

MWVSC
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“The Pick-Up Game”

Ah yes...the way we learn soccer the best. ..or is it? We just get a ball and a bunch of buddies, make some goals with a couple of sneakers and play. Our South American friends might play in dirt and rocks of the favelas. Our European comrades take to the cobblestone alleys and our African friends may find old rags to tie into a ball and play. Even us aging players find a way to hobble around for an hour or so and reward ourselves with an adult beverage at the conclusion of our extraordinary performance. However it is done, it is the game of soccer. So simple, so beautiful.

As a coach, I encourage my players to try to touch the ball for a few minutes each day. If they can get a pick-up game going, then an added bonus. This is where the fun and joy of the game sours and I get frustrated. Maybe I am looking at it thru the eyes of a coach who is always overly critical. If the purpose of your pick up game is to exchange war stories with Ralph on Wednesday nights, then awesome. If the purpose of your pick-up game is to get you ready for fall high school or college soccer, then it is time to rethink things.

I have often witnessed high school players playing pick-up. They play 7v7 on a full size field. There is no structure to the team offensively or defensively. There is no attempt to build out of the back, but rather let's see how far a non-goalkeeper playing goal can punt it up the field. Because there is a female player on the pitch, the boys have to be sure to take the 14 touches before losing the ball to show off their skills. One player makes the first of the ten same runs with the ball down the side, kicks it over the goal, and then there is 5 minutes of walking about while the players try to shake the boredom of the kick and run game out of their heads. Passes are lazy and inaccurate. Touches are limited. Poor decisions on and off the ball are constantly happening. Bad habits are formed all over the place. It is a big waste of time. "...but Coach, I played all summer long". We then expect the players to show up on the first day of preseason and flip a switch and turn on the talent! Again, if the purpose for showing up twice a week is to have fun and not improve, that is ok. If you have any desire as a player to improve, stay away from this USA version of pick-up soccer. No wonder Argentina kicked our butts in the Copa America tournament this past June.

So, here are a few recommendations:

Enjoy the game, have fun, take in the summer friendships and weather

Play small sided games on an appropriate size field. 5v5 on 30yd x 40yd or 7v7 on 40yd x 60yd, give or take a few steps and depending on age of the player

If you have a lot of players, get two games started at the same time

Play to small goals or multiple goals if you do not have a keeper

Work on possession, quality passing

Work on quality runs and ball support

Small sided games mean more touches for all players
Small sided games mean more real time soccer decisions
Players can actually attack and defend. (If you are over 40 you do not have to defend!)
Be creative
Avoid bad habits
Days without a pick-up game should be spent with the ball, one on one touches, foot skills, conditioning, speed and strength work.

The “Pick-up” game means different things to players depending on age or number of pins you might have in your ankle. If you are a high school or college athlete, work it out with the other players how to structure the game in a way that best benefits all the players. This way you can still have a blast in a kick around, and you might also give yourself a chance to improve!

If you have any questions you can always email me at dbhart343@gmail.com.

Love the game!

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