. But, like Colonel Jessup said, you don't want us in your stadium, you need us in your stadium.

New England Revolution -- This year, we're adding all kinds of things: a money-back guarantee on every contract with washed-up English players; an explanation for why assistant coach Paul Mariner wears sunglasses in the rain; the Shalrie Joseph bobblehead doll; a date with Tom Brady for every female season-ticket holder over 21; and one super-talented, fine-looking color analyst to our television broadcasts.

Columbus Crew -- This year, we're adding a "no tie" policy to our season-ticket package. In 2004, we had more ties (13) than wins (12). Well, you know what they say about ties. And that's not what America's Hardest Working Team is all about. So from now on, if it looks like any game involving the Crew is going to end all knotted up, we're going to let the other team score so our fans can go home with a bad taste in their mouths. The marketing people say a bad taste is better than no taste.

MetroStars -- This year, we're adding a goalkeeper. No. No, we're not. Please don't print that. We love all of our goalkeepers. We would just love them more if they were better. Wait! Strike that. Didn't mean that to come out. Internal monologue. What we meant was that a better goalkeeper is better for the team. See? And although our management may criticize our players in the press, that should in no way be considered an honest assessment of how terrible we think they are.

Chicago Fire -- This year, we're adding some Polish players. Remember the good old days when we had Polish players? Boy, we were really good back then. We won championships. We sold lots of kielbasa. We even won in other cities, like in D.C. Geesh, it's going to be a long season if we don't get a Polish player. Can we get another sausage and an couple of Old Styles over here, please?

Kansas City Wizards -- This year, we're adding nothing. We are for sale, after all.

West

FC Dallas -- This year, we're adding "playoffs" to our season goals checklist. We realize this might sound ambitious for a team that hasn't made the playoffs since before the Dixie Chicks became traitors, but we think we're on to something with this new logo and stadium in Frisco. Look what the logo did for San Jose, and what the stadium did for L.A. And even if we don't win MLS Cup, we'll at least finally have some decent swag.

Colorado Rapids -- This year, we're adding "the ability to score" to our criteria for the acquisition of strikers. Honestly, we didn't even average a goal a game last year, the first time that's ever happened in this league.

Los Angeles Galaxy -- This year, we're adding an over-the-hill No. 10 midfielder who isn't from Central Europe because we hear that the Los Angeles market isn't the epicenter of the Austrian diaspora. Maybe they're interested in Mexican players. We're not sure about that, but it's a rumor that's in the air.

San Jose Earthquakes - This year, we're adding anything we can get our hands on. If you can kick a ball straight, we'll take you. You know what? We'll take you even if you can't kick the ball straight. Just be able to run.

CD Chivas USA -- Este año, estamos agregando todo. Que!

ReAL Salt Lake -- This year, we're adding everything. Duh!

Section 8- Caught In the Intensity Web and Experiencing “Tunnel Vision” On The Soccer Sidelines. By Dr. Keith Wilson

I am often asked what it really looks like when parents get stuck in the Intensity Web. The following examples shows how parents can get caught up in their children's soccer game and lose focus, dramatically increasing the chances that they will act in ways that do not reflect their values.

Setting The Stage

It is a great day for a soccer game. Two Under 12 select girls' teams (red team and blue team) are meeting in the final game of the season to determine which will represent their league in the city tournament. The teams have already met twice during the season, each coming away with a win. Both games were often physical, with neither team willing to be intimidated by the other. Each team feels the other team plays dirty, and that the referees haven't called the previously games fairly.

The teams will share one sideline; their parents stand on the opposite sideline. Instead of practicing good sportsmanship by exchanging friendly greetings, each group of parents stakes out “their” own turf on the sideline and eyes the other with suspicion and distrust. After all, they are “the enemy.”

Rising Tensions

During the pre-game warm up, the red team parents become a little agitated when they learn who has been assigned to referee the game: a man who they feel has not treated the red team fairly in previous games and one who they think lacks the skills needed to handle a game with playoff implications. The parents start to talk about how this may be a long day for the red team. The game hasn't even started and yet the tension level has *already* gone up a notch or two.

When the game begins, the teams feel each other out. After the red team's goalkeeper saves a weak shot, she punts it to midfield. Two players jostle a bit for position as they go up for the 50/50 ball. The blue team player heads it to a teammate; the red player ends up on the ground, rubbing her head. The parents on the red team start abusing the ref. “Hey, ref! Are you blind?” one yells. “Are you being paid by the blue team?” another shouts? The sideline intensity continues to increase.

Perfectly Executed Offside Trap Or Perfect Through Ball?

