



FOOTBALL FEDERATION
TASMANIA

FROM THE DESK OF THE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

18 JUNE, 2010

Last weekend's Devonport Cup, played under virtually cloudless skies, attracted several hundred players, male and female, aged around 10 to 13. The teams represented most of Tasmania and played a series of games over Saturday and Sunday at Meercroft Park and Devonport Football Club. Some players ended up on WIN TV as part of a segment the channel ran about the World Cup in South Africa.

The carnival, extremely well organized and run, was notable for various aspects.

Most importantly, it was nice to see most teams trying to play the right way, that is, a ball on the ground passing game with goalkeepers distributing the ball with their hands and feet instead of just booting it down field.

For Australia to become a football power, a possession game is vital. It promotes creativity, movement and decision making by players. I spotted a number of above average players and a handful of exceptional ones, some of whom played for teams that did not fair so well in the results category. This is a key factor, because in terms of young player development, results do not matter.

Exceptional players, those with above average technique and game intelligence, will stand out no matter what.

I spoke to one Devonport coach about the quality of play of his team of 11-year-olds. This group really tried to knock the ball around and were correctly allowed to do so without any criticism for their inevitable mistakes.

I commended another coach from Ulverstone for the quality of his game preparation, every part of which was done with a ball. When he told me he was from Central America, it became even clearer as to why he follows this admirable route.

The Central Americans are well aware that the ball is for kicking at every available opportunity and that spending precious football time without it is counter-productive.

All game and practice preparation can be done using the ball.

On the sidelines, some coaches were giving instruction to players during the games, a few on an incessant basis.

Such instruction for young developing players should be restricted to before the game and half-time. During games, let players play. Encourage, not instruct. Our young players do not make near enough decisions on their own and coaches cannot keep making them for them.

I saw coaches talking to players at length after games. Please make sure such feedback is encouraging. Harping on mistakes destroys confidence. Identify a player's successes to better lead into positive suggestions on how to improve other aspects. Keep it short and simple. They're kids. They want to play, not listen to diatribes.

During games, a good number of parents were also instructing players, some of them while running the line. Apart from driving your youngster into a shell, most of the instruction I heard from parents was wrong. Imagine being at work with your boss yelling at you every few minutes.

Parents need to keep comments heartening. Better still, say nothing. Many clubs around the world ban parents from training and rigidly restrict comments at games.

On another issue, if a coach wants to speak to his or her players about the game they should be able to do so without parental presence.

An example of horrendous parental intervention occurred during a nine v nine match. The young teenage referee called up a goalkeeper for kicking the ball up in the air as far downfield as possible, insisting he distribute the ball from his hands.

The player's parent behind the goal – no-one should be standing there - made a real fuss. The official told him to move away.

I congratulated that ref and I later heard that, commendably, the parent apologised.

All is well when a mere lad is brave enough to insist the game is played the correct way. His is an example for us all.