



## LTPD FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In Ontario soccer, our primary focus is on skills development at the crucial young ages. Once our boys and girls have developed the skills they need, then it makes sense to learn how to train properly and then to start competing at a serious level. While everyone will always keep score, that won't be the focus at the early ages as we move away from our dependence on standings that lead to promotion or relegation.

It is important for everyone to understand that LTPD is based not only on extensive research from the worldwide soccer community (research conducted by “real” soccer people, not only “academics”) but on the science around how and why youngsters develop as they do. We need to understand not just the obvious chronological age of our youngsters, but their biological realities as well. With science, research—and common sense—as our guide, we need to acknowledge that children mature physically at vastly different rates. LTPD recognizes this important reality.

Way more important than whether they win or lose a game at the age of 9 or 10, is making sure we give our young players the skills they need to play the game properly, to be creative, to try things on the field of play and to make “mistakes” without fear of criticism. If we put too much unnecessary pressure on our kids, we can kill the love that youngsters have for the game at an early age. We will make them afraid to try things because they might make a “mistake” and “lose the game”. If we keep failing in this regard, we will be “losing” way more than a game—we will continue to lose thousands of youngsters in a sport where many had the potential to become outstanding.

People forget that, more than 20 years ago, parents and youth coaches were aghast at the idea of “small-sided” games in our sport. “This isn't soccer” was the cry. Now, small-sided games are universally embraced as natural and a huge element in developing players with vision, foot skills and a sense of the game. It's accepted—and common place.

If you have not seen the new materials developed that provide a step-by-step overview of the different stages of LTPD and the clear rationale behind it (along with some practical recommendations regarding utilizing fields effectively at the various ages and stages of development, etc.), we encourage you to download the information on the OSA web site by clicking [here](#)

Here are some of the questions we continue to receive:

### **1. What is LTPD?**

LTPD stands for Long-Term Player Development. It represents a philosophy that is much more focused on ensuring players who love soccer stay in the game for life and enjoy the experience. It further ensures that all players—recreational and the more talented, competitive players—are developed to their full potential. LTPD (though not necessarily with a formal “name” attached to it) is common practice in many of the best soccer nations in the world. It stresses, especially at the crucial early development ages, far less emphasis on games and “winning”, and much more on a positive learning environment with educated coaches who encourage practice, touches, creativity, skill development and learning how to play and enjoy the game. In Ontario, we are working toward an approach where players U12 and younger will practice and train much more than they play in “games”, with field sizes and training methods geared to specific development stages, which can be different for every young player.

Although the LTPD initiative is a directive from Canadian Sport for Life and mandated by the Canadian Soccer Association, it is not something we are doing in Ontario because “we have to”. We know the system needs to change and that we need to make the game more child friendly in the younger development stages for the benefit of all our youngsters in the game.

In short, we are committed to a different mindset, creating a soccer culture that is about really getting the best out of our players, so they continue to learn and grow every day. Everything we do going forward will be rooted in this objective: what is best for the player to help them reach their potential.

### **2. Is this about developing elite level athletes or recreational players?**

LTPD is for *all players* the recreational player and the player who wants to play for Canada or play professionally.

The focus of LTPD is to help both the player who is in youth soccer strictly for fun and fitness, but also the talented youngster who dreams of a future in the sport—be it a scholarship and/or to play professionally or for the Canadian National team.

### **3. Isn't this just another trendy thing recommended by academics that don't even know soccer?**

One of the great things about LTPD is that it is much more than an academic exercise. It is a proven of developing players—with science and research to back the claims—long already utilized by soccer nations in the world, including Spain, Denmark, South Africa, Germany, the United States, Australia and many others. England has embarked on this road as well, because top former players and coaches there have identified that the emphasis at the early ages on “winning” hurts true player development.

So if you are playing for fun, we want the experience to truly be fun. If you are playing for fun *and* want to go further in the game, we know from international “best practices” that this approach will grow the sport in Ontario and Canada.

#### **4. I talked to my child's coach and they said they didn't agree with LTPD. Why is this being pushed on us?**

There has been pushback from some coaches and parents. That's natural. And we want to be clear. Some great work has taken place in the province; we are building on that good practice and ensuring that it is consistent throughout the province. We have many great coaches who have developed very good players. Many Clubs and Academies have done some wonderful things for years and are ahead of this curve. Our communication and education programs will help coaches to understand LTPD and reduce the resistance.

