

YSC / UNION YOUTH ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

THE UNION

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The Philadelphia Union Academy U18 and U16 Teams Competed in the Development Academy Winter Showcase

The Union Academy U18 and U16 teams competed in the 2014 Development Academy Winter Showcase in Lakewood Ranch, Florida in the week following Thanksgiving. The showcase is an exciting, yet challenging, tournament for the teams. The players eagerly anticipate the opportunity to play against the country's best competition, while they manage the physical stress of playing three games in four days and the potential psychological stress of playing in front of hundreds of coaches and scouts.

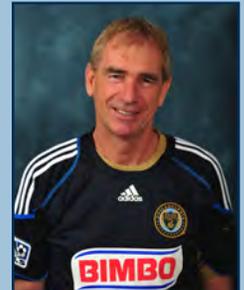
The Showcase affords teams the chance to play against opponents that are not in their conferences or divisions. The Union Academy teams competed against:

U18:

- Seattle Sounders
- Real Salt Lake
- St. Louis Scott Gallagher Missouri

U16:

- Seattle Sounders
- San Jose Earthquakes
- Beachside Soccer Club



In my previous article, I spoke about the four qualities a player needs to possess in order to get to the top: ability, desire, luck and nerve. Along with those four qualities, it is important that players know the difference between ambition and expectation.

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UNION ACADEMY UPDATE

While this is a good opportunity for players to test themselves against new and difficult competition, it is a physically taxing tournament. Garrison Draper, Director of Sport Science for the Union Academy, worked to physically prepare the Union Academy players for the challenge. "From a physical performance point of view," Draper stated, "these showcases are extremely difficult. With the help of some of our world-class technology from Catapult Sports, as well as monitoring body weight fluctuations during the tournament, we were able to track how our players were performing and responding to the tournament conditions." This information helps Draper, and Athletic Trainer Jeff Apple, understand how the players feel and what their recovery needs are in order to ensure that they have an opportunity to compete to their full potential.



"The Union" Newsletter

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Draper was certainly not the only person preparing the players for the Showcase. Auston Trusty, U16 player, discussed how his coaches, Head Coach Jeff Cook and Assistant Coach Phil Karn, prepared the team to compete. "Leading into the Showcase, coaches made training a little more intense and it was a lot more focused on getting ready for the Showcase," Trusty explained. "We were focused on preparing to perform well, which we did. We won two out of three games."

One factor that could have contributed to that success was not feeling too much pressure to perform on such a high stage. "I didn't feel pressure playing in front of so many coaches and scouts," Trusty continued. "The only pressure I felt was basically just winning or losing. The coaches make us learn to just play our game. They tell us that if we play our game, coaches will find us."

The sport psychology department also helps the players try to prepare for events like this. The players learn to create pre-performance routines, which help to alleviate stress and boost confidence and focus, independent of the location or conditions of competition. The players also learn about the value of recovering quickly from the highs and lows during games and remaining focused on the present moment in order to perform at their best.

In terms of the physical impact the games had on the players, Draper logged several notable statistics:

"The physical performance results were very impressive," Draper said. **"A large majority of our players covered between 20 and 30km — over 18 miles — during the three-game event, with our top players covering closer to 40 km, which is nearly a marathon."** Draper continued, **"our top performing players during the weekend performed well over 1,000 high intensity accelerations or decelerations, ran at over 20 mph, and made over 100 high intensity 90° turns."**

(For more information on the players' physical preparation and results, see the Sport Science section)

Besides the staggering physical results the staff gathered, players like Auston Trusty also learned valuable lessons. When asked what he took away from the tournament experience, Trusty explained, "finding the will to win and really fighting to win was something I learned. When we were down in the second game, we were all scrambling and trying to come back. We got a goal, but lost another and that kind of shut us down. But, we fought and fought throughout the whole game." This effort and perseverance is what all staff and players involved in the Union Academy expect of the players.



