Twitter Thread by Money Grab FC



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@MoneyGrabFC

I completely agree. Remember that talent is distributed evenly, whereas opportunity is not. In the US, you have to buy opportunity, you don't earn it. Is it a governance problem or a mindset problem? Bit of both.

Gather round boys and girls! It's thread time!

> First, thanks for engaging. As far as the kids, maybe use a different word to describe them? IMHO, far too many kids in the US could become brilliant soccer players or musicians or scientists but never have a chance because of the system. How do we fix that?
>
> — Brian Urbancic (@SciGroupie) January 16, 2021

Where do we start? It's hard to say, as they're all priorities, and we would be fighting on many different fronts. These points will be addressed in no particular order.

Our first stop takes us to Iceland. In the US, there are so many unqualified coaches working with youths. Even many DOCs have low or no licenses. We need to get more licensed coaches, and higher licensed coaches, in front of our kids.

https://t.co/I4ZkCZIF4a

> "It exploded when we got the Uefa badges,' he explains. "Everyone wanted the little ID that you can keep ir your wallet to show people you were a Uefa-licensed coach. We found that was really encouraging."
>
> The KSÍ used a carrot-and-stick approach to secure the support of Icelandic clubs. A licensing system made it mandatory for them to educate their coaches.
>
> If, for example, the champions did not have a licensed coach in charge of their U14s, then the first team would not be allowed to defend their title.

In most countries, a coach cannot work at a particular level without a license. That's a huge barrier in the US, because of the way coaching courses are taught. They are expensive, centralized, costly, time consuming. It prevents coaches getting them.

Spain has about fifteen thousand pro or A licensed coaches. That's simple. Hold more courses, in more convenient locations. And with the advancements in technology, so much more can be done online. Coaches won't have to fly across the country several times.

While we're in Spain, let's take a few ideas from there. First will be their youth league structure. At teenage years, they do something very different than the US, in two ways. And they only work if both done together.

https://t.co/jHhm3a9eip

1. Go to two year age brackets. U16 and U15 play together. U18 and U17 play together.

2. Have no more than three teams per club. Operate as an A, B, C team.

A good U13 player can move into the B or A team, to be challenged by better players, likely a year older.

It also allows for late maturers to play down longer against other kids that are more in their range physically. A short, skinny, slow U14 can be moved to the C team. Likely they will play with slightly smaller kids, so then they can get more time on the ball.

Clubs and coaches will have to work together, unlike the free for all Money Grab clubs in the US, that have six to ten teams per age group, that operate as individual teams that happen to be in the same uniform.

It's not about winning, but placing players in better environments.

These leagues also have promotion and relegation, and no team is allowed more than one team per division. So if you're B team wins Division 2, they stay there. Otherwise, the big clubs will saturate the top division with the A, B, C teams.

Without such a limit, the big clubs would just begin to dominate, and would become the default place for most kids to play. They start to monopolize the market in the area, as all the parents want to take their kids there. Happens all the time in America.

If Rush, GPS, Surf etc. all have three teams in the top division, it destroys other smaller clubs. That destroys competition and accountability. That means the Money Grab clubs don't have to work hard to be good, they simply vacuum up all players in the area.

And if you have enough kids in your club, law of averages state some of them might turn out to be good. Your club then parades them as proof that the system works.

The other thing they do in Spain which we need to do immediately is that they wait longer to go bigger. In the USA, we're in such a rush to get to the adult game. 4 foot tall kids defend eight foot tall goals.

Why?

Because it's not about the kids, but adult entertainment.

