

What is Recreational Soccer and Why it is Good for Kids

Recreational soccer primarily devotes itself to the enjoyment and development of soccer players without the emphasis on high-level pressure to win. The purpose of recreational soccer is to provide an opportunity for the participants to have fun, play with a sense of team and community, learn the sport, and develop life skills including a life long love of the game.

The Benefits of Recreation Soccer

- Recreational soccer provides a rich and enjoyable environment where children can be introduced to the sport in a nurturing and supportive way that allows them to learn the game, experience the game and grow to love the game.
- Low pressure, fun filled activities are essential to the development of basic skills and tactical awareness and recreational provides just that model.
- Players get to play with the school and neighborhood friends
- Guaranteed 50% playing time

A starting place for all young players

- Recreational programming for the younger players is the very lifeblood of the sport. The youngest players in soccer, **all** enter as recreational players.
- Young people who have constructive and useful activities are less likely to have social problems.
- Young women who participate in sports and much less likely to have to face teenage pregnancy or abuse.
- Initial development of the future elite players later down the road for those who choose that level of play.

While recreational soccer serves the needs of the far majority, there are those who may wish to explore a greater level of commitment. However, there are tradeoffs to moving your child from a recreational team to a competitive team in the "Classic League". The following are a few things that every family should think about before making this move.

Cautions for Moving Your Child to a Competitive Team

A select number of players may stand out during the course of a recreational soccer season, and their parents may consider moving their child to a competitive team. This is where the dilemma begins. As a parent it is normal to feel pride when your child may perform at a level above their teammates, but is it enough talent to compete at the competitive team level? And, if the answer is "yes," will your child thrive in that environment?

Here are some pros and cons of joining a competitive team. This is not an all-inclusive list; however, these are all important points to weigh when considering the move to a competitive team.

Playing time and starting

One of the potential downsides of joining a competitive team can be that your child experiences less playing time than on their recreational team, where they may have been a team leader in many areas. It is the old adage of going from being a big fish in a small pond to being a small fish in a big pond. This experience may potentially deter children from continuing the following season if the experience is perceived as negative.

Additional playing requirements

Competitive teams require a much greater commitment by players and their parents. There will be both home and away games which can sometimes result in driving an hour each way for a hour long game (and don't forget about getting there 30 minutes early for warm-ups). An away soccer game in the competitive league could take 4-5 hours out of your day, and there are also typically all-day tournaments in your future towards the end of the season.

Economics

In almost all cases, competitive team soccer has significantly higher associated costs than recreational soccer. These fees include uniform costs, tournament fees, indoor training during the offseason, seasonal registration, etc., and can quickly become a large financial investment, depending on the club.

Those are just a few factors to consider before encouraging your child to take the step towards competitive play. On the plus side, if your child is truly passionate about soccer and eats, sleeps, and breathes the game, then there are benefits to moving up to a competitive league.

Benefits for Moving Your Child to a Competitive Team

Coaching

The coaches in competitive soccer generally speaking typically have gone through coaching education programs at a high level and may give your child an opportunity to learn the game in ways they may not experience through recreational soccer.

Level of competition

If your child is the best, not just on their team but also in an age group, competitive soccer may be an environment for your child. In competitive soccer they can give their all, matching skills and wit, amongst the best players in the area.

Commitment and discipline

Playing for a competitive team requires more discipline than recreational teams. Once a child moves up to competitive soccer, it requires much more work outside of the normal practices and games to allow their skill level to increase and improve. There is great value for kids to learn that hard work, commitment, and discipline are required to excel in anything they do and this discipline can help them both on and off the field in all areas of their lives.

Final Thoughts

There are pros and cons to anything and advancing to competitive soccer is no different. The most important thing is to use your knowledge of your child (no one knows your child like you do) and determine if this will really benefit them. If you believe that they have gotten all they can out of recreational soccer, still never tire of practice or games and exceed most of their teammates and competitors' talent levels, then it may be time to move to the next level. Whereas if your child wants to play competitive soccer so that they can continue playing with their more talented friends, then a move to competitive soccer will most likely not be in the best interest of your child.

If you are still on the fence, take your time to make the right decision for you and your child. Remember, despite what many people say, there's always next year. If your child is truly destined to play at the more competitive levels, their spot will be there for them when they are ready. Keeping that in mind, it is better to let your child enjoy the game and develop at their own pace.

Portland Youth Soccer Association (PYSA) is Portland's Home for Recreational Soccer.

PYSA is a non-profit organization that creates opportunities for kids to enjoy soccer in their neighborhoods through recreational leagues and tournaments, coaching education, field development and community outreach.