



WAYS Q&A

What is the philosophy of WAYS?

The mission of WAYS is to promote the enjoyment of soccer, the development of age appropriate individual and team skills, and good sportsmanship. Success at accomplishing this mission at all age and skill levels depends on the joint collaboration of coaches, players, and parents.

Our philosophy is that if kids have fun playing soccer they will want to keep playing. This is the overarching basis for our program. It is not about wins and losses. It IS about how to be part of a team, about sportsmanship and about learning both individual and team skills. Our belief is that in order to accomplish this, our kids must be placed in an environment where they can succeed and where they get lots of positive feedback from parents and coaches alike.

Why does soccer play two seasons in both fall and spring?

We all have different opinions about the direction that youth sports has taken where for example kids are playing some sports all year round or playing multiple sports in the same season. Soccer is a sport that in its simplest form only requires a ball or any object that can be kicked. Perhaps for that reason soccer runs as a common thread through countries all over the world. It is the sport that people all over the world play growing up be it formally on an organized team or just games of keep-a-way. As soccer has grown in popularity in the US it has followed the pattern of the rest of the world where it is played year round.

The Boston Area Youth Soccer League (BAYS), the league Wayland plays in, has both a fall and spring season. And as is the norm across the country, the spring season is the “competition” season when state, regional and national tournaments take place. WAYS participates in both seasons offered. We leave it up to parents and their kids to decide if they want to play both seasons.

Why does WAYS not offer intramural soccer beyond the fall of the 3rd grade year?

There are two reasons. First, Wayland’s size makes it very difficult to offer both intramural and travel soccer and offer good programs for both. Second, and probably most important, we believe that the opportunity to play on an organized team is a true growth experience for kids. In towns where there are both intramural and travel soccer, kids have to try out for the travel teams. In Wayland, everyone plays on a travel team regardless of their level of skill.



What are the WAYS “team formation procedures”?

Prior to the development of our team formation procedures (about eight years ago), there were no procedures in place. Every age group made their own decisions. This led to many kids always playing on the top team and other kids always playing on the least skilled team. Some age groups formed equal strength teams and others formed skill based teams. The President of WAYS was kept very busy at the start of every season fielding parent complaints about their child’s placement.

WAYS decided that there needed to be a common team formation process for all age groups to follow. In the beginning years, the policies were modified from season to season. We continue to review the policies annually and make adjustments. Our procedures reflect our belief in player movement from season to season. Though this can cause heart ache we see no good option that allows kids who deserve the opportunity to play at a higher level that chance. Though we understand that there will never be unanimous agreement on our procedures, most important is to have procedures for all to follow.

Why does WAYS not make equal strength teams at all age levels?

There are two main reasons why we do not make equal strength teams.

First, the league we play in (BAYS) is a skill based league. Each age group has three to four different divisions (skill levels). Their goal is to set up competitive groups within each division so that all games are competitive.

The second reason is that the goal of Wayland Youth Soccer is for all players at all skill levels to experience success. Our experience is that less skilled kid placed onto a highly skilled team lose confidence and in close games frequently do not want to play for fear of making a mistake. If you spend a Saturday watching games being played at different skill levels there is a common theme being played out especially in close games – parents are cheering, kids are putting out their best effort. In short the excitement and challenges of competition are being played in all of these games regardless of skill level.

Some will argue that this approach prevents the less skilled players from getting a chance to improve. Indeed one way to improve is to be challenged. It is for this reason that our team formation procedures call for player movement so that kids on the margin do get the chance not only to get challenged but also to play at a slower pace where they often gain confidence in their skills. But we believe it makes no sense to put the stronger and weaker players on the same team across the board. The stronger players get frustrated. And the weaker players typically lose their confidence and do not get a chance to experience success.



Why do the WAYS team formation procedures require player movement every season from U9 through U12 and then are only “encouraged as appropriate” for U13 and U14.

Our experience is that the U9 through U12 years are the most formative years in player development. As the team formation procedures explain, we believe that kids, who we know develop at different times and speeds, must be given the opportunity to be challenged at a higher skill level. In order for that to happen other kids need to drop down a level. Though kids and often parents do not see it this way initially, our experience is that playing a step down in speed proves to be a positive and beneficial experience. Kids get to play more of a leadership role and gain confidence in their skills. By the U13 and U14 years our experience is that there usually develops more of a differentiation between team skill levels and requiring player movement when there is a clear gap in skills between teams does not make sense. However, we make it clear that if a coach believes that a player really deserves a chance to be challenged at a higher level, then this should happen.

How are placement decisions made to move kids between levels?

This is a two step process. Towards the end of each season all coaches are asked to submit player ratings without consulting with each other. Coaches may not submit ratings for their own child. They are asked to rate their players on a bell curve. They are asked to identify the top 3-4 kids on their team who deserve a chance to play at a higher level. They are also asked to identify 3-4 kids who should be considered to move down a skill level. After the season all coaches are invited to a meeting led by an age group coordinator. All coaches are asked to review the team formation guidelines before the meeting. As a group they work to come up with teams pursuant to the guidelines.