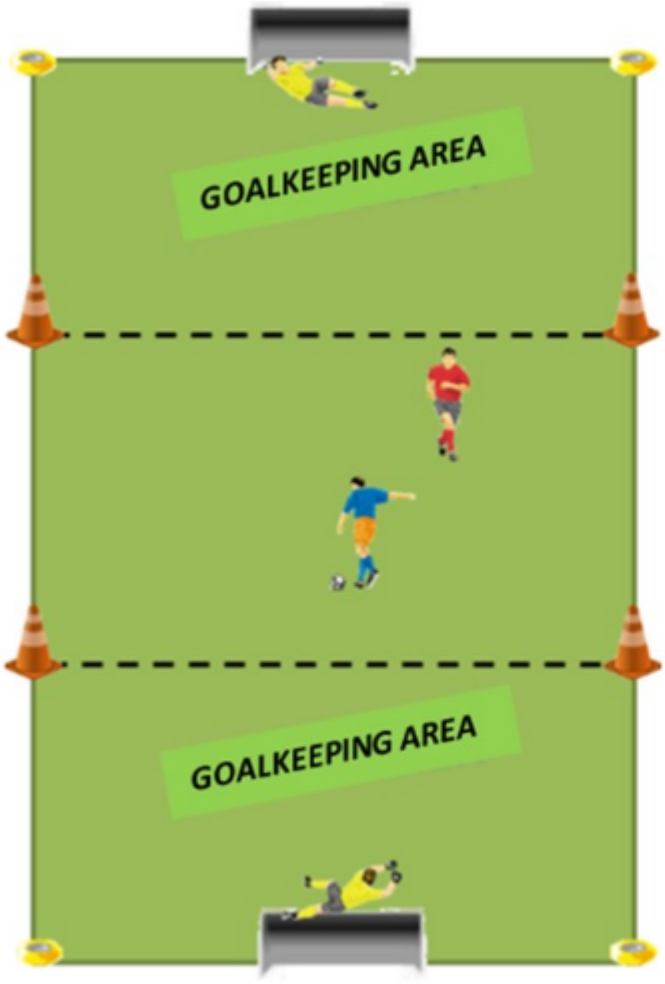
Smaller team sizes, smaller pitch dimensions, smaller goals.

U13s playing 11v11 on a full sized adult pitch allows the big kids to shoot from distance with a toe punt and score easily over the keeper's flailing arms. It doesn't teach shooting, it teaches hoofing.

With the massive fields, soccer becomes about speed, size, strength, Get your big kid to boot it into the vast space, get your fast kid to run onto it. Repeat, score, win. And in order to keep winning, those players are valued, those actions are reinforced. Nobody learns.

Belgium also has great ideas in this regard. Particularly at the younger ages, the game has to have a more individualized approach. American kids are already playing dump and chase at U6/7 in 5v5. They're not learning to dribble, pass, or shoot.

https://t.co/yZ8LlqnFk0



2v2 Format: this includes the nominated fly-keeper who can handle the ball in his area

Goal: 3 m width x 1,5 m height

Goalkeeping area: 6m

Pitch: 10-12.5 m x 16.5-18 m

Playing time: 2x 3 min (+1 min half time)

Maximum 6 games per child per festival

(=max 60 min)

No throw-in, just dribble in and play
(defender stand 3 m away)

No corner kicks
Kick off after a goal: opponents in their goalkeeping area

My recommendation is always use age minus four as a guideline. A 13 year old should be playing 9v9, for example. Don't go to 11v11 until 15.

@markstkhlm Is a good follow, and asks the question; if we started from scratch and redesigned youth sport with the wants and needs of the kids in mind, would it resemble what we're doing now? In America, definitely not.

What do kids want? @CTGProjectHQ Is another good follow. Here's their article.

They want to play. They want to be with friends. In The US, we keep them on the bench, and separate them from their friends based on perceived levels of "ability."

https://t.co/94EDmUX5iT.

When Amanda Visek of George Washington University asked children in 2014 why they played sports, 9 out of 10 said because it was fun. When asked what made sports fun, here were their top answers:

1. Trying your best
2. When the coach treats a player with respect
3. Getting playing time
4. Playing well as a team
5. Getting along with teammates
6. Being active

Much farther down the list we find winning (48), playing in tournaments (63), private training with specialized coaches (66), and my favorite, taking team pictures (81). In a nutshell, kids want excitement, support, and positive interactions with their peers and the adults. Those things bring enjoyment.

