

## **Burnout Ahead**

*By Jay Martin*

The headline in the Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch read, “Top soccer players don’t have time to kick back.” The story documented the summer of a number of Central Ohio soccer players, both boys and girls. All told of the time commitment youth soccer requires.

- Brandon Lacko, a senior at Westerville South High School: “Soccer is definitely an all-year-round thing. I do get tired every now and then, more mentally than physically, but love doing it. Basically, when I am not playing soccer I am relaxing and getting ready for the next practice.”
- Steve Serr, coach with Premier adidas and Westerville South High School: “As soon as the high school season ends, the club season starts and runs through June.”
- Annette Bonasso, a player at Ohio Premier and Dublin Coffman High School: “My freshman year we won the state championship and had club practice the next day!”
- Maria Shipe of Bexley High School quit club as she entered high school to play softball. When she didn’t start on her club softball team, she quit softball, saying “I don’t see softball in my future, so I’m going to play soccer again. I see soccer as a way to advance into college!”

What’s wrong with this picture? Sure, soccer is a great game and it’s fun to play, but is this a healthy situation for our young soccer players? Ask any college coach about the number of soccer players recruited who left because of burnout. You’ll hear many horror stories. Why should a high school age girl have to quit softball to play soccer? The priorities of club coaches are way off. This country’s youth soccer situation is holding back the growth of the sport.

- Coaches have fostered the belief that playing on certain clubs will enhance college soccer scholarship chances. This simply is not true. Very little soccer scholarship money is available.
- The emphasis on wins creates a situation where kids are not prepared to play the game, but are coached to do what it takes to win. This leaves many young players at a disadvantage going to the next level. Many fast and strong players are never taught how to play in the clubs and are at a huge disadvantage in college.
- The emphasis on tournaments creates a situation where kids cannot possibly learn to play the game the way it should be played. Tournaments foster “underwater soccer” and a total disregard for learning how to prepare to play. Soccer is a game that cannot be played more than once a day or even a weekend. No one can prepare to play when there are three games in one day.
- The club system eliminates kids from playing. If kids cannot get into a club, they do not play “rec soccer” because it’s viewed as a lower level of the game; therefore, kids who need to play or who may be late bloomers are eliminated from the game.
- There is well-documented conflict between clubs and high schools. Like all adult conflicts, this puts the players right in the middle, and they often are the losers.

Let’s start making decisions that benefit the players and not coaches!