Several minutes later, the blue team's defense clears the ball to midfield, where a midfielder traps the ball and heads towards goal. Dribbling the ball into the red team's offensive third, she sees a striker streaking down the

left side completely unmarked. As she is about to send a through ball for the wing to run under, a red team defender steps up field hoping to create an offside trap. But the offside flag of the assistant referee stays down.

The non-call creates a break away. Only the red team goalkeeper stands between the blue team striker and goal. Drawing the goalie off her line, the striker drives a hard shot just under the crossbar into the back of the net. Goal! The referee signals a goal for the blue team and the blue team parents begin to chant, "Ole, Ole," in celebration of the goal and their Mexican heritage

Caught In The Intensity Web

The goal sends the red team parents straight into the sticky clutches of the "intensity web." Their girls have worked hard but have given up a goal. They feel the officials have missed several calls and, to make matters worse, the obnoxious parents from the blue team are taunting them by singing their celebration song.

The stage is set for bad things could happen. One of the red team parents is tempted to charge over to confront the assistant referee for failing to call the wing offside. Another parent wants to scream at the blue parents that they have no class. The red team parents are frustrated; they are a ticking time bomb seconds away from exploding. They are beginning to experience what I call "tunnel vision".

Tunnel Vision

Tunnel vision is the state where a parent loses his or her ability to see the whole picture of the youth sports contest they are watching. Instead of being able to think about different alternatives for handling a situation based upon experience and good judgment, the parent starts to think there are only a few ways to respond the intensity of the moment. Tunnel vision often causes parents to take a difficult situation personally and believe they have to respond forcefully to defend their honor, or the honor of their team or family.

Tunnel vision is so dangerous because it limits a person's range of options and makes the parent blind to the rest. Often times, under extreme pressure, a parent will respond with violent, or at least verbally abusive, behavior. The person loses the ability to think clearly and often will take action that he or she would normally not dream of doing.

Bad Things Can And Do Happen

In our soccer example, when the red team parents experience tunnel vision in the intensity web, their response can be either positive or negative. By calming down, a parent on the red team sideline may be able to get out of tunnel vision and, by seeing the big picture again, head off an ugly scene. When the coach or parent leader is not able to calm down the sideline and pull them out of tunnel vision bad things are likely to happen.

The bad results might include several of following:

- A parent moves across the dividing line between parents and starts to confront them about their lack of class. This could end in a physical confrontation between parents.
- A parent verbally attacks a referee and may be cautioned about his behavior. If the referee does not handle the situation in a positive way, it may escalate into a red card, a parent ejection, or, worse, physical violence.
- Red team parents may encourage their daughters to physically harm one of the blue team's stars. In the next close playing confrontation an elbow may be thrown to the face or a hard slide tackle made from behind, resulting in a potentially serious – even career ending – injury to the player.

- At the end of the game, a parent may physically confront an opposing player and push her to emphasize how mad he or she is.

Parents Don't Want To Get Stuck In Tunnel Vision

These are a few of the bad results that can and do happen when parents get caught in the tunnel vision part of the intensity web and do not have the skills to get out of a difficult situation. Chances are, if you asked the parents on the red team an hour before the game if they were in favor of violence in youth sports, they most likely would say no. They would tell you that they believed in good sportsmanship, that they want a healthy environment in which their children can play sports.

In the heat of the moment, however, as the intensity web is woven tighter and tighter, it is all too easy for a parent to end up with tunnel vision, their ability to make good decisions severely clouded. Parents literally, and figuratively, lose sight of what is important in youth sports. The inability to stay out of tunnel vision is often the reason parents act out at a youth sports contest.

How To Avoid Tunnel Vision

The good news is that disaster does not have to strike when parents move close to tunnel vision. Several types of interventions can help parents stay focused.

1. Parent Training

When parents have been through a good sports parent training class they will learn several skills to utilize that will help them stay more focused. When all a team's parents have completed parent training, they develop a comraderie on the sidelines that allows them to help *each other* keep things positive.

When the team has built the expectation that only positive things will happen on the sideline, when one parent starts to cross the line, other parents will help them regain their focus and continue to behave appropriately.

2. Performance Skills

Just like athletes, parents on the sidelines can improve their performance as spectators by learning and practicing such techniques as relaxation their bodies and mind and rhythmic breathing. To learn more about the performance skills I recommend parents learn to avoid tunnel vision, click [here](#).

Remember: parents are not helpless when it comes to getting caught in the Intensity Web. Parents do not have to experience Tunnel Vision. By learning performance parenting techniques and practicing them on the sidelines, chances are you will enjoy watching your child play sports much, much more. And by making the sideline a healthier and safer place, you will see your child, and everyone else's, play better and have more fun. After all, fun is what youth sports should be all about!