

## Introduction

Hello and a warm welcome to all stakeholders at the Acton & Boxborough youth soccer club. Firstly I would like to thank the outgoing DOC Tim Hallett, for his offer of support to help guide and assist me with my new responsibilities and also for the great work he has already completed in establishing a framework of programs within the club. I wish him well in his new ventures and future in soccer.

Secondly I would like to thank the ABYS board for giving me the opportunity to oversee the ABYS technical programs (player and coach development) strategies.

The size and structure of the club which is already in place, makes my appointment very exciting as there appears to be no boundaries, to restrict the potential and prospects for the players, coaches, parents and staff of ABYS.

I will be working with the board, on an ongoing basis to develop a long term strategic plan – However the initial scope of my responsibilities has been made quite clear, the board has asked me to create and implement developmental programs and work with the coaching teams, with a view to;

- Review playing and coaching standards
- Raise the profile of ABYS in the community
- Raise the standards of coaching
- Raise the standards of playing
- Assist in developing players from the grass root level through to high school (and beyond)
- Assist in developing coaches, through a series of coaching clinics and workshops
- Increase participation numbers at all levels

These goals can be achieved through a number of ways including projects, workshops, programs, clinics, on-field and off-field activities, and a varying degree of development modules. The plans are currently being engineered and put into place, ready for delivery in the coming weeks, months, and years.

The key to the success of these goals, is a team effort from all involved at the club, one thing I have learned during my many years involvement at clubs around the world, is that the more involved and active the parent groups are, the better the outcome, for their children. This holds true on both a long and short-term basis. I am also aware of the acute balancing act and time constraints placed on parents, who work, run families and juggle a number of other responsibilities, which is why I would stress – the more people involved – the easier the workload becomes – more hands make lighter work!

So, a little bit about myself, then I will discuss my philosophies and aims, which I will be working to implement during my tenure with ABYS.

- **My Family**

I am a family man, born and raised in the soccer “hotbed” of Manchester, England I was the second eldest, with two younger brothers and two sisters, (one older), mum and dad still live in the Manchester area, along with one brother and both of my sisters, who all have families of their own. The other brother married a German (*fraulein*) and lives with his young children in the northern part of Germany.

I am married to Karen, (a hairdresser) who is also from Manchester and we have four fantastic children, Sam (20) – who plays semi -pro soccer in Australia and has decided to stay there to continue his career, Hollie-Lulu (12) who likes singing and dancing and enjoys all kind of sports, and the (surprise) twins – George and Meg, (8) - both are sporty types George playing soccer and Meg (who can play soccer) preferring to play Netball, which is sort of basketball with refined rules for ladies. The twins were a (wonderful) surprise as my wife was 40 years of age, when she announced their imminent arrival.

In 1999 we moved to the city of Perth, in Western Australia. This is where the twins were born. Prior to that, we lived in Germany (4 years) Holland (4 years) Denmark (2 years) and the former Yugoslavia (18 months) the rest of the time would have been in Manchester, UK.

I was fortunate to have played or coached in all of these countries, thus being exposed to a wide range of soccer styles and cultures. I have worked with club committees, and have taken a wide range of volunteer positions in the sport of soccer. I am extremely passionate about the game and developing children, outside of my family time, coaching is by far the most rewarding experience I have ever been involved with.

During my time in Western Australia I was involved from grass root (kindergarten) level through to state and representative levels. I have learned from a lot of experienced coaches, administrators and players, wherever I have lived and believe the learning process to be a continual evolving, never ending process. The board at ABYS appointed me into this position after a long, thorough recruitment process, and I would like to thank everyone involved in that process for offering me this opportunity.

- **My Philosophies towards the game of soccer and development of players**

Explaining ones philosophies can sometimes be tricky, even treacherous ground, if it is not done in a clear and concise manner. This document is aimed at the recreational level of coaches, parents and players at ABYS with whom I aim to create a slightly different psyche, and certainly different levels of programs from that of the travel (competitive) program. Nevertheless my underlying principles and philosophies remain constant for all players.

