

Preventing Blowouts

No one wins when a game becomes a blowout. No matter which end your team is on, it's a lost opportunity to gain skill, have fun, play fair, and often, be safe.

Here's the interesting thing: With no adults around, blowouts never happen in sandlot games. Why not? Kids have an instinctive sense of fair play and competition. A blowout is simply no fun. So if one team is running away with a game, kids just automatically swap players to balance the teams and continue play. It would be a sad irony if, by providing adult role models as coaches, we actually undercut sporting play.

Most coaches and refs understand the AYSO philosophy and set an example to ensure that players' soccer experience is one of fun and enjoyment (winning is only part of it). Ask yourself: Could you deliberately put your team in position to lose to improve the competitive level of the game for everyone? The AYSO Coaches' Code stresses the fundamental AYSO philosophy of sportsmanship and respect: Enthusiastically support and practice "Everyone Plays", "Good Sportsmanship" and "Positive Coaching".

Common Courtesy and Balanced Games

- Keep scores close
- NO 7-0 or worse scores
- Pull back. No one should know you have instructed your team to pull back. Just do it quietly and discretely; treat everyone with respect. Look your players in the eye and ask them how they'd like to be treated if they were on the other team. They will get it.

Tips for Pulling Back (While Respecting the Opponent and the Game)

Some techniques are better than others because they still allow your team to play all out and gain important skills that will help them next week (when the soccer shoe might be on the other foot). Try to avoid restrictions that are completely foreign to the game itself. They can actually be more of a slap in an opponent's face. Here are ways that you can coach skill, respect, and sporting play while preventing the game from getting away:

- Out of Comfort Zone. Put your players in unfamiliar positions (e.g., forwards play as fullbacks). Let your weaker and less experienced players take goal and corner kicks and throw-ins. Teach them where to kick or throw the ball, but be ready to accept that the other team may capitalize on their mistakes. This strengthens your players while avoiding a blowout.
- At the next quarter break or substitution, very quietly tell your players to successfully pass the ball at least 4 times (more for older kids) before they can shoot. As soon as the other team touches the ball, regardless of whether possession changes, the count starts all over again at 0.
- Be ready to call over players who don't pass and just continue trying to score; moving them back is perfectly okay
- One touch passes
- Four players must cleanly control ball before shooting
- Outside Box, Header, or Back Pass Shots Only
- At least one drop, give-and-go, etc.
- Left Foot Only. Use only left foot (or right foot for lefties)
- Play "keep away". Concentrate on passing. No more shots.
- Count a point for every minute they maintain possession or for every group of 5 passes they make
- Decrease size of zones (where players can go)
- Play down one. Discretely pull a good player over to the side, effectively pulling him/her out of the game, keep him/her distracted by explaining some technique or tactic you want him/her to work on. Try to teach him/her something. Don't let him/her rejoin the fray until you're sure your team won't score.
- You may even want to play short for part of each period. Just be discrete about it. Don't be insulting to the other team.
- Offer to swap or provide players to the other team. Don't hold onto all your good players. Be fair about it. Let them pick. So what if your players turn around and beat you? Who really cares?

Being On The Losing End of a Blowout

- Ignore the score and tell your kids to be nice and have fun
- Play everyone where they want
- If they all want to be forwards, fine; is 0-8 any different from 0-10?
- Keep a fictitious score (e.g., count number of successful passes, drops, or crosses)
- Compliment and reward your kids for being good sports and not giving up
- Encourage your kids to be positive in their comments to their teammates and the other team
- Be sure to shake hands after the game; leave all bad feelings on the field

Safe. Fun. Fair.

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