#### **5. Are you getting rid of the Ontario Youth Soccer League (OYSL)? If so, why? It was a great league for good players.**

The OYSL has played an important role for many years. Over the past twenty plus months, we have had some top soccer people in the province, part of our Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) research what is being done elsewhere (in British Columbia, for example, and in soccer centers around the world) and what is the best way to structure our competitive leagues to ensure we give our players the best chance to develop and reach their potential in soccer.

One of the things we have identified is that, rather than create an elite development league that tends to draw individual teams that are built around "star" players (and unfortunately, quite often players who have been "poached" from other Clubs/teams), we have established key "standards"—benchmarks that Clubs must achieve in order to be considered to have their teams play in a high-level development program.

So, rather than promotion and relegation as driving factors (and some of the many negatives that come with that approach in youth soccer) Clubs will now need to meet LTPD standards technically and organizationally.

#### **6. LTPD sounds great why is it taking so long getting it implemented?**

Based on the extensive feedback we are receiving, we know already that we are moving way too fast for some, and way too slow for others. Some want change things tomorrow; others would prefer the status quo.

Our job is to listen to everyone who has the best interests of the children at heart, and then do what is right based on LTPD values—and lots of real-life experience and very current research. It is clear that LTPD is a great approach, and from a timing perspective, we want to do things right, rather than quickly. So we have adopted a phased-in approach to LTPD.

As we kick off the 2013 outdoor season, many of our Districts have done a great job of leading the way when it comes to LTPD implementation.

## Scores/Standings

### **7. It makes no sense to play a sport and never keep score and not have standings. How else do we know how our kids are doing?**

While parents are of course interested in how their son or daughter's team is "doing", most parents are understandably most concerned with **a)** is their child enjoying the sport they are participating in and **b)** are they seeing an improvement in the skill level of their child. While watching "games" can be enjoyable, unfortunately too many parents—and yes, coaches—take games and game results far too seriously at the early ages. This creates a focus on scores, winning games and league standings even at the early ages (U8-U12, for example) when the focus really should be on whether each player is having fun, progressing and developing as they can and should.

Parents want to see enjoyment and they like to see improvement. When we really strive to focus on those things, we are helping the child the most. We want to encourage our coaches to help to develop every player on their roster—not just the oldest or biggest and fastest or those who can boot the ball down the field the furthest. *Every* child should be able to work on their skills and get lots of playing time and touches at the early ages.

Kids will always keep scores. That's natural. Youngsters are naturally competitive. If people want to "keep score" they can, of course. But the point is we won't use game scores to build a system of promotion and relegation, which feeds the cycle of focusing on a few "big" or fast players "poached" by coaches to ensure victory and promotion to a higher-level league. Again, we are far more interested in ensuring our coaches are trained to develop *all players* - not just the so-called "best" at those early ages, while other youngsters sit and watch.

### **8. Parents aren't happy with no scores, no standings no promotion**

In fact, there will be games at the early ages. But scores won't be kept in the formal sense of standings leading to promotion and relegation. (Kids will know the score, of course. It's human nature to be competitive.)

Yes it will be an adjustment for some parents and coaches who live for trophies at the young ages. But that approach has got us where we are now: players dropping out of the sport because of senseless pressure from coaches with misplaced priorities and from parents who too often ruin the sporting experience for their own children.

## Competition

### **9. Competition is a natural part of life—why take it away from children? Isn't it better to learn to compete in a controlled environment such as on the soccer pitch?**

Competition is “part of life” without question. But at the early ages (U8-U12) we need to focus on enjoyment and skill development. We have been lacking in this regard for too long in Canada. Our kids have natural talent, as much as anyone in the world. But if they don't receive the best type of training, skills development and coaching at the early ages those that aspire to play internationally someday won't be ready to compete with the world's best in later years.

So we need to do better, much better. And with the focus of LTPD, we will. Part of that is a focus on skills for *all players*, rather than just games and “winning” because a couple of kids are big and fast or can kick the ball a long way. Once youngsters reach an appropriate age range, U13, there will be plenty of opportunity to focus on game outcomes—and to learn how to “win” and lose”—at a recreational or elite level here in Ontario.

