



Below is an article from Dr. Jay Martin, the editor or the NSCAA Soccer Journal and head coach at Ohio Wesleyan University. In the article, Dr. Martin believes that our expectations of U10 players are not as high as they are in Germany or other soccer playing countries. Within the article Dr. Martin offers his reasons for this disparity as well as possible solutions.

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I visited Bayern Munich for a week in March. There will be more in-depth information on that visit in the September-October issue of Soccer Journal. At the beginning of the week Bayern assistant, Nick Theslof told me the best team in the club was the U10 team. So, I went to a training session, then another and then another and I attended a game on Saturday. I was absolutely stunned. The team was, without question, a very good team.

The training sessions were conducted at a high level and intensity. Each activity forced the players to "play the game". The players passed; played the wall pass; played in the third man; played one and two touch; attacked the goal with combination play and worked hard on defense. They were fun to watch!

Surely this was a group of youngsters who were scouted throughout Germany and brought to Bayern as part of the Academy program? But when asked, the coach assured me these were members of the club from the local area and not really special players. So how did these kids get so good at such a young age?

Gianluca Vialli in his book *The Italian Job* asks a similar question in the early chapters. He says, when young children start kicking a soccer ball they do so the exact same way all over the World. You cannot tell one nationality from another at the starting point. But what happens in the next ten years? Why are some cultures and their U10's far in front of other cultures in terms of soccer maturation and level of play? Why were these U10's at Bayern so far ahead of U10's in the United States? There may be a couple of reasons.



First, the Bayern U10's have a tremendous group of role models. At Bayern, the U10's get to train on the field adjacent to the first team. They see Phillip Lamm, Frank Ribery and Luca Toni train everyday. They carry those images to their training sessions and try to imitate their heroes. At one time, not long ago, that was a problem in this country. No one saw soccer (as they did basketball and baseball) and no one had role models.

But we should not have that problem today. Today in the US, we have role models for our players. There is more soccer available at all levels for our young players to watch and imitate. That includes players in the US and from international teams. So I ask again, why doesn't that kind of advanced play happen in the United States?

Allow me to suggest a possible answer; our expectations of our U10's are not as high as they are in Germany or other soccer playing countries!! A perusal of soccer curriculums on the Internet may support this statement. The characteristics of U10's include selfishness, independent, short (but getting better) attention span etc. These characteristics lend themselves to dribbling, receiving the ball with your feet and maybe shooting with both feet. The focus is still the individual and combining with teammates and passing are not a priority. This is wrong. We must increase our expectations of young soccer players.

After watching the Bayern U10's, it is clear that we can get more out of our young players. And, we must get more out of our young players.

Research in many areas suggests that high expectations are important for success. Academic expectations have been studied many times. Low expectations reap low achievement; high expectations reap high achievement.

Many coaches today feel that U10's are not ready for passing, combining and one touch play. They want youth coaches to be patient and wait until the young players are ready. Why? Passing is an integral part of the game and should be taught and demonstrated early. This is not an indictment of any youth coach and his/her coaching, rather a concern that should be addressed by our soccer culture.



We tell ourselves that U10's are not ready for advanced soccer technique. Our expectations for these young players are too low. If, as a soccer nation, we get behind the other international players at age 10 it stands to reason that we will always remain behind these players. While U10's in Munich move forward and incorporate tactics into their play, the U10's in the US are still dribbling or standing in two lines passing.

Part of this is due to our inferiority complex as a soccer culture. We are so concerned with our supposed lack of foot-eye coordination that we over do the early steps in the training process (i.e. dribbling, juggling etc.). It is time to move on from that mindset and push our young players.

When I say push and suggest higher expectations I am not referring to winning. In fact, winning has nothing to do with these expectations; I am referring to playing, competing and expecting more from our young players on the field.

Youth coaches spend a great deal of time teaching the basic fundamentals of soccer because we feel our children need a longer introduction to "foot skills". In our American culture "foot skills" do not come naturally as they might in Germany or Spain. But they do. Remember the scenario raised earlier by Gianluca Vialli. Children in all countries kick the ball the same way when they start. Then what happens? In many countries the young children begin to learn how to play. In the US we start to teach the children how to kick and dribble. I believe they already know how to perform these skills. Let's get the children playing the game and using and refining these skills. Children will refine these skills as they play because they will learn what is necessary to be successful.

Remember how children learned by playing soccer in the streets? When children play in the streets there are no lines; there is no standing around and all the children are playing whether it is even or uneven numbers on each team. Coaching schools urge us to replicate street soccer in training.

So, we should push our younger players. We should expect more from them. We should challenge the young players in training and devise ways and means to incorporate a number of skills in each training activity.