YSC ACADEMY UPDATE

YSC Academy Students Get a Visit from Daniel Keat, Professional Soccer Player



On Tuesday, December 9th, YSC Academy students had the pleasure of meeting and talking with Daniel Keat, professional footballer with Falkenbergs FF, a team in Sweden's premier League, Allsvenskan. Keat, native to New Zealand, has earned himself a long career thus far in the sport of soccer. Playing for New Zealand's National Team, as well as for LA Galaxy in the MLS, he worked his way to the professional ranks in Sweden. On this journey, Keat earned a degree while playing soccer at Dartmouth College for now Union Academy U16 Head Coach Jeff Cook, who was the Head Coach for the Dartmouth Men's Soccer team for 12 years.



Cook, proud of the work Keat has accomplished, provided the students with a detailed introduction to the perseverance Keat has displayed throughout this career in order to get to where he is today. For example, after earning a position on New Zealand's Olympic team during his time at Dartmouth, Keat suffered a knee injury that forced him to miss his opportunity to compete on the highest athletic stage and represent his country. He also dealt with rejections from team after team as he tried to break into professional soccer in Europe.

His efforts and his experiences – both positive and negative – are good lessons for the students to learn. As usual, the students were very engaged in the discussion, asking a range of questions.

Questions for Keat:	Keat's Responses at a Glance:
How did you handle playing different positions?	Smart players make themselves useful to coaches and adapt to what the coach and team need from them.
Why did you choose Dartmouth College?	Dartmouth provided an opportunity to get a good education and play good football. As a college student, I grew as a person and expanded my perspective on life, and I'm grateful to have earned a degree to fall back on.
What advice can you give aspiring players?	Be yourself with what you want to do in the classroom and on the field. Be confident in your abilities as a person, first and foremost.
What were the hardest obstacles you faced?	Injuries were not the hardest because I had a plan. My biggest setback was getting cut from my U17 National Team. It was mentally hard because I couldn't control it. My advice is to not let things you cannot control affect your confidence; believe in yourself.
What is it like playing against world-class players?	It is incredible to play against great players and to see how they deal with situations off the field. You can take things from their game and apply it to your own.



COACHING EDUCATION

Competitive Coordination Games: Creating Better Soccer-Playing Athletes

YSC Academy continues to redefine what it means to participate in physical education. The state of Pennsylvania holds its public school students to select standards and physical competencies, which must be met and maintained while progressing through the public school system. Upon reviewing and researching of these standards, the Athletic Development Training (ADT) coaches at YSC have adopted a new format and platform for physical education at YSC Academy known as "Competitive Coordination Games," or CCG's. This platform of physical education is tailored to the highly athletic pool of student-athletes at YSC Academy and is consistent with the school's and Union Academy's core belief to continue to challenge the soccer players to become "better soccer-playing athletes."

Pictured here is an example of a competitive coordination game. On the ADT gymnastics floor, a small circular trampoline is propped up vertically in each of the four corners. On the floor around each trampoline is a small ring of cones to set a boundary. The purpose of the game is to earn points by bouncing the ball off of the trampoline and having it hit the floor outside of the ring of cones without a member of the opposing team snatching the ball out of the air or sending it out of bounds. Two teams compete against each other, trying to score their own points while also blocking the other team from scoring.



ADT Coach Anthony Greco worked on creating CCG's and developed the games very deliberately.

Competitive: Students are tested to play "in the moment" and are asked to make critical in-game decisions constantly, they also need to prepare strategically for success. In the outline of the rules, ADT coaches planned the games to require students to strive for creative ways to achieve success. Teamwork is crucial for winning in all team sports and the games are used to test communication and teamwork in unique sport settings. The ADT coaches want students to figure out the best way to win by communicating and collaborating in order to work together as a unit.

