

"The definitive book on coaching girls' soccer."

— Ian Stone, Head Women's Soccer Coach, St. John's University

THE **B**AFFLED **P**ARENT'S
GUIDE TO
COACHING GIRLS'
SOCCER



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Bruce Curtis



Camden, Maine • New York • Chicago • San Francisco
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To my Mum and Dad, the two most loving people in the world, who have supported and encouraged me in everything I have done.

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Preface

When I was growing up in Jersey (the Island of Jersey, that is—not New Jersey), the dream of every young boy was to be a professional football player. We played footy every day before school, during morning break, during lunch break, and after school. We played every kind of footy game imaginable: wembley, four-on-four, heads and volleys, 11-on-11, three and in. During break time there would be different footy games going on at the same time with trash cans and bags spread all around the school yard as goals.

We weren't allowed to bring real leather footballs to school in case the windows got smashed, so we used plastic or rubber balls instead. When these ended up on the roof of the science building, which was more often than not, somebody would pull out a tennis ball from his bag, and the game continued. If the tennis ball vanished down the drain, landed on the roof of the science building, or was confiscated for hitting the teacher on school-yard duty, then we would just stamp on a soda can and use that. Whenever the custodian would throw down all the balls from the roof, there would be a huge cheer and a sudden mad rush to claim the best ball for your game!

Since realizing my schoolyard dream of being a famous footy player and playing for Nottingham Forest was just that . . . a dream, I've been lucky enough to do the next best thing.

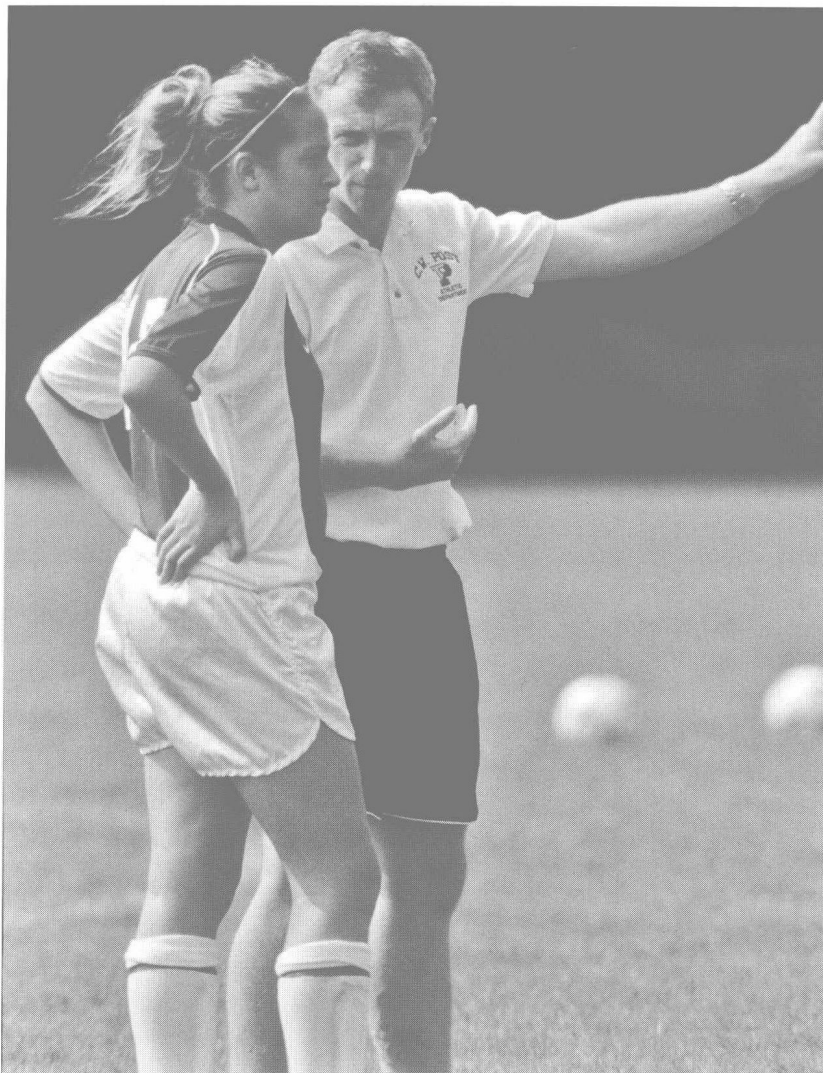
For the past 12 years I've been coaching soccer at levels ranging from 4-year-old beginners to professional players. I've gained advanced coaching licenses from the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA), and the English Football Association (FA) and hold a Bachelor of Science degree with honors in Sport Science and Physical Education from England's premier sporting institute, Loughborough University.

