



# THEIR GAME

Youth Football Development



## PROFESSIONAL CLUB ACADEMY

### HOW DO YOU BALANCE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND WINNING IN YOUR CLUB?

At Everton we don't have to work too hard to ask our players to think about competition, they bring competitiveness to the table, it's part of our culture.

For the players, it's part of their day-to-day environment to achieve and make themselves better. This ethos is reflected in performance and attitude towards the game. We've never really had to discuss winning versus development as such, they win because their passionate about football.



### NEIL DEWSNIP

Neil Dewsnip is the Head of Coaching at Everton FC, a club with a rich history of developing players for their First Team. Neil has been at the club 17 years having previously been involved at the FA National School as a coach.

Within Neil's time at the club, the likes of Wayne Rooney, Jack Rodwell, Leon Osman and Ross Barkley and many others have all graduated from the successful Academy structures.

The coaches, many of which we born and bred from within the Academy, approach the game with the same ethos. Having been youth players with us to begin with, they understand the culture. Some have played in the first team so they are completely immersed in that culture as well.

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## HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT THESE VALUES ARE ACTUALLY LIVED OUT BY YOUR COACHES?

The focus is never on winning, especially from a young age. We don't put pressure on players between the age of nine to fifteen in order for them to grow and develop.

If the boys win a match, we don't really discuss it. The emphasis is placed around learning to play the right way. Whether we win or lose, it doesn't matter, we don't lose too much sleep over it.

The point I'm trying to make is about our culture. We win more than enough times, so we don't have to get into the discussion about the fact we keep losing every week.

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## HOW IMPORTANT IS WINNING, AND WHY DO YOU FEEL THIS WAY?

I think it's an age thing. Winning is important in a developmental point of view. The age of a player can determine how important winning is to them. The younger a player, the more confidence can be built by winning.

If the boys win, I think it raises confidence, self esteem and self-belief as individuals and by being part of a team.

Winning creates an positive environment. Providing it's handled

by skilled coaches, who don't go too far the other way and become win-at-all-costs, it can help to generate and enhance an optimum environment which contributes to their development.

I don't think coaches should shy away from winning: in our opinion it's not a dirty word.

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## DO YOU BELIEVE A CLUB'S REPUTATION IS IMPACTED BY THEIR YOUTH TEAMS' WINNING RECORDS?

No, I don't believe this is true. There is a greater reward than winning and that is getting players into the first team, enjoying their success and learning from their achievements. That is the essence of the game.

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## WHEN DO YOU COACH TO WIN?

I would say around the age of fifteen, around that time they go into their U16 year. Winning football matches then becomes part of their development. At that time, we would agree on a group of players who we would then spend a lot of time and investment in.

We then hopefully encourage players to continue on to U18 and the reserve teams. This is the final stage, the final part of the jigsaw, so they have learn and understand how to win by then.

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## IF YOUR TEAMS PLAYED WITHIN A LEAGUE FORMAT, WOULD YOU COACH DIFFERENTLY?

The best coaches wouldn't, they would use it as a vehicle to enhance the development of their players.

When we won the national title at U19 a couple of years ago, we had our five best players away on England duty, however it still wasn't win-at-all-costs. The focus was on the development of players into our first team.

**'I DON'T THINK COACHES SHOULD SHY AWAY FROM WINNING: IN OUR OPINION IT'S NOT A DIRTY WORD'**

That is our primary focus at Everton. We recognise it's part of the journey but it's not our goal. We don't discuss results on a Sunday when the coaches feed back to me after the game, they feedback on performance.

Do we discuss the result, of course we do, but it is not the highlight of conversation. We talk about who played well, how we did against the other team and things we had been working on that particular week. Then the *'how did we do'*

conversation follows later on, in that kind of batting order.

We enter our boys, of all ages, into European competitions at least twice a year and we do that for a number of reasons. There is a danger the whole flavour of competitive football in Academies has gone away.

By entering competitions like these, we encourage our players to learn from their performance. This is a positive action, as competitions like these only occur a couple of times a year, the emphasis is on winning but they aren't focused on this all year round. We see this as a healthy, controlled way of introducing competition to our players.

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## DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT WINNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

I think as coaches we should not be afraid of talking about winning. It is part of their development and progress into our First team, then ultimately into the England team which we work towards too.

This progression must be undertaken by skilled coaches correctly. It's part of learning the game and certainly a win-at-all-costs mentality is not good at all. Coaches need to communicate to children that their development is the priority.



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## PROFESSIONAL CLUB ACADEMY

### HOW DO YOU BALANCE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND WINNING IN YOUR CLUB?

It's the hardest challenge we all face and from our point of view as Academy Manager's, Heads of Coaching or whoever is responsible, we must ensure that the pressure is taken off the coaches.

