

# Winning vs Development

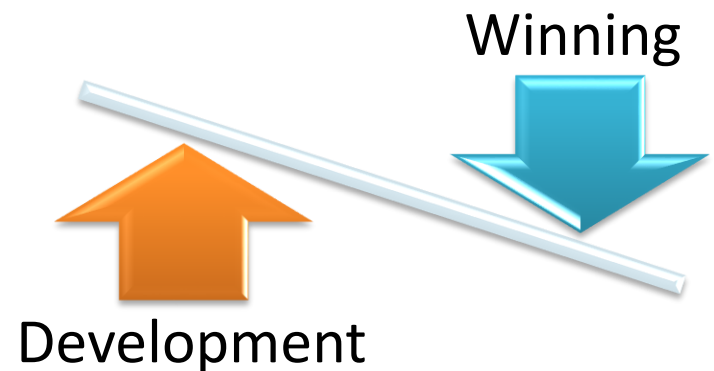
In terms of philosophy and approach in sport, the subject of winning and developing players has become a hot topic amongst the stakeholders at all levels of play. Coaches and Club Directors alike have spoken about this new approach in an effort to educate parents and convince them that their club or team is the proper developmental environment for their child. In most professional settings, winning is king. However, in amateur and especially youth, this view can be detrimental and hide future failure under current success.

In the long run, winning and development go hand in hand and eventually, the ones that develop more skill and ability end up winning more times than not, while reaching higher levels within the game. Nevertheless, in the short run, things get a bit trickier. Winning can go hand in hand with development in the short run; actually, in one match – players want to win and apply themselves to do it (and the adults need not to get in the way of that competitive desire), coaches choose a strategy, style of play and system that will help their team do better (which can also be developmental), players are placed in roles where they can achieve most success and give the largest contribution to their team (which helps their confidence and feeling of competence and contribution to team success), etc. However, one can also win without developing and can inversely - develop without winning.

We, at GNK Dinamo Zagreb Youth Academy, despite being a Champions League competing professional side whose main goal is to develop players for the first team (the likes of Modrić, Kovačić, Lovren and Halilović, amongst others), find ourselves in the same discussions and pressures to focus on winning matches at the youth level. Despite trying to reduce the focus on winning by the management, often external factors, such as the fans, culture and big name expectations, as well as coaches' egos, create that pressure and the decision-making can go astray. We strive to see results only as one piece of information (how we fare against competition on national or international level), not the only piece of information. Many coaches that focus on skill development in the younger ages, can find themselves frustrated losing players (and recognition), as parents (non-experts) choose a team/club for their child based on the only piece of information they understand – result and brand name.

Depending on the primary focus of the club director or coach, different decisions will be made based on the primary goal that one embraced more – to win or to develop players. When these two cannot go hand in hand and it is not possible to achieve both, one has to choose the degree up to which they sacrifice one to achieve the other. It is not an alternative way of thinking (either-or), but rather a point on a scale between the two extremes. These decisions will always fall somewhere on the range from completely or somewhat focused on development to somewhat or completely focused on winning.

It is also not about finding exceptions in one's behavior, but rather in the norm. Not being exclusive in thinking and finding moments where an exception can be made is a skill and one should consider when and how to apply it (e.g. focused on development majority of the time, but making choices with a clear decision to win and sacrifice development for that time frame in an important match).



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U9 ... U11 ... U13 ... U15... U17 ... U19 ... Adult

Obviously, decisions will also **differ for different age groups and levels of competition**. As players grow, the focus slowly shifts from development to winning, which is also a step in preparing them for collegiate or professional soccer.

The table below discusses some topics based on which one's focus can be evaluated by their behavior – in terms of time or degree. It can be used for:

- coach's self-reflection (do I really act according to the way I say I want to act?),
- a part of director's evaluation of the coach's work (in comparison with set club philosophy or team goals) and a healthy discussion about the growth of a coach,
- a part of a club's feedback (such as a questionnaire sent to its members)
- as well as an evaluation point of the club/team by the parents.

We hope that by providing some reference points below can give insight and spark discussion within soccer organizations to make its environment better and members better off.

