



# character fitness skill game sense

A real-life scenario heard often in my conversations with current Worthington Youth Boosters (WYB) recreational and Ohio Champions League (OCL) coaches (and things I wrestle with as a 'soccer dad' of three).

**A "Typical" Dilemma:** *I have been coaching the same team of boys for multiple years now, first in WYB Recreational League and more recently in the OCL. This team consists of players (currently ages 7 and 8) with definite differences in their skillsets and passions for the game, as well as their willingness to listen, learn, and work to improve. During this time, my team has gone from never losing in WYB recreational league (because of a core group of strong players) to having limited success in the OCL because not all of my players are strong (i.e., it is difficult to "hide" a weak player in 6 vs. 6). Now having faced teams with a full complement of talented players, I have come to question what is best for my son and his teammates (both those talented and untalented). Should I keep the team together because they are good friends/schoolmates and they enjoy playing together? Should I split the team and recruit new players so that my son and his "talented" teammates are surrounded by more talent? Or should I completely break up the team to join a "select" (try-out) team such as Worthington United 94. Four realistic options seem to exist:*

- **We stay together as a team in OCL.**
  - **Pro:** *These kids have developed real bonds with each other and like playing together.*
  - **Pro:** *The risk of "burn-out" is less, because the atmosphere would be more fun and stress levels likely lower (as long as losing doesn't eventually get to the kids).*
  - **Con:** *I am not a professional coach (i.e., I am certain the kids could learn more from someone else)*
  - **Con:** *The better players would still not be surrounded by teammates of their caliber, who could push them to become better.*
  
- **We keep the "more talented" players together, release the others (perhaps back to WYB), and recruit other talented players from within Worthington to create a better OCL team.**
  - **Pro:** *This approach might lead to more wins.*
  - **Pro:** *Players are likely to improve by playing with stronger teammates.*
  - **Con:** *No mechanism exists within WYB to bring good recreational league players together.*
  - **Con:** *Friendships might be broken among kids (and parents), as players move to different teams.*
  - **Con:** *Players released from the team might feel shame or real disappointment that discourages them from playing soccer at any level.*
  
- **The "more talented" players (and possibly all of the players) try out for Worthington United 94 and we see how things develop based on their suggested team placement.**
  - **Pro:** *Players are placed on an age-appropriate team that suits their playing skills.*
  - **Pro:** *Players that move up to Worthington United 94 get trained by professional coaches.*
  - **Con:** *The team would have to split up (the "dream" of coaching the same group of kids through school, with them making up a nucleus of the TWHS team, will die).*
  - **Con:** *I would lose control over how my son and his teammates are coached (i.e., they might get a coach that improves skills, but takes the fun out of the game).*
  - **Con:** *Children burn out from soccer by going too hard too early.*
  
- **The "more talented" players (and possibly all of the players) try out for a league outside of Worthington United 94 and we see how things develop.**
  - **Pros/Cons:** *More or less the same as above (with recognition of **Pro/Con** of playing/meeting new kids from a different city).*

None of these options is perfect, which is why I am struggling as a parent and as a coach. For this reason, I am writing to learn more about what you recommend, given your successes in soccer, as well as your experiences in coaching kids of all ages. In the process, I hope to learn more about Worthington United 94 and what potential advantages it could bring my son and his teammates.

Below are my answers to specific questions posed in previous conversations, in no specific order. In the process of answering these questions, I have tried to provide more information about Worthington United 94. To understand more of my background experiences and how I have formed my philosophy, please see the STAFF TAB on [www.worthingtonunited.org](http://www.worthingtonunited.org)

**1. Is Worthington United 94 (or any other “select” team) too much for a child less than 8 or 9 years old? What have you done to promote soccer in your family?**

- *I believe each child and family is unique. Personally, my philosophy for my three kids has been to keep things simple when they are young. I believe in providing an environment that a) is supportive, b) is challenging but fun, c) is consistent (schedule-wise) but gives us free time to still be a family, d) limits travel but still allows games against similar competition, and e) provides opportunities to practice on a regular basis. I also believe in my children getting opportunities with other sports and activities over the course of the year is IMPORTANT; not deciding ‘soccer is the only thing’ at an early age prevents injuries, keeps them fresh, and allows them to learn games that can all ‘carry over’ to the other. We (as parents) do set a limit on one ‘select team’ – other choices are recreation.*
- *My son started his select soccer experience in third grade. He currently plays at an age group above his age as he plays with classmates’ grade level; he has a late September birthday.*
- *My oldest daughter played recreational through 5th grade and then jumped to select in 6th grade. She has moved on to x-country and track which was always a goal of hers.*
- *My youngest is in first grade and plays recreational, with time in the Stars program as well. I am not sure if or when he will make the jump to the next level.*

