



Long Term Player Development

WALDEN MINOR SOCCER ASSOCIATION

In 2013, the Ontario Soccer Association, as part of the Canadian Soccer Association and Canada Soccer For Life initiative, is introducing a new Long Term Player Development strategy.

WMSA has received questions about the LTPD strategy and changes that will be taking place.

Changes are being introduced in a phased fashion to WMSA to make us more compliant with the LTDP strategy, including introduction of a U4 division. Further changes will be coming to divisions. The biggest change that will be seen as part of LTDP is an emphasis on learning and skills development, and less emphasis on games. Some changes that will begin to take place in 2013 will include the introduction of more practices, less focus on games and winning, and getting children more touches on the ball.

For more information on the LTPD program, including the phases for children based on age and coaching information, please visit the [OSA website](#).

CBC Radio recently ran a story about LTPD. A number of questions were sent to the OSA as follow-up. The OSA has posted the following answers to parent questions here: <http://www.ontariosoccer.ca/OSABlog/index.php/archives/8747>

1. What is LTPD?

LTPD stands for Long-Term Player Development. It represents a philosophy that is much more focused on ensuring players who love soccer stay in the game for life and enjoy the experience. It further ensures that all players—recreational and competitive—are developed to their full potential. LTPD (though not necessarily with a formal “name” attached to it) is common practice in many of the best soccer nations in the world. It stresses, especially at the crucial early development ages, far less emphasis on games and “winning”, and much more on practice, touches, creativity, skill development and learning how to play and enjoy the game. In Ontario, we are working toward an approach where players U12 and younger will practice and train much more than they play in “games”, with field sizes and training methods geared to specific development stages, which can be different for every young player.

For the aspiring players, they in later years (U13 and up) will have the opportunity to play in a very competitive elite-level league. Further, such players will have much greater opportunity to be “identified” for regional programs and ultimately the provincial team, and not just at the U13 level, for example.

In short, we are committed to a different mindset, creating a soccer culture that is about really getting the best out of our players, so they continue to learn and grow every day. Everything we do going forward will be rooted in this objective: what is best for the player to help them reach their potential.

2. Is this about developing elite level athletes or recreational players?

Both! The focus of LTPD is to help both the player who is in youth soccer strictly for fun and fitness, but also the talented youngster who dreams of a future in the sport—be it a scholarship and/or to play professionally or for the Canadian National team. At the young ages, we will stress basic physical literacy, and players will go through the various development stages not worried about “winning games” but instead actually developing their individual skills. There will still be competition but the emphasis will be not on avoiding “mistakes”, or coaches selecting the biggest, fastest players to help “win” league games, but rather giving all players the opportunity to play and develop their skills.

3. Isn't this just another trendy thing recommended by academics who don't even know soccer?

One of the great things about LTPD is that it is much more than an academic exercise. It is a proven method of developing players—with science and research to back the claims—long already utilized by some of the best soccer nations in the world, including Spain, Germany, US, Australia and many others. England has embarked on this road as well, because top former players and coaches there have identified that the emphasis at the early ages on “winning” hurts true player development.

So while we know change is often resisted, and we understand that, we also know that those who are passionate about soccer in Ontario (and Canada)—whether administrators, coaches or parents—want the best for the young boys and girls who play our great game.

So if you are playing for fun, we want the experience to truly be fun. If you are playing for fun *and* to go further in the game, we know from international “best practices” that this approach will grow the sport in Ontario and Canada and most importantly, give many more youngsters the chance to shine, be identified and find a future in the game.

4. It makes no sense to play a sport and never keep score and not have standings. How else do we know how our kids are doing?

While parents are of course interested in how their son or daughter's team is "doing", most parents are understandably most concerned with a) is their child enjoying the sport they are participating in and b) are they seeing an increase in the skill level of their child. While watching "games" can be enjoyable, unfortunately too many parents—and yes, coaches—take games and game results far too seriously. This creates a focus on scores, winning games and league standings even at the early ages (U8-U12, for example) when the focus really should be on whether each player is *progressing and developing* as they can and should.

Parents want to see enjoyment and they like to see improvement. When we really strive to focus on those things, we are helping the child the most.

There will be plenty of room—and time—for competition. House-league participants will still play games, but there will be more practices than games. And games will be played on small-sized fields as appropriate for younger players.

For the serious player looking to play at a high level in the future, there will be no lack of competition as part of a holistic approach to authentic overall skills development. Competitive leagues for talented players U13 and older will provide an extremely challenging environment where winning will be part of the objective—once the players have developed the necessary skills and a thorough understanding of the game.

5. Competition is a natural part of life why take it away from children. Isn't it better to learn to compete in a controlled environment such as on the soccer pitch?

Competition is "part of life" without question. But at the early ages (U8-U12) we need to focus on enjoyment and skill development. We have been lacking in this regard for too long in Canada. Our kids have natural talent, as much as anyone in the world. But if they don't receive the best type of training, skills development and coaching at the early ages, those that aspire to play internationally someday won't and aren't ready to compete with the world's best in later years.

Clearly, the present "system" has not worked for Canada. So we need to do better, much better. And we will. And part of that is a focus on skills, rather than just games and "winning". Once youngsters reach an appropriate age range, likely U13, there will be plenty of opportunity to compete—and to learn how to "win" and lose"—at a recreational or elite level here in Ontario.