### *Development vs. Winning decision matrix*

FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT				DECISION TOPIC		FOCUS ON WINNING			
Completely or Always	Mostly or Often	Moderately or Sometimes	Mildly or Rarely	Slightly or Barely	Slightly or Barely	Mildly or Rarely	Moderately or Sometimes	Mostly or Often	Completely or Always
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Boasts with players that have come out of the program and/or ideas about growth and training process.				Personal presentation		Boasts with results that their teams have achieved.			
Puts the players' needs before his own				Who takes priority		Puts his needs for recognition and advancement before the advancement of his players			
The player that will be dominant when they reach adulthood is selected (which is not an easy task to predict, even for experts). Size matters less (late developers are considered), but technical skill, passion for the game, and game understanding are valued.				Player selection		The player that is dominant now is selected, which favors the biggest and the strongest now (early developers). Size and speed matter most – athleticism and current physical dominance is the most important criteria, so			

		it is not about the best player, but about the player that hits the growth spurt earlier.
Seeking challenge, playing in competition where the team will be 3-3-3 or win games by a small margin	<b>Competition (league and tournaments)</b>	Seeking dominance, playing often below their level of competition, reinforcing the idea that “they are good”
Training is more important than matches and that is reflected in the ratio of trainings to games (3/4:1)	<b>Event importance</b>	Training is less important than matches and that is reflected in the ratio of training to games (1/2:1)
Quality training is considered as crucial for growth of player	<b>Primary focus by coach</b>	Game experience is considered to be more important than quality training.
Earned by performance, attendance and behavior; but guaranteed up to some point (maybe 30/40/50% in younger ages and diminishing as the players age), as it is essential for development	<b>Playing time</b>	Earned by performance; not guaranteed to play regardless of dedication and behavior
Cooperation focused, gets players by common values of caring and help.	<b>Team culture</b>	Competition focused, gets players by a common enemy – the opponent.
Recognizes a difference between development position (where the player is pushed out of his comfort zone and with an idea to develop other qualities, not just the ones where a player does well) and a performing position (where one contributes to team strategy most)	<b>Determining positions</b>	Playing position is only set to where one contributes to team strategy most.
Possession and attack-minded soccer is practiced and played, encouraging risk taking	<b>Style of play</b>	Direct play is favored, minimizing risks and taking advantage on opponents mistakes
Game (task) oriented – the main question asked after the game: How did we play?	<b>Team evaluation</b>	Result oriented – the only question asked after the game: Did we win?
There is a set plan and program of training and developmental needs that is: Age-specific, holistic; rooted in Long-Term Athlete Development Model (big picture)	<b>Curriculum</b>	There is no set plan and training program, but rather a reaction to last week’s match with an idea to fix last week’s problems or next week’s opponents (narrow view)
Most of the training time is dedicated to age-specific exercises and small-sided games that hit windows of optimal trainability (sensible phases)	<b>Training time allocation</b>	Most of the training time is dominated by scrimmages, fun games, set-plays.
One recognizes values in their work that go beyond winning matches, such as: integrity, cooperation, competition ( <i>lat. competere</i> = strive within (to win)), develop work ethic and application of effort,	<b>Values</b>	One recognizes winning as the only value that represents their work and where efforts are aimed at.

discipline, positive life habits, spur passions for the game, etc.		
Respect them, they make us better than we are; US + THEM mentality	<b>Opponents</b>	They are considered an enemy, they tell us we are better/worse than them; US vs. THEM mentality
Respect their role – facilitation of the game we are playing. Another element we can't control in the game	<b>Referees</b>	An element we try to control and potentially use as an excuse if we fail (lose)
Growth mindset – all experiences are growth opportunities	<b>Mindset</b>	Fixed mindset – all experiences are validations (tests)
Good decisions, the assist men.	<b>Praises</b>	Successful attempts, the finisher.
What lessons from today can we turn into next week's practice?	<b>Rationalization upon losing</b>	The players are not good enough.
Embraces, as it is seen as crucial element for growth	<b>Feedback/Criticism</b>	Defends against, as it is seen as an attack on ego and confidence
Sign of stretching current capabilities, necessary for growth, motivation for improvement, educational opportunity	<b>Mistakes</b>	Sign of weakness, threat to the ego and confidence
Achieve excellence on and off the field, develop life skills using the game as a tool, develop life-long players of the game, etc.	<b>Goals</b>	Score goals, win games
Determined by us and our own goals that were set in advance	<b>Success</b>	Determined by result of matches
Not tolerated, seen as an opportunity to educate the individual and create a stronger team-culture	<b>Poor behavior by large game contributors</b>	Tolerated, under the belief that they need them to win; weakening of team culture
Pull the team up and help others	<b>Key players in rough times</b>	Pull the team down and accuse others of not being on their level