

Youth coaches are role models who exert a lasting influence on our impressionable young players. As the role of the coach in the growth and health of our children is increasingly acknowledged as vital, the importance of coaching education falls into sharper focus. Proof that our recreational coaches need a formalised training program is amply supplied in every league. Countless incidences of players quitting soccer because of poor, or even abusive, coaching dot the soccer landscape. Not surprisingly, risk management studies also present a strong argument for the certification of coaches.

Up until 1998, only competitive coaches had to attain a coaching license. In the absence of mandatory licensing at the recreational level, most recreational coaches did not bother to get educated. Coaching at the recreational level became the weak link in the player development chain. Player development experts always felt uncomfortable about having untrained parent-coaches in charge of our players' first, and clearly the most crucial, exposure to soccer, when the love of the game is nurtured. It is very important to create the right learning environment for players in their formative years of ages 5 to 12. And the more knowledgeable the coaches, the better. Granted, coaching education will not rid youth soccer of all its woes, but it is certainly a good place to start.

The good news is that our membership has finally heeded the need to fill the knowledge gap and did something about it. At the January 1998 AGM, the Georgia Soccer youth leagues membership voted to implement mandatory licensing for all coaches of recreational teams. This long overdue mandate became effective as of the Fall (September) 1998 season. The new ruling states the following:

"2220.1 All recreation program coaches must meet a minimum coaching license requirement as follows:

U-6 to U-8 'G' Certificate

U-10 to U-12 'F' Certificate

U-14 to U-19 'E' Certificate (to be replaced by the 'Recreational E' certificate)

2220.2 Coaches have a 6 months grace period to attain initial required license and the same when moving from one level to another.

Rationale:

To improve the coaching abilities of the coaches in the recreation program. Especially important with implementation of the small-sided program, coaches must be taught how to coach the players in a way that is meaningful and educational for all."

The Georgia State Soccer Association has an established Coaching Education Program which is conducted according to USSF guidelines. The program's centerpiece is the Coaching School. There are 5 coaching certification levels, with each one geared to a specific player's age and level. The first three levels are aimed at the recreational level coach and they are the 'G' course, the 'F' course, and the 'Recreational E' or 'Rec E'. The two highest levels, the 'E' and the 'D' courses, are aimed at coaches who work with competitive (select team) players. - See more at: <http://www.georgiasoccer.org/coaches/licensing-at-the-recreational-level.aspx#sthash.tT0TrVX6.dpuf>