

# US Women's National Teams Program

## POSITION STATEMENT

### Adult Politics: The Games Adult Leaders Play

#### Issue

Soccer is a GAME played by children, organized and run by adults. There are 5 categories of adult leaders involved in the process:

1. Administrators – adult leaders who are there to facilitate the process and assist all other adult leaders in performing their functions;
2. Coaches-adult leaders who evaluate, select, and train the players technically, tactically, physically, and psychologically and who attempt to create the most positive and competitive environment for athletic and personal growth;
3. Parents-adult leaders whose role is to support and encourage their children and their teammates;
4. Referees-adult leaders who officiate the games and protect the players during competition; and;
5. Sponsors – adult leaders who provide additional resources in support of the efforts to grow the sport and provide opportunities for the players.

The priority of every decision made by these adult leaders in the sport of soccer should be made for the good of the game and for the good of the players who play it. Unfortunately, the decisions made away from the field are often clouded by egos, personal interests, territorial protection, “power” struggles, and profitability. These decisions can often have an extremely negative affect on player growth and development.

Problems arise when the adult leadership entities are in a state of conflict and competition rather than cooperation and their priorities shift from the players to other issues. The struggle for “control” or “power” is dangerous. It exists at all levels - between clubs, associations, groups and individuals.

Financial concerns can also create tension or motivate poor decisions. Budgets are going to influence every decision that is made. Adult leaders find themselves in an extremely tough and stressful position in trying to stay within a budget, and at times, respond to that pressure in ways that stray from the vital priorities. The pressure to get the most for the dollar may inhibit getting what is BEST for the players.

Decisions made based on the pressure from parents with respect to playing time, positions played, scheduling, win-loss record, etc., can also be detrimental to player development. Every parent has a unique interest in their son or daughter and may not see the big picture. All good decisions must be made with the big picture in mind.

Adult leaders and coaches can work for and have allegiance to different organizations possibly with different sponsors and/or different objectives. If the organizations or the sponsors compete against each other, the pressure to please both can greatly influence

priorities. This can also affect finances if sponsors are involved. Leaders again must resolve these conflicts in a way that insures that the players' best interests are at the center of all decisions.

## **Recommendations**

We must admit and realize that there is no real "power" to struggle over and none of us will "control" player development only contribute to or impede it! Adult leaders must make a point to develop relationships with each other based on frequent communication and mutual appreciation. Coaches and administrators must recognize their co-dependence. Competition needs to be on the field among the players, not off the field among the adults.

Set goals as a unified group and plan cooperative efforts to achieve those goals. Composing a mission statement for your own team or organization can be a positive starting point. There is a ceiling/limitation to what can be done due to budget, scheduling restrictions, and limited resources so it is vital that adult leaders come together, prioritize, and devise an affordable plan that has the players' best interest at heart. Brainstorming to problem-solve together is productive and rewarding. When a good decision is made and every party had a part in it, there is unified support for it, compelling drive in implementing it, less jealousy and hunger for power, and more cooperation. Through this process, establish an environment in which an appreciation for the value and importance of each entity can grow. Every facet of adult leadership must realize and appreciate the fact that they all contribute in very important ways. It will take a "leader" amongst you to organize this cooperative effort!

Implement term limits for all leadership positions within your organization. This "turn-over," if carefully planned with overlapping terms, can provide continuity and stability but at the same time insure fresh ideas and continuous enthusiasm. Rotation and promotion can keep good people involved without relying on any one person to "lead" forever. Leading forever can soon become an unrealistic sense of "ownership." Within the leadership plan for the organization, there should be a clear division of responsibilities so that each category of leadership (parents, coaches, administrators, referees, and sponsors) understand their role in achieving the goals of the whole group! However, understand, nothing will be accomplished without a cooperative effort.

## **Rationale**

Adult leaders need to be on 'the' team. Team, by definition, is a group of people committed to a common goal. No entity is more important than the other. We all need each other to succeed. The common goal must be doing all we can for the good of the players and for the good of the game. We all preach to players about what it means to be a team, yet at times, we do not live by and practice these standards. When we can all put our underlying agendas aside for our common goal, we will rise to new heights. It's just a decision to do so. Abraham Lincoln once said, "United we stand; Divided we fall." In order for soccer in America to blossom to it's fullest potential, it is critical that all adult leaders work together with compromise, not conflict; with open minds, not closed ones; and with selflessness, not selfishness.

**"By union the smallest states thrive. By discord the greatest are destroyed." - Sallust**