

OYSAN Position Statement on ODP vs Club Conflicts
Tom Turner, OYSAN Director of Coaching and Player Development
September 2007

The OYSAN Olympic Development Program schedule provides leeway for players to compete in important club events without jeopardizing their chances of being named to the state pool or team. Players are not expected to make every ODP event, but are encouraged to take advantage of the additional training opportunities and be evaluated by the ODP coaches as often as schedules permit.

Because ODP is, first and foremost, about talent, the very best players can, in theory, attend a very limited number of evaluation sessions to be selected to a state pool. With second and third tier players, the more often they are observed, the more likely their strengths will be accurately assessed; subsequently, raising their odds of being named to a state pool or team (see article below on the state team selection process).

During the spring season, when the final state team is chosen and preparation for regional camp begins, even a top player may be omitted from selection if they are not available to compete for their place and participate in the teambuilding process.

OYSAN appreciates that the club season includes important events where teams should prepare and compete at full strength. These events would include elite invitational tournaments, the Midwest Regional League, and the state and regional cup competitions. In turn, OYSAN expects clubs to prioritize their schedules so that talented players can have the opportunity to compete for state, regional, and national team recognition.

-----***-----

What Makes an Olympic Development Program Player?
Tom Turner, OYSAN Director of Coaching and Player Development
September 2007

Many parents often ask what it takes for their child to become an Olympic Development Program (ODP), or State Team player? Is it the best 18 players who are selected, regardless of position, or is it the best team of players? What qualities separate those selected from those who are not? This article will help answer some of these questions.

Player Evaluation

Team selection always begins with an assessment of individual players. There are four criteria that form the basis for most evaluation schemes. These four criteria, made popular by the KNVB in Holland, are collapsed into the acronym "TIPS," which stands for

Technique * **I**n-sight * **P**ersonality * **S**peed

The most critical quality for all soccer players is **Technique**. This would include the player's overall range of techniques and the speed and ease with which they secure and use the ball. A player's balance and agility are closely related to technical range and at each successive level of play technique under pressure becomes the most obvious starting point for distinguishing between players.

Tactical Insight is the second element in the equation. The talent evaluation of this area looks at how players solve small-group tactical problems and the degree to which they can perform in a structured team organization. At the younger ages, tactical insight is less important than technique and speed. However, as players mature into their mid and late-teens, they are often chosen for representative teams based on their superior qualities in a position or because of their adaptability to other roles within the team.

The third quality is **Personality**, and it is here that the players within a squad must be balanced to allow a team to be built from the complementary sum of its parts. Personality players are usually the first to catch a coach's eye and generally form the starting point for the teambuilding process. In evaluating a group of players, it is readily apparent that they come with an assortment of qualities. Some have exceptional dribbling skills, while others have explosive speed; some have excellent passing range, while others dominate in the air; some are resolute defenders, while others impress by their ability to read the game and lead others; some very ordinary players are coachable and work hard and impress by their selflessness, while some very talented players are lazy and frustrate through their unwillingness to work for themselves or the team; some players simply score goals, while others create chances for others through their set-up play; some gifted younger players are worthy of investing time and opportunity, even if they are physically overmatched; some players are so physically dominant that they are hard to ignore, even when their skills are a little rough around the edges. In contrast, some players are so volatile and high risk, or so one-dimensional in their qualities, that their selection poses a very difficult decision; in these situations, only the exceptionally talented players are moved along within the system, but it is not uncommon for these very talented players to be excluded from international teams because their personality or playing qualities do not match the vision of the coach, or the "esprit de corps" (spirit and work ethic) within the existing squad.

Finally, the quality that often separates the good player from the exceptional player is **Speed**. As a "relatively" genetic asset, physical speed from "A" to "B" is always part of an overall assessment. At the top levels, there are no slow players, although there are some international class players who are not considered "fast." Speed evaluation also includes the time players take to assess match situations and take appropriate action (tactical speed) and the speed with which they control and use the ball (technical speed).

Team Selection

Choosing representative teams is, in large part, a question of balance and adaptability and it is not always the best eighteen attacking players who are chosen to fill the roster spots. Coaches must always endeavor to blend ball-winners with "skill" players in order to

create a balanced team that can defend, and create scoring chances from both the center and the flanks.

Adaptability is also a key determinant in player selection. When a professional or national team coach needs a player to fill a role on the left side of midfield, for example, the top left-sided prospects are invited into the squad to compete for that specific role. With established professional and international teams, new players are usually selected for their ability to fill existing roles within an existing system. Ironically, the arrival of new players can also challenge the coach to consider ways in which the established playing formation and system can be changed to accommodate the qualities of the new players.

In contrast, when a representative team is selected at the youth level, identifying the best players is often the starting point for team selection and it is here that the versatility of players becomes more critical for the final analysis. At the club level, the best all-round players are usually found in central positions. At the ODP level, the dearth of natural wide players often poses a dilemma for the selecting coaches. Assuming there is a rank-ordering of the central players, if the second tier players cannot play in flank positions, they are likely to be passed over in favor of naturally left-sided players and other natural wide players, even though these players may not possess the same overall range of qualities. A team cannot consist of eleven central midfield players.

Another critical factor at the youth level is “potential.” Because everyone matures at vastly differing rates during puberty, cohorts may be as much as a foot and 40 pounds apart in height and weight. At the younger ages in particular, care must be taken to prioritize from the “TIPS” analysis. A 13-year-old with wonderful skills will likely be selected over a physically mature peer who has an immediate impact but limited technical upside. Conversely, the 16-year-old ball wizard who cannot out-run, out-think, or out-play the physically stronger opponent is unlikely to be given the benefit of the doubt at that stage. Such is the difficulty in youth team selection.

Summary.

Philosophically, ODP is a selection process and not a club system. However, the limited frequency of training at the club level is considered a serious obstacle to maximizing long-term potential in Ohio North. For this reason, the scheduling of additional ODP training opportunities has become a necessary feature of the changing soccer landscape.

The ODP state team selection process can involve as many as six coaches at training sessions to provide feedback to the head coach. With 40-60 players in each age-group pool, this reduces the possibility that a player will be accidentally overlooked; and increases the likelihood that the final decisions will be made on the basis of talent, potential and team balance.

All team selections, in some way, reflect the bias of the head coach, except perhaps the choice of first-tier players who are always the easiest to select. It is with the second and third tier selections that coaches earn their salt; and where personal bias in terms of style

of play, player commitment to the teambuilding process, and overall team balance enter into the final decisions. In the representative team environment, coaching bias should not be regarded as detrimental; it is simply a fact of life. Coaches with experience make selections based on potential at the next level and potential over time, with the physical dimension often the last variable considered in the equation. Selecting the second and third tier players reflect educated guesses that one player has more of the tangible and intangible qualities to succeed than another. Without this perspective, the fine line in selecting one player over another can be lost on most observers. Sometimes the coach is wrong; more often than not, their experience bears out the selection.

If you have any questions about the US Youth Soccer Olympic Development Program, please call the OYSAN state office at (330) 659-0989.