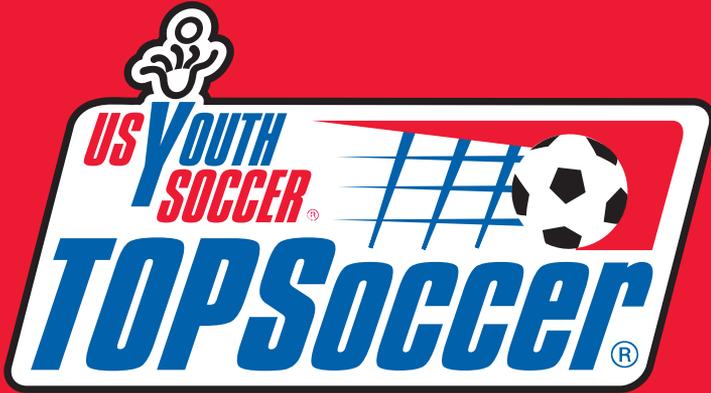


TOPSoccer

[The Outreach Program for Soccer]

An official US Youth Soccer
program enriching the lives of young
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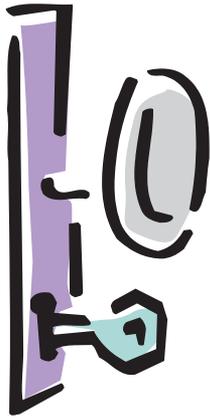
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Chapter 1



Introduction

What is TOPSoccer?

TOPSOCCER (The Outreach Program for Soccer) is a community-based training and team placement program for young athletes with special needs. The program, designed and administered by **US Youth Soccer** and its volunteer TOPSoccer Committee, provides meaningful learning, development and physical participation opportunities to these young athletes through the game of soccer. The emphasis of this program is on development, training and meaningful participation rather than on competition. TOPSoccer was formed to perpetuate the **US Youth Soccer** mission statement, which is, “to foster the physical, mental, and emotional growth and development through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition.” Our goal is to enable thousands of young athletes with disabilities to develop their physical fitness, technical skills, courage and self esteem, through the joy and excitement of playing soccer.

Seven Keys to a Successful Program

A TOPSoccer player is defined as any youth player between the ages of four and nineteen who has a physical or intellectual impairment that limits their ability to perform at the level of play at which they have chosen to participate. A successful TOPSoccer program consists of the following elements:

1. Placement of players by ability, not age.
2. Emphasis on ability not disability.
3. Player involvement.

4. Meaningful experience for players.
5. Achievement of individual goals.
6. Dependability and stability of coaches.
7. **FUN! FUN! FUN! FUN!**

How Can I Help?

There are thousands of children with disabilities who need, and can be provided the opportunity to play soccer through the TOPSoccer program. That opportunity exists for these athletes to achieve, develop and compete according to their individual abilities. The TOPSoccer program would not exist without the countless hours donated by dedicated volunteers across the country. *US Youth Soccer* has the structure and the opportunity, yet we need more volunteers to help make this a reality for these children. We need you to help us reach our goal of having a TOPSoccer program in every community in this country.

If you believe in the statement **“the gift of life is the gift of giving,”** you are on the right track to becoming a volunteer and starting a TOPSoccer program. A whole new world of soccer fun awaits these children, so reach out and bring them into the soccer family.

This guide was designed to help you initiate a TOPSoccer program in your community. Our hearts have been touched by those children already participating and their efforts to deal with the challenges they face each day of their lives. They give to us the most precious gift of all - FAITH IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT!

The Facts...

Listed on the following page are some amazing facts on the prevalence of disabilities within our society. These facts are the latest available from the 1990 Census conducted by the United States Census Bureau. These statistics along with empirical experience show the need and desire to organize and support the TOPSoccer program.

- ▶ There are 251.8 million people in the United States. Of this number 48.9 million are disabled and seven million have intellectual impairment.
- ▶ 50,000 children a year become disabled through accidents.
- ▶ 150,000 babies are born each year with a birth defect.
- ▶ Over 6 million children with disabilities between the ages of four and nineteen are living within the territories of the 55 Member State Associations of *US Youth Soccer* according to the Department of Education's Report to Congress.
- ▶ US Youth Soccer believes that all children should have the opportunity to play soccer, regardless of their race, color, religion, sex or ability.



“TOPSoccer is an opportunity for all of us to give back to the game and make a tremendously positive impact on athletes, their families and the soccer community.”

Jim Cosgrove, Executive Director, US Youth Soccer

Chapter 2

Developing a TOPSoccer Program

How Do I Get Started?

Developing a TOPSoccer Program can be very rewarding! Just like anything new it takes time! Listed below are some suggestions to help you start your TOPSoccer program. These suggestions are based on experience, and the fact that any soccer program has four different and distinct groups involved; coaches, volunteers/parents, administrators and, most importantly, PLAYERS! All four elements of the program must work together harmoniously for it to be successful.

What Kind of Program Should I Have?

In reality, you could have participants with a wide range of disabilities, each one providing a different challenge (see TOPSoccer case study). There are several ways to meet the challenges that these athletes may present and to find the resources available to you and your program. The following are suggestions on how to draw athletes to your program:

Targeted Approach

Advertising, through Public Service Announcements, newspapers, flyers, etc., for athletes with specific disabilities or in specific age groups, based on your program's resources.

Shotgun Approach

Advertise for athletes with any type of disability who wish to participate, regardless of your program's resources or lack thereof.

Unified Approach

Advertise for all athletes regardless of ability or disability. So... now what? How do you find the children and start a program? There are several answers and possible sources of information.

