

# Keeping Your Expectations in Check

By Eric Steege

Source Soccer America - YouthSoccerInsider

As a coach it is natural to have your "favorite" players. However, the positive and negative expectations you form about players on your team affects not only your own behavior toward them but also the feelings and performance of those players.

Having such an influence on your players' athletic development and experience can be a heavy responsibility. Thus, it is critical that all coaches understand the cyclical relationship between a coach's expectations and player performance. Refer to my last article to see how this process works (How Expectations Affect Performance).

Along with understanding the process, it is important to know how to keep your expectations for players in check to ensure all the players (not just your "favorite" athletes) reach their full potential and maximize their enjoyment of soccer.

The following are helpful hints how to keep your expectations in check.

-

Establish an objective approach to evaluate players in the preseason or early season. This provides a more consistent way to form initial expectations for every player.

-

Realize that your initial evaluation of an athlete's skill may be inaccurate. Continuously work in opportunities to evaluate every player in a structured manner and be open to revising initial evaluations as the season progresses.

-

While in practice, be aware of the amount of time each athlete spends waiting in line. Resist the urge to allow your "favorite" players to participate more than your "non-favorite" players.

-

Design practices that provide every athlete the opportunity to improve their skills. Remember, minimize the amount all players are waiting in line and maximize the number of touches every player is getting on the ball.

-

Establish a practice environment that allows all individuals the opportunity for peak improvement and respect creativity while focusing on team play. Using positive-reinforcement when you see a player execute a new skill is a great way to increase self-confidence in players and communicate to your team that you define success by individual improvement as opposed to winning.

-

Interact frequently with all athletes and value every player's input when asking their opinion and attitudes regarding team rules etc.

In closing, I recently attended a talk by an esteemed college coach. One comment, in particular, inspired me as a coach of youth athletes and it may do the same for you:

"I [the coach] am so average, I'm boring. I'm used to being average and that's OK. Because of this, I feel I have always been able to connect better with the 'average' player. I know there will always be many more of these 'average' players than the gifted athlete. As a result, I see the importance of the 'average' player and I get excited for the opportunity to take this type of player and make them above average."

(Eric Steege, a performance consultant with the International Center of Performance Excellence at West Virginia University, is currently in the doctoral program for Sport and Exercise Psychology at WVU and a volunteer assistant coach with the WVU Men's Soccer team. He can be reached at 608-213-5025 or by email at [esteege@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:esteege@mix.wvu.edu).)