

## **U-8 Ejection?!**

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The article below from the Daily Mail hit my inbox via Soccer America a few days ago. Mr. Beckham's actions aside, I agree with his sentiment. Ejecting a 7-year-old from a youth soccer game? Really people? Come on!

The story here is not Becks. The story is a crazy youth soccer environment. For starters why would there be a league for the U8 age group? That age group should be playing in-house only. Better yet that in-house play should be in an academy format of no set teams.

From the U.S. Soccer Best Practices for Coaching Soccer in the United States: U-8: 1st and 2nd Graders – GAME APPLICATION:

- Game Form: 3 v 3 is best option for these ages
- GK Status: Optional. Players should not be limited to playing one "position"
- Field Size: 4 v 4 (40 yards x 25 yards) – 3 v 3 (30 yards x 20 yards)
- Ball Size: 3

When ball goes out of bounds, the game is restarted with a kick-in or dribble-in. No throw-ins. U.S. Soccer recommends that there be no organized matches at this age. Consistently set up mini games at practice for your kids to compete with and against each other, according to their age. There will be no need to keep score or even be very involved, except to enjoy the players and their effort and joy.

Let's also discuss the rules under which the match was being played. Penalty kicks at 7? Does a 7-year-old child really understand penalty kicks? What's going through the head of the child who committed the foul to give the PK? Is the psychology on someone that young strong enough to handle the outcome that could be that the team lost today because of your foul. What about the PK shooter and the goalkeeper? They too have fragile personalities now facing the up close and personal situation of a penalty kick. Think of the moment. The entire match has stopped, all the players are still and the spectators and all of the bench personnel from both teams are entirely focused on those two kids. Wow! Even professional players waiver under that kind of scrutiny. No matter how the PK goes, one of the two kids is the goat. No wonder so many kids quit our sport before age 15.

This particular youth soccer organization should, as should all youth soccer clubs, play under the US Youth Soccer Modified Rules instead. Here's the link: </coaches/RulesSmallGames.asp>

The type of game and league described in the article points to one that is entirely outcome based. This is the adult model of soccer competition, not the child-centered model of soccer competition, which is process based. The U-8 age group should not be in a soccer experience that is based on the score and league standings. What's next, promotion and relegation? Stop the insanity!

It is the adults who are responsible for setting up the soccer environment for children 8 and younger. In this case they are the ones to blame for allowing such an atmosphere of yellow or red

cards being shown to these very young players. Most to blame are the parents. The parents are the customers and they can cause a club and/or a league to change by taking their business elsewhere. The parents need to get the ball rolling in this instance to evoke these changes:

1. Get the U-8 age group out of league play
2. Adopt the US Youth Soccer Modified Rules for the U-8 age group
3. Be the watchdogs that their club follows the curricula and guidelines set forth by US Youth Soccer and U.S. Soccer
4. Remember when watching a youth match that we adults are guests at the children's game

It's too bad that David Beckham was ejected from a youth match. But maybe not, as it is helping to bring into the spotlight a need for change in the youth soccer game.

### **'The ref gave me a red card!' David Beckham reveals how he was 'sent off' from the sidelines at son's football game in LA**

He's faced a red card in his own professional football games in the past, but David Beckham would hardly have expected to be dealt one while cheering on his sons at football match.

The 36-year-old revealed during his appearance on last night's Jonathan Ross show that he was 'sent off' during a match in LA recently after sticking up for a child who he felt had been punished too severely.

During the interview, which aired on ITV last night, the footballer recalled: 'I was watching the kids play the other day, it was the game just before they were playing.

'It was the younger kids of Romeo's club, and they're playing in the game and there was a penalty given. And the kids are seven-years-old and he sent the kid off.

'And I was like, "Come on, he's seven-years-old, referee, you can't send him off." And he looked at me and was like, "Yes, I can." And I was like, "Ok, well, you can't, he's seven-years-old."

'And he came over and gave me a red card. He told me to get out of the park. For real. The gate was only 20 yards away and I waited and went back in when my son's game was on.'

David also spoke about the fact that despite being happy in Los Angeles, the family will always be proud of their British roots.

He said: 'My children have been happy for five years there, they're stable there. They're loving life there. My eldest is 12 years old now, he needs stability, so we did it for that, but we also love living there.

'But my boys, they love coming back to London, they love pie and mash.'