Local School District

The Individual Disability Education Act (IDEA) mandates that each state must provide education to children who are disabled. Your local school district can provide you with their enrollment specific to these federal guidelines. The Act does not require that they give you actual names of the children, but the information will help you determine where the majority of disabled children are in your school district and their ages.

Programs for the Disabled

Contact some established programs for the disabled and ask for additional information. These programs might include the United Cerebral Palsy Foundation, the Special Olympics, the Shriners, **US Youth Soccer** or any other organization that provides services for the disabled.

Soccer Organizations

Check with your local soccer club, league, local association or state association. They also will be able to provide you with information on insurance, rules, fees and other administrative issues. There are other issues to consider when starting your program.

- ▶ Check with the facility you plan to use and see if they have any restrictions, and if they are accessible to the disabled.
- ▶ Decide the length and time of your program.
- ▶ Create a list of possible volunteers who can help with the program. **YOU CAN NOT DO IT ALONE!** Local colleges and universities are good sources for volunteer interns. Established soccer clubs in your community also are good sources, as well as potential sources for participants. It sounds like a lot of work; however, all it takes is one person to take the first step, and others will follow. The load becomes much lighter and the rewards are well worth the effort!

Now that you have addressed and considered these issues, you should have a general idea of the shape of your TOPSoccer program. The next step is interacting with the four groups of people that make the program succeed!

Soccer Administrators: Get Their Support!

- ▶ Contact all of them, from your club president to your state association president!
- ▶ Supply information on the program; communication is essential!
- ▶ Ask them about player insurance.
- ▶ Ask them for equipment and facility support.
- ▶ Inquire about possible volunteers, lists of coaches and players, etc.
- ▶ Request that your TOPSoccer program become a budgeted item.

Coaches: How to Find 'em!

- ▶ Communicate with the State Director of Coaching.
- ▶ Contact local universities, colleges, high schools, US Youth Soccer, ODP and local clubs.
- ▶ Ask parents; they often make great coaches.
- ▶ Contact established groups for disabled children.
- ▶ Inquire at your local school district.

Players: How to Find 'em!

- ▶ Contact your local school district. (IDEA Act)
- ▶ Contact local established groups for the disabled.
- ▶ Spread the word among friends, family and co-workers; word of mouth works!

- ▶ Find out if any registered player has siblings who have special needs.
- ▶ Advertise or send out press releases to your local media. Send, at least, the following information:
 1. Location, date, time
 2. Cost, if any
 3. Age groups
 4. Contact person and telephone number
 5. (Most Importantly) Definition and description of the program!

Volunteers/Parents: Get Them Involved!

- ▶ Contact your local soccer club or state association.
- ▶ Contact local universities, colleges, high schools and local civic clubs. (Note: many educational facilities have teaching and volunteer requirements of their students.)
- ▶ Ask the players' parents; quite often, they make the best volunteers.
- ▶ Contact established programs for the disabled.

Chapter 3

TOPSoccer Case Study

A Program Model

The following model illustrates just one way to service the variety of needs presented by the athletes in a TOPSoccer program. The program can be organized in any manner and will serve equally well dependent upon the resources allocated and available and the types of players that are registered.

The Anytown TOPSoccer program is in its first season. Twice a week, three volunteer coaches and several older select-level players gather at a local soccer field to welcome their regular group of TOPSoccer players. The players with different disabilities regularly attend. The Anytown TOPSoccer group consists of the following:

- ▶ Four high-ability players with mild intellectual impairment, ages 8-14.
- ▶ Eight low-ability players with moderate intellectual impairment, ages 8-14.
- ▶ Two very low-ability players with mild intellectual impairment.
- ▶ Two low-ability players with cerebral palsy.
- ▶ One player who is hearing impaired.

The coaches and assistants run a 75-minute training session focusing on small group activities. Each training session finishes with an informal game in which the older select-level players participate as “soccer buddies”.

After assessing their skills in the first couple of sessions, the TOPSoccer coordinator placed the players in competition opportunities considered safe, meaningful and challenging.

- ▶ The four high-ability players with mild intellectual impairment were placed on non-disabled teams in a recreational program.
- ▶ Eight lower-ability players with moderate intellectual impairment play amongst themselves.

- ▶ Two players with severe intellectual impairment have difficulty in understanding or participating in a meaningful way in team play. Both do benefit athletically and socially by the one-on-one basic technical training they receive through TOPSoccer.
- ▶ Two players with cerebral palsy cannot be placed on a non-disabled team due to their need to use a walking device; such devices or wheelchairs present a safety hazard to other players. Both do benefit athletically and socially by the one-on-one basic technical training they receive through TOPSoccer. They may participate in an indoor wheelchair league if the TOPSoccer program provides this opportunity. Please check with your TOPSoccer coordinator about this possibility.
- ▶ The player who is hearing impaired has developed a lot of confidence through the program and has learned techniques that will enable him to play successfully on a non-disabled team in the future.

Athletes come in a wide variety of ages and abilities. TOPSoccer has something for every player who requests the opportunity to participate. It is our opportunity to assist by providing the specialized training and support to ensure these athletes continued success in the *US Youth Soccer* family.

Chapter 4

Education and Training

As with anything, the more you know the better off you are. Our key objective is to recognize we are dealing with kids who just want to have fun. Keep in mind that every situation which might occur on the playing field won't be addressed in this guide. Typically, a TOPSoccer program will consist of skills development and assessment exercises and the placement of players into appropriate game situations. However, there are many experienced TOPSoccer administrators who can help! The wide variety of disabilities, and the fact that some individuals have more than one disability, create numerous challenges to overcome. Recommendations and suggestions can be given, and your creativity provides solutions to these challenges. Some knowledge or experience in soccer and working with children can help to overcome fear and lack of knowledge. Remember, "ALL kids have dreams" and through your efforts and hands-on experience, these dreams can come true.

