



## What Can WE do as Coaches in a Mismatched Soccer Game?

Have you seen the story about the Southern California high school girls basketball team that won 161-2? No kidding.

As reported by the San Bernardino County Sun, Arroyo Valley High School Head Coach Michael Anderson was suspended for two games as a result, but defends himself to the Sun's Pete Marshall with the following explanation:

"I didn't play any starters in the second half," and "I didn't expect them [Bloomington] to be that bad, I'm not trying to embarrass anybody. And I didn't expect my bench to play that well. I had one [bench] player make eight of nine 3[-pointer]s."

Anderson also defended himself saying that he tried to get the referees to run the clock non-stop in the second half, but they only agreed to so in the fourth quarter. He also said he restricted his players not to shoot until there were less than seven seconds on the shot clock, and they didn't "full-court press" in the second half either

All too little too late, really, as the halftime score before all of these moves was 104-1!

We're a soccer website, not basketball, but this certainly brings up a lot of questions that do get "kicked around" a lot in soccer coaching and parents circles. What do you do when you come up against a comprehensively overmatched team in soccer?

Many feel it's an insult to the opponent to not play your best, but there has to be a line, right? The longer you wait to "call off the dogs" against an inferior opponent, the more risk you run of unnecessarily embarrassing that opponent, which could cause you to do things that then further disrespects them on top of it!

***(The above Excerpted from Five ways to develop soccer players during a blowout without disrespecting opponents, By Chris Hummer | January 22, 2015)***

I propose, the following items developed/presented with the AYSO Six Philosophies in mind. Specifically, Positive Coaching, Good Sportsmanship, and Player Development.

### AYSO Six Philosophies

1. **Everyone Plays®**
2. **Balanced Teams**
3. **Open Registration**
4. **Positive Coaching** -- Encouragement of player effort provides for greater enjoyment for the players and leads to better-skilled and better-motivated players. A coach can be one



of the most influential people in a child's life, so AYSO requires they create a positive experience for every boy and girl.

5. **Good Sportsmanship** -- We strive to create a positive environment based on mutual respect rather than a win-at-all-costs attitude, and our program is designed to instill good sportsmanship in every facet of AYSO.
6. **Player Development** -- We believe that all players should be able to develop their soccer skills and knowledge to the best of their abilities, both individually and as members of a team, in order to maximize their enjoyment of the game.

## So, What Can YOU Do in a Lop-sided Match?

First try to identify the situation early, then look to change the game (objectives) to something that will benefit your team in later in the season, then remember to be good sports. Specifically,

**Identify the Situation Early** to maintain and provide the optimal developmental opportunity for both teams. As in the story above, if you wait too long—almost no steps will authentically address the situation. As the coach you can maintain a victory while keeping control of your team/players and help them develop as players and people!

**Change the Game** – As a coach you can shift the focus of your players and their activities. Change the game from one that is score—based/centric to one of working on other areas—see below for specific suggestions. Moving players around may be a start—if you authentically plan on using that player in that position moving forward in the season. Otherwise, look to develop or expand a dimension of your team that will help you win against more properly matched competitive teams.

**Demonstrate Good Sportsmanship** --Avoid any ego crushing comments—e.g., “we are not going to score anymore”, “let's get a goal for <player name> she/he hasn't scored all season”, etc. -it's neither helpful for your players or the opposing team. Additionally, you, your team, and your supporters can start celebrating the good plays of the other team! During a blow-out, there should be no need for your team, coaches, or supporters to continue to celebrate after goals, react/dispute calls, or do anything to extend the game.

## If You Are On the Dominant Side of a Mismatched Game YOU CAN...

If you are on the winning/dominant side--create new challenges that will help improve your players and the team—versus padding your goal differential. For example, work on possession, different patterns of play, specific team or individual skills.

**Change Your Formation**—Assume a defensive posture with the purpose of keeping the other team from scoring, perhaps only letting one player cross over mid-field.

### Implement Alternate Game Objectives (Tactics + Techniques)

- All players must touch the ball before going to goal OR they must complete “X” number of passes (selecting a number passes that present a substantive challenge for your players)
- Only score off volleys, headers, or diving headers
- Players only shoot or dribble with their non-dominant foot
- Shoot only from outside the penalty area/penalty arc, etc.
- Only score off crosses (practicing/learning how to play from wide)
- Only score off set plays like a Corner Kick (CK)--have the players learn to draw a corner kick by dribbling/passing to the goal line and "making" the defense kick the ball out of bounds

- Only score after the ball is passed from one touch Line to the other (side) touch Line (Switching Play)
- See how many Offside traps you can create (Defensive tactic/s)
- Connect 5 passes in each half of the field (10 total) before going to goal if opponent touches the ball the number resets to 0 and your team must restart)
- Every player must make a soccer move with the ball before going to anyone on the team can go to goal

**BE creative--**how can your team improve--can you make them better players? A better team? Mix and match from the ideas above to improve your team/players vs. running up the score.

### **If You Are On the Wrong Side of a Mismatched Game YOU CAN...**

As odd as it sounds try some of the ideas above too? What you want to do is take the focus off the score and place it squarely on smaller more achievable items--see what your team is capable of and recognize that performance.

For example, tell your players to forget the score on this match and let's start preparing for the next one. Challenge them to see how many times they can connect three passes in a row? Challenge them to try out soccer move? Or do the "thing" that you did in practice that week?

As a coach you have a valuable developmental platform in real-game situations to run a practice as the score may not be favorable to achieving a result—USE IT TO DEVELOP!

And be sure to count and **applaud all the mini victories inside the game which will ultimately serve your players far better in their development as player and people.** After all, I guarantee none of your players will be turned away from the U.S. National Team because they got beat or won a game in youth soccer by a larger margin.

I will bet that the lessons the players learn from how you respond to that situation can positively or negatively affect their development. As a coach you have the power to make a difference.

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