

JOE KNOWS AYSO **Spring 2005**

Joe Eldridge, National Referee Administrator

AYSO frequently receives questions regarding rules, regulations, policies, interpretation of FIFA Law and AYSO modifications. In my position as National Referee Administrator, I am often asked to respond. The following are some of the interesting questions I recently received. If you have questions, please contact me, Joe Eldridge, at (888) 686-2976 or by e-mail at joeeldridge@ayso.org.

Question from Debbie:

Joe, our team just played our first soccer game of the season. The kids on our (U-6) team were very upset because the other team scored multiple times every quarter and we didn't score once. The end of the game wasn't as bad since our kids started catching on and several of the kids on the other team had older siblings in AYSO.

I am an assistant coach and feel responsible to help them but I don't know what to do. The coaches on the other team had been coaching AYSO in another well established community prior to coaching for this team - this is our first year doing AYSO in our community. These other coaches know so much about the game and they were also the referees, but this doesn't seem right. They were applying rules to the game that we had never even talked to the kids about, let alone practiced with them. When I spoke with our AYSO representative about this, (her daughter is on the other team) she just said the rules for the game are basically what were being used in the game the kids were playing. Nothing seems to be written down or agreed upon ahead of time and it certainly is not being communicated properly.

While U-6 isn't supposed to be as structured as U-8, they must play by some rules. Are the rules supposed to be decided upon by the AYSO section or are the rules the same for all of AYSO soccer games at each level?

Please help as I am frustrated and want to give the kids a fighting chance at their next game.

Debbie

Answer:

Hi Debbie, thank you for your questions. The most important question I like to ask young players about their games is "Was it fun?" I hope that the frustration you experienced watching the U-6 games primarily involved the feelings of the adults and not those of the children. These very young children focus on the enjoyment of running around, kicking the ball, falling down, laughing, and generally having a good time. For the most part they do not know or care what the score is and often do not even understand that some of the kids are on their team and some are on the other team because the concept of teams is so new. They just want to play.

Winning and losing is of little or no concern to 4- and 5-year-old children. However, the adults who are watching them play have different priorities and often focus too much on the end result of who is ahead or winning. As adults we tend to concern ourselves with the end result or end product (winning or succeeding). Young children are mainly focused on the process (playing and having fun) and not the end result.

Soccer is a game and the purpose of playing any game is to have fun doing so. The process of playing is supposed to be fun regardless of who ultimately wins. Games can still be fun even if you end up losing. Young children understand this instinctively but, over time, are often influenced by adults to change their focus and become overly concerned with winning and begin to forget how to enjoy the process of playing.

The rules or suggested guidelines for the U-6 games are outlined in the *AYSO U-6 Coaches Manual* and the *AYSO publication Short-Sided Games Guide for Referees*. If your region does not have copies to give you, copies are available from the AYSO Supply Center (888-243-2976). It is the job of the coaches to teach the players the rules. Referees are not recommended in U-6 games, but, if used, they can also help instruct the players. The rules are greatly simplified for the young four and five year olds to avoid unnecessary interference with the fun of playing.

The bulk of the time and energy of the adults involved (coaches, referees, and parents) should be spent making sure playing is an enjoyable experience for young players. This means lots of praise, cheering, and encouragement so that the next time someone mentions soccer to the young player a smile comes to their face as they associate soccer with fun. If they enjoy playing, they will stick to it and continue to development as players (skills, rule knowledge, etc.).

I hope you continue to volunteer your time and energy in your region. Your desire to "give the kids a fighting chance" could be restated as "let the kids play and have fun" and this applies to all the coaches, referees, and spectators who sometimes get overly concerned with winning and losing.

Good Luck and enjoy the experience.