The following question comes up in virtually all initial discussions of starting a TOPSoccer program.

Question: **Is special training and education required to start a TOPSoccer program?**

Answer: **NO! It is not required, however it is helpful. As with any program for children, COMMON SENSE and some general knowledge about the sport of soccer will get you through most situations. We all learn from each other and the hands-on experience you get from working with these disabled athletes will enable you to assist the next volunteer.**

Helping the People Who Are Helping the Program

- ▶ Hold a meeting with all four groups of people. Outline your program, ask for input from all involved and address any concerns.
- ▶ Provide a Youth License module from *US Youth Soccer* for your coaches and volunteers/parents. This can be arranged through the State Coach or Director of Coaching of your State Association.
- ▶ Provide a training course for your coaches and volunteers/parents, conducted by one of the established groups for the disabled, such as Special Olympics.
- ▶ Arrange to conduct a TOPSoccer clinic at your State Association workshop or AGM, to provide information on your program. One very good idea is to invite a physician, a physical therapist and a psychologist, each of whom work with the disabled, and have a round table discussion on the various subjects concerning people with disabilities.
- ▶ Set up a meeting with the local groups in your community that work with the disabled, and share ideas and ways you can help each other.
- ▶ Provide on the job training for your coaches and volunteers/parents, by having them observe and participate in your practices.
- ▶ Talk with your *US Youth Soccer* Regional Committee Member for TOPSoccer, and with the *US Youth Soccer* National Office. These people have a wealth of information to assist you.
- ▶ Education for the disabled players involved in your program depends on your ability, and the level of creativity and flexibility in your program.

- ▶ If you have chosen the unified approach, education for non disabled players in your program should be the same as with your education for coaches, administrators and volunteers / parents.

Qualities of a Good Coach

- ▶ Pleasant Personality.
- ▶ Flexible with a relaxed approach while teaching skills.
- ▶ Reliable.
- ▶ Firm, but fair, and able to discipline players when necessary.
- ▶ Gives praise to players when needed and warranted.
- ▶ Able to give clear, brief and simple instructions.
- ▶ Able and willing to demonstrate the skill to be learned.
- ▶ Includes everyone in practices and games.
- ▶ Provides a ball for everyone at practice.
- ▶ Makes learning new skills and playing soccer FUN, FUN, FUN!

Training Sessions

Training Sessions should be fun and include all the players. The suggested length and number of practices depends on the players ages, but ranges from 50 minutes, once a week to 90 minutes, twice a week. The following are examples of a typical training session, assessment activities and some fun games to help your players achieve some technical proficiency.

- 10-15 minutes of warm-up exercise**
- 15-45 minutes of learning the game or skills**
- 10-15 minutes of cool down exercises**

A break or two should be provided during the training sessions. A great suggestion is to provide the break just when the players are really into and enjoying what they are doing. This will hasten the time spent in the bathroom or getting drinks of water, and make them eager to return to the field.

The following are some examples of fun games to use in your training sessions:

**Simon Says
Soccer Bowling
Man in The Middle**

**Red Light / Green Light
Soccer Golf
Dodge Ball**

It is important to remember that you are working with disabled children and it might take one entire training session to teach just one skill. Patience and understanding are not just essential, but required! Some of your players will have great athletic abilities, some will have close to none and many will fall somewhere in the middle. **You should adjust your session to accommodate all your players' abilities.**

Most importantly, always remember that during your training sessions you should emphasize **TRAINING, PARTICIPATION and FUN.....never competition!**

Chapter 5

Developing Relationships

Communicating Effectively

Sometimes the things we say or do can either open or close doors to communication. Here is a list of some “DO’S and DON’TS” to help enhance your relationship with the players and their families.

Do

- ▶ Use the term “Down Syndrome.”
- ▶ Use the word “disabled” instead of “handicapped.”
- ▶ Say a player has “seizure” or “seizure disorder” rather than “takes fits” or is an “epileptic.”
- ▶ Say a player “uses a wheelchair” rather than “is restricted to a wheelchair.”
- ▶ Say a player “is partially sighted” or “is visually impaired” rather than “is blind.”
- ▶ Say a player is “hearing impaired” rather than “deaf.”
- ▶ Be certain they can see your mouth and keep hands away from your mouth when talking.

Don’t

- ▶ Stare.
- ▶ Ask, “What happened to you?”
- ▶ Automatically give assistance to a player with a disability. Ask if they want your help first.
- ▶ Stand up while talking to a player in a wheelchair, bend down to their eye level.

Don't Continued...

- ▶ Talk fast to a player who is hearing impaired. Most hearing impaired people read lips. Talk slowly and directly to them. If in a group setting, be sure to include them.
- ▶ Sensationalize their accomplishments.
- ▶ Call them “son” or “honey.” **Use their name.**
- ▶ Use words such as unfortunate, special or challenged when talking to the player.
- ▶ Be patronizing.
- ▶ Use words like dumb, stupid, idiot, senile, retard, etc.

Chapter 6

Guidelines for the Modification of Play

Creating a Meaningful Experience for Everyone

The safety of all players must be a primary concern. We can make equipment used by the disabled safe such as padding crutches, walkers and wheelchairs. However, sometimes even by doing this there poses a problem of safety for children with disabilities themselves or the other participants. Caution must be used to insure that all participants will be safe.