Coordination: Every element of sport is considered when implementing the games. Eye/hand coordination, eye/foot coordination, spatial awareness, manipulation of objects, depth perception, and field awareness are all themes seen throughout the games. Rules, equipment, and movements are taken from all areas of sport and combined uniquely to deliver a truly one-of-a-kind sport experience. Students are asked to learn a multitude of movements across all sport platforms and to piece them together to solve the games.

Games: The games are athletic puzzles. The rules of each game allow students the freedom to develop their own strategic thought processes, and with time, the games grow more challenging. Each game is meant to be won and all students are expected to compete for success.

When creating curricula for CCG's, ADT coaches seek to push the students out of their comfort zones and challenge them to relate the curricula back to real-game scenarios seen on the field. ADT coaches have adapted previous physical education lesson plans focused simply playing baseball, basketball, or football, for example, to reflect the true elements of sport, such as proprioception, coordination, gymnastics, bracing, balance, and agility. With these core concepts, games can be molded to suit the needs of increased athletic performance.



SPORT SCIENCE

Development Academy Winter Showcase: Sport Science Approach

The Philadelphia Union Academy's goal as a club during tournaments like the Development Academy Winter Showcase is to give the players the best opportunity to succeed, and collecting physical performance data is extremely important in understanding how to help them perform. The best way to help these players perform is by examining every possible variable the staff can control. These variables include nutrition, work loads, and sleep, to name a few.

Nutrition is a key element of the recovery process and the sport science staff and coaching staff take it seriously. The staff know the players cover an immense amount of ground in tournaments like these, and perform a large amount of high intensity activities, so from a nutrition standpoint, the staff advise players to fuel plenty and fuel often. As a general rule, players are not allowed to go more than approximately two and a half hours without eating something, and they are provided three full meals during the day, with each menu designed to meet the players' needs based on timing in relation to games. For example, following games, meals consist of very high amounts and varying types of protein (meats, cheeses, sauces, etc.), while meals on days off contain higher levels of healthy fats.

Hydration is another important element of proper nutrition for recovery. Union Academy Athletic Trainer, Jeff Apple, is in charge of weighing each player before and after competitions. Based on the amount of weight lost following a match, there is a requisite amount of water the player must replenish before game time the next day. This protocol ensures that each player approaches the next game re-hydrated, which reduces his risk for injury and optimizes his potential for performance. During tournament play, sport science staff and coaches have found that players who have not recovered to baseline weights following a match have a much larger decline in physical performance than players who return to baseline weights following matches. This was vitally important during the Showcase, in particular, as the temperatures the teams were performing in were greater than 40°F higher than the temperatures in which they prepared. This means that sweat rates were much higher and the composition of their sweat was much different from how they had prepared throughout the preparation period leading to this tournament.

There are other protocols the staff utilize to aid in recovery following a match, such as pool sessions, to ensure optimal performance in the next match. Pool sessions are extremely useful in the recovery process because they are multifaceted. Hydrostatic pressure aids in improving blood flow by creating pressure gradients, while also reducing the compressive forces during activity, which allows players to complete movements without incurring too much extra stress from landing. While cold water is not necessary for recovery pool sessions, when it is available, the staff utilize it to reduce the player's "Rating of Perceived Soreness" (a scale Union Academy players use to rate how they feel following matches).

The most important aspect of recovery is rest. During tournaments as demanding as the Showcase, it is important that players sleep more than their typical eight to nine hours per day, because sleep is when recovery and regeneration of muscle and bone tissue occurs at the greatest rate. The Union Academy teams were fortunate that the game schedule for this tournament allowed the players to sleep in and eat at least one good meal before they had to start preparing for the match. As the tournament unfolded, this was vital in the recovery of performance scores back to near baseline levels.

