

YSC / UNION YOUTH ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

THE UNION

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The Union Academy Teams Competed in Development Academy Showcase and Playoffs, and U16 Team Finished Third Overall

The Union Academy U14 team traveled to Indianapolis at the end of June to play in the U.S. Soccer Development Academy Showcase. Later in the week, the U18 and U16 teams joined them in Indianapolis to compete in the U.S. Soccer Development Academy Playoffs. The tournament gathered top teams from around the country and displayed strong competition throughout the week. In July, the U16 team traveled to LA for the final stage of the tournament.

In Indianapolis, the U14s competed in three games. Ending their week 2-1, they played San Jose Earthquakes, SC United Battery, and Tampa Bay United. It was a good experience for the Academy's youngest players to travel and compete on such a high stage.



Youngsters want to have fun all summer and enjoy their holiday from school. Getting involved in summer soccer camps is a good way for players to have fun, while still having contact with the game...

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UNION ACADEMY UPDATE

When the U18s and U16s teams joined the trip, each team also competed in three games. The U18 team played Montreal Impact, Kendall SC, and LA Galaxy. At the end of the regular season, the U18 team fought to earn their place in the Playoffs. They continued that fight in Indianapolis as well, ending the tournament with a 2-1 record. Academy Director, Tommy Wilson, said, "I'm very proud of the players. Proud of their effort and application and the way they have represented the club."

The U16 team matched up against Everton FC Westchester, Weston FC, and Houston Dynamo, finishing 3-0 and advancing to the next stage of the Playoffs. Their final game against Houston tested the players. Shortly into the second half, relentless thunderstorms delayed the remainder of the game for over two hours. When the boys finally returned to the field, however, they seemed focused and prepared to play. The team scored its second goal (to go up 2-0) within the first few minutes back in the game and held that score until the final whistle. The U16 team had to battle through tough competition in their games. "The boys showed great resolve," Wilson explained, "coming back from losing positions to win matches." Head Coach Jeff Cook told his players that their character, effort, and fight helped them earn victories and advance in the tournament.

The U16 team continued on and competed in the final leg of the tournament and earned third place overall. They played their first game against FC Dallas (who went on to win the title) and lost 3-0, before beating Georgia United 2-0 in their final game of the season. Coach Cook stated, "I'm pleased that the team was able to produce such a good performance to finish the season on a high note," and explained that he is excited to watch the players' continued

development over the years. Wilson reflected on the season, saying, "I'm proud of the efforts over the course of the season and would like to congratulate the staff, the players, and everyone associated with the project." Looking to the future, he said, "The challenge for us now is to show progress next year, and obviously the main focus of the project is individual player development. Our ultimate aim is to produce players for our First Team and beyond."

The teams had a strong support system in place to help them achieve their goals. Coaches, trainers, sport science and sport psychology staff, and operations staff were on hand to keep things running smoothly and to continue to prepare the players — both physically and mentally — for competition. All three teams represented the Union Academy with professionalism and pride.

"The Union" Newsletter

Editors:

Cristina Fink - Director of Sport Psychology
Emily Galvin - Asst. Dir. of Sport Psychology

Contributors:

Iain Munro - YSC Academy Director
Tommy Wilson - Academy Director
Finn Gundersen - Director of Coach Edu.
Jeff Cook - U16 Head Coach
Garrison Draper - Director of Sport Science
Jeremy Sullivan - YSC Academy History Teacher



YSC ACADEMY UPDATE

Second Annual YSC Academy History Conference

YSC Academy hosted its second annual History Conference on Monday, June 8th. Similar to last year, the students spent most of the year completing research projects and preparing for the conference. Their educational journey started with choosing a topic and developing a research question, and went on to researching the topic, creating a thesis and writing a paper, and preparing an oral presentation.

Dr. Jeremy Sullivan, YSC Academy History Teacher, explained, "Fundamentally, the research project emphasizes the process of learning. In contrast to memorizing a laundry list of names and dates, students have to discover information themselves, critically analyze what they've uncovered, and present their findings orally and in writing."



"This is a yearlong process," Dr. Sullivan continued, "because it is important to break down every step and make sure students practice the small distinct skills that are needed to complete the final project."



"Every month of the school year is dedicated to a different task," he said, "such as developing a research question, identifying potential sources, taking notes, and so on." He concluded, "The weeks following spring break are when the students ramp up their engagement and create outlines, rough drafts, and finally, a completed essay and oral presentation. We take our time with every step, because ultimately, it's the steps that matter as much as, if not more than, the final product."