If after an event like the Nike Cup, a coach returns with a trophy and feels it could benefit him in terms of career progression, we have to make sure that through our coach mentoring programme and conversations we have, yeah we want to create a winning mentality in our players, but it's not a win-at-all-costs mentality.

The coach must recognise that we have a philosophy of equal playing time with the U14s and if you're in the semi-final and winning 1-0, you shouldn't comprise that philosophy for winning that game. Of course, we want the boys to do well and win matches but this cannot be at the expense of this philosophy.

## MATT CROCKER



Matt Crocker is the Academy Manager at Southampton FC. A current hotbed of player development in the Premier League, having produced the likes of Theo Walcott, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and having other Academy graduates in their current First team.

Matt has been at the club for seven years, having previously worked at Cardiff City and with the Football League. Matt has a degree in Sports Coaching, a qualified PE teacher and has held the UEFA Pro Licence since 2005.

We must ensure coaches understand that there is no pressure for results. We want a good environment in which to win, without a win-at-all-costs mentality. That's something we want our coaches to buy into.

First thing after a game I never ask the scores, instead I ask "how did the team play?" We want to make sure that winning is a by-product of the game. We try the best we can, but nobody's perfect. Instead, we try to ensure coaches understand that winning isn't the be-all and end-all.



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## WHEN DO YOU COACH TO WIN?

Usually when players come into the building as full-time players, around the U17/18 bracket. We've recently discussed how and when to teach young players the techniques they need to manage the game.

Jason Dodd, our youth team coach said, *"We just want to encourage the boys to play if we are 2-1 up with five minutes to go"*.

Luke Shaw is currently in that environment. If we aren't teaching him the techniques he's expected to know when he is with the first team, then we are doing him a disservice by not providing him with the educational framework.

When he's playing in the First Team, it's a results orientated business and we need to give him all the tools to deal with that environment. If one of those is managing the game, then he needs to start with those techniques in his armoury.

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## HOW IMPORTANT IS WINNING, AND WHY DO YOU FEEL THIS WAY?

I think a winning mentality is important, in the sense that players try their best to achieve success in the game. Success is not necessarily winning, it's more the effort put into the game that counts.

However, I would never turn round to the boys and say *"just go out and enjoy yourselves, don't worry about winning"*. We want the boys to develop and they need to understand that winning is a part of the game too, at the moment it's not the most important part. They have to achieve success through developing their skills first.

For the younger players, winning is important and if done in the right way, developing skills can result in a boost in confidence. For them to go on and achieve a good performance, a good result helps.

**"JUST GO OUT AND ENJOY YOURSELVES, DON'T WORRY ABOUT WINNING"**

External factors such as comments from parents like *"you did really well there"* will also lift their confidence. We must balance this out, as winning has some importance, but we don't expect our U9 and U10 to win every game.

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## HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT THESE VALUES ARE ACTUALLY LIVED OUT BY YOUR COACHES?

Through our Continuous Professional Development programme and in-house events. We are quite big on the psychology side at the moment and will always reinforce the message and bring back the key points to our philosophy.

That's how everybody relates to you as a coach and within player development, by giving all players an equal opportunity to progress. We have quite a lot of written material, including our methodology and especially in the Foundation and Youth Development Phase.

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## IF YOUR TEAMS PLAYED WITHIN A LEAGUE FORMAT, WOULD YOU COACH DIFFERENTLY?

Yes, and I think other coaches would do the same. The best environment for development is to be league table free until U18. As soon as you start with a league table, especially if you are an U14 coach with heavy aspirations, you want to feel success.

Moving from 12s to 14s, then 14s to 16s and 18s can be viewed as a career ladder. The league structure would then be the first thing coaches put on their CVs, rather than the players they

developed. The emphasis would therefore be on the coach and not the players.

That's why the best process is to leave league tables until the Professional Development Phase at U18.

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## DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT WINNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

When we send our boys to tournaments abroad, we change our philosophy: *"We are going to prepare you differently, prepare you to win games. Some of you might get less game time, some of you might get more but we are going to give you a different mentality for what it is like further up the ladder"*.

We are going to the Dallas Cup next week with the U13s and have said, *"Rather than the typical Sunday experience, this is going to be a taste of a different experience. It's an intense four, five, six days, where we are going to prepare, recover, lots of games over a short period of time and we are going to try and look to create a different style of winning and really go for it"*.

This wouldn't be said every week, but it's nice to have a balance of opportunity once a year, flip it on its head and see how the players react in a different way.



# THEIR GAME

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## FA CHARTER STANDARD CLUBS

### HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT ABOUT WINNING AND DEVELOPMENT WITHIN CHARTER STANDARD CLUB FOOTBALL?

