

What Makes an Olympic Development (ODP) Player?

By Tom Turner

Many young soccer players are probably wondering what it takes to become an "elite" player at the State Regional or even National ODP level. While some players have good technical skills, others have speed, and still others can kick the ball a long way or are strong in the air. Is it any one thing, which makes a player get noticed?

The answer of course is yes... and no! While some elite players have impressed coaches by doing one or two things better than their peers, others may have impressed by simply being good over a wide range of abilities. The key component for all elite level or ODP players, however, is the ability to control the ball and be comfortable with it when in possession. This is the first thing a coach looks for when evaluating talent: what can the player make the ball do?

The "yes" and "no" answers can be illustrated by comparing the following two teams. The first team has 11 players who work hard to get the ball, but do not have the individual talent to take advantage of their possession and therefore struggle to win games. The second is loaded with individual talent but has no one willing to do the hard work in winning back the ball when it is lost. This team also struggles to win matches. Finding the right blend or balance between the two teams is the key to choosing select team rosters. There needs to be players who work hard to win the ball and there need to be players with the individual talent to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them.

Choosing rosters for the Olympic Development Program, like any other team, is in part a question of balance. Coaches must try to blend the "workers" and the "players", the consistent with the brilliant. The following is a list of terms which identify what coaches look for in "elite" level players. While each coach has his/her own preferences in looking for talent, these components will all be considered in selecting players for ODP teams.

TOUCH ON THE BALL: Does the player have control over the ball with both feet? Can he/she make the ball do what he/she wants while in possession? Does the player look comfortable with the ball under pressure?

BALANCE: Is the players in control of his/her body? Is the player able to change direction in a controlled manner with the ball?

TECHNICAL SPEED: How fast does the player control the ball and play it? Does the player have the ability to use good skill quickly?

COACHABILITY: Can the player carry out a directive from the coach? While many young players are tactically weak, a good player will be coachable, and therefore have the ability to develop good habits?

WORKRATE: Is the player willing to push him/her self to the limits? Does the player attack and defend?

AWARENESS: Does the player see good opportunities to pass/dribble/shoot? Does the player have vision of what's happening on the field or does he/she make the game difficult?

REACTION TO FAILURE: How does the player respond to a bad call or a mistake? Does failure result in a drop in performance?

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: Does the player communicate to others? Does he/she demand the ball? Will they take charge when the game is on the line?

PHYSICAL SPEED: Is the player fast? Does the player have enough speed to be effective without being exploited by opponents?

SIZE & STRENGTH: Is the player physically able to play with bigger opponents? Is the player's size the reason for his/her success (especially at younger ages)?

As you can see, there are many components, which can go into making an "elite" soccer player. Different positions call for different requirements in players' abilities. During the State Olympic Development Program camps, you will learn many new ideas about soccer. It will be a chance to compare your abilities with other players of the same high standard. For those who advance to the Regional teams it is another step towards national team recognition.

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