The conference is structured like a professional conference, including ten different session times, with five concurrent presentations going on in various rooms throughout the school. The students demonstrated varied interests, with presentation topics spanning from discussions about legendary athletes and sports brands, to technology, global warming, and wars throughout history. Students did their presentations – the culmination of the project – in front of classmates, teachers, staff, family, and friends in attendance.

Ryan Porrini, an 8th grader at YSC Academy, explained, "I chose the sponsorship battle between Nike and adidas. I was interested in it from this past World Cup. Which company will take over the sport of soccer was emphasized a lot, so I researched that and had a lot of fun with it."



YSC ACADEMY UPDATE



YSC Academy 10th grader, Juan Infante, took a different approach. He presented on Colombian coffee, as a way to represent his home country in a positive light. “Researching it was nice because I learned a lot of things I didn’t know about the process of growing coffee, and my parents were able to help me through some of it.” Although the research process was fun, preparing for the presentation was a bit nerve-racking. “The night before, I was nervous,” he stated. “But, once I was standing up there to present, it wasn’t really that bad. In my previous schools, I’ve done research projects before, but this was the first time I had to present what I found. I practiced at home a few times to help get prepared.”

YSC Academy 9th grader, Rayshaun McGann, who presented on the Vietnam War tragedies, said, “For me, I’m not really nervous to present in front of people. I kind of like it because it teaches me a new skill of talking in front of people.” Ray is a very vocal leader on the field, and believes that his comfort communicating on the field translates to the classroom and helps him succeed in that task. Similarly, classmate Ryan Porrini said that his familiarity with his audience helped allay some of his nerves, saying, “The audience was my classmates and my teachers, who I know on a first name basis, so I was able to just have fun with it.”

This enriching experience helps to prepare students for life outside of YSC Academy. Dr. Sullivan stated, “This process has applications in all academic subjects and in most every future career choice a student might later pursue.” The students enjoyed their experience with the research project, as did their family and friends who had the opportunity to attend their presentations.

YSC Academy Graduation

YSC Academy held its graduation ceremony for nine graduating seniors on Saturday, June 6th. Family and friends, YSC Academy teachers, and Union Academy/YSC Staff attended the ceremony. All came out to celebrate and support the graduates in their accomplishment.

All nine seniors are pursuing college educations, and will be balancing academics and athletics as they join the soccer teams at their respective institutions.

Will Campbell – University of North Carolina
 Mo Conde – University of Mobile
 Sebastian Elney – University of Maryland
 Garrett Keys – La Salle University
 Sean Wilson – University of North Carolina

Kevin Carvalho – Northeastern University
 Peace Drevitch – Duquesne University
 Cameron Keys – La Salle University
 John Schroeder – University of Delaware

The ceremony commenced with remarks from Dr. Nooha Ahmed-Lee, the Head of School at YSC Academy. Union Academy Director, Tommy Wilson, and YSC Academy founder, Richie Graham, also addressed the graduates, providing advice and best wishes.

Next, each of the nine graduates took the podium for a chance to say some of their own words. They relayed both meaningful and funny memories about their time at YSC Academy, as well as the lessons they learned – in the classroom, on the field, and in life in general – and the legacy they hope to leave. The students’ remarks were a nice demonstration of the bonds they created with each other, their teachers, and their coaches as part of the tight-knit YSC Academy community.



COACHING EDUCATION

Using Analytics to Read the Game: YSC/Union Academy Coach Training Seminar

In today's game, more and more emphasis is placed on using analytics in an effort to make smarter soccer decisions and gain a competitive edge. YSC hosted Dr. Patrick Lucey, Associate Research Scientist from Disney Research in Pittsburgh, to deliver a Union Academy coaches training seminar. As mentioned in the [May/June newsletter](#), the Union Academy has embarked on an initiative to offer consistent coach education opportunities to affiliate coaches in an effort to continue to enhance our region's coaching effectiveness, and thus, the region's overall level of play. Coaches from the Philadelphia Union First Team, the Union Academy, YSC Union Juniors, and Union Academy affiliate clubs learned about research regarding finding ways to learn from and strategize for training sessions and games.

The presentation highlighted a program that tracks players and movement within a soccer game and yields extensive data. This tracking data provides information about a team's formation, style of play (pressing versus sitting back), and ability to adapt over time.

Of particular interest is the program's ability to estimate the likelihood of shots being converted to goals, and from that information, ultimately quantifying a player's or a team's efficiency. In other words, using tracking data, the team of researchers calculated expected goal values (or the likelihood of a goal to be scored under various conditions) and used that information to compare a particular player's shots on goal, for example, to the expected chance of that shot to make it to the back of the net. This can provide information about a player's efficiency as a forward, for example.

