

Strategies for Dealing with Blowouts

There is nothing more discouraging for a child than to be on the wrong end of a 0 - 6 score, or one that is 0 - 18. Dr. Tom Turner, Director of Coaching and Player Development for the Ohio Youth Soccer Association points out that if KIDS were managing the game instead of the responsible adults, they would stop the game in the face of unbalanced teams.

Blowouts are no fun for children and characteristic of youth-orchestrated play is the need for excitement and challenge. Ironically, while being the last player picked from a group can often be embarrassing, the practical outcome of this age-old tradition is relatively balanced competition. No youth sport contest begins with the two best players starting out on the same team. If the sides turn out to be uneven, either the game is concluded and new sides picked, or players trade places and new hope is given to the trailing side. Young players often modify their rules to accommodate imbalance or inequity and, particularly in lopsided contests, "next goal wins" serves to produce the required adrenaline rush in pursuit of last-minute glory.

We want our TPSC coaches to believe that they are responsible not only for their own players, but also for the well-being of those on the other team.

Unfortunately, we have seen adults who believe that beating up on other teams helps the losers build character - and don't appreciate the difference between a 4-0 game and 15-0 game. We've actually had one imply that it is 'un-American' to limit better players in those situations from exercising their skills. We suspect these beliefs might be altered if they were on the losing end. (Imagine walking your six-year-old to the car and saying, 'Don't worry about losing 15-1, dear, it was a good learning experience for you. I bet you can't wait to get back out here next week!')

Particularly in the younger ages with as few as four players on a side, it is all too easy for one or two good players on a side to dominate a game. We're not going to get on the case of the coaches in those games, as some of us have been there ourselves...in the heat of the game, with the score rapidly rising, it's difficult to invent ways on the spot to keep the score within reason. Those of us who've struggled with such a game learned to come to the next game prepared so that it would never happen again.

What's necessary (and expected of our coaches) is 1/ to have the commitment that you're responsible for the well-being of the opposing players as well as your own and 2/ a thought-out arsenal of coaching strategies ready to employ if the score gets out of hand.

Many clubs impose a four or five goal maximum goal differential on their games. (Those playing in the end of the year U-10 and U-12 jamboree will find that every goal more than four will incur penalties.) We as a board have chosen not to codify a "Rule" to this effect in our club play, but to strongly request that our Tiburon coaches abide by a four goal maximum differential and expect them to take steps to limit scoring when the differential reaches four goals.

Things to do to avoid running up the score:

1. Recognize early – Generally you can tell early on in the game if your team is going to dominate. Start doing the things necessary to avoid an excessive goal differential early on in the game; don't wait until you hit 4 goals before you do anything.
2. Stop your Scorers from Scoring – Tell them not to take shots and only pass the ball to others. Passing is a more important part of Recreational soccer than scoring.
3. Put your Non-scorers up front – Take advantage of this time to allow some of your other players to get a goal.
4. Switch your goalie – Put in someone that normally doesn't play goal to give them the experience. Don't just put in your back-up, second best keeper – put in someone else. Nothing erases a goal differential and boosts the opposing team's morale like a couple of goals.
5. Set a mid-field boundary – Tell your offensive players they can't cross mid-field to help the defense (lets the opposing team have a numbers advantage). Tell your defense the same thing, not to cross midfield to help the offense score.
6. Set a number of passes before a shot – Tell your players they must have a set number of passes or touches before anyone can take a shot and you've got to start over at 1 every time the opposing team touches the ball. This is a very good practice drill/tool to use also. Teaches the players to pass the ball around, forward and back, and switching the field. But, please don't chant out the number from the sidelines as this is sometimes demeaning to the opposing team.
7. Play short – Start pulling players off the field. Play a man down when you hit a two or three goal differential. Play two men down or even three down when you hit a three goal differential. We know that there are minimums for players on the field in each club, but this is more for starting a legal game, not avoiding running up the score. Plus, once the opposing team closes the gap, you can always add players back on – but you don't have to if it's a better competitive game!!!
8. Add players – Not you, the other guys. Talk to the other coach and work out between the two of you that the other team can add an extra player or two.
9. Anticipate that last second goal – Many times we hear “we were keeping the differential at 4 goals, until little Johnny, who never ever scores, scored a goal right at the end of the game. I didn't want to stop him from getting his first goal!! Am I in trouble for a 5 goal differential?” Our answer to this is – YES. As a coach, you should have anticipated this and planned how to maintain the 4 goal differential.