Our program is open to any child with a physical or mental disability between the ages of four and nineteen. However, we must face reality. Not all children with a disability will be able to play soccer. Honesty with the child and parents is a must. Remember the goals of this program are to develop the child's self esteem, physical fitness and socialization. Soccer is a simple game, modifications can be made to adapt the game of soccer for children with disabilities. We stress having a fun and meaningful experience playing soccer, not being competitive. A child who is immobile and can't actively participate by any means is not going to benefit from this program.

Children that have a history of violent behavior or inflicting physical harm to themselves and others, if accepted into your program must be monitored. Should they be violent or do physical harm to other players, a decision will have to be made about their continued involvement in your program.

Modification of the Playing Environment

Remember our objective here is to create a meaningful experience in soccer for children with disabilities. Modification of our playing rules and equipment is sometimes necessary.

For Children With Orthopedic Impairments

- ▶ Reduce field size.
- ▶ Increase number of players on team.
- ▶ Use a soccer buddy for children in wheelchairs, if needed.
- ▶ Use regulation balls with less air, nerf balls or other types of adaptive balls.

For Children With Visual Impairments

- ▶ Increase size of ball used.
- ▶ Use brightly colored balls.
- ▶ Wrap goals with brightly colored tape.
- ▶ Use beeper balls.
- ▶ Have soccer buddies to aid the children in running when on the field.
- ▶ Have some kind of sounding device near or in the goal.

For Children With Hearing Impairments

- ▶ Learn some hand signals or sign language.
- ▶ Get an interpreter if possible.
- ▶ Work out hand signals between your soccer buddies and players.

Chapter 7

Creating Your Own Program & Playing Rules

The options available in determining the type of TOPSoccer programs are unlimited. Keep in mind that we want to provide as many opportunities for these players as our others. If you have fall and spring sessions for your other players, then you should have fall and spring sessions for your TOPSoccer players. Conducting one four-week program and never having the players return is not a TOPSoccer program. *US Youth Soccer* and its State Associations are the experts in the game of soccer. The resources available to you from them is unlimited. Where else should the responsibility of creating a soccer program for children with disabilities fall, but in the hands of the experts. The following are some ideas you may consider in creating your TOPSoccer program. The length and time of your program is left up to you.

- ▶ Small-sided games (3 v 3 , 4 v 4 , etc.).
- ▶ Full-sided games (11 v 11). It is sometimes unrealistic to begin with full-sided games in a new program. This may be a goal to strive for as your program and players develop.
- ▶ Unified Games. This is a great way to begin a program. In unified soccer a ratio of players with disabilities to non-disabled players is kept on the field. Example: 5 v 5 with a ratio of 3 disabled to 2 non-disabled players.
- ▶ Indoor program.
- ▶ Outdoor program.
- ▶ Skills only. Due to medical reasons, some players cannot play an actual game of soccer. Design a skills program that is rewarding, challenging and fun.

- ▶ **Camps.** This is another great way to start a program. Camps can be held on a weekend or during the week. Stay-over camps are terrific, but be aware that you must have plenty of help, including a medical staff to administer medication and first aid.

No program is complete without some rules and guidelines to follow, and TOPSoccer is no different. Although the rules of competition can be changed to fit the needs of our players, the concept of the game of soccer should remain the same. *US Youth Soccer* has guidelines available for playing modified, small-sided games like 3 v 3 for the U6 age group. Please read these guidelines and make adjustments within the rules to fit your program and players. An example of such an adjustment would be as follows:

EXAMPLE

The ball crosses the touchline and goes out of bounds. You have a player on your team with no hands. Allow that player to put the ball back into play with a kick-in from the touchline rather than a throw-in.

Keep in mind that some children with disabilities must use wheelchairs, crutches or a walker to get around. The game can be modified so that all players can have a safe and joyful experience while given the opportunity to play. For example, wheelchairs can be padded and have a board attached to the bottom of the chair to stop the ball from getting caught underneath. Crutches can be padded, and walkers can be padded and turned around, so that the open end is in front. This gives the player more mobility when kicking and running for the ball. Using common sense and keeping the safety of all participants in mind will help you solve a lot of equipment challenges.

The purpose, as always, of the TOPSoccer program is to provide a quality opportunity for all kids to play soccer, while keeping this opportunity as close to the real soccer game as possible. No matter what modifications you make, always keep them simple and let the kids play and have fun.

Chapter 8

Administering your Program

Registration

The registration process for a TOPSoccer player is no different than any other player. However, it is recommended that your TOPSoccer registration form include a section for medical history and a medical waiver for parents to sign, if the State Association or league form does not already include this informational requirement. Examples of a registration form and medical waiver form are included in this guide. Feel free to use these or make your own.

Insurance

There is nothing special in the liability policy which excludes or includes participation by a player with a disability or special needs. **US Youth Soccer** recommends that you contact your insurance carrier. The participation of these players should not be prevented because of this liability policy. However, there are several steps which we would recommend you take prior to beginning this program. The following suggestions come from The Center For Sports Law & Risk Management, Inc. in Dallas, Texas.*

First, conduct a meeting between the association administrator, parent/guardian, youth athlete and the athlete's physician (if possible). Describe the special needs participant and inform the parent/guardian about the additional risks of injury or death which accompany a decision to participate. The physician should address the degree of disability and make a recommendation about the child's level of participation. The administrator should record the minutes of this meeting and document the date, time and location of the meeting.