Further, Figure 1 shows that 14.9% of all counter-attacks end up as a goal, versus only 8.3% from open play. Thus, it is incumbent on coaches to practice all aspects of a counter-attack in order to best prepare their players for competition. Because counter-attacks involve full-speed running play, players need to practice shooting and crossing with a running ball, versus a "dead" ball. A properly placed cross, delivered at full speed, is a highly developed skill that needs deliberate practice.

In addition, Dr. Lucey noted that the majority of goals scored are within the box (Figure 2), often with the attacking player beating a defender one-on-one before scoring. His advice for coaches was, "In one-on-one shooting drills, keep score of how many times the attacker beats the defender before the shot." Letting players know that they are being evaluated on that measure could help them focus on deliberately training that habit and better preparing for competition. In addition, Dr. Lucey advised coaches to count the number of goals they score from corners in practice. For many teams the number is very low. So low, in fact, that teams should explore preparing for a counter-attack by placing a team's fastest players farther up the field, versus supporting the defense. This tactic may be more valuable in the long-term for increasing the number of shots on goal and scoring.

Finally, Dr. Lucey emphasized that the biggest value of analytics is in game planning and preparation. One long-term goal for all coaches in teaching the strategy of the game is for their players to understand that soccer is about patterns, and finding the patterns which coincide with a team's scoring and conceding goals. Teams are always searching for plays and for set-ups that maximize their advantage while minimizing their weaknesses. This research demonstrates that analytics can help teams define which plays are successful and lead to better results and outcomes.

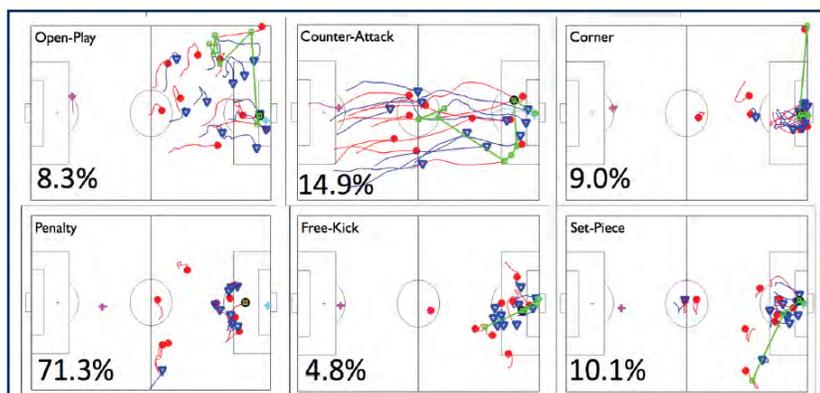


Figure 1. Expected Goal Values



Figure 2. Shots Scored in Box



SPORT SCIENCE

Training in the Summer Heat

Summer time is a great time to focus on individual development. School is out of session, which means more time for training. Individual development is extremely important for all players, whether they are 12 years old or in their 12th professional season. The key is ensuring that you get the most out of your training, but also, ensuring that you set yourself up to start the new season healthy and ready to go. Summer time training has its risks, however, due to temperatures and humidity, but there are also many rewards from training during these months. Keep in mind that rest and recovery is also important, so talk with your coaches and trainers about your plans for summer training.

Summer brings a lot of environmental changes that can aid or hinder training. The biggest factor in summer time training tends to be the heat. Heat has been found to be an amazing tool in the training process. Sport science literature demonstrates the value of training at high altitudes, but a notable debate in the sport science world is whether or not training in the heat can produce similar benefits. Both types of training have their advantages. It is well documented that altitude training helps players develop their aerobic system better than most players training at sea level, but it has also been found that in a very similar way, heat training does the same, just to a lesser magnitude (Cheung, 2010). This is valuable information for players who do not have access to training environments at higher altitudes, but are looking to enhance their physical fitness and training levels.

The way the body responds to heat training is slightly different than altitude training, the most noticeable change being sweating rates. Sweating is a response by the nervous system to keep the body's core temperature down, ensuring vital organs are kept in a very small range of temperatures to function optimally. Cooling is done by a process called evaporation, very similar to how water evaporates when you heat it up on the stove. Sweat droplets evaporate, pulling heat from the body and releasing it into the air. Sweating is a very important part of training, and how you sweat says a lot about your fitness levels and your need for hydration and other supplements. Efficient sweaters "glisten" when they train, which allows for efficient evaporation of sweat. Inefficient sweaters form "drops" while they train, which leads to a lot of lost sweat. Each drop of sweat that falls off of the body is a lost opportunity to reduce the body's core temperature. Players who "drip" sweat will require more hydration and more electrolytes to make up for the larger loss of sweat and fluids after exercise. Hydration is key to performance in the heat. Always drink as you feel thirsty, and drink until you feel satisfied.