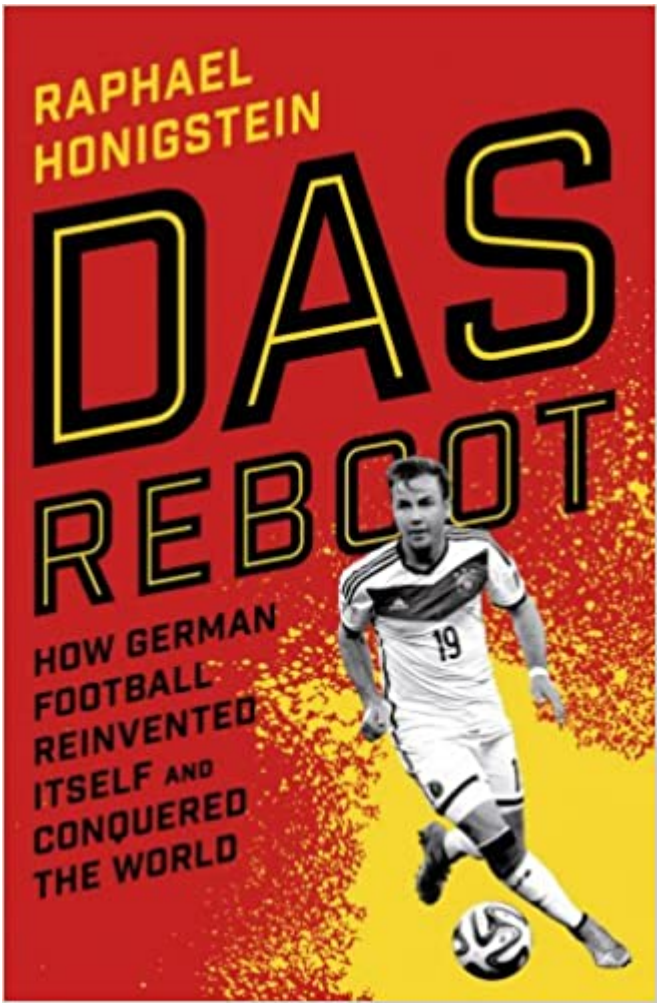
Further age specific research by Paul McCarthy and Marc Jones has found that poor coaching and punishment for mistakes take the enjoyment away for younger children, while peer rivalries, overemphasis on winning, and excessive training and expectations suck the enjoyment out of sport for older athletes. Does any of this sound familiar, if not with your child in sports, perhaps in your own job?

With those answers in mind, let's consider the pitch dimensions. Kids want to have the ball, they want to be involved in the play, and they want to score goals. The way we play now, some kids go long periods of time without touching the ball.

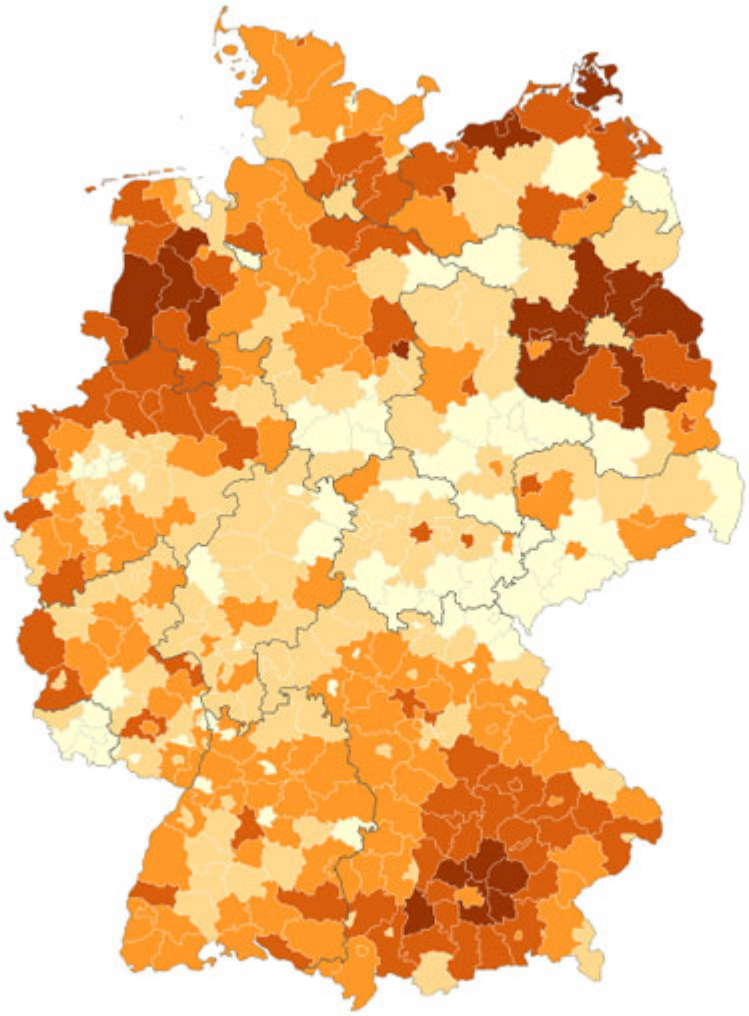
The constraints of the game mean that the bigger faster kids, the early maturers, dominate. Play 3v3, 5v5, 7v7 until later ages, on smaller pitches, with more appropriate sized goals, and more kids are involved, they get more touches, and everyone scores lots of goals.