If, following this meeting, the special needs athlete decides to participate, he/she, along with the parent/guardian, should be required to sign an informed consent agreement outlining the additional risks of injury or death, in light of the disability. Please note that we cannot guarantee that a court will enforce the entire agreement or any of its contents. The aforementioned guidelines are to be considered risk management information and not legal advice.

* The information on insurance was provided by Bene-Marc, Inc., a provider of insurance to many state associations and other youth sports. It should be noted that these are recommendations and information, and cannot be construed as legal advice!

SAMPLE

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I (name) wish to participate in youth soccer, and more particularly the (name of the soccer program). In connection with my participation, I acknowledge the risk of possible physical harm to me as a result of my participation is increased because of (name of disability) which I sustained in the past, and for which I have received medical attention. While there is no immediate danger to me, I am told that due to my disability, strenuous collision type activities, such as soccer, could render me more susceptible to future problems than might be normally expected.

I have considered participation in activities other than soccer and reviewed those considerations with my parents and physician. I have discussed this situation with my parents and we understand the potential danger of participating in soccer. Notwithstanding that my participation in youth soccer constitutes more risk to me than it does to other athletes, I nevertheless wish to participate in youth soccer. In making this decision, I am aware of the value of participating in youth sports programs in my life, and choose to continue my participation in order to take advantage of those values. In weighing the risk of potential injury to myself both now and in the future, I wish to exonerate and save harmless (name of youth soccer organization), their agents, servants and employees, from any liability as a result of an injury or death relating to (name of disability) and not to any injury that may occur in the future which is unrelated to my previous disability. I execute this agreement freely, fully intending to be bound by same.

Participant

Parent or Guardian

Date

Cost/Funding

As with all youth soccer players, the cost to the individual should be kept as low as possible. The factors that affect your registration fees are as follows: insurance, state administrative fee, uniforms, field rentals and equipment costs. One way to help keep costs within budget parameters is to keep uniforms simple by using T-shirts instead of jerseys. If possible, have a ball for each participant at every training session—ask the parents to provide their child with a ball. It is nice to have scrimmage vests available so that teams can be distinguished if uniforms are the same. There are many ways to get the necessary funding for your program. Listed below are just a few.

- ▶ Apply for grants available through *US Youth Soccer* (application and guidelines can be found at USYouthSoccer.org).
- ▶ Contact your local Shriners, Lions Club, Rotary Club, etc. and ask for volunteer assistance and/or a donation.
- ▶ Approach local companies or corporations for cash or in-kind donations.
- ▶ Put an advertisement in your local newspaper or club's newsletter asking for sponsorships of TOPSoccer players.
- ▶ Run a concession stand at local or state tournaments, with the profits going to the TOPSoccer program.
- ▶ Approach government and non-profit agencies that serve people with disabilities; local chapters of Arc, UCD, Easter seals, etc.

NOTE: We do not recommend that your players sell items door to door to raise funds.



"The younger they are, the more organized the coach must be."

Dr. Tom Fleck, USSF National Staff Instructor

Chapter 9

F.A.Q.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What exactly is a TOPSoccer player?

A. Any youth player that has a physical or cognitive/intellectual disability that inhibits their ability to perform at the level of play at which they have chosen to participate.

Q. What is the TOPSoccer program?

A. TOPSoccer is a *US Youth Soccer* program created to provide a caring environment in which to train and coach young people with disabilities to play soccer; to serve as a feeder program to recruit, assess and train players to participate in competition opportunities offered by existing sports organizations for people with disabilities; and to mainstream higher ability players onto regular youth soccer teams.

Q. How are TOPSoccer players covered by insurance?

A. They are covered in the same way as any other registered player.

Q. Do we have a TOPSoccer program?

A. You should check with your State Association to see if there is a TOPSoccer program in your area.

- Q.** Is special training required to coach or volunteer?
- A.** No, however it is helpful to have some experience in working with people with disabilities.
- Q.** If a child has a disability must they play in the TOPSoccer program?
- A.** No.
- Q.** What does the American Disabilities Act (ADA) act have to do with soccer?
- A.** The ADA itself has nothing to do with the game of soccer. However, when clubs or state associations are building fields or facilities, they must be accessible to individuals with disabilities. If you as a club or state association are using public facilities for your current program and are not including those with disabilities, then you could be in violation of the ADA and are discriminating against people with disabilities.
- Q.** What is Unified Soccer?
- A.** Unified Soccer is played by teams of players that are and are not disabled.
- Q.** How do I get coaches and volunteers for the TOPSoccer program?
- A.** The same way you get coaches and players for all other programs! Coaches and players can be found through state association contacts, established groups for special needs children, your local school districts and through advertising in your local media.



Q. Our state has a big Special Olympics program that offers soccer. Why do we need TOPSoccer?

A. Special Olympics is a great organization for children with disabilities. However they only offer soccer certain times of the year and are, obviously, not soccer specific. Further, some local Special Olympics organizations do not even offer soccer as one of their activities. We can make note of their experience in working with athletes with disabilities, but when it comes to soccer, we are the experts! Most important is that we will be providing programs from a foundation committed to all children, including those with and without disabilities.

Q. What types of disabilities do the athletes in TOPSoccer have?

A. Disabilities can range from minor to severe. Examples include children in wheelchairs, with Down Syndrome, learning disabilities, hearing impairments, etc.

Q. What type of playing rules are used?

A. The rules are set by the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and *US Soccer*. Modifications are allowed to accommodate the skills and abilities of the players.



“All organizations are measured by how well they serve the least of their membership. TOPSoccer provides us the opportunity to earn, as an organization, an ‘A’ grade .”