For 10 years I've had the privilege of working for Noga Soccer, one of the largest and most respected private soccer education companies in the country, and have had the opportunity to work alongside and learn from many talented and successful coaches from all over the world. During this time I've developed and implemented a range of coaching programs for youth soccer clubs, lectured on soccer at the university level, and conducted a wide variety of coaching and educational clinics for both experienced and novice coaches. I've been fortunate to coach and train some of the best girls' youth soccer teams in the region, including four different New York state championship teams and have also been part of the Eastern New York Soccer Association (NYSA) girls' Olympic Development Program.

I've been coaching women's soccer at the collegiate level since 1996, the last 4 years as head coach at the CW Post Campus of Long Island University. In 2003 the team won the NCAA Division II ECAC Championship for the first time in the program's history.

Whether you're a professional soccer player scoring goals for Man-

**Coach Hounsome gives
pregame instructions.**



chester United, a collegiate player winning NCAA championships with North Carolina, or a 5-year-old playing three-on-three for the first time, the game of soccer has something magical to offer. Soccer has been part of my life for as long as I can remember, and it's a great pleasure to be able to pass on my coaching knowledge, experience, ideas, and insights through this book.

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Introduction

Soccer is by far the most popular sport on the planet. A record number of girls and women are playing soccer worldwide. In the United States the number of female participants has risen from 7.5 million in 1998 to almost 9 million in 2002. The number of universities and colleges in the NCAA that sponsor women's soccer has increased 40-fold in the last 27 years and risen to an all-time high with 879 programs.

Women's soccer in the United States leads the world. In 1999 the USA national team won the World Cup in front of 90,000 spectators in Pasadena, California, making household names out of stars like Mia Hamm and Brandi Chastain. A professional women's soccer league was established, providing youth players and fans the ability to live and breathe the game like never before.

The enormous popularity has led to a dramatic increase in the number of opportunities available for girls to participate in organized soccer at every level, from middle school to high school to youth soccer leagues. This huge growth in girls' soccer means there's a need for more and more parents to step up and volunteer themselves as coaches. Which is where you fit in.

If you've never coached before, or never even played soccer for that matter, don't worry. Whether you're a first-time coach or one who's been coaching for several years, *Coaching Girls' Soccer: The Baffled Parent's Guide* is here to help you. This book will guide, teach, inform, and lead you in the right direction to becoming a successful girls' soccer coach. Success, to me, is not measured in wins and losses but in the number of girls given the opportunity to learn the world's greatest game and experience the love, teamwork, social interaction, sportsmanship, and fun of playing sports.

Coaching Girls' Soccer: The Baffled Parent's Guide is designed to help all parents and coaches who work with girls up to the age of 13 become better and more informed coaches and educators.

With girls playing soccer at an increasingly younger age, there's a need to learn and understand how to teach the game to very young children. The book provides teaching techniques, ideas, modifications, and adventure games for beginners from the age of 4 and provides new coaches with the basic rules of soccer and how they should be adapted for the age of your players.

This book highlights the important differences that exist between girls and boys and discusses the many issues faced by girls' coaches. Part One helps both novice and experienced coach develop teaching and organizational skills and offers insight into coaching techniques that are vital to motivate and build confidence in girls. It runs through each of the essential techniques needed to play soccer, from dribbling to shooting. I've identified how to teach each skill successfully to girls in order to provide maximum

repetition and development, provided key coaching points, and outlined many common mistakes and tips for avoiding them.

The most specialized position and therefore possibly the least coached position is that of goalkeeper. This book covers the essential techniques needed for all goalkeepers so that, at long last, your keepers can get the teaching and coaching they need.

