

**The Super Liga Newsletter is proudly designed and distributed by Giovanni Pacini, your Super Liga Director of Coaching Education.**

**The Super Liga Newsletter is designed to keep you up to date with all that’s happening in the world of coaching and player development! Enjoy!**

**THE SUPER LIGA NEWSLETTER #3**

**“The Value of Street Soccer and Its Associated Mentality”**

**by Giovanni Pacini**

A group of youngsters play excitedly in the streets wrestling the ball free from one and other in an effort to keep the magical sphere at their own feet. With self taught creativity and flair, they move toward scoring a goal by striking the ball between shirts laid down on the ground. Some are in street shoes, others in sneakers; but no matter what the footwear, the focus is on the ball. Win it and be Messi, lose it and track the ball carrier as if you were Andrea Pirlo. The beauty of street soccer allows for not only the game to be the ultimate teacher, but for the imagination to run wild. The street can be Wembley Stadium, Maracana, or even Gillette Stadium! You can surround yourself with the likes of Pulisic, Bradley, or Ronaldo. If you’re a young lady, it’s Marta, Carli Lloyd, or Alex Morgan. Each goal scored or flash of brilliant play can be met with thunderous applause from the throng of admirers watching the match! You are only limited by your own imagination. Only in the streets can one’s mind create such an atmosphere. Only in the streets can players be free from coaches who do not recognize the value of this dynamic. Only in the streets can imagination, creativity, and flair be fostered.

The street soccer mentality can and should be the cornerstone to any player’s development. Let it not be said that the street soccer mentality is just for young players. At every level of development, a street soccer mentality must be implemented into training regimes. As a former collegiate coach, I had implemented on a very regular basis the opportunity for my players to just play. Some days it is small sided games, others it’s full sided. No coaching from me, just play; figure things out on your own.

But why street soccer? Well, strictly in terms of youth player development, the reasons are quite simple!

\* First and foremost, it lets the game be the ultimate teacher. The game, in its own organic and spontaneous way, can offer more than any coach can imagine. Let’s for a moment take a look at the American basketball player. Their game is born on the urban basketball courts or in the driveways at home. Shot after shot, imagination runs wild as to what each scenario brings forth.

Pick-up games or “street basketball” if you will, are where many of the NBA’s great players nurtured their game. These urban environments and driveways are free of the obstacles which could stifle the creativity of a young player emulating LeBron James or Kevin Durant.

\* Similar to playing basketball in the driveway or at the playground, street soccer can be played in the backyard, local park, or in the street! If there can be a multitude of youngsters playing street hockey, a common youth activity, why not soccer too?! Grab the ball and go! Any open space can be an area where games are organized. Goals can quite simply be two shirts on the ground. It is the beauty and simplicity of having any open space as your field of dreams.

\* There’s no time limit! In the over organized world of youth soccer, all too often kids are bound to regimented practice times, during which the maximum opportunity to truly “play” is minimal. Research has shown that most youth soccer practices fail in terms of actual engagement that is moderate to intense. In street soccer, play as long as you want as hard as you want until Ma screams that it’s dinner time!

\* As far as equipment is concerned, all you need is a ball. Period. I can recall in my youth packing a soccer ball in a backpack and riding my bike to the park and presto, I was in San Siro! The pick up games I organized at the local park called for my friends to just show up; I had the ball and we played! It doesn’t get much simpler than that!

\* Similar to pick up basketball; you don’t need a lot of people. One on one, two on two, three on three; or as we know the term -“small sided games”, are all perfect. As one who also played hockey growing up, I always enjoyed what was referred to as “shinny hockey”. Shinny hockey was an activity where whomever had the puck, had to try and keep it for as long as they could. So, if there were 5 guys out on the pond, it was a virtual 1 versus 4 all the time! Talk about improving your stick handling skills! The very same activity can be done on any field.

\* I would be remiss if I didn’t mention beach soccer. Its rise in popularity can only complement the notion of street soccer and the inherent benefits already noted. One often talks about having a “feel” for the ball. Certainly on the beach without shoes and having the ball move unpredictably over the sand, the development of that feel is enhanced.

\* What is not present in street soccer is a coach. Without that person, there is no one who could possibly obstruct the creative process that manifests itself organically in street soccer. There are still too many coaches with an X’s and O’s mentality who lack an understanding of how to enhance the creative process. Further, the all too familiar individual who feature themselves as the focal point on the field which still permeates our soccer fields does not exist. The true coach understands the delicate balance between teaching and the flow of play within a practice session. Particularly at the U6 and U8 level, the individual who oversees this age group is one who has the capacity to introduce and implement activities which reflect street soccer, are fun, and indeed challenging. Throughout the process, this individual steps back and exudes a cheerful and positive presence which only heightens the experience for the players.

I recall a number of years ago listening to Jan Hansen, head of the Danish Football Schools, about innovations in youth soccer development. He outlined the approach then taken in Denmark relative to player development. He cited the need to create a “fun football culture”. Central to that effort was the implementation of street soccer to the curriculum of the football schools. Micro soccer (as it was referred to then) was pointed out as a principle aspect of the school’s curriculum as well. Implementing the elements of street and small sided game soccer enhances not only the creative aspect of player development, but also small group tactics, elements which both these intrinsically introduce. I cite this as an example of how the street soccer mentality can (and should) be implemented into training, and in particular, the development of our youth players.

Simplicity. Street soccer in its purest form is a simple way to play the game. No frills, inexpensive, and best of all, it ignites the creative process both physically and psychologically. These are the elements which forms the basis of imaginative play.

Let them play!

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**HAVE FUN OUT THERE!**