Variables to Consider:

- Nutrition
 - Fuel plenty and fuel often
 - Plan meals based on timing of physical activity
 - Hydrate before, during, and after playing
 - Post-performance hydration is dependent on weight lost through sweating during performance
- Work Loads
 - Monitor output and plan recovery methods accordingly
 - "Rating of Perceived Soreness"
- Sleep
 - Aim to get more hours of sleep per night than usual
 - Allows for regeneration of muscles and bone tissues



SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Tips to Improve Your Competitive Edge

Some players are intensely competitive and others struggle to consistently have killer instinct on the field. Being a competitive player, though, can help you realize your athletic potential. Competitiveness can fuel you to fight to beat an opponent or beat your personal best. Your competitive drive can help you push through immense fatigue, continue to challenge yourself to improve day in and day out, and welcome competitive games with excitement and a smile on your face. It can help you recover from small mistakes and bounce back from larger obstacles.

If you want to improve your competitive edge, the first step is identifying your motivation to compete. What drives you? To help you answer this question, think about your responses to the following:

- How motivated are you to achieve your goals and reach your personal best?
- How motivated are you to defend your (or your team's) previous titles or accomplishments?
- How motivated are you to prove your skill and ability to coaches, teammates, and/or parents?

Your responses to these questions will help you identify some of the factors that motivate you to continue to push yourself to train hard and compete. For example, if you noticed that you certainly do want to prove yourself to coaches and teammates, then you might be motivated by pride and earning respect. You might be intrinsically motivated if you recognized that you are very driven to achieve personal goals and beat personal bests. You also might have noticed that you are motivated by some combination of all of those factors – and perhaps more – which is a good thing. Having various sources of motivation can help you sustain the physical and mental effort it takes to be a truly competitive player.

Once you identify your sources of motivation, taking pride in your training and preparation can help you develop into the best – and most competitive – player you can be. You can use these sources to your advantage, using them as encouragement when you play. To ensure that you are prepared to play at your best, develop a routine that helps you get both physically and mentally prepared. Besides getting equipment, gear, water, and snacks prepared, use your routine as a way to remind yourself of some of your sources of motivation. Repeat them in your head to help you get focused and mentally energized to compete.

Also, in order to take pride in your training, hold yourself accountable for your efforts and actions. Identify the goals you want to complete that will help you make strides in achieving your competitive objectives, and reflect on your training daily to make sure that you are doing what you need to do to stay on track. If you are already doing what you need to do to stay on track, keep it up. If not, hold yourself accountable and make the necessary adjustments to get yourself back on your path to your outcome goals.

Improve Your Competitive Edge:

Identify your motivation

Take pride in training

Focus on the process

Finally, focusing on the process of performing – rather than the outcome – during competition will help you to develop a fierce competitive drive. Staying focused on the process allows you to recover quickly from mistakes and to remain aware of what is going on around you, and allows you to enjoy your experience competing more because you are not preoccupied with winning or losing throughout the whole game. All of these factors help you be a stronger competitor in the moment. It can also help you manage any stress you might be experiencing as you compete. This stress might come from being excited, overwhelmed, or nervous about the upcoming competition. To manage it, use a centering breath. Before you play or at a stoppage in play, inhale through your nose, taking the breath down into your stomach. Exhale slowly out of your mouth. Doing this helps you feel calmer and more focused because you stay focused on your breathing rather than the stress you are feeling. This can help you compete and perform at your best. Another strategy to use to stay focused on the process of the competition is to be aware of your goals and objectives as you start each game (similar to how you take pride in your training). This will bring your focus to the present moment and help you concentrate on specific tasks you want to accomplish in order to continue progressing with your goals. As you play, particularly during games, there may be times when you find yourself thinking about whether you will win or lose, or whether you will reach your desired outcome. Use refocusing cues to help bring your mind back to the present moment and focus on the process of playing. To do this, repeat short words or phrases to yourself, such as “Let it go, next play” or “Here and now.”

As with your physical training, practice these skills consistently in order to improve your competitive edge.



RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Sport Psychology Staff member Ryan Sappington, M.S., is completing a Master's thesis examining the coach-athlete relationship, and investigating how preferred and perceived coaching styles impact a player's psychological needs, motivation, and burnout. The study is also examining a player's psychological coping skills in order to determine how these skills interact with perceived coaching styles to impact the player.