This goes hand in hand with kids experiencing more game actions. They interact with the ball, their teammates, and opponents way more frequently in these circumstances. It's even shown with adults, preferring indoor 5v5/6v6 to 11v11. Around 5x as many touches on the ball.

Now we'll go to Germany, and look at the lessons from this book. Mario Gotze, the guy on the cover, scored the winning goal at the 2014 World Cup final. Had Germany not changed their youth soccer system, he would never have been found.



Here's a population density map of Germany. Like in most countries, population isn't evenly spread. Many live close to big cities, few live in rural areas. But when you're competing with Spain, France, Brazil etc. for titles, no talent can be wasted.



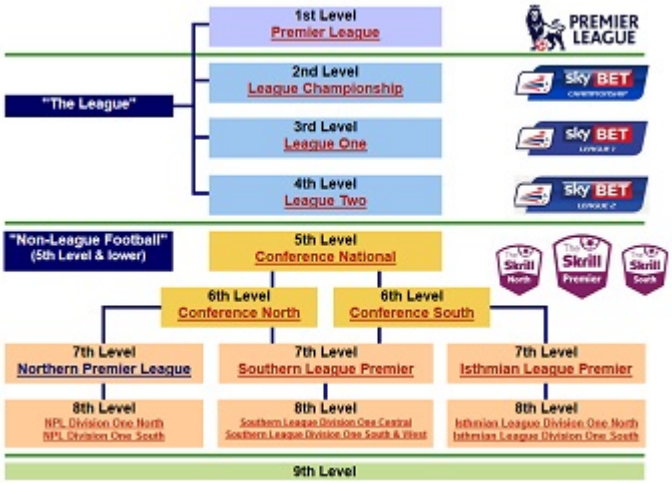
If you were to eliminate the most pale areas, you may lose 5-10% of your population. It doesn't sound like much, but at the top level, these marginal gains count. Mario Gotze came from an area that was overlooked and underserved by the DFB. Until they changed things.

Couple this with what they did in Iceland. Get more qualified coaches out there. Give every kid access to a minimum of a B licensed coach. And in the rural areas? Do what the Germans did. Once or twice weekly, hold USSF sanctioned development centers.

You could probably cover 99% of the population, and have those kids within a 30 minute drive of training with a B licensed coach. Make the development centers invite only, make them either free or affordable. Do not run them as a team that competes in leagues.

This gets kids in front of good coaches, which has major benefits. The kids get better coaching, and more soccer sessions. The USSF sanctioned coaches get to keep an eye on the local talent, feedback good players to the USSF, and adjust training to the demands of the kids.

And now we'll go to England. The USA needs to adopt a true soccer pyramid with promotion and relegation. Without this, you'll never get a Hoffenheim or Leipzig promoted to the top division. You'll never get a Blackburn Rovers winning the league.



A closed system such as MLS, USL, and NWSL discriminates against people who don't live close to a big city. They can't invest, support, grow, and develop the team from their town, because there is nowhere for them to go. They win the league and stay there. So what's the point?

The way it's done in the US now also aids the academy monopoly. The only way to go pro is to be near a DA team. Not everybody is, and the ones who aren't cannot earn a DA team. Because their local club, if there is one, cannot get promoted to a national league.

Even in big cities that can handle multiple DA or ECNL teams, the boards can veto other local applicants, handing monopolies in regions to clubs. This makes that designated club the default club. They vacuum all the youth players.

They're the only game in town. Nobody can compete with them, hold them accountable, or hold them to a standard. So they start to do a mediocre job, because they can get away with it. Introduce a local rival to hold their feet to the flame, and watch them rapidly improve.

McDonald's needs Burger King. Coke needs Pepsi. Without them, they can start to offer inferior service, and we will have no alternative.

Another thing we need to introduce from England is their Charter Standard clubs initiative. Youth clubs have to adhere to certain criteria, and are given accolades for doing so.

