



Eastern New York State Soccer Association

Hiring a Professional Trainer: Wisdom or Folly?

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By Tim Bradbury, Director of Coaching Instruction, Eastern New York Youth Soccer Association

It is that time of year again! Teams now formed and parent/managers under pressure from 12 sets or more of well-meaning parents to select the ideal trainer. What used to be the case with players aged 14 and up is now the case for all ages. Buyer beware would be putting it mildly.

There are many “professional” trainers available within the Eastern New York Youth Soccer Association (ENYSSA) today. They come from different backgrounds in the game, hold a variety of different coaching qualifications, have different playing experiences and educational backgrounds. Finding the right fit for your team is next to impossible.

The huge number of trainers available within Eastern New York today combined with the fact that many team managers often have no set idea as to the philosophical and educational path that they wish their team to follow frequently leads to disastrous relationships and negative learning environments being established.

In employing a trainer, the following criteria are the minimum that should be considered:

- **Background in the Game**-to include education, coaching licenses, playing career, profession, last coaching education attended and coaching experience.
- **Coaching Style**-personality and experience.
- **Knowledge on Child Development**—they should know the basics in the three realms of cognitive, physical and social development as they pertain to the age group being taught.
- **Resume References, Testimonials and Background Check**-coaches with a solid background and reputation should have access to many references.
- **Coaching Philosophy**-Style of play, developmental or “problem fixing!”
- **Marriage of Philosophies**-If the trainer is teaching a possession-based style of play and the parent/coach is demanding a direct style of play in games, the players will quickly become confused. The trainer and coach must be transmitting the same message (not necessarily the same way).
- **Team Construct** that the professional trainer wishes to establish.
- **Cost**-private trainers in Eastern New York currently vary from approximately \$70 per hour to upwards of \$175 per player per month.

Assuming that the above are a sensible set of criteria to use when selecting a trainer, then it is briefly worth examining what may be considered a ridiculous set of criteria to use:

- **A Friend of a Friend**-someone within the parental group will undoubtedly canvass for a friend of a friend who does some training.
- **A Great Player**-simply being a great player is not enough. For many great players, the skills of the game came easily. For most youth players, it takes a good deal of application and effort to master the fundamentals of the game.
- **Politically Connected**-although they may not be a good trainer, they are an assistant college coach or high school coach, so even though the training sessions may not be great, success is assured due to connections.

Although the above may seem hilarious, they are all frequently presented reasons for selecting a team's trainer.

Having considered all of the above, the parent/coach should begin to ponder the following issues:

Is the trainer to be employed once or twice a week? If, as in most cases, one session is to be done, the coach must decide whether they wish this session to be developmental in nature or more of a problem fixing session.

If the sessions are going to be developmental, the paid trainer should have a clear and concise set of aims and objectives. The skills and concepts they intend to teach should be readily available (in written form). If this developmental approach is to be used, the parent/coach should attempt to communicate at least once a week with the paid trainer so that the trainer can explain the skills being worked on and

therefore what skills should begin to appear in games.

If the sessions are more of a "problem fixing" approach, there will be a need for more communication with the trainer. Clear and concise descriptions of the problems will need to be supplied to the trainer. Ideally, if this approach is to be used, the trainer should frequently attend games to witness first-hand the problems that occur.

Session Content

Whether the sessions are developmental or problem fixing in nature each session should exhibit the following qualities:

- Be well organized so that each practice follows a logical set of progressions.
- Have sufficient equipment such as cones, balls and pinnies.
- Start on time.
- Coach should look professional at all times.
- Clear and appropriate coaching points should be made throughout.
- Due to the practice limitations of most travel teams, (once or twice a week) the sessions should be as economical as possible.
- Players should be technically and tactically challenged to play at the next level.
- Use of lines, laps and lectures should be limited – all three lead to unrealistic and stagnate teaching environments.

Session Participation

It is difficult for even the most skilled and professional coaches to co-coach the same set of players at one time. Those who achieve this successfully fulfill very definite roles. One leads and the other assists, both transmitting the same agreed messages. The assistant, normally taking on the role of a technical coach, providing players with individual technical correction. Coaches who have perfected the art of working together have had many opportunities to rehearse and practice their roles.

Effectively combining the coaching of a parent and paid trainer so that the session is enhanced is difficult at best. If a positive result cannot be guaranteed, then it is more effective to have one person coach and the other observe so that the necessary reinforcement can be made later.

Any parent/coach wishing to use a team coaching approach should also be aware of the background and knowledge that they bring to the coaching equation. Two coaches, both with USSF "A" licenses will probably be able to bring a comparable body of knowledge and therefore coaching wisdom to a practice. Parent/coaches with a USSF "F" license may not have the same expertise to bring to the same coaching equation and therefore should be more reluctant to step in and coach alongside a professional trainer.

To help those in search of a trainer, three years ago Eastern New York started our trainer pass program. Those trainers that have registered with Eastern New York as professional trainers and are listed on our website have had all their credentials verified and a background check has taken place. Click here for that info: http://www.ensoccer.com/programs/list_of_verified_trainers/

With over 100,000 youth soccer players—both boys and girls—and more than 25,000 volunteers, the non-profit Eastern New York Youth Soccer Association (ENYYSA) stretches from Montauk Point, Long Island to the Canadian border. Members are affiliated with 11 leagues throughout the association, which covers the entire state of New York east of Route 81. ENYYSA exists to promote and enhance the game of soccer for children and teenagers between the ages of 5 and 19 years old, and to encourage the healthy development of youth players, coaches, referees and administrators. All levels of soccer are offered—from intramural, travel team and premier players as well as Special Children. No child who wants to play soccer is turned away. ENYYSA is a proud member of the United States Soccer Federation and United States Youth Soccer Association. For more information, please log on to <http://www.ensoccer.com/>, which receives nearly 300,000 hits annually from the growing soccer community.

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