

Ask The Coach



Coaches have to deal with all sorts of scenarios week in and week out. Each week John will address a question that has been sent in by an AYSO coach. If you have a question that you want answered please e-mail John (heycoach@ayso.org). This week's question is:

Question: "Why does AYSO recommend no goalkeepers in U-8? Is this really soccer?"

- **Answer:** Soccer games without goalkeepers provide a better experience for 5, 6 and 7-year-olds for several reasons, which is why not only AYSO but also U.S. Soccer, the national governing body of soccer in America, discourages the use of goalkeepers at the U-8 level and below. It's the right way to teach soccer for these young ages.

First of all, the goalkeeper is denied a chance to run around and chase the ball. The boy or girl who must guard the goal is being prevented from doing what he or she signed up for - play soccer!

Depending on the game, the young goalkeeper is also likely to get bored (if the action is on the other end) or get discouraged if the ball keeps flying into the goal.

In their early experience with soccer, we want young players to shoot on goal as much as possible, because striking the ball is such an important skill for players to master. Young kids are more likely to shoot often when they're aiming at a goalkeeper-free net. With a goalkeeper there, they become apprehensive, looking for the perfect shot that they are not physically mature enough to pull off.

Nor are the very young kids physically prepared to make saves. They may get in front of a tough shot now and again, but they just don't have the tools for the position's requirements and are inclined to feel devastated when scored upon.

In fact, not using goalkeepers makes the coach's job much easier because the coach doesn't need to cajole players to take turns in goal.

Coaches and parents who have soccer knowledge, but not much experience with coaching young children, are most often the proponents of including goalkeepers in soccer games with even our youngest kids. They mean well,

but don't realize that there is a more effective way of teaching soccer skills at this early age.

The use of goalkeepers at such young ages creates a temptation for the coach to make his bigger and more advanced athletes play goalkeeper, because this will greatly increase his team's chances of winning. In other words, the use of goalkeepers encourages the results-driven approach to coaching that hinders long-term player development and can suck the fun out of soccer. The players who are more advanced athletically at the young ages shouldn't be kept from enjoying field play so that the coach can rack up some wins.

In the worst-case scenario, players who are forced to play goalkeeper at the early ages lose their enthusiasm for the soccer.

When goalkeepers are used, at the U-10 level for example, the goalkeepers should be rotated frequently. Even players who enjoy playing goalkeeper should not be restricted to the position and should get plenty of time playing in the field. Players shouldn't specialize at any one position until they are well into their teens.

Many of the nation's best goalkeepers - Hope Solo, Tim Howard, Brad Friedel and AYSO alum Brad Guzan - spent much of their youth as field players. This not only prevented them from burning out on the position, but honed the foot skills goalkeepers need and their ability to read the game, which is crucial to being good goalkeeper.