

US Youth Soccer Grassroots Survey

Executive Summary

A. Recognition/Breadth of Respondents

Recognition:

- Good at the local level, 88% are familiar to extremely familiar with their local organization
- Good at the national level, 63% know that their local association belongs to US Youth Soccer
- Knowledge of our competitors is limited
- Multiple level of response from recreational to elite and a bit skewed towards the elite level

Breadth:

- Volunteer coaches make up a majority of the respondents (79%)
- Have participation from administrators, paid coaches and referees as well

B. Most Valuable and Least Valuable Benefits: Parents Perspective

- Most Valuable Benefits: (in order of most value)
 1. Fun (96%)
 2. Physical Development (91%)
 3. Soccer Skills Development (91%)
 4. Lessons in Teamwork (90%)
 5. Character Development (86%)
 6. Lessons in Self-Discipline (84%)
 7. Competition (84%)
- Least Valuable Benefits (in order of least value)
 1. Mandated Playing Time (14%)
 2. Winning (15%)
 3. National Level Competition (16%)
 4. Exposure to Professional Coaches (18%)
 5. Low-cost Sports Alternative (22%)
 6. Opportunities in sports parent did not have (24%)
 7. Opportunities for Collage Scholarship (30%)

- Commentary: Values (i.e. life values) matter the most. Also, parents are favorable to competition. The benefits of elite soccer (at least as often perceived) are not valued generally (which is to be expected as most children do not play at that level). These are not valued highly by a significant portion of those parents involved at the recreational level. Basically, technical development is not more important than competition; it is more important than winning. There is a distinction between competition and winning. Our parents see great value in competing (*i.e.*, seeking to achieve) and less in the score-based result

C. Reasons Kids Play – Parents Perspective

- Most Important Reason
 1. Fun (97%)
 2. To be with friends (81%)
 3. To develop soccer skills (74%)
 4. To be with peer group (54%)
 5. To stay in shape (49%)
- Least Important Reasons
 1. To emulate well-known soccer players (17%)
 2. To emulate respected adult – parent, sibling, etc. (23%)
 3. Parent was once a player (25%)
 4. It is a family-oriented activity (25%)

D. Impact of Soccer on Children – Parents’ Perspective (This is a key set of responses because it tells how the family decision-makers view the quality of our products.)

- Satisfaction with soccer experience (good to excellent)
 1. Local organization 78%
 2. State and national 65%
- Impact on child’s physical development (96%); generally to very positive
- Impact on child’s social development (91%); generally to very positive
- Impact on child’s emotional development (91%); generally to very positive
- Impact on child’s character development (89%); generally to very positive
- Impact on child’s skill development (89%); generally to very positive

- Impact on child's mental development (88%); generally to very positive
- Commentary: The above tells us that what parents want their children to get out of their soccer experiences (see A. above – physical development and values lesson). They perceive our organization as providing these things. The responses to Questions 47 and 48 support that what is being experienced is generally to very positive and results to Question 49 (78% generally to always meeting expectations) supports that our organizations are doing well in providing those experiences (*i.e.*, it is the game and the organization).

E. What Do the Respondents (Parents, Administrator, Coaches) Want us to Develop?

- Individual skills training programs (53%)
- Maintaining recreation program for older children (44%)
- Better parent education (42%)
- Greater focus on individual creativity on the field (37%)
- Higher level referees (35%)
- Commentary: Respondents want players with greater skills but not for the purpose of moving to college or professional levels. See the results for Question 9 and Question 51. They seem to want greater skills for the simple purpose of achieving excellence. What does this tell us? We are delivering products that parents perceive as valuable to their child, most of which are not technical skills oriented

F. What Matters About Local Soccer Associations?

- **Matters Most (very important and important)**
 1. Quality of fields (88%)
 2. Seeks to develop character traits as well as soccer skills (86%)
 3. Emphasizes fairness (86%)
 4. Provides opportunities for all children (72%)
 5. Produces competitive teams (68%)
 6. Provides an academy program for younger players (60%)
 7. Is a non-profit corporation (57%)
 8. Employees a professional DOC (57%)

- **Matters Least (somewhat important and not important)**

1. Economic characteristics of member families (73%)
2. Produces championship teams (68%)
3. Is growing rapidly (67%)
4. Offers employment opportunities to coaches (66%)
5. Has history of college scholarship players (62%)
6. Emphasizes travel soccer for older players (61%)
7. Is less costly than other youth soccer organizations (59%)

- Commentary: These results again confirm the values-based focus of member parents. They also tell us that good facilities and good teams are key drivers. Last, the technical acquisition aspect for younger kids is a focus.

G. What is Most Important and Least about State Association?

- **Most Important (very important and important)**

1. Child safety programs (88%)
2. Adopt/administer rules of play (86%)
3. Provide coaching education (83%)
4. Organize leagues (81%)
5. D&A (76%)

- **Least Important (somewhat important and not important)**

1. ODP (46%)
2. Marketing Programs (40%)
3. State Championship (37%)
4. Support of travel teams going to tournaments (36%)
5. Representation before US Youth Soccer and USSF (33%)

H. Purposes of Soccer: (important to very important combined %; in order of most value)

- Providing opportunities for all children to play (95%)
- Developing soccer in the United States (86%)
- Assist parents in character development (72%)
- Developing elite players (63%)
- Supporting professional soccer leagues (39%)

I. Broad Conclusions:

- Assuming the perceptions of parents, coaches, etc. are accurate as to them and, where applicable, accurate reflections of what children think:
 1. Youth Soccer is about fun, values building, friends/peers, and developing skills for the sake of achieving the excellence possible at the relevant levels of physical ability.
 2. We (US Youth Soccer, State Associations and local associations) are doing a good job at meeting/providing, etc., those things described in 1., despite the fact that we spend disproportionate dollars and time on things parents and children care about to a significantly lesser degree.
 3. Academy programs/individual skills training at younger ages are much desired, but teams and competition at older ages are also much desired.
 4. College scholarships, ODP, national teams and the professional leagues matter only to a small minority. Confirms October 2004 USSF Survey.
 5. Marketing should sell what our respondents find to be the values of youth soccer; *e.g.*, soccer players become successful adults because soccer teaches them critical values. This is very close to the current NCAA program about college athletes are successes in left because of college sports. I suggest that we look at this concept very, very closely. *E. g.*, Hi, I'm Larry and I am a doctor serving children in Sudan. Medical school was tough, and working in these conditions is even tougher. But, I played youth soccer and it taught me about **[list various key values]**. (Shift focus to Sudanese lads playing soccer in the dust). Overlay "Soccer is about your life."
 6. The greatest attraction we have nationally, at the state level, and locally is found in:
 - Values enhancement/preservation
 - Risk Management/child safety
 - Creating order (rules of play, leagues, D&A, etc.)
 - Teaching coaches
 - Educating parents
 7. We have a much greater affinity with the NCAA teams than the USSF.
 8. The 21st century has arrived in youth soccer. Paper has to go at all levels.
 9. Recreation teams for older age groups are a fertile field for growth. Co-ed recreational play as well!

ODP, state championship and elite teams are things we should do to keep the minority happy. The things the great majority of our families care about is what we must do.