

# **WYSA phasing in new soccer player development guidelines**

## **Changes bring enhanced coaching training, small-sided games and lower registration fees for U9 players**

New and better training for youth soccer coaches is the centrepiece of the Winnipeg Youth Soccer Association's new Long Term Player Development initiative. A joint WYSA and Manitoba Soccer Association task force has begun rolling out changes to the way youth soccer is coached and played in Winnipeg.

"We expect to see changes this year from mini-soccer up to age 9 and will then phase in changes year by year for older age groups," said Alastair Gillespie, president of WYSA. "The foundation of the initiative is the launch of a better coaching development program that will support coaches from mini-soccer up through our older premier leagues. We are also moving to smaller roster sizes and smaller field sizes for younger ages, which will give every player more touches on the ball."

The task force has been meeting for nearly a year to discuss ways to implement the new LTPD guidelines that are mandated by the Canadian Soccer Association and Sport Canada. Similar player development guidelines are expected to become the norm in all youth sports. In addition to representatives from WYSA and the MSA, the task force also consisted of people representing recreational, developmental and premier level soccer programs from around the city. The objective of the task force was to come up with an LTPD framework that will fit Winnipeg's unique soccer culture (consisting of community centres and soccer clubs).

"Recently we've been meeting with volunteers and coaches from district soccer clubs and community centres to introduce the new program for mini-soccer," said Gillespie. "Our goal with this is to increase the numbers of children playing the game by improving their experiences and confidence with better training."

"These changes are grounded in the very best practices from around the world," said MSA technical director Rob Gale. "The English FA is going through a very similar process to improve their youth soccer programs, and the Dutch soccer world has operated with small-sided games for decades. The program we're introducing recognizes that one of the biggest hurdles we have in Manitoba is coaching the coaches."

Under the new coaching guidelines, coaches are trained at one stage or age level at a time. This makes getting certified easier and ensures coaches are given training appropriate for the age level of their players. Gale, who also coaches the Canadian men's U17 squad, is a master facilitator who has already trained other learning facilitators around the city. Those learning facilitators are responsible to train coaches. WYSA and the MSA are asking community centres and district soccer clubs to take advantage of

these resources. The MSA is aiming to keep clinic costs to a minimum to encourage full participation. Fees for the clinics will be released by the MSA in the near future.

The new guidelines will begin to be phased in spring 2012 in time for the outdoor soccer season.

#### Youth Soccer Long Term Player Development changes

1. New coaching program rolling out citywide. Coaching instructors have been certified to teach mini-soccer coaches. Community centres and district soccer clubs will have easy access to instructors who will coach the coaches. Each coach will also receive coaching materials to assist them in planning practice sessions for the entire season.
2. Recommending standard approach to mini-soccer across the city:
  - a. Stage ONE "Active Start" for ages 4-5: two sessions per week for approximately eight weeks, 30-45 minutes in duration, adults and children play together informally with fun drills, max 12 players to a team with ratio of 4 players to 1 coach.
  - b. Stage TWO "Fundamentals" for ages 6-8. Ratio one coach to six players.
    - i. U6 - 3 v 3 with max roster size of six, co-ed
    - ii. U7 - 4 v 4 with max roster size of 8, boys and girls to play separately
    - iii. U8 - 5 v 5 with max roster of 10 players, boys and girls to play separately
3. Stage THREE (for this year the U9 level) recreational soccer boys and girls to play games 6 v 6 on smaller fields with a Maximum roster size of 12. Games to be 2 x 25 minute halves. No referees, games will be scored but no league tables will be published, jamborees to replace district and city championships. Expected to result in lower registration fees.
4. Stage THREE (U9) boys and girls developmental program to commence in 2012 through district soccer clubs for players seeking higher level of training and commitment to the sport. Previously, developmental leagues commenced at U10.

"Soccer is already the most popular sport by participation in the city with more than 20,000 youngsters from ages four and up playing the game every year. We'd like to see those numbers grow and the quality of Manitoba soccer improve." said Gillespie.