Southlake FC Playing Time Guidelines

OVERVIEW

Southlake FC offers select and recreational programs for both fall and spring seasons. Playing time guidelines are different between the two programs.

RECREATIONAL TEAMS

All players on Southlake FC recreational teams are required to play at least 50% of a game for all games, both league and tournament. This is standard practice for recreational teams. Southlake FC also encourages coaches to have each player try different positions. Some obvious questions arise:

What if I have a player who rarely attends practice? Is it fair to give them the same playing time as someone else who attends all the practices?

The vast majority of players are below driving age, which means that your players are not in control of their schedules or transportation. By punishing your players for not attending practice, it is holding them accountable for something they probably have no control over. Instead, try talking to the parents of the player in question, and develop strategies to get their player to practices. If a player cannot make any practices due to other obligations, give that player "homework" so they have an opportunity to improve at home, such as jogging for a specified period of time while dribbling the ball.

One of my players doesn't work hard in practices. What message am I sending if I let them play as much as the player who is always hustling?

Coaches need to be able to set expectations for their players, and then hold them accountable for their actions. Rather than take away playing time, use other incentives to motivate your players, such as the top hustlers in practice get to start the game, or the person who improved the most in a skill gets to be the captain for your next game. Furthermore, if you have a player that rarely extends effort, when they do show more drive, be sure to recognize that change and reward it appropriately. If a player doesn't show any drive, talk to the parents and/or reach out to our Director of Coaching for help.

COMPETITIVE/SELECT TEAMS

Playing time guidelines for select players differ by age. US Youth Soccer defines U9-U12 as the primary developmental ages, in part because their curve for development is so steep. As such, younger players must have more equal playing time. As players get older, playing time can become more merit based.

At any age, once players have committed to playing with a select team after tryouts, coaches are expected to treat players fairly and stick with the players selected for both fall and spring seasons. **As such, all players must receive a minimum of 10 minutes per half, per game.** Reducing playing time to discourage and push players out to bring on new players is not permitted.

Besides age, guidelines for playing time for Southlake FC teams are also based on several important factors:

- **Commitment to team / Communication** – how often does the player attend practice? Do they contact you when they can't? Do they put in hard work/effort into every training and game regardless of their ability?
- **Coachability** – is the player easy to coach? Are they learning and making strides in practice? If so, it's important to recognize that through playing time.
- **Form** – Is the player playing well? Are they having an off-day?
- **Tournament / League** – is this a 'must-win' tournament, or just a league game?
- **Injuries / Fatigue** – in events like tournaments which have several games over a couple days, it's important to be attuned to your players' needs and injuries. As a result, you may need to spread out playing time more readily.
- **Score line** – If it's a result centered game, is the game result still in doubt? If not, can you give more playing time to certain players?

Playing time in competitive soccer is a difficult subject, because there are so many factors at play. However, regardless of the situation, there is one golden rule:

Every player is to receive meaningful playing time.

This means, don't ever leave a kid on the bench for an entire game. The minimum of 10 minutes per half, per game for each player is a hard limit. When you do play them, make sure they are getting minutes where they have enough time to make an impact on the game. That means don't play them for the final five minutes of each half; give them a chance to make a difference. If a player does get less minutes then normal in a game, make sure to play them more the next one.

At the end of the day, regardless of leagues and results, our purpose as coaches is to develop young players and help foster their love for the game. You can do neither of those if certain players only ride the pine.

Finally, be super open and honest with communication.

Talk about your coaching philosophy and views on playing time during a pre-season parents/players meeting, and set those expectations right from the start. During the season if you do have a player who is getting less playing time, make sure to have conversations with them and let them know what they can do to improve their standing on the team. If you are not open to these types of conversations, then you've given that player no chance of success or future improvement. Make sure to be the type of coach who is open and honest with the players on their team, and cares equally for all their development, not just the ones who are currently the best.