

## High School vs. Club Soccer: The Battle Rages On!

There is an ugly battle taking place in youth soccer in this country and there are no winners, only losers. And the losers are teenage soccer players.

I speak, of course, of the battle for players between high school coaches and club coaches.

Today, nearly every soccer player in high school plays club ball. Many of these clubs play games during the high school season, especially the elite club. As such, coaches from these elite clubs often recommend that the players do not play high school ball -- or, at the very least, do not go all out during high school games.

By the same token, high school coaches have a disdain for club coaches and club soccer in general.

We need to end this battle as soon as possible because the ones most affected by this are the players. Granted, players at the elite clubs will play a higher level of competition and get, for the most part, better training. This is not to say that high school soccer is not competitive.

Here in New Jersey, the Shore Conference offers a tremendous level of competition for both girls and boys. I've seen a good share of matches and can tell you the level of play is outstanding. But is it better than what you will see at a college showcase tournament? Most times, no.

Rarely do you see college coaches flock to high school games. For obvious reasons, they attend the college showcase where on one field you can see many prospects as opposed to just one or two at a high school match.

This where the high school coaches disdain for club coaches and club ball originates. My feeling is that too many high school coaches think their club counterparts look down upon them. That might be true in some cases but not all.

There are many, many outstanding high school coaches. But too many of these coaches look down upon club players for no other reason than these players love playing club ball.

Somehow, we must find a way to get the high school coach and the club coach to work together. I was able to do that with the girls on my club team that I coached. No, we were not an elite club team but we did play in college showcases and several of my girls are currently playing in college. But the girls who did play for me while in high school were lucky to have a high school coach who was not against club ball. Colts Neck (NJ) High School Coach Dave Irvine actually would attend some of our club games.

Perhaps it was because he knew that I promoted high school ball and I continue to do so with the many players that I train. Having played high school soccer (for an incredibly horrible, winless team, by the way), I know how much fun it can be. I know how great an experience it can be.

We need our club coaches to promote high school ball. We need high school coaches to take an interest in their players' club seasons.

Fortunately, the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) is doing a great job of getting these two combatants together. The United States Soccer Federation needs to jump into the fray on the NSCAA's side.

Getting high school coaches to accept club ball and vice versa will result in a win-WIN result. The coaches will "win" because they will benefit from the year-round training the players will get.

The big "WIN" though goes to the players. And isn't that what it is supposed to be all about!