### **10. Why are Clubs being pushed to have more coaches certified?**

While volunteer parent coaches can provide a valuable service to soccer, it has become apparent that if we are to really progress as a sport at the Club level, in terms of how we train and develop players, we need to enhance how we coach the game at all stages of the sport.

While there are many fine coaches in the system that do not have their coaching certification, we still need to set a higher bar in terms of what we expect from coaches. The new Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) coaching curriculum is outstanding. Any coach, no matter how experienced, will benefit by attending the new development stage appropriate courses. All children deserve a trained coach, it's our plan to enable your child to have a trained coach.

### **14. Where do Referees fit in LTPD?**

Referees have a huge role to play in the new player pathway. A huge component of our “Respect in Soccer” initiative has to do with ensuring that our referees—at all levels—are treated with the respect they deserve on and off the pitch.

We are currently in the process of reviewing the Referee Education pathway and looking working to align the referee pathway to fit the LTPD Development stages. LTPD presents a wonderful opportunity to look a new ways to recruit, reward and retain referees within our wonderful sport that we are not going to miss.

### **15. Why are we doing this now?**

When would be a better time? In reality, this is a step that should have been taken long ago. This approach to developing players is so common in most of the world there is no “name” for it;

it's just referred to a Player Development.

For those that don't have the time to review the vast amount of research that is widely available (including on our OSA web site), or the countless articles from high-level international soccer people pleading for us to take this approach, then we invite you to watch the video we released at the Soccer '12 Conference <http://www.ontariosoccer.net/LTPD.aspx>. Listen to what some of the best Canadian players, including Diana Matheson of our Women's National team and current Major League Soccer MVP and Canadian National player Dwayne De Rosario have to say. They are imploring Ontario to follow this approach. They both stress that they wish they had this opportunity when they were young players. Canadian international David Edgar recently added his voice to the growing list of those who absolutely support this initiative.

## **Some criticisms of LTPD**

### **1) LTPD supposedly kills competition**

LTPD is not "killing competition". Yes, the intent is to move away at the early ages (U4 through U12) from an emphasis on game scores and standings that lead to promotion and relegation. But there will still be plenty of games—and lots of competition.

By implementing age and stage developmental programs where children will not be put under physical and mental stress we are actually encouraging competition. When Children feel more comfortable in their environment with the freedom to be creative and improvise they will actually compete more freely and often.

With the new Ontario Player Development League (OPDL) starting in 2014 there will be plenty of opportunity for not only great training but also very competitive, high level competition.

### **2) Young people need to learn to "win" and "lose"**

We're kidding ourselves if we think this has to be "taught" when children are 7, 8 or 9 years old. Youngsters who are in our sport purely for fun and fitness don't need to learn to "win" or "lose" at those young ages. Those who aspire to play at a more serious and competitive level will need to learn about winning and losing—at some point. The question is one of timing. Just as we do in the academic system, for example, our young people learn the basics before we test them on complex formulas. Kids are not taught algebra before they master (or are tested on) arithmetic.

Academically, we have an entire youth development phase where young people are "assessed", yes, but the "system" works to ensure that they are not discouraged from continuing to move ahead with their schooling. In fact, we consider it a major societal failure when kids drop out of school. When that happens too much, we study and assess how we can do a better job of motivating youngsters, teaching them better and keeping them focused and in school—so it has real meaning for them.

### **3) LTPD is only about finding players for the National team**

The reality is the vast majority of youngsters who play soccer in Ontario simply want to play and have fun. Those who stop playing, as we mentioned earlier, usually do so (and the research is

very clear on this) because it's no longer fun when parents and coaches criticize constantly and take the fun out of the game. LTPD is primarily about keeping youngsters active, fit and healthy while playing the world's best sport for as long as they can.

At the same time, it will also be a tremendous boost to our overall player development system in Canada. We have improved our coaching curriculum. We are over-hauling our training approaches and the way we coach and identify our more elite players under LTPD. This means we will be developing better players, and many more of our aspiring youngsters will have an opportunity to be "identified" and developed if they have the passion to work toward a future in the game. This can mean playing at a high level, including scholarship possibilities, international opportunities or representing Canada on our Canadian national team.

So in reality LTPD aims to help the youngster who primarily wants to have fun and stay active but also is a huge benefit to those who aspire for more. Neither player "stream" is more important than