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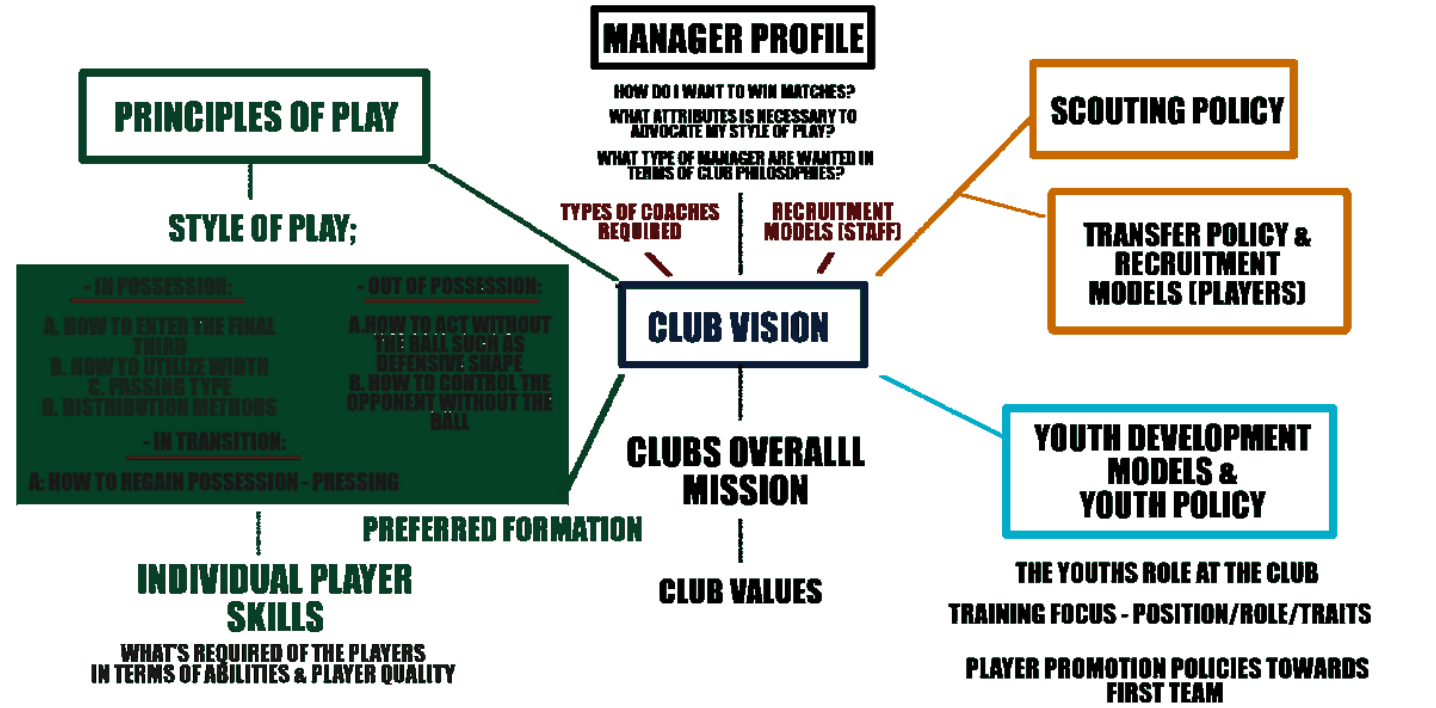


It can be about safeguarding, facilities, coaching, parents etc. But if you're looking for a place to take your kids, you can see which clubs have been awarded for practicing what they preach. All US youth clubs talk the same nonsense about development and holistic environment.

Very few actually do it. In England, the Charter Standard allows you to check out and see if a club practices what they preach. I think in America we're just too used to being lied to and let that we don't care anymore.

I would also introduce other quality controls. Clubs can't just be free for alls. A collection of middle aged emotionally stunted dads trying to recapture their youth.

Publish a philosophy, methodology, mission statement etc. Then be audited every couple of years.



There's lots of different ways to play and to develop. What's yours? Let's see if you actually do it, and how good are you at doing it? We need to move away from serving the aspirations of the adults to serving the needs of the kids.

What else is missing? Let's have a look at economically deprived countries that still outperform the USA, even with all the advantages America has.

Their kids play.
They play a lot.
They play with freedom.



The US certainly has enough resources to build plenty of urban and suburban soccer spaces, in parks, streets, and on rooftops. There's many good initiatives already building inner city futsal courts. But the way kids are raised these days, they're taught to fear the outside.

With more places to play, perhaps with some adults around to keep things safe, we can start to create a nationwide pickup culture, rather than simply in the small pockets. Very few American kids play soccer without adult intervention.

They don't play at recess, they don't meet with their friends after school to play in the park, they don't go to the park with their friends on weekends. All their time is scheduled and organized by their parents. They don't get to be kids.

With this, I would also talk about clubs' responsibilities to educate parents. Tell them, show them, include them in what you're doing. Tell them why you're giving equal playing time and playing short from goal kicks. And if they don't like it, be brave enough to cut loose.

Hope this has given some idea into what needs to change, and what can easily be implemented. I'm sure more ideas will come to me over the next few days, which I will add to this thread.