

# Let's Use Our Head : No More Heading for Players 10 Years & Younger

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I am a coach, who was born and raised around this beautiful game of soccer. I am also a parent of college age children. I have watched my own children play this beautiful game from when they were 6 years old, to that of seeing my son play at the college level. Believe me, I understand the nature of the game. I could tell you stories of how the game was played when I was growing up, the nature of our training, and what we were expected play during games. Most of which would cause me to blush in embarrassment. However, times and things are changing in youth sports in this country and more so in our game. As a coach, I too am seeking to change with times and continue to grow. One of the things, which have helped me to date, was my willingness to accept and navigate the changes with this sport.

With the onset of the "Heading Ban" I have received many calls, had a lot of conversations with fellow coaches, seen numerous YouTube videos, and read many blogs about the ban and its far reaching implications on the future of US Soccer and the development of players in the future. Time and space would not allow me to expound on all the details of this subject matter, but I really want to share a few thoughts on this subject. So I am saying without a shadow of a doubt "It's Time For Us To Use of Heads. " Not so much in playing but rather in how we approach and think about this issue.

First, we must see and understand this ban as a "Player Safety" issue as opposed to a "Changing the Rules of the Game" issue. At the end of day as administrators, coaches and parents if there is anything we must all agree upon, it has to be the safety and well being of our players. If a decision is made to enhance the safety of the players on the field then it should make sense to us as administrator, coaches and parents. Think about the 10-year-old player and the way in which they play the

game. How many times in a game is the ball literally in the air above the heads of the players? Players at this age and stage of their development are learning to be comfortable with the ball at their feet. As coaches we are asking them to pass accurately, run with the ball at speed, and also to change direction and speed while doing so. Then we are asking them to be creative while ball is at their feet. All of which is what we should be seeking to teach the 10 year old. As I am sure you will all agree, the ball at this age is on the ground 98% of the time. This is where our focus should be. We must earnestly contend that our players are learning to play the game correctly and developing the right skills. For me, while heading is important, it is not the main thing. Coaches, let's use our energy and time keeping the main thing as the main thing for 10 year olds.... That is "competence" with the ball at their feet. AND LEARNING TO LOVE THE GAME.

Second, we must commit ourselves to the education of not only ourselves, but also the education of our players and parents. This begins with us as coaches getting that facts and leaving personal opinions out of the discussion. I cannot tell you about all the "what-if" questions I have been asked. The funny thing is, all these "what if" questions has nothing to do with "Player Safety", but more so with the outcome of a game. Such as "What if a player has a chance to score with winning goal with his/her head in a game? Really?

Food for thought on educating our stakeholders:

- Eliminate punting & teach players how to build out of the back.
- Coaches should continue their professional development on how to teach the game correctly to 10 year olds.
- Educate parents about the joys of development vs. the winning mentality.

- Making Player Safety priority #1

So, I say yes indeed Let's Use Our Heads in understanding that a 10-year old does not need to be heading balls in this beautiful game. There is so much ground to cover in the developing of players that we cannot afford to waste time debating on matters we cannot change. Some of which may prove to be for the betterment of the game.