You'll learn how to teach essential tactics and soccer strategies to your girls during practice and show them how to successfully attack, defend, and keep possession as a team. There's practical advice on how to plan, organize, and run a session from soup to nuts and a structured format for all your practices. I'll lead you through the process of managing and coaching an entire season and teach you how to successfully coach girls during a game.

Throughout the book there's reference to a myriad of original games and practices. The games are numbered consecutively from 1 to 84. Each game and exercise comes with a detailed description in Part Two, and many include suggested progressions and a diagram. Although there's a suggested age for each exercise, the level of difficulty can be modified to meet the actual ability of your group of players. These games and exercises will provide you with a wide resource of activities, so that you can step onto the field with the knowledge that you're ready to teach any aspect of soccer to your team.



Coaching 101: Everything You Need to Know about Coaching Girls' Soccer





What's Different in Coaching Girls' Soccer?



What makes coaching girls' soccer, you ask, different from coaching boys' soccer? Is it like lacrosse, where the rules are different? Do I need to coach differently with girls? Are there any special qualifications for coaching girls? Are girls easier or harder to coach than boys? Should the coach push girls as hard as boys? What are the differences in motivating girls? What techniques and approaches should I adopt when coaching girls? Do boys and girls grow differently?

There are many questions you might be asking yourself about coaching girls' soccer. This chapter will give you some answers to these many questions.

Girls' Soccer vs. Boys' Soccer

It's important to know that girls' soccer is no different from boys' soccer. Unlike some sports where the rules are different for males and females, in soccer they are identical; the rules, equipment, duration of the game, goal size—everything's the same. There are no special qualifications required to coach girls' soccer. The technical, tactical, mental, and physical demands of the game are the same whether for boys or girls. The techniques and tactics that need to be mastered to be able to play successfully are the same and should therefore be coached at the same level with the same expectations. Girls can and should be pushed as hard as boys.

Some consider girls' soccer to be easier to coach than boys' soccer, but for me both have their challenges. Many coaches prefer to coach girls because they feel that girls have a willingness to be coached and are keen to learn and find out what the coach knows. Girls have a tendency to be more cerebral and group oriented than boys, providing the coach with a highly rewarding coaching experience.

Physiological Differences

Not too long ago young girls were discouraged from participating in sports as it was not considered feminine to develop athletic physiques or to display physical aggression in athletic competition. In today's society, however, with changing attitudes and ever growing media coverage of women's sports on television, girls are being encouraged at a younger age to participate in athletic competition, and consequently many of the differences in athletic accomplishments between boys and girls are fading away.

Prior to puberty there are very few physiological differences between boys and girls, and it's common for young soccer teams to be co-ed. As young girls tend to be physically less aggressive toward each other compared with boys, they need to be encouraged to be more physical in their game. They need to know that it's OK to be physical and play tough, and they should be encouraged to dive into headers, make tackles, and generally be as physical as they can within the rules of the game. With the onset of puberty, girls and boys go through many changes. Girls experience puberty as a sequence of events, with these pubertal changes usually beginning on average 2 years before boys. Girls tend to reach puberty at around 8 to 13 years whereas boys go through puberty at around 9½ to 14. One of the many changes that take place is increased hormone production by the body. Testosterone is produced in greater amounts in boys, while estrogen is produced in greater quantities in girls. This results in boys developing more muscle mass per unit volume of body mass than girls do and increased levels of aggression. Girls increase not only in height and weight but also in body fat and body shape. In both sexes there is a change in size, with the feet, arms, legs, and hands all beginning to grow in advance of the body.

So while puberty leads to boys developing into stronger, faster, and more aggressive players, girls are forced to deal with a rapidly changing body that's not as strong, as fast, or as aggressive. Techniques that girls mastered previously may not seem so natural or easy to them anymore, and many will have to relearn skills with their "new" body. It's important that great patience is shown over this time period and that players understand it's very normal to go through this process.

The onset and rate of puberty vary from player to player so those individuals who reach puberty earlier or later than their peers will often become self-conscious about their bodies. It's vital for the coach to be sympathetic and caring to those who might be embarrassed, and to continue to build the girls' self-esteem through a positive coaching environment.

