

## **More Games Fewer Tournaments**

For more information on this topic visit the following pages:

- [https://www.chattanoogafootball.com/news\\_article/show/783471](https://www.chattanoogafootball.com/news_article/show/783471)
- <https://www.socceramerica.com/publications/article/51792/the-perils-of-tournament-play-how-to-cope.html>

Something happened over the last 10 years, even the last 5 years. Tournaments have come to dominate the way we think about competitive soccer. It is in homage to tournaments that we schedule our season, plan our training, and prepare our teams. And, it is not a positive development.

When I started United just over 10 years ago this was not the case. We played matches, lots of matches. Indeed, we had a club match schedule with a series of home and away weekends with Amory, Meridian, Starkville, and (yes, I know) Greenville. These matches helped teams prepare for the handful of tournaments played. At most teams would pick one or at most two tournaments a month. Sometimes fewer; always using the match schedule as a way to prepare teams for the tournament that they were collectively working towards.

What happened? That is up for debate. The prevailing wisdom is that clubs figured out that a tournament could be a money maker and soon every club was trying to wedge their tournament into an increasingly crowded tournament schedule. More tournaments meant fewer weekends free and fewer teams to play in matches. Pictures circulated on social media of smiling players and coaches with medals and everyone said “I want one of those for my kids.”

What is not in debate is that tournaments are expensive, time consuming, and terrible vehicles for player development. Yes, let me repeat that—tournaments are not good for player development. Why? There are many reasons but let’s take just two.

1. Tournaments are all or nothing events. Get a medal or leave disappointed. Why would any coach play a player that needs more time on the field when a medal and that picture is at stake? Simply put—as coaches we don’t. The players who need more time on the field to get better to help the team get less. Players are scared to do something new for fear of making a mistake and losing it for the team. Toying with different line-ups or formations—too dangerous.
2. Recovery time is inappropriate. Every medical and H & K consultant agrees that players need time to rest and recover. Not just to avoid injury (which is important enough), but to be able to recover and perform at a high level. How long? For an 80 minute match it is 48 hours. Not one single individual consulted in multiple studies thought playing 3-5 matches in a two-day period was appropriate for any age player.

Tournaments are also the #1 reason players and families indicate that they stop playing competitive soccer—too many expensive tournaments, hotels to pay for, dinners out, and weekends that can not be spent doing other activities. The final point is the most important for players as they get older. Players and parents get burnt out. The thrill of a weekend with the team at a hotel soon becomes drudgery. Kids want to spend time with friends on weekends. There are school events they want to go to. A weekend at yet another tournament? No thank you. Yes, they love soccer. They love playing for their school team. School teams play one or two matches a week and they get to go on a date on Friday night.

Conclusion—tournaments are terrible for long term retention of players and they are flawed vehicles for player development.

What to do? The answer is simple and straightforward. More matches, fewer tournaments. Use the matches to develop players and work to improving the team so they CAN perform well at the tournament, bring home that medal, and give everyone the picture they want.

In pursuit of this goal the club will be utilizing player development funds to help pay for matches (let's call them "league matches"). The club will pay for all expense associated with setting up the field (generally about \$40 per field) and any charge for lights (if the county asks for such). In addition, United will pay the following:

1. All ref fees for a home match(es) if there is a reciprocal agreement to go to the team we are hosting at which they pay.
2. United will pay all ref assignor fees for matches we host—whether they meet the requirement of #1 or #3.
3. One half of all ref fees if there is no agreement or if you have been able to set up a day of matches. The presumption here is that the visiting team(s) (with no reciprocal agreement) will pay the other half.

\*A good example of this is if we are hosting 3 teams and each team plays every other team. United will pay ½ of fees including the "neutral" match.

Referees will be notified that payment will come from the club, rather than cash at hand at the field on the day. All money collected from visiting teams that meet the requirements above will be deposited back into our player development fund.

U10 and below matches will utilize a single or dual ref system which has become the norm at tournaments. U12 and above we will ask for a 3-person ref crew.

Once rec soccer starts all matches will have to be scheduled around recreational matches.

The money tap is open. Quite simply United teams can now host teams at no cost or very little cost. We can play a series of matches and then go to our own homes, and have the weekend free to go on a date—including our coaches 🐼.

This will be an immediate and effective way to get off the tournament grind. More players playing more soccer. Parents paying less for weekends away. More player development and hopefully more retention long-term.

Coaches, the money is there. The ball is now in your court. Let's set up those matches with the \$\$ incentive we have at hand.

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