*There are MANY different paths to success with no universal answer to when a player should enter a select league or specialize in soccer. Further, the current path in US Soccer is MUCH different relative to the rest of the world where players have much less structure at the younger ages but play on a daily basis in a much more pick-up style environment. But, a common denominator to success in all countries is the following three attributes: the child (1) is a good athlete (has speed, endurance, and coordination), (2) has JOY for the game (has FUN playing and even has FUN watching the game when not playing), and (3) is conscientious about getting better (plays on his/her own). If your child possesses these three qualities, he/she is likely READY for a select league.*

- ***Will my son/daughter fall too far behind the curve or miss out on getting onto a good team at an older age because they joined a select league like Worthington United 94 too late?***
  - *I believe that players will not ‘fall behind’, if they have the attributes listed in the last question answer (i.e., athleticism, JOY, and a desire to improve). But, if your son/daughter has these three qualities, playing in on a select team within Worthington United 94 with other players of his/her caliber certainly would help him/her improve, if he/she enjoys the atmosphere. Thus, while certainly not required to be successful, a select team could help bring success.*
- ***Is joining a select league a disadvantage by increasing the risk of burnout or injury?***
  - *While I cannot comment on injury, burnout is a real concern as the dropout rate for soccer players spikes dramatically at age 11 and 12. And, the age of dropping out has continued to lower as competitive select leagues continue to lower age groups. Thus, it is critical that your child has a real passion for the game and a real interest in learning. And, as stated above, I highly recommend that your child engages in other activities during the year, which will prevent both burnout and possibly injury.*

- **Why is Worthington United 94 a wise choice as a select league for local kids?**
    - *United 94 is great option for many reasons. First, United 94 sponsored by WYB and has community ties that provide ample resources and fields. For example, Phoenix Middle School (south fields) is used as United 94's hub, providing a consistent, central practice location for team practices, camps, and clinics. Other local Worthington fields (e.g., Perry Park, Fishing Access Park, Worthington Parks and Recreation land, school fields) are made available for games and other uses. Second, United 94 fees help pay for field usage, as well as the upkeep of these "public" resources (i.e., these dollars are reinvested in the community). Third, having access to fields in Worthington limits rush hour drives to practice outside of our community. Our goal is to create a local club where children can develop in a supportive, fun and challenging environment RIGHT here in their community!*
  - **What is the coaching philosophy within United 94? From parent: *I am particularly concerned about this for my child, who is talented, field smart, puts the time into improve, and basically lives/breathes soccer, but who also has a bit of anxiety about new coaches and teammates (i.e., he doesn't want to make a mistake). My child does take construction criticism fine; but, I fear an over-competitive coach crushing his/her spirits in some way or exceptionally talented kids teasing him/her, if he/she makes a mistake.***
    - *United 94 continues to grow its staff through outreach to the community, through investing in coaches within our club by paying for continuing education licensing, and through the vision set by me, the Player Development director (see coaching resources on our web site under documents). United 94's coaching philosophy is to help develop players and teams to the best of their ability through the guidance (and unpacking) of the new US Soccer Curriculum presented in 2012. We want our teams and players to (1) compete and (2) have freedom to try new skills in practices and games. We believe this balance allows individuals and teams to progress (focusing on just one area stifles players in the long run). Our goal is to help players develop through encouragement; not through fear or threats of losing their position within their team or club.*
- 6. For what are the fees for playing in Worthington United used?**
- *Our fees are comparable and in some cases lower than surrounding select clubs. Player fees go to equipment (e.g., goals, field maintenance), staff (our Player Development Director is the only paid position overseeing the club currently), individual coaches (for their work with teams), league and tournament fees, and administrative fees (web, WYB, insurance, etc.). Most of the fees stay in Worthington, which helps develop/ invest into our community. We strive to create programming that seems "worth it" for players/ families who want to have the challenge of playing at a higher level.*
- 7. Do United 94 teams practice and play year-round (all four seasons), or just spring and fall?**
- *Official seasons occur during Autumn (from August through the end of October) and Spring (mid-February through late May/early June). During summer, informal (pick-up) playing opportunities occur at places like Thomas Worthington High School (turf field) and Evening Street Elementary (playground), with camps and clinics beginning during late July. During the winter, some teams/ age groups play informal pick-up games (street soccer, gym time, turftime pickup, with some teams/players choosing to play in an organized indoor league). United 94 also offers optional, indoor programming once a week during winter. In other words, the decision to play year-round is left to the families.*
- 8. How many practices and games occur per week during Autumn and Spring?**
- *We strive to achieve an overall ratio of two practices to every game (recommended by US Soccer). This ratio changes from time to time due to tournaments and occasional scheduling difficulties. Our coaches do their best to set a consistent schedule to help families manage their schedules.*
- 9. How much travel is involved within season for regular games and tournaments?**