Dave Guthrie, Indiana Youth Soccer

Chapter 10

Potential Challenges

Troubleshooting Your Program

We would be kidding ourselves if we thought there would be no problems in trying to start a TOPSoccer program, just like any program for children. Many problems can be solved through better education and communication on the issues concerning children with disabilities. However, these things take time and you might be faced with some problems at the beginning of your program. Listed below are some of the problems that might arise and possible ways to solve them.

1. Parent denial. Some parents may not accept the fact that their child has a disability, and may set high expectations for their child that the child can't fulfill. If this should occur, try talking with the parents about their expectations of the program and their child.
2. Fear from the established organization for the children with disabilities that you are trying to "steal" their athletes. Try to assure them this is not your intent, that you are simply providing additional opportunities for the kids to play soccer in an environment that includes children without disabilities.
3. No support from your local club or State Association. This is where education and communication play an essential role. Try the best you can to supply them with the information needed to gain their support.
4. The fear of being sued. This is America and people sue "at the drop of a hat." If you have to worry every time you do something that you are going to be sued, you would never do anything!
5. A player has a disability but refuses to be placed on a TOPSoccer team. Just because a child is disabled does not mean they have to play on a TOPSoccer team. Every child should have the opportunity to play **as long as they can** meet the requirements established for play and safety; their safety and that of the other players.

- 6.** Safety for the player when on the same team as a disabled child that needs to use special equipment such as a wheelchair, crutches, etc. Try to make the equipment as safe as possible.
- 7.** Uncontrollable behavior of a player. Have a talk with the child first and then if necessary, with the parents. If this behavior is severe enough that they cause physical harm to the other players or themselves, you may need to restrict the player from playing in games. This player may still be able to participate in skills activities. One technique may be to try to get the parents involved with the program.
- 8.** The child with an overprotective parent. Try to have someone work individually with this child, and get him/her away from the parent. Give the parent a job to do, like getting the drinks ready for breaks or writing down the assessment scores. Assure the parent that their child will be just fine.
- 9.** Not having enough volunteers to help. In some cases your players will need one-on-one interaction to function. In these situations, ask the parents to help or ask an established team of players (disabled or non-disabled) to give you a hand. You will be surprised how well this works.
- 10.** Parents dropping off their child and returning when practice is over. Have a talk with the parents and tell them that you would like them present at all practices and games. If that doesn't work, be prepared by having a medical history on each of your players and a list of phone numbers for the paramedics, hospital and parents, with you at all times. (It's a good idea to have this information with you whether the parents are there or not). Always be sure to have a medical kit that contains tongue depressors. If at all possible have a cellular phone on hand.

The above represents just a few of the problems, and solutions, that could occur in your program. You may be lucky and have none, or some of the solutions may not help you with certain problems. If you need additional assistance, call the **US Youth Soccer** National Office at **800.4.SOCCER**.

Terminology

Terminology

Listed below are some common terms used when working with athletes with disabilities, and their definitions.

Intellectual Disabilities

This is an individual who has at least two (2) limitations of adaptive skills that are present from childhood (daily living skills, self care, self directions, etc.). Intellectual disabilities can range from mild to severe.

Down Syndrome

This is an individual who was born with one extra chromosome, causing developmental and learning difficulties. Alanto-Axial Instability (a condition of Down Syndrome) may require the participant to see a Medical Doctor before participation and an x-ray may be needed.

Learning Disability

This is an individual who exhibits difficulty in learning.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Sometimes referred to as A.D.D. This is an individual who exhibits low ability to focus on a subject or complete a task, and lacks complete control of emotions. A different variation is Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHA). This individual has an overabundance of energy.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

This is a federal law which deals mainly with relationships between employee and employer and accessible facilities and opportunities for the disabled.

Some Types of Disabilities

Visual Problem
/Blindness
Hearing Loss/
Deafness
Speech Problems
Asthma
Autism
Cancer
Cerebral Palsy
Diabetes
Seizure Disorder/
Epilepsy
Paralysis
Personality Conflicts
Missing Appendages
Down Syndrome

General Activities for U6-U19 TOPSoccer Players

Developmentally Appropriate Activities / Warm-up Games
Dribbling, Turning with Ball, Fakes and Skills
Passing – Encourage players to pass to partner
Finishing – Encouraging the mentality to shoot!

The Principles of Youth Coaching

The coach makes the games and the rules simple. With the TOPSoccer player make sure they all get plenty of touches on the ball. The coach, to make the play somewhat continuous and offer plenty of repetitions, must have the balls accessible. A coach must use his or her experience when assessing the levels of their players.

**A COACH OF YOUTH SOCCER
MUST ALWAYS BE POSITIVE!**

**A COACH MUST ALWAYS CHECK
THAT THE PLAYING AREA IS SAFE!**

1. Activities need to be developmentally appropriate – fun, agility.
2. Give clear instructions – brevity, clarity, relevance; provide good pictures – little talking.
3. Simple to Complex progression – not always appropriate for TOPSoccer session.
4. Opportunities for decision making with small numbers - attacking/defending.
5. Use safe and appropriate spaces (i.e. 20x30 yards).
6. Provide plenty of implications for the game – very wide scope with young kids.

It's All in a Name!

Note: The name of a game is very important. The younger players will concentrate far longer at an activity if it is called something they can relate to and use their imagination to play. "Three years ago, the kids favorite was the Power Rangers, so instead of a 'soccer drill', we played the Power Rangers game!" They didn't think they were learning the same old soccer skills so they enjoyed themselves using their own imagination and creativity. Coaches should attempt to get into the psyche of their players and find out what they enjoy. Their concentration will last longer and the coach's job will be easier!

