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## **New soccer player development program puts the young players first**

Though we are in the “dead of winter”, parents are already registering their sons and daughters by the thousands across Ontario for the 2012 outdoor soccer season.

Some of you will have heard about “big changes” coming in youth soccer, but the truth is, the changes are nowhere near as dramatic as they might sound—and they are all geared toward making the soccer experience even better for boys and girls in every corner of the province.

If you hear the term “LTPD” don’t be afraid! It simply stands for Long-Term Player Development. And the aim is simple: making the game more fun for everyone—coaches, parents, referees and most importantly, our kids.

Some “changes” won’t even be noticeable. Over time what you will notice is more emphasis at the very early ages—U4-U6, for example—on simple physical literacy (movement, coordination, etc.). At those very important young ages (U6 to U11 or so), there will be way more emphasis on sound coaching, developing the skills of ALL players, and much less of a focus on playing lots of games—and who wins and loses.

Kids will still compete, but they will be allowed to enjoy themselves and learn from making mistakes and trying new things, rather than feeling badly about losing a game when the score really shouldn’t matter to kids—or their parents—at those young ages.

You will see more and more small-sides games; competition on sizes of fields that make sense for young players and again, an emphasis on enjoyment and improving individual skills.

Over time, there will be plenty of competition for all youngsters, and especially as they reach the ages of U12 and U13. Youngsters who aspire to a future in the game will have more opportunities than ever before for improving, enhancing their skills and being “noticed” along the way if they are seeking opportunities for advancement in the game.

Some Clubs in Ontario are already moving in this direction. These “changes” will be phased-in over the years to come, starting with the younger ages. The Ontario Soccer Association will devote a lot of time and energy meeting with passionate soccer people in 2012—listening, creating broader awareness and doing everything we can to implement this approach effectively and get this *right*, rather than doing it quickly.

Fortunately, we have great models to follow. Some of the best soccer nations in the world have already long ago taken this approach, with great results. Whether a youngster wants to play strictly for fun, or whether they want to compete at a high level, a focus on the player—and developing their skills—will make the soccer experience better for everyone involved in the sport.

This “new” approach will build on the good work that is already being done by so many Clubs across the province to make our game even better for all concerned.

Stay tuned for more information throughout 2012!