- *We currently compete in MOSSL (Mid Ohio Select Soccer Association), which means the majority of games take place within central Ohio. From time to time, a team may compete against Chillicothe/ Newark/ Delaware at the lower division levels as these teams compete within MOSSL as well. This is not the norm, however. Tournaments have been limited to Ohio in our first year (one out of town tournament -Dayton/ Cincinnati/ Cleveland areas- and one in-town tournament a season).*

**10. Do costs include tournament costs?**

- Yes, tournaments are included in fees; no add-ons.

**11. How many levels of teams exist within Worthington United 94 and how are players moved between these tiers?** *We currently are in our first year, during which our U9/ U10 boys and U12 girls have two levels of teams. Our other age groups only have one team (level). Our goal is to field 2-3 teams from age groups U8-U10; 2 teams from U11 to U12; and 1-2 teams at age groups U13 and above. Our ideal roster sizes are: 10 players for 6 vs. 6 teams; 10; 12 players for our 8 vs. 8 teams; and 15-15 players for 11 vs. 11 teams.*

**12. How does playing time work? Are players on a team guaranteed equal playing time? Some minimum playing time?**

- *Coaches are strongly encouraged to play all players at a minimum of ½ total minutes (i.e. 50 minute game = minimum of 25 minutes) in all league games. Tournament knockout games, playoffs, and state cup matches are competitive situations which may limit time to less than ½ of a game. Coaches will communicate to parents and players at an appropriate time if playing time is less than the minimum stated. Parents and players are encouraged to communicate to coaches if playing time drops below minimum.*

**13. Once players are assigned to a team roster, is the team roster fluid with players moving up and down levels within a season or year? Or, are players “locked” into a specific team for the season or year?**

- *Players are locked into their team for the year UNLESS a player leaves a team midseason (moves, etc.) and then there may be a player moved. We do have players move from time to time up an age group (for a tournament, league game), if there is a need from a team (a player is sick, hurt, etc.) or within an age group. This provides great opportunities for players, although it is limited. We believe in not burning players out (always a conversation with parents) and keeping them fresh! We also do not roster a team if they will constantly need guest players.*

**14. When are tryouts?** *Spring (\*and supplemental winter tryouts if needed):*

<http://files.leagueathletics.com/Text/Documents/14807/41511.pdf>

**15. What happens during the tryouts (i.e., How are kids evaluated)? Are decisions based on a set of skills, fitness, decision-making abilities, etc.?**

- *Yes, players are engaged in activities that showcase their skill such as small-sided games, full-sided games for their age level, and activities that allow them to showcase their skill in repetitions (finishing, dribbling, passing).*

**16. Are there skills/drills that my son/teammates should be familiar with, if they decide to try out?**

- *Basic soccer skills – dribbling, passing, finishing – are important. Checking out [www.isoccer.org](http://www.isoccer.org) – and getting familiar with those assessments is good. Juggling the ball in the backyard helps ANY player as well.*

**17. Are kids actually “cut” from Worthington United 94? Or are teams formed to accommodate all skill levels?**

- *If we do not have enough players to field a second or third team, we will first look to find players to join. If it is a situation where we cannot form a team unless we have to draw from other teams*

*in-season to play games; we will not field the team and help players find another situation (OCL or even another club).*

**18. If my son plays in Worthington United 94 (let's say next year), would he be guaranteed to remain? Or is every year another set of tryouts?**

- *Every year is a new set of tryouts; however, coaches communicate with players through assessments (Fall and Spring) to let them know where they currently stand on the team and where they are individually. The communication is done in an encouraging fashion with specific feedback provided to help the player develop at his/her appropriate level and speed.*