Sample Practice Session

Activities

Warm-up (10-15 minutes)

A. Start by having players dribble in and out of each other in a confined area.

B. Have all players toss up a ball and then dribble to the first ball found (obviously each player needs a ball).

C. Coach picks two people who must chase everyone else and tag them. Tagged players can't move until you allow them. The chasers don't have a ball; all others do.

D. Coach has a pile of 6 or 7 balls. Coach kicks or throws these in all directions. The players should chase any ball and dribble it back to the pile at the coach's feet. Never letting the pile get down to zero is the player's objective. (Balls are thrown or kicked 10-20 yards.)

Emphasis/Coaching Points

→ A. This prepares the body and mind for the session to follow.

→ B. This builds hand/eye coordination and general movement abilities.

→ C. This game improves dribbling in a fun, competitive environment.

→ D. Emphasis here is on visual tracking and dribbling in a fun environment.

Individual Activities (10-15 minutes)

Emphasis on dribbling

- A. Vary the pace at which the players dribble in and out of each other, at fast and slow motion, and medium speeds. → A. Observe ball control and balance.
- B. Put out as many cones or markers as there are players. Have players dribble randomly until you command they dribble to a cone. They should all run to the nearest marker and freeze with the ball. → B. Beyond the dribbling and movement enhancement, you are asking the player to expand the decision-making process.
- C. Play follows the coach. Every player follows the coach dribbling around the field. Along the way coach does goofy things like hopping on one foot, rolling on the ground, sitting on and spinning on the ball, etc. Show players that coach has fun too. → C. The varied movement patterns that you demonstrate will simply put the players in positions that will help them improve their general coordination and balance. Along the way, enjoy yourself.

Small Group Activities (10-15 minutes)

- A. In groups of 3, play 1 v 2. The one who has the ball must dribble and keep it. Those who don't have a ball try to get one. → A. Both A and B in this section create situations in which players become familiar with the pressures of the game.
- B. Set up a game in which two teams of 5-6 players line up across from each other at a distance of 15 yds. On command (call players by name), one player from each side runs to win the ball and dribbles it back to the team. The other player tries to prevent this from occurring and attempts to dribble it back to the other line. Keep score. → B. Speed of response and ability to beat an opponent are emphasized. Don't start with a ball in the middle. Roll or kick it out so they must react to it.

Large Group Activities (10-15 minutes)

- A. Play 4v4 or 5v5, with no goalkeepers. Have one extra team of equal numbers. They rest, until you switch them, this allows for recovery. → A. Let them play! Here they can learn everything! They should have a great time!

Fun Games – Warm-up/Dribbling/Passing/Finishing

WARM-UP / DRIBBLING

The first thing to note here is that the TOPS players tend to drift in over the first 15 minutes, due to rush hour traffic, bad weather and/or mobility difficulties. Players should be invited to play immediately with the volunteers and helpers, to get some valuable one-on-one time. Parents are always invited to watch and participate. Once the majority of the players have arrived (we should have a good idea after the first couple of sessions) then the games can begin. Don't be too worried about grid lines, the players do not pay too much attention to them and they can't go too far in the gymnasium anyway!

Concentrate on a lot of touches on the ball for each player – each with own ball. Always remember that if a game is becoming tedious or the players are restless – declare multiple winners and move on to another activity. **(OFTEN YOU NEVER GET PAST THE WARM-UP/FUN GAME STAGE. DO NOT WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT A TYPICAL COACHING PROGRESSION.)**

It is vital that a coach knows (or works out quickly) what level his/her players are at! If the games are too easy, the kids get bored and if they are too difficult, they get frustrated. Make activities sufficiently challenging to keep the players interested, or challenge the better individuals while a game is ongoing (e.g. using left foot only).

PLEASE NOTE: Many TOPS players, due in part to fun and in part to their disability, like the repetition and consistency of the same games each week. We found that we didn't need to be as creative as we thought we did, particularly for the younger players! There is no need to panic before each session!

Warm-up & Dribbling Games

Possibly use a quick warm-up tag game to get kids juiced up (excited) for the game of soccer. Try and encourage players to dribble ball with both the left and right foot, reminding them to keep the ball close to their body.

Red Light Green Light

Start all kids on one sideline of a grid. The object is to be the first to the other side. When you (the coach) call “green light” they move as fast as they can towards the other line. When you call “red light” they must stop, keeping their ball under the control. If they still move or their ball is more than 1 yard from their feet they go back to the start line! Make it fun – if they move their face muscles (coach tries to make them laugh) they have to go back also.

Sharks & Minnows

All players start in a line at one end of the grid (or gym), while coach is in the middle. The coach is the shark and the players are the minnows. Sharks like to eat minnows, so the coach tries to tag (eat) players, who in turn try to reach the other side of the grid safely. If they do, they turn around and wait for the coach to call again. If they don’t, then they are transformed into sharks and are in the middle to help the coach. This game can progress to having the kids each with a ball and gets them to attempt to look up while dribbling!

Blob/Mutant Blob

Coach is “IT”, all the players have a ball in a grid. If the coach tags someone or their ball (usually get the best dribbler first to allow the weaker kids to get more touches), the player’s ball is knocked out of the grid and then the two link arms and try and get somebody else. Game continues. If blob gets too big, coach can mutate it into two smaller blobs to make it easier to tag.

Pac-Man

One player starts with a ball in a grid. All the others start in the grid without their balls (placed just outside the grid within easy reach). On command the player with the ball has to dribble the ball under control while attempting to tag others. If he does then they also get their ball and attempt the same.