In order to stray from the team formation procedures the age group coordinator must present the issues that the age group is struggling with to the President and appropriate Commissioner for their review and directions.

Why does WAYS not run formal tryouts or evaluation sessions as part of the team formation process?

WAYS used to run age group evaluation sessions at the end of every season. There were many problems. First and foremost, experience was that in the course of an hour or so it was impossible to do any kind of valid evaluation. WAYS hired Mass Premiere Soccer one season to do ratings for a couple of age groups to see if evaluations done by professionals might be a solution. The results (with many of the stronger players getting rated low and some of the weaker players getting rated high) confirmed our suspicion that evaluating a large number of kids over an hour or two created for many kids a high level of anxiety and for us limited information. Our conclusion was and continues to be that the best judge of player skills are the coaches who work with the kids over 10 weeks in both practices and games.



My son is on the 2nd BU11 team but my husband and I think he is better than some of the boys on the 1st team and our friends agree with us. Why is our son not on the 1st team?

The U11 year is the first year when teams are straight skill based (not two equalized teams at each skill level). Players on the top team come from at least two teams from the season prior. Coaches only know the relative performance of the kids they coached the season prior. As our priority is player movement, skilled kids on the second team will get a chance to play at the higher level in following seasons. As team size grows when the kids move from 6v6 to 8v8 play and then to 11v11 kids on different teams get consolidated over time as well. The challenge is to help kids get over the initial disappointment of their placement. Our experience is that once the season begins and kids get to know their new teammates and the team takes shape that kids are resilient and end up having fun playing soccer and their initial disappointment fades.

The WAYS team formation procedures call for equal strength teams at different skill levels for U9 and U10 teams. However, some teams which are supposedly even strength end up in different BAYS sections. Are the teams equal strength or not?

Yes they are!! When we submit placement requests to BAYS we that teams are equal strength and ask placement in either the same or contiguous sections. However, depending on what other towns request the BAYS placement committee is usually not able to satisfy every request. In addition, especially at the younger age levels, differences between sections is random. The skills of teams in for example the division 3B section can easily end up being equal to or weaker than teams in the division 3D or 3E sections. Placement requests and final placements are NOT based on neat mathematical equations!! Every town is making their best guess as to where to place teams. And then BAYS does the best it can do based on the placement requests.

My son played football in the fall and not soccer. What happens to him during the team formation process? I have heard that if a child skips a season he is automatically place on a lower skilled team.

There is no rule that if a child skips a season of soccer that they are to be moved to a lower skilled team. Team formation is driven by multiple variables including registration numbers which translates into the number of teams to be formed. If there is a drop in registrations and that drop has mainly occurred among less skilled kids, then there will be a push downward to fill out the resulting open spaces. Or, if numbers are such that one less team is formed, then that introduces another range of variables. The only time that skipping a season will come into play directly is if final roster decisions come down to the placement of a few kids. If all things are equal the player who has not missed a season will be given preference to play at the higher level.

What should a parent do if there are problems with their child's coach(es)?

We encourage parents to share their concerns by talking directly with coaches. Very often coaches are unaware of problems that might exist or of certain behaviors that are upsetting to your child. Most often parents and coaches can work together to successfully address issues or



concerns that may exist. However, sometimes that is not possible. The WAYS President and Girls and Boys Commissioners are always available to hear your concerns and to follow up as necessary.

What do you mean by "Wag more bark less"?

We believe this motto speaks to what we want our coaches and parents to practice. Our belief is that above all else our emphasis needs to be on having fun, to “wag more and bark less.” Kids keep playing and keep improving when they get constant encouragement and support. Kids stop having fun and stop playing when they are always being yelled at and criticized. The most common complaint about youth sports is that it is all taken too seriously. At all levels of play, including professional, if players are not having fun they will not be successful. There are always exceptions to this rule but the fact is that we always hear about the successful teams being the teams that are loose and have fun. In pro sports results do matter and can influence how much fun a team is having. In youth sports there is no place for such an emphasis on winning.

What is the zero tolerance rule?

This is a BAYS rule that prohibits talking to the referees. There are two issues.

First and foremost, most of our referees are young kids in middle school and high school. Being a referee can be very intimidating. Overzealous coaches, parents and players (perhaps influenced by what they see at the college and pro levels) have on many occasions led to young Wayland referees quitting, never to ref again.

Second, in Wayland we prioritize good sportsmanship. In our view yelling at a referee is not good sportsmanship. We encourage our coaches and through them our kids to worry about what they can control – their own play. Soccer is a game of mistakes. Referees are no exception. They can only call what they see. And what they see is subject to their knowledge and interpretation of the rules.

Anyone who violates the zero tolerance rule will be disciplined up to and including, in the case of coaches, dismissal.