



COACHES CORNER

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“FAVORITE TOY”

by Aaron Brunner

Jim Claffey was the first “soccer person” I was introduced to in my life and I remember it like it was yesterday. I was five years old and I was with my father, who at the time was my recreational coach, picking up our team uniforms and equipment for the fall season. As I walked into Mr. Claffey’s house I glanced down the stairs to the right where there was a room full of soccer gear. Piles of different color uniforms, black and white cotton shorts, and baseball socks (which was what we wore in the early 80’s) were scattered throughout the entire lower level of his Dale City home. The air was filled with the scent of cigar smoke, iron-on numbers, and unwashed cotton t-shirts. In the back corner were piles of deflated soccer balls that had not been touched. As my father began to sort out the uniforms with Mr. Claffey, I picked up one of those soccer balls and held it in my hands. It was a black and white unstitched Kick-It Mikasa soccer ball with gold letters. I had never seen such a new soccer ball before and never had one of my very own. As I looked up at my Dad while holding the soccer ball, my father turned to Mr. Claffey and asked him, “how much?” My whole body began to shake and I didn’t even have to ask if I could have one. Immediately the thought of the possibility of having my own soccer ball filled me with excitement - not my brother Eddie’s or Matt’s, but mine! As my father gave Mr. Claffey the money for the soccer ball, my world changed and because I now had a toy of my own. That soccer ball immediately became my favorite toy.

My goal as a youth soccer coach is to make the game fun and to find a way to make the soccer ball, for all the children I coach, his or her favorite toy. We as coaches, we must compete with so many things that influence our youth, such as the ever-growing world of technology and other extra-curricular activities. Fortunately, we can overcome these obstacles of modern life. It is our duty. Our goal as soccer coaches is to make the -a real difference within that hour or hour and a half we have with themour players. We can make a connection with that child to show them how magical the soccer ball really is and to allow them to become a true fan of the game. When a child is a fan, he or she wants to play the game, watch the game on television or in a stadium, talk about the game to friends or family members, dare to dream of being the next “Cristiano Wayne Rooney Ronaldo?” or “Mia Hamm”. We must nurture their passion and love for the game so they want to keep coming back day after day, week after week, and year after year. Make the soccer ball their favorite toy and you may have a “Fan for Life”.

Each day I have the wonderful opportunity to wake up and make an impact on kids and how they perceive the game of soccer. For most many of them, I am the first “soccer person” they have encountered in their lives. With that, I have a choice. I can either make it fun to play soccer or not. I have the opportunity to influence the views of each child and how the game of soccer relates to them and their lives. I am grateful because I get the chance each every day to make the soccer ball someone else’s favorite toy.

Favorite Toy Practice

See if you can TRY to do what I do?

Before each activity, use the phrase "Try This".....

- Dribble the ball with your hands (on the ground with both hands with your head up)
- Place the Ball on your head and see how long you can keep it there without using your hands (Seal-Like) - if it falls then quickly put it back on your neck and start again
- Dribble with your Feet (Right, Left, Both, Inside, Outside, Laces, Sole, Heal, Toe)
- Toss the Ball up (Under Control), as the ball is in the air, see how many claps with your hands you can perform before you attempt to catch the ball
- Place the ball on the back of your neck see how long you can keep it there without using your hands - if it falls then quickly put it back on your neck and start again
- While jogging, bounce the ball off of your head and catch while moving (you may also use your thigh, feet, shoulders, etc.)
- Move the ball with you hands around your waist in a circle while keeping control of the ball and the ball should not touch the ground (around feet, head, figure eight, etc.)
- Try to pick the ball up with your feet off of the group and catch it without using your hands
- While the players are dribbling call out a body part. Touch the ball with your forehead, nose, knee, both knees, elbow, ear, foot, back, stomach, chin, etc..... (have them watch you, no verbal cues - Power of Observation)
- Can any of you show me something you would like me to try? Allow players to show off a trick of their own. You try it and then see if everyone can try it as well. (Kids love this...)

** Make sure to demonstrate each activity. Children learn in various ways, but mostly learn through observation and then trying it themselves. Be sure to help those who don't quite get the exercise. Finally, make sure you choose exercises that challenge the players, but also allow them to achieve success.

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