

Watch More TV? Yes Please!!

I would argue that the single biggest positive of youth soccer and sports in general is that it gets kids out of the house, off the couch and exercising. Obviously the same cannot be said for playing video games (nobody has ever improved their cardio-vascular endurance level by playing FIFA 2011) or watching TV (it is mighty hard to burn calories watching Sportscenter). So how can I, as a soccer coach, turn around and encourage, nay plead, with my players to try and watch more soccer on the box? Or, more to the point, WHY would I?

My answer centers around a point that is considered an old chestnut in soccer circles. I have heard many times from many different folks that one huge difference between young American players and many of their counterparts in especially Europe and also South America is that those kids over there watch soccer games on a far more regular basis. There is no doubt that supporting a team, having favorite players and cheering them on has huge benefits. For the younger player it helps nurture a deeper love for the sport and I would even argue that it can also prove inspirational. (One only has to watch a 4 minute clip on YouTube of Messi or Zidane to feel the Goosebumps). But most importantly it is just the sheer enjoyment of watching the game they love being played at the highest level. (We can all agree that it is FUN to watch Barcelona play).

I also truly believe that watching games can be an invaluable training tool for players as they start to get older and a little more experienced. They can now watch players who play in their position, follow their runs, see if they get caught out defensively, see how they play in relation to the players around them, and then, just maybe, a penny drops or a light bulb goes off and they say "Oh! That is what coach was talking about last practice". In short, watching soccer games can give players an incomparable visual aid to complement their own training sessions and games. This will hopefully lead to a deeper understanding of the nuances and intricacies of this complicated game, which, when you get to the older age groups and the higher levels, can make the difference between talented players and exceptionally talented players. One of the biggest compliments a coach can give a player is "that kid gets it". The "it" factor needs to be learnt, to be developed. Think of older youth players watching soccer games and actually learning from them as a precursor to what they do at the Collegiate and Pro levels, where watching game film is a staple training principle.

But wait a minute! What of the cries from all the parents out there who say "Are you crazy? It is hard enough to get my kid off the XBOX to do their homework and now our coach is telling us that they need to watch more TV?" A very valid point to which my answer would be twofold.

First off, watching a game should take the place of video game time, not add to it. Maybe their coach can make a worksheet for their players to use while watching a game. Simple questions for the young players, more open ended questions for the older ones.

Secondly, there is always the option of going to watch live games. We are very lucky in Central Pennsylvania to have 2 professional franchises, the Union and the Independence, numerous high level college programs and the best teams in the world playing at The Linc every summer. Take advantage of these opportunities! That way the kids are watching soccer AND getting off the couch!