

Travel Soccer vs. Academy Soccer

“Should I sign my child up for travel soccer at U10 or keep my child in the FYSA Academy?” You have a choice!

FYSA requires that all registered “under 9” players participate in the U9/U10 Academy. The reason for this is to ensure that all players are being shown the correct techniques to play soccer. Professional coaches oversee the development of the players, as well as the coaches. Since the program is for U9 and U10 players, parents have the choice, at U10, to either remain in the Academy or register for the “travel” program. Many don’t know that they have a choice.

“Under 9/10” is the “Golden Age of Learning” for players. Just look at the rapid development of the players since the fall season! U9-U10 is a very important time if they are to be proficient players at the next level. Once puberty begins, their bodies and brains will have a lot to deal with. Because of this, creating “muscle memory” (doing something over and over teaches the muscles to respond quickly without thinking) will be that much more difficult. Conversely, if they develop bad habits now, it will be very hard to break those habits, once puberty begins. What coaches do now is crucial to a player’s development!

I’m often asked by parents about whether or not they should have their child join a “Club team” and I tell them it can be great or it can be not so great, depending on the coach. **It’s all about the coach.** Will the coach develop your child? Or will he/she make decisions based on winning and losing at the expense of the players’ development?

As you explore whether or not to go to travel (either as a coach or just as a parent watching your child play for a coach), please consider these questions:

- **Will the coach know soccer?** Is the coach just a well-intentioned parent filling in because the number of players registered for travel is such that FYSA is scrambling for coaches?
- **Will the coach continue to develop “skill” in all of the players?** This is the single biggest factor in the continued development of the players. We won’t know how athletic a player will be until they are in high school (and for boys, until they are sophomores in HS), but we can continue to make them skillful and knowledgeable until then.
- **Will the coach play the players at ALL positions?** The players need this to become well rounded players and see the field from all perspectives. Will the coach do this ...even if they are losing? Or...will they make decisions based on winning and losing? A player needs to learn how to play under pressure and be encouraged to try new skills and concepts in the face of that pressure. Limiting players to certain positions stunts their growth and makes them one dimensional.
- **Will the coach encourage “risk taking”?** Just watch any travel game and you’ll pick out the one or two top players on the field pretty quickly (one of them is usually the coach’s kid) and the rest are just average. The landscape is full of players that are “role players”. That is, they aren’t difference makers on the field. Players should be encouraged to take risks (“Dribble out of danger and keep possession”, “Take a player on 1v1 and try to beat them!”) ALL of the TIME so they develop their skill and creativity. Will the coach allow this when the game is on the line? Or will they say things like, “Don’t dribble there. It’s too risky!” Are they willing to give up a goal in a game in order to advance “risk taking”?
- **Will it be fun?** Can the coach keep it fun while teaching the players to play at a higher level?

The beauty of the Academy is that it is an environment that focuses on the individuals, rather than the teams. When I watch your games on Saturdays, I can’t help smiling at the **huge development** the players have made since the fall and I wonder what would happen with another year of skill development in that environment. I wish that U10 travel was not an option in FYSA for these reasons, but the reality (for now) is that you do have a decision to make in the fall and either can be the right decision. If you decide to move to travel with your child, I hope you have a coach (or are a coach!) that “gets it”. I hope you don’t get wrapped up in what’s best for the team, but rather...I hope you continue to do what’s best for the individuals. The side benefit of developing the individuals is that the team will get better anyway. As Rich and I often say, “There is no better tactic than to have a team full of skillful players”.

If you have any questions about your choice, we’re happy to discuss this with anyone who wishes. Rich and Kevin
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