The study will help evaluate the effectiveness of relationships between players and coaches in the Union Academy and results will provide insight into the preferences players have for coaching styles, as well as whether certain styles are more effective for certain players, depending on their psychological coping skills. Dr. Cristina Fink and Emily Galvin, M.S., will put the information to use as they continue to work with players and coaches on performance enhancement.

On November 8th and 9th, Bill Knowles, HP Sports Director of Athletic Development, was invited to be the featured speaker at a Finnish Coaches Association Seminar in Helsinki and Tampere, Finland. Knowles was the featured speaker on reconditioning and athletic development. Presenting for eight hours each day, Knowles worked with sport coaches, strength and conditioning coaches, and sport physiotherapists in both classroom and practical settings.

On December 6th, Knowles presented a lecture and practical session at the Perform Better 1 Day Learn By Doing Seminar in Fairlawn, NJ. Knowles was one of four speakers, all of whom were international experts in their respective fields. At this seminar, Knowles presented to sport coaches, athletic trainers, personal trainers, physical therapists, and strength coaches.

In November, Dr. Cristina Fink traveled to Spain to participate in two conferences. In Barcelona, she participated in two round table discussions at the International Congress of Psychology Applied to Football (Soccer) and Team Sports. She discussed applied sport psychology work with soccer academies, alongside Jaime Sabate (RCD Espanol), Alejo Garcia (Atletico de Madrid), and Tofol Villalonga (C.E. Constancia). Those in attendance were interested in and impressed with the work Dr. Fink and the Sport Psychology Staff do with the Union Academy program and asked many follow-up questions to learn more. Dr. Fink also discussed sport psychology in professional football with panelists including Eusebio Sacristan (former famous footballer, now coach for Barcelona B, second division) and Emili Vicente (former footballer for UE Lleida, now coach for Lleida Esportiu, second division).

Dr. Fink then traveled to Madrid to present at the International Seminar on Sport Injuries: Psychology, Medicine and other Sciences conference. She spoke in a round table discussion about the work HP Sports does helping injured athletes return to play. This includes integrating reconditioning techniques from Bill Knowles, Director of Athletic Development for HP Sports, with sport psychology techniques and skills.



In December, Dr. Fink traveled to Florida to continue her work with U.S. Soccer as a presenter at the coaching courses for coaches earning their B License through U.S. Soccer. Dr. Fink's involvement with the coaching licensure process demonstrates the importance of valuing the mental side of soccer and encouraging the development of the art of coaching.



RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

The Philadelphia Union Academy Buys SmartGoals:

The Philadelphia Union Academy became the first club in the United States to purchase and implement SmartGoals, a state-of-the-art training tool developed in the Netherlands to accelerate player learning and development.

Pictured here, SmartGoals consists of two cone-like lights (a varying distance apart) that form a goal line. The cones in one pair light up to indicate that the player's task is to pass the ball through the cones to turn the lights off. At that moment, another pair lights up to indicate the same objective.



The players are required to react quickly, remain focused and aware, and pass with accuracy in order to succeed.

SmartGoals can be used in drills to enhance positioning, skill acquisition, and finishing, to name a few.

Players from the youth level (pictured left) to the academy level (pictured above) and beyond can benefit from this training tool.

YSC teamed up with Team TEN, a lacrosse program in Tredyffrin Township, to enhance the overall development of the youth players. Team TEN includes three boys teams of players in fifth, sixth, and seventh grades.

For eight weeks in the fall, the players flocked to YSC to have on-field training sessions with their own township coaches. The sessions included work with the Athletic Development Training Coaches for the first four weeks, and with the Sport Psychology Staff for the final four weeks. In all, the eight-week program was a comprehensive opportunity for youth players to develop their physical and mental skills on and off the field while training with their own coaches and teammates.