Firstly let me make clear, I have an in-built fiercely competitive nature and attitude towards most sports but especially soccer – even when soccer is only mentioned, let alone played – my ears prick up. Coming from a background in Manchester, where soccer is a way of life from an early age and competition, be it for a place on the team, or between local clubs (youth, amateur or professional) is tough - the will to succeed, be first and win is endemic and tangible at every level. Therefore the atmosphere I grew up in could be highly charged, often emotional and incredibly competitive. However experience has taught me that this can, **when taken out of context, be detrimental to the development of players.**

**Therefore this type of competitive mentality MUST be put into perspective.**

When it comes to junior (recreational) soccer, from the young kindergarten ages, through to competition ages, starting around 11/12, the most important factors for children of these ages is they must have fun, they must enjoy what they are doing, and they must focus (by way of the coaches and support from the parent group) on **TECHNICAL** workouts rather than TACTICAL workouts. **The will to win should not overshadow the first and foremost responsibility of each coach – that is to develop each player on an individual level.**

Prior to arriving in the USA I researched some of the websites available and have to concur that I agreed with the position taken by US Youth Soccer of introducing small sided games for age groups up to 12. The small sided game is a proven, way forward, for achieving technical excellence in the game. Few professional clubs operate a development program which does not include 1v1 2v2 3v3 4v4 etc and a different mixture of other small sided games. It makes so much sense when you analyze the way the 11v11 game is played – in each situation, a small sided competition is taking place wherever the ball is. Generally, whoever has the ball will often face a 1v1, 1v2 or 2v1 or 2v2 type of situation. So why not practice small sided games? The players get much more ball time, and so their rate of learning and overcoming problems on the field increase (dramatically) than if you play 11v11 at a young age.

Most (soccer) organizations around the globe have had a huge shift to this way of thinking in recent years, spearheaded by the world governing body FIFA, who listened and worked with clubs and then invested and researched in the best ways possible to develop players. **Small sided games, which create more time on the ball, more participation and therefore much more fun was an overwhelming winner in developmental strategies.**

The technical skills a player can acquire during their formative years is his or her toolbox, and the more tools available, at a younger age, the better prepared that player will be when the time comes to migrate from the recreational small sided games - to the competitive match play games. This means, if we follow structured developmental programs, we could expect to see a higher standard of player moving into the travel programs, (and beyond) - which in turn means more successful teams!

I will make myself available to ABYS coaches and – at scheduled occasions - to the parent group should you wish to discuss any of these philosophies or your child's development.

For a more detailed understanding, of my philosophies, please read the following passage.

Understanding soccer is easy, when compared to understanding the children who are playing it. Each age brings unique problems. Emotional, physical and social development will vary a great deal within the players at ABYS. While this variety poses a challenge to the coach there is one factor that will bring all of the children together, one element that will reach everyone - **Kids want to have fun.**

***Enjoyment is the unifying motive.***

Some children don't want to learn. Some don't care about winning. A few have no interest in hard work and one or two can't remember which goal they're attacking!!

Many dream of playing professional soccer, some might! Others will switch to different sporting codes. In spite of all of their different agendas they all want to **have fun and play a game**, that is how they have come to this point in their soccer "careers" They also

want to be children. All too often the coach (or parents) sees them as an extension of **their** vision and they become puppets to it. The time spent at practice and at the games is a part of their childhood. It should not reflect the adult world. Some adults forget this and it is quite often **their** expectations that take the fun out of their children's experience.

Growth in the learning process can be measured by the child's **contribution to the game** in the two main phases: "Own team in possession" and "Opponents in possession" The greater the contribution that the child makes the further their learning process has developed. This measure, coupled with an improvement in techniques is part of the benchmarking standards, which can be used to validate the child's development during the time they spend with ABYS. A child with a strong internal desire to master the game will succeed to the best of their abilities. A child that needs constant external support will not. This child will only grow as far as he can be carried; **their level of motivation being one of the most important limiting factors.**

In order to make a contribution it's important for them to learn **how the game unfolds** and to have an impact on it. Soccer is a dynamic and fluid game. Pictures and decisions change in a second. This active element creates situations that drills do not always adequately address. It involves the child in reading situations, analyzing them, making predictions, arriving at decisions and finally acting on them. There are three major factors that will determine how far a child can go in their development.

- **Talent.** This is a quality for the fortunate few. Great athletes share similar attributes and if the basic package is missing, then it limits what a coach can do. Competitiveness, personality, motor skills, intelligence or instinct among other factors must already be present.
- **Motivation.** This comes in two types, internal and external. The internal motivation is what is important. Without a strong internal drive to master the proficiencies an athlete is working on talent alone. While the coach can provide some external motivation it will be of limited use and of short duration.
- **Environment.** This is the one area where the coach has the greatest impact. A talented child with a strong internal drive placed in the correct environment has the greatest chance to succeed to the best of their abilities.

**Working on the TECHNICAL aspects of the game of soccer – from a young age is, I believe, the best method for which to develop players. My aim is to implement programs here at ABYS which will facilitate the advancement of these skills in an optimum learning environment.**

Regards and best wishes

*Mitch Doherty*