

After a weekend of rain, we're back to late summer weather. After winter jackets and umbrellas, now you need sunblock and more water. It must be South Dakota.

Following a couple weeks of games, parents new to soccer may be trying to figure out what coaches are trying to teach. Youth soccer provides a licensure system of coaching to those who decide to volunteer. The first coaching license level is "F" and the highest level is "A". All classes build on four main components of teaching the game: technical, tactical, physical, and psychological.

Tom Goodman, M.Ed. writes advice to parents who are trying to figure out how to help their young players. Goodman believes that knowing that coaches base their training on the four components helps people understand the message. He explains to parents that the most important thing for them to do to support their young players is to understand the basic parts of coaching and to enjoy playing what are called "small-sided games" such as 1v1 or 2v1 just to have fun. Don't coach. Just have fun playing passing, receiving, dribbling and trying to beat the other player to a goal. Play "Follow the Leader" or "Shark and Minnow". Set up a couple of empty milk jugs to identify a goal and you're ready.

Parents should understand that the technical component is the mechanics or skills kids need to develop in order to handle the ball. It involves such things as learning how to position the body when receiving a pass or how to position your foot and ankle when kicking off the top of the foot. Let your child teach you what she learned from the coach about these types of things.

The tactical piece of the game is really the thoughtful part where players make decisions about what to do with the ball. Should they pass, dribble, shoot? Do they pass immediately (first touch), dribble and then pass, let the pass go on to another teammate? All are questions that coaches ask kids to think about as they play and to make the decisions as well. Soccer requires quick decisions and assessments.

Physical elements of any sport involve the basics of endurance, flexibility, agility, balance, speed, etc. Soccer coaches ask players to commit to improving all the physical aspects of their bodies in order to play more effectively. They teach conditioning, stretching, running technique, and

other physical fitness pieces. Kids who feel healthy and strong are more successful in the game and happier playing.

The psychological component refers to things like “mental toughness”, managing a range of emotions, learning the good and bad parts of yourself, and developing an attitude about the game, competition, and life.

Your child’s coach will try to provide training sessions that incorporate all of these components and to utilize more “game like” environments. This means less standing in line waiting for a turn to kick at the keeper but more 3 v 3 games where decisions about what to do with the ball have to be made quickly in the run of play. It means that the stop, start, run, turn, pass, receive aspects of games get practiced over and over but not in rote drills. In short, the game is the best teacher. Go outside and learn with your child.