A key pubertal change in girls around the age of 10 to 16 is the start of the menstrual cycle. This will cause both emotional and physical changes in the players that you should be aware of such as headaches, cramping, and water retention. This is obviously a very sensitive issue and should be handled with a great deal of care and compassion.

Coaching Advice

"If a player complains that she doesn't feel well, encourage her to continue playing, but let her know that it's fine for her to rest and sit out if she feels she needs to. If a female athlete is to continue to participate in sports as she gets older, it's important for her to learn how to play and participate during the menstrual cycle."

Psychological Differences

Prior to puberty there are very few psychological differences between boys and girls; they both play soccer to have fun, to compete, and to interact socially. With puberty, girls become more group and relationship oriented than boys. One of the primary reasons they play soccer is the desire to be part of a team, participate as one of a group of players, and gain satisfaction from the relationships and friendships they build.

Coaching Advice

"When a girl hasn't played well, make an extra effort once she steps off the field to engage her in conversation that has nothing to do with soccer."

The relationship they build with the coach is unique and must be preserved. By consistently showing confidence in and respect for each girl, you'll create a strong and durable relationship with them. Even if you're unhappy with a particular girl's play, it's important to let her know that this has not affected your view of her as a person or your relationship with her. Girls need to know that you care for them above and beyond their abilities as soccer players. If girls get a sense that their relationship with you is dependent on their success on the field, it won't be a close and effective coaching relationship.

If this relationship is destroyed by criticizing players in public or not speaking with them after a game, you'll be faced with difficulty in motivating them and building their confidence. Try not to criticize girls as a result of temporary or present limitations—it's never beneficial; always think about a player's potential ability. The coach who starts moaning at the players and criticizing them over mistakes during a game is far more likely to lose the game than the coach who remains positive and compliments good play throughout.

Coaching Advice

"Try to prevent the same four or five girls from always being on the same team by continuously making girls work with different partners and in different groups. This is an important way to control the power dynamics within the team."

As a coach of girls, you'll need to pay close attention to the social dynamics of the team. From an early age girls show more psychological aggression toward each other and are more likely to develop cliques and attempt to exclude individuals than do boys. It's important to observe the group closely and attempt to understand what social forces, if any, may be limiting their progress. Care must be taken to encourage inclusion of everybody, by frequently assigning different partners and groups to work with. Girls are unable to function as a team if the players don't get along as individuals, so it's vital to prevent cliques from forming. With boys this is less of an issue, as they find it much easier to temporarily forget about any differences they may have with teammates during game time.

Motivational Differences

Another difference between girls and boys is how they are motivated. Girls tend to be motivated by pleasing others, whereas boys tend to be motivated largely by personal gratification, the "me" mentality.

Girls are motivated by knowing how their efforts affect the results of the team and the performance of their teammates. It's important for them to know that you recognize their efforts. They're motivated by you showing and having confidence in their ability. By giving players your confidence, you'll



Push girls as hard as you can by creating an environment that is competitive, challenging, and fun.

build theirs. Always let them know when you're pleased with them; don't assume that they know you're happy. Encourage and praise small successes and look for positive signs of progress. Every player on your team has something to contribute, and it's your job as the coach to find and develop each girl's strength. Try to highlight all contributions—physical, emotional, and mental.

Girls place a high value on what others think of them and how they fit into a group. As a result, they find it very tough competing against their friends in practice. They're great competing against other teams but will try to avoid direct competition with their friends. In order to create intensity in practice, however, it's vital that players do compete against each other. Teaching them and getting them to do this is one of the greatest challenges you'll face as a girls' soccer coach.

Performance Differences

Prior to puberty, no significant differences in performance exist between boys and girls. With puberty and the changes that take place, differences in performance do become evident.

With higher levels of testosterone and more muscle mass, male soccer players have increased physical strength. It means that they're faster and stronger and are able to pass and strike the ball harder and over greater distances than females. Goalkeepers are able to jump higher and kick farther. By the time players are in their early teens, it's very evident that with boys' increased strength and power, their game has become much faster and more physical than the girls' game. Speed of play, decision making, and technical

Coaching Advice

"Explain to girls that by pushing their teammates as hard as they can in practice and by competing as hard as they can against each other, they're actually helping each other improve and become stronger players."