Having a development policy within a club is a good thing. A club that doesn't have a policy will probably have coaches who go out and shout at kids each week. They might win or lose matches, but they won't have the right outcome overall.

You're not there just to provide coaching, you are an integral part of that young person's life. They will respect you and look up to you. Then when they have children themselves who start to play football, they will come along knowing this is a good club where players enjoy themselves and are treated well.

When they come up to me in the street years later and say thank you, "*I enjoyed it there*", you know you have done the right thing. I think that is really important. Through our coaches, we educate a message that starts with the younger players and continues up to

## GARY DEMPSEY



Gary Dempsey has just about done it all: Coach, Referee and now Chairman of Bedwell Rangers in Hertfordshire. He has been involved in the club for over 30 years, taking the club from a previous era into the modern age.

They are a registered charity who have over 350 players and can proudly say they have several players in the Sunday adult team that started at the club when they were six years old.

the adult teams. When I see our Sunday senior team, well behaved with no swearing, then compare them to other teams, I see the difference. Our managers tell the children "*if you swear, you will not play. Go and sit down, you are not going back on regardless of score.*"

If this is then challenged by a parent, they will be told why their child has been removed from the game. It's all linked to our code of conduct. Of course we have the odd sending off here and there, but we know we are doing the right thing for the kids.

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## HOW DO YOU BALANCE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND WINNING IN YOUR CLUB?

From a club perspective, winning is not important. My ethos has always been; if you win a game of football 23-0, what does that actually achieve? It achieves nothing. It's about understanding the development of players.

It is essential to balance out the teams who are relatively successful and who win a fair number of games, with teams who win now and again. As a club we have 23 teams and allowing them to see and recognise other teams success can benefit everyone in the club.

The most important rule for me, is that every squad must be treated exactly the same and given the same opportunities. If you create a squad at the age of six, they should still be together aged 16. If you do that, you have achieved success.

If we have a number of players that go on to a more senior level, I hope their experience with the club has been a positive one and their time here won't be forgotten.

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## HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT THESE VALUES ARE ACTUALLY LIVED OUT BY YOUR COACHES?

We closely monitor our coaches and hold monthly managers'

meetings which we ensure all managers and coaches attend. We won't allow a manager to continuously sign players on, at the risk of losing valued members of the club who have been with us for some time.

When a new committee member joins, I always let them know that we operate an open forum in which all matters are discussed openly.

So if a problem arises, whether that be with a coach or a squad, it's no good saying to other people "I don't like how it's going," we discuss it openly and it works! We make sure the policy is implemented.

We are a committed registered charity who makes sure that if we have 17 players registered to play football, all of them get an equal chance to play the game. There are managers that keep regular minutes of the amount of time each child plays.

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## HOW IMPORTANT IS WINNING, AND WHY DO YOU FEEL THIS WAY?

It's not the most important thing. I hate seeing teams that are beaten week in, week out. What I like to see is a fair mix of results throughout the season.

I know if they are beaten week in, week out, it will have a detrimental effect on the development and

sustainability of that particular squad. You can go out and win a game 10-0 and achieve nothing, you can go out and lose a match 4-0 and achieve a hell of a lot more.

As a club I think we need a balance across the teams each week. Over the past 32 years I've seen very successful clubs, which were built on a strong squad, amount to nothing and no longer exist. So winning is nice but not the be all and end all.

**'FROM A CLUB PERSPECTIVE, WINNING IS NOT IMPORTANT'**

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## DO YOU BELIEVE A CLUB'S REPUTATION IS IMPACTED BY THEIR TEAMS' WINNING RECORDS?

Yes, totally. If we communicate our ethos to teams, they go out and enjoy themselves, as well as gaining respect by other clubs if we win. Our ethos is not to win at all costs. There are adults that are only interested in winning and it isn't winning for development purposes, it is winning for their own ego.

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## WHEN DO YOU COACH TO WIN?

I've rarely witnessed this at grassroots level and it's not something we would ever promote. We address our coaching structure, so when a kid kicks a ball out of the pitch, people say '*well done!*' We embrace change to encourage players to do what is right.

So if they should control the ball and get it down, that's great. If they have used their right foot for the first time ever to kick the ball off the pitch, we praise them for using their right foot! I've never heard a coach say they are going to train to win at all costs. We train coaches to tell the kids to go out and enjoy themselves.

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## IF YOUR PLAYERS DID NOT PAY TO PLAY, WOULD YOU COACH DIFFERENTLY?

If players didn't pay, it wouldn't change the way I coach. In the early days, the kids didn't pay to play and that was no different than as it is now.