For the final week, the players in the sport psychology session had a special visit from professional player Kevin Crowley. Crowley, originally from Canada, plays for the Major League Lacrosse team the New England Black Wolves (formerly Philadelphia's team, the Philadelphia Wings). Over the summer, he was instrumental in earning his native Canada a gold medal victory over the U.S. in the world championship. Crowley attended the sport psychology session to speak with the players about the importance of the mental side the game and to allow players to ask him questions about his development, his career, and his physical and mental training. Team TEN's opportunity to train at YSC and utilize its state-of-the-art facilities and knowledgeable staff is hopefully the first of many opportunities for teams in the future.



FINAL THOUGHTS BY IAIN



Valuing Ambition Over Expectations In Order to Get to the Top

In my previous article, I spoke about the four qualities a player needs to possess in order to get to the top: ability, desire, luck and nerve. Along with those four qualities, it is important that players know the difference between ambition and expectation. There are 350 million people living in the United States. Currently there are 17 MLS clubs throughout the country. Of those clubs, approximately half of the players are foreign, which means that there are roughly 250 American soccer players in the MLS. That being said, there is an extremely small chance of an American player making it to a MLS club. Even though the odds are very low, this should never discourage any player from pursuing his or her hopes and dreams. Therefore, it is important for young players to recognize the value of ambition.

As a youngster, I grew up playing the game with no pressure and no adult involvement. I played the game because I enjoyed it. I never took for granted any opportunity to play. Over time I developed a passion for the game. This passion came from me wanting to become a better player. I was not driven by wanting to become a professional player, playing in huge stadiums, in front of thousands of people. There might have been players out there who were better than I was, but I knew in the back of my mind what I wanted and I was willing to work for it. I came to figure out that the game did not owe me anything because of my talent. I had to earn my place in the game through effort and hard work. I worked very hard to become the player I was.

For those who are striving to become the next Messi or Ronaldo, listen to what they have to say about the game. They will continue to talk about how they want to get better and that they are not driven by expectations to achieve greatness in the game. They have hopes, dreams, and ambitions that drive them to develop themselves individually as players.

The best way to put this idea of ambition and expectation into perspective is to consider people who are about to purchase a lottery ticket. People who buy a ticket are aware that the chances of winning are very slim, yet they want to buy the ticket anyway. Thus, they do not buy the ticket with expectations of winning in mind. They buy it with a small piece of hope that this particular ticket – this one chance – could be their chance to win. Overall, this is the mentality any player needs to have who has ambitions of becoming a professional player. Players need to want to work hard and be willing to be resilient and pick themselves up when things get hard. They need to know that their chances of becoming a professional are slim - just like the lottery ticket - but that there is value in wanting to put in the work to develop their talents and passion for the game. There should never be a day when players take anything for granted. Players need to be determined and make sure they take advantage of every opportunity.

Therefore, whether you are a player coming to YSC as a student, a Union Junior, or a player in the PDP program, it is important to understand that in order to become successful in this game, you need to have balance. Know that hopes and dreams develop at different ages and stages of your life. As a youngster, you should play multiple sports and have multiple interests. As you get older, you should be able to choose which sport you want to pursue. However, even after you choose, you should still have hobbies outside of the game. Of course soccer is fun and may feel very important to you, but it helps to have other interests as well. That way, every time you step on the soccer field, you can feel excited to be back with the ball and the game and excited to train and play. On top of that, keep in mind how important it is to keep up with your relationships with family and friends. Without your family and your friends, if you do one day make it to the top, you will be there alone.

Along your journey, things might get rocky, so it is important to have the support of others. Never believe everything is brilliant. Keep in mind that if you do fail multiple times, then you might be surprised when your next opportunity becomes your shot. When you make it, immerse yourself in it and never forget about the ambitions you have for wanting to play the game. If you begin to lose your ambitions and focus only on expectations, you will start to feel that everything should be given to you. If your dream to keep playing the game remains an ambition, you will only see the future as a target that you need to work even harder to accomplish.

