

Proactive Lopsided Score Management

Strategies for keeping a wide score differential in check

Lopsided scores in youth soccer are avoidable! Not only is this true, but situations in which your team has a clear edge in skills, tactics, and athleticism can prove to be unique opportunities for your team to work to improve. In youth sports, RESPECT and COMPASSION alone should be enough of a reason to try to keep score-lines down. It is your responsibility to look for creative ways to challenge your players to make the most of these mismatches.

FIRST, recognize early when a game is headed this way. The earlier you recognize it, the sooner you can send substitute players on who know what the plan is to keep it in check. If restrictions are employed early enough, you afford your team the chance to continue to play hard, while even possibly scoring one or two more, as opposed to already being up 6-0 and essentially forbidding your players from scoring.

SECOND, communicate to your players (certainly during halftime you can do this) that the restrictions/modifications you are putting on play are for two reasons:

- 1) to show **sportsmanship**. Inevitably, at some point in every player's career they wind up on the other side of a game like this.
- 2) The restrictions are designed so that your team can **benefit** and be more prepared when you play a more evenly matched opponent.

Please also **show discretion** about your modified tactics, and encourage your players to remain quiet about it as well. This can be done. We have probably all been on the receiving end of a first half blowout in which our team played a much better second half, with an improved scoreline and a group of players who were proud of how they had "stepped up". Truth was, the other coach had discreetly put restrictions on the team's play, which evened things out to a degree. Both teams went home winners!

Following are some **STRATEGIES** for keeping a score differential reasonable. Each of these suggestions challenges your team to improve while also allowing the players to continue to play at pace rather than simply backing down. Try them out and figure out what works best for your team. You may even try using a couple of these methods simultaneously.

Restrict finishing on the player's stronger foot i.e. shooting is allowed only with non-dominant foot or other part of the body (chest or head even [heading only in Grade 8]).

Play your less skilled players a bit more. This gives those players a chance to see success.

Mix it up. Use your more defensive minded players more on attack and your more creative finishers in back. **Put your best goal scorer at Keeper.**

Possession vs Scoring. Make your team play 3 or 4-touch soccer to encourage quick ball movement.

Distance shooting. Only allow shots from outside the penalty area.

"Feed" a player. Pick a player who normally has difficulty scoring and tell your team that this player has to be the next to score. *This also potentially accomplishes creating a successful situation for a player who may often be over-shadowed. This can be rotated.*

Thank you all for your cooperation with this. Sportsmanship is enormously important to Westwood Youth Soccer and our BAYS league. As coaches, we have the ability to affect the development of young soccer players and, even more importantly, young people.