

The Youth Soccer Coach

Mike Berticelli

You donate your time for the good of our youth,
But you scream and you yell and are often uncouth.

The ref is just twelve and still learning the game,
But you call him a jerk and say he's not sane.

The parents are screaming and follow your lead,
As you sprint up the sideline at uncontrollable speed.

You jump as you yell—"Pass, pass the ball!"
You turn red as you bellow—"Ref, make the darn call!"

"You're the left back, get in your position,
If you don't we might lose and ruin our tradition!"

Positions are needed so we look like a team,
'Cause they're miniature pros, or so it does seem.

The fullback is bored, he picks at his nose,
While the others run wild and kick with their toes.

You scream for a goal, no matter how it goes in,
The skill doesn't matter, just as long as we win!

The parents go crazy as the ball nears the goal,
Their advice and instructions will soon take their toll.

You see, "Junior" feels pressure, he's not having much fun,
We tell him to pass, when to shoot, and to run.

He came here to play and to use his own mind,
'Cause soccer's the most creative game that you'll find.

Imagination is needed on the part of each child,
Solving problems on the field is what makes them go wild.

A week of long practice, while just standing in line,
Waiting to shoot, just using one ball at a time.

This just doesn't cut it, and for some it is too late,
Make your practices fun, don't be the coach that they hate.

They come to "play" soccer, not to work at the game,
Their excitement is something we don't want to tame.

Maradona had moves that are beyond comprehension,
No coach taught those moves while threatening detention!

He learned from his friends, and tried copying others,
While playing in games, without coaches and mothers.

Soccer is different, not like baseball at all,
We don't need positions, just give them the ball.

They, first must learn skill, it's the meat of the game,
If they can't dribble or shoot, then who should we blame?

Skill must be learned through repeated trials,
If motivation is present you will see them run miles.

"Fun games" are the answer to encourage repetition,
They laugh and they scream and enjoy competition.

Without the skill to dribble past an opponent at will,
Your players may win, but their growth will stand still.

I dream of the day when the parents just cheer,
And losing the game doesn't bring out a tear.

When practice is fun, not dull and so boring,
And playing the game means more than just scoring.

I know you mean well, and you donate your time,
But bury your ego, and try something sublime.

Call all the parents, and ask for their aid,
You're teaching their kids and not getting paid.

Your goal's to develop a youngster with skill,
Not a team that must win, or some fancy new drill!

You see players are not judged by their wins and their losses,
Instead they are judged by their shots, heads, or crosses!

Scholarships are given to players with great names,
Not to those who played on youth teams who never lost games.

A pro player gets paid 'cause his skills are real fine,
Not because his team never lost when he was nine.

It's time to bring soccer to new heights in this nation,
The future's in players, not a coaching citation!

Let's start to say "dribble" and stop yelling "Pass!"
You'll then see players go to the head of the class.

I hope you're concerned, but not really offended,
It's the need for more skill that I have defended.

You're giving your all, from the good of your heart,
Why not make sure the kids get the right start?

This poem was written by Mike Berticelli. Former Notre Dame soccer coach, NSCAA Director of Coaching, mentor and good friend. As he now rests peacefully in heaven, his vision and goals are shared by many who believe that American youth soccer can go to a new level.