Body Part Dribble

Every player starts in a grid with a ball and dribbles around. When the coach calls out a body part, they all have to stop their ball with that part of their body! Progress to getting kids to look at part of body coach is pointing to. No one wants to be last in the group and it encourages them to look up while they are dribbling.

Everybody's "IT"!

Every player starts with a ball in a grid. On command they can hunt each other down and if they can touch their ball against somebody else's then they score a point. This teaches them to be creative, fake to get a view of someone's ball, or in turn shield their own ball from attack!

Other Simple Ideas

Dribble in area. On command "switch", leave ball and find another. Continue dribbling.

All players like opportunities to challenge themselves. For instance, once in a while use outside of foot or left foot – Get players used to using all surfaces of their feet.

Minefield

Two teams turn cones upside down or right way up to score in 30 seconds!

Variations

Dribble around cone in order to pick up Croquet – same as above only introduce knocking other person's ball away with your ball outside of foot (still w/knocking ball away). Can dribble around two at a time (schemer).

Play and Retrieve

Get with partner (opposite color). Throw ball away and give # of body parts to bring ball back with # of passes to hit server's feet. Server moves after he kicks ball away.

Link Tag (simple variation of sharks)

Play this old favorite with the younger kids. Have a safe zone at either end of the playing area. All players start down one end in a safe zone, the coach is in the middle as a tagger. On command, the kids have to run across the danger zone to the other safe zone without getting tagged. If the kids get tagged they have to link hands with the coach and try to tag other players.

Windows '98

Place a number of windows around an area (2 cones close together). Players have to dribble through a window in order to score a point. Only rule is not to pass through same window ***twice in a row!*** The coach must introduce visual recognition at this point, go for the empty windows!

MORE ADVANCED DRIBBLING ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER/ MORE EXPERIENCED TOPS PLAYERS

Star Wars or “Running bases” game (for more experienced players)
Set up 2-4 random bases (4 cones in square)



12 players (3 taggers – holding colored training vests). If tagged, drop vest and move away (no tag-backs). Last one on base is safe. Only 1 allowed in base at one time (other has to move away). **Coach players in game – point out good things!**

Then play the game with the taggers without a ball, but everyone else with a ball. **Introduce new rule: tagger has to touch ball, not person!** Then make it more challenging by having the taggers only tag by touching a ball with their foot. Stop. Coach can introduce shielding with hands, then play again. Highlight smart play – ask player why he/she is doing it. If one player is struggling – the coach can play and bale him out (dribble into him accidentally).

Shielding

Introduce shielding using hands first. Each player has a partner with one ball between them. (The coach should give a good picture to start). One player tries to keep the ball away from coach. The only rules are that the ball has to remain on the ground and that you can only maneuver it with one hand at a time and if partner touches swap over! Demonstrate that you don't have to run away, just simply place your body frame between the ball and the opponent. Secondly, tell players not to travel – stay in one spot. Third, get shielder to keep hip pointing to partner. Fourth, play shielding game using feet.

Go back to the running bases game again and see if players can now shield and keep ball during game. Then introduce another tagger!

Get the Chin off the Chest!

TOPSoccer players generally have little soccer experience and so teams usually play 3 v 3 for plenty of touches. There is no such thing as 3 v 3! In reality, the game is 1 v 5 because all players play with their head down concentrating on the ball! We want them to look up to be aware of what is around them. There is a simple activity to help do this. Have all players dribble their ball around in the set area and when the coach calls out a certain body part, for instance "hand" then the players stop the ball with their hand. Try this a few times then the coach does not call out but simply points to the body part on his/her own body. This will quickly get the players to look up after each gentle touch on the ball.

Find Your Own Space!

Then instead of having to look up for the coach, just let the kids play without bumping into each other. Stop the players when a few are close to each other, then get them to stand with their arms out to the side and twist gently from the waist. If they can touch another player, they are too close! Then guarantee that the next time you stop them, they will all find their own space. As a coach, one must stand in an appropriate spot to see the whole field of play. He or she can wait until every player is in their own space before calling stop. Show the coaches that they can stand in a position to see everybody and recognize certain situations in which to stop the players to make positive points.

Ball Tag!

Then introduce competition. Blue against orange. If hit this time, they have to kneel down on one knee, but can knock balls away with other foot. Time it, then change teams.

Passing

Windows '98

Pair players up and place a number of windows around an area (two cones close together). Two players have to pass through the window to score a point. Only rule is not to pass through same window ***twice in a row!*** The Coach must introduce passing and communication at this point.

Advance the game by using left foot pass only, outside of foot passes or play in groups of three and introduce the wall pass.

3 v 3 Passing

Play in a grid 15x25 yards. Two teams of three playing with a ball each. All they are to do is to keep possession in the area without bumping into the other team. Introduce communication and the importance of looking around before receiving and passing!

3 v 3 or 4 v 4 "American Football!"

Play 4 v 4 (start with 2 balls) but instead of making goals for the teams to score in, create an end zone at either end of the small field. A team can score a touchdown (6 points) if they pass the ball to a teammate standing in the end zone. Think up any number of variations for an extra point!

Resources

US Youth Soccer is one of the most valuable resources available today for the game of soccer. Experts are available in the areas of coaching, refereeing and administration, and various committees formed for specific programs are available for further assistance. These people have put years of dedicated effort into promoting and developing players, and educating local coaches, administrators, volunteers, referees and parents. Information on the rules of the game and how to play, coach, administrate, and referee is provided on a continual basis. There is no better place to go for information on the game of soccer, with a network of valuable resources only a phone call away. **START A TOPSOCCER PROGRAM TODAY!**