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Subject: Soccer Newsletter - Running a tryout

Welcome to the Soccer Newsletter. Today's subject deals with the Tryout process.

This is the last week of the current online survey so if you haven't done so already please take a moment to participate by going to <http://finesoccer.com/survey.htm>

I frequently receive emails from subscribers asking the best way to run a tryout for a team so I thought I would share with everyone a tryout I ran the other day for a new team. The first thing to understand is that this team will be a relatively advanced team of players ranging in age from 17-27. There were 50 players at this first tryout and unfortunately, because of weather factors, we only had one field (and it was Astroturf) and a 2 hour period. I will explain how the tryout was run and also what the evaluators were looking for (we had 5 evaluators).

The players first had to register for the tryout and what they didn't know was that this was actually the first part of the tryout process (I will explain this later). It simply meant they had to fill out a player profile form and sign some waivers in case of injury etc.

Next was a brief introduction to explain what the team was about, who was eligible, what was going to be expected from the players and an introduction of who was involved in the team. The players were then given 10 minutes to finish up their warm up (they had been encouraged to arrive 30 minutes before the start of the tryout to start their warm up).

The field had been split into 6 small-sided fields of 30 x 25 fields with 2-yard goals on the end lines. Plus there was one larger field that was 60 x 40 with full sized goals and bibs were placed on each field so that there could be 3 v 3 games on the smaller fields and a 5 v 5 game plus keepers on the bigger field (there were 5 keepers so they rotated in the big goals).

The first game was Street Soccer. This is done by having the players line up behind three cones (the keepers were taken out of this set up). The first person in each line goes to the far small field and were a team and they played against the second person in each line. This was continued until all of the small fields had players and then the remaining field players were put into two 5-player teams. All games start at the same time and the games last 5 minutes. The way the scoring is done

is that a team gets 3 points for a win, 1 for a tie and 0 for a loss plus they get one point for each goal scored by the team (regardless of whether it's a win, loss or tie). At the end of the five-minute game, the players report their scores to the scorekeepers (each player is assigned a number 1-50 so when their number is called they say "5 points") and then get in the same line as their teammates behind a cone. There were a total of 7 games played by each player. Each game lasts 5 minutes but actually takes 7 when you factor in the recording of scores and transition time and if it's not organized well; it can take a LOT longer than this.

The reason for Street Soccer is that it measures one of the most important factors, which many coaches forget about during a tryout process, which is whether the player wins or loses. It's amazing to watch a tryout and see a player who LOOKS like a real player but when you look at the results the player loses every game and then you see another player who doesn't look like much of a player at all but tends to win all of their games. Street Soccer does a great job of measuring a player's ability to win since the players are constantly playing with and against different players so it measures the individual's ability to win rather than his ability to get on a good team.

Next the players were split into teams of 12 and the first two teams played 11 v 11 (with a sub). The problem with doing this was that it meant that more than half the group has to sit out during part of the session but since we only played 10-minute periods it wasn't too bad. Each team had two 10-minute periods. The reason for playing 11 v 11 is that some players shine on full sized fields but don't excel in small-sided games (frequently this might be the player who is a marking back or outside midfielder who does a couple of things exceptionally well but don't have the space or time to show it on a small sided field).

The last thing the players did was go through a speed ladder. The players were put into 10 groups of 5's and each group raced. The first group to race was Group 1 and they raced 40 yards. The two fastest runners moved up to Group 2 and the rest of the players stayed. Next the 5 runners in Group 2 raced and the two slowest runners moved down to Group 1 and the two fastest runners moved up to Group 3. This went on till all of the groups ran and then started again. A total of 10 runs took place by each runner and at the end the fastest runners were in Group 10 and the slowest were in Group 1. As was explained to the players, a player would not be "cut" because he ended up in Group 1 but rather it was just one of many factors to be looked at. While this measures the player's speed it doesn't take into consideration that the speed of a player in the first 10 yards during a game is usually dependent upon the thought process as opposed to pure speed.

After the speed ladder, the players were thanked for coming out, and encouraged to come to the next tryout in 2 weeks. Then they were urged to go through a proper cool down and were done for the day.

The evaluators had a form they worked from throughout the process. Since each player was assigned a number and had it pinned to their shirt, the form had the number and NOT the name on it (the reason this was important was that some of the evaluators knew some of the players and not others and other evaluators knew some of the reputations so by taking the name out of the equation, it was hoped to make it more fair to all). After the number were 5 boxes. Each player trying out was evaluated on the 5 Pillars, which are Physical, Psychological, Tactical, Technical and Lifestyle (for more on the 5 Pillars please go to http://finesoccer.com/soccer_edition_95.htm). The evaluators were grading on a 1-10 scale with 10 being the best and each understand that if charted, their scores should look somewhat like a Bell Curve so the majority of the players would be in the 3,4,5,6,7 range. Only a select few would be in the 8,9,10 range and those were the ones who we would want to make the team. The one Pillar that is almost impossible to evaluation in this type of setting is Lifestyle and the one way to do this was at the registration. The people helping with the registration were asked to keep track of anyone who was rude or disrespectful during the registration process. The reason for this is that if they are rude in this situation, they most likely will be much worse in other situations such as when they have a young person ask for an autograph or when they are being interviewed after a hard loss. The other 4 Pillars are pretty easy to evaluate with enough time and experience.

Along with the 5 boxes to grade the 5 Pillars, there was also a space for comments. The reason for this is that some players do one thing exceptionally well and it's important to be able to mark this down somewhere (for example, some players don't do much over the course of an entire game but have the great ability to score goals and you don't want to overlook this type of player because the rest of his game he is technically and tactically deficient).

After the tryout session is over, the 5 evaluators sit down and between the 5 Pillars of the game, the results from the Street Soccer, the results from the Speed Ladder and the comments made throughout the session, are able to make a reasonably informed decision regarding the make up of the team. There will be a second tryout session, which will be done a bit differently, but this is a good way to make a fair evaluation during a tryout process.

Ideally there would be more time, more space and real grass for this type of tryout but as a coach

a person has to be prepared for whatever the situation.

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Have a great day!

Lawrence

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