If you had a no fee scenario, for example, if the club was paid for by a wealthy benefactor, I think you would start to attract the wrong type of players. However, I don't think it affects the coaches.

In most clubs the parent has a role within the running of the team or the club, so my scenario was quite rare.





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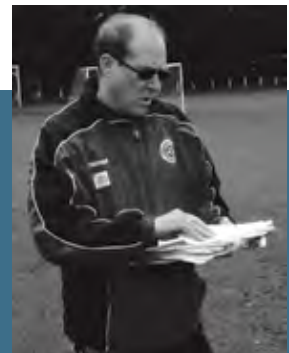


## HEAD OF COACHING FA CHARTER STANDARD CLUBS

### HOW DO YOU BALANCE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND WINNING IN YOUR CLUB?

We have a simple policy that says *'everybody plays'*. In practice, for our younger teams, we play two games at every fixture. The format and ethos of the *'league/group'* we play in is that it's a fun environment first and results are not emphasised.

We have mercy guidelines which state that if one team is running away with the game with four goals up, then coaches should act by moving players into different positions or involve subs. We try to work with teams to create balanced games. The most important thing is to make parents aware of the club and leagues ethos.



## MIKE COLLIER

Mike Collier is the club secretary and girls chairman of Scotton Scorchers FC in West Yorkshire. Mike has been involved in coaching for nine years, having taken his FA Level 1 in 2004, developing experience working in schools and setting up new teams for the club.

The biggest achievement, as well as producing some great players for local Centre's of Excellence, is seeing the lesser players develop and building their own club pavilion!

We feel that nobody benefits from winning or losing by a large margin, everyone will play a full game. I have seen other clubs (not in our league) who have the same sub every game and even friendlies!

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## HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT THESE VALUES ARE ACTUALLY LIVED OUT BY YOUR COACHES?

We make it clear when they start coaching that we believe in every one playing. We have a 'Coaches Commitment' form, which we ask coaches to sign up to (an extension of Respect) which specifically says *'ensure all your players are treated fairly and valued equally in terms of match time'*.

As club secretary, I also try to watch every team over the season in at least one game, particularly watching our own coaches and their behaviour.

Unfortunately, one coach did leave because he didn't agree with our ethos. At his new club he has told at least one parent that he isn't afraid to tell an eight year old *'you're not good enough'*!

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## HOW IMPORTANT IS WINNING, AND WHY DO YOU FEEL THIS WAY?

I have often described winning like this: if '20' is *win at all cost* and '0' is *couldn't care less about the team or result*, then we are looking for our coaches in the middle range, somewhere around the ten mark.

We should let the children compete at their own level of competitiveness, not the parents or the

coaches level. Everyone likes to win but it's how you go about achieving it and reacting to your team's performances and results.

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## DO YOU BELIEVE A CLUB'S REPUTATION IS IMPACTED BY THEIR TEAMS' WINNING RECORDS?

We have local clubs who hold trials. They have a reputation for winning and competing to the maximum. There is a place for clubs who want to attract the best players providing they coach appropriately.

Some parents will go to a club like this because they believe their child will win more, others because they think it will improve them as players. We are lucky enough to have teams in A, B, and C leagues who are all enjoying their football.

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## 'ENSURE ALL YOUR PLAYERS ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND VALUED EQUALLY IN TERMS OF MATCH TIME'

We have a policy of no trials, everyone plays and we are successful on the pitch too. We attract players because parents like our ethos.

We certainly don't have problems getting players!

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## WHEN DO YOU COACH TO WIN?

We play as a team who always aim to do our best and try to win games. However, winning a game isn't put ahead of the overall enjoyment and involvement of our players in the game. That's what is important.

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## DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT WINNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

We have a good sized girl's side of the club at the moment, with a number of girls having progressed on to *Centre of Excellence and Player Development Centres*. This is something we encourage players to do as it gives them an achievable goal. We want the players to be as good as they can be.

I would like to see this better reflected somehow, so parents know which clubs are genuinely developing players and those who encourage players to stay with friends at existing clubs.

This could be reflected league tables of the clubs who have been most successful in developing and encouraging players.

This could be highlighted by giving points to the clubs whose players go

to Development Centre trials, accepted players would gain five points for every season they are there. Additionally, funding for clubs could potentially be linked to this system.

**'WE WANT THE PLAYERS TO BE AS GOOD AS THEY CAN BE'**

For the teams who aren't so successful, their continuing efforts could be recognised by awarding more fair play or specific club awards which aren't specifically linked to winning but their coaching style and performance achievements.

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## IF YOUR PLAYERS DID NOT PAY TO PLAY, WOULD YOU COACH DIFFERENTLY?

No, I wouldn't and can't see that would make any difference.