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Another physiologic response to training in the heat is a change in the body's use of carbohydrates (sugar). When training in the heat, carbohydrates are utilized at a much faster rate, meaning that you will run out sooner. If you are training for longer periods of time, or more frequently, then it is highly recommended that carbohydrate consumption is increased before and after training to replenish carbohydrate stores. Snacks like grapes, apples, oranges, and sandwiches are effective options to help you stock up on carbohydrates. When it comes to refueling during performance times, and you feel a dip in your performance, some gummy bears are a really simple snack to get some sugar back in your system.

Training in the summer can help push your game to the next level, but it is important to realize that you must understand and listen to your body to ensure that you get everything out of training, and that you do it safely. When you are sweating, make sure that you are replenishing with fluids and electrolytes. Planning plenty of snacks throughout your training day guarantees that your body also has the fuel to perform at the level you want it to. In hot weather, it is important to continually monitor that your body has the resources it needs to keep pushing.



SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Developing Decision-Makers

Strategies such as developing a pre-game routine and creating a focus cue are fairly manageable tasks for players who are committed to developing their mental game. They can decide what works best for them through trial and error, and implement it consistently. Both are relatively concrete endeavors. Improving decision-making, however, is much more abstract, and therefore, can seem much more daunting.

Improving decision-making starts with understanding the nature of decisions and the decision-making process. Decisions, particularly on the soccer field, are very dynamic. There are various factors to take into account, such as the individual making the decision, the tasks required for the decision (such as passing, shooting, or moving into space), and the context or environment in which the decision is being made. As for the decision-making process, there are two primary systems with which individuals make decisions: a quick, intuitive, and emotional system, and a slow, deliberate, and rational system (Beshears & Gino, 2015). The emotional system, System 1, is the first system to take action when an individual is presented with a decision. The logical system, System 2, often must be deliberately engaged in order to purposefully think through the alternatives in a given situation.

What does all of this mean for a soccer player?

Consider the context of a soccer game. The environment is constantly changing and evolving as play progresses and possession changes. Things happen rapidly and do not allow much time for conscious processing and deliberate thought. Players need to make decisions – fast – that meet their personal interests (in order to help them play their best and contribute to the team) and the interests of the team overall. Throughout a game, some decisions have very minor consequences, while others seem to have a direct impact on the outcome of the game. Thus, it is in every player's best interest to deliberately develop decision-making skills, just as he or she might develop foot skills or finishing technique.

How can a player improve decision-making?

After understanding the complexities of the decision-making process and the systems with which individuals make decisions, the next step is to self-reflect and become more aware of individual decision-making skills. Players should consider if there are contexts in which they make better or worse decisions, such as being under pressure versus having time with the ball, or being excited versus being angry or frustrated. Enhancing self-awareness gives players a better understanding of their own skills, and thus, allows them to anticipate how they will make decisions in the fast-paced and emotional context of a game. Based on their conclusions, they can set goals for training sessions to enhance these skills.

Another important factor to focus on when developing decision-making skills is the information needed to make informed decisions on the field. Players have to remain focused in the present moment in order to be aware of where the ball is, where their teammates and opponents are, and where space is, for example. Staying engaged and taking in these factors gives players the necessary information to make quick, informed decisions. If players find themselves getting distracted, then they should use focus cues like “zone in” or “here and now” to help them stay in the present moment and gather information.

Finally, after playing, whether in training sessions or in games, players should take the opportunity to engage System 2, their logical and deliberate decision-making system, by objectively evaluating their performance and their decisions. This should include a reflection on decisions made throughout the game, both effective and ineffective, and their subsequent results. Reflecting on which factors influence the decisions can help players recognize patterns and plan strategies for how to continue to improve decision-making on the field.

How can a coach improve a player's decision-making?

It is easier for players to have the confidence to make decisions if the environment allows them to take chances. Players need to know that the coach encourages creativity and risk-taking and will help them learn from both their triumphs and their failures. When players recognize that they are playing in this kind of safe environment, they can focus on what they want to do, rather than how the coach will react if their decision does not turn out well. This helps them stay focused in the present moment and take in the information they need to make good decisions. This kind of coach-created climate can help players thrive.

Reference

Beshears, J., & Gino, F. (2015). Leaders as Decision Architects, *Harvard Business Review* (93)5.



RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

The Talks and Travels of the HP Sports Team

Dr. Cristina Fink, Director of Sport Psychology:

- Invited to present to parents at Lower Merion Soccer Club, speaking about how to manage situations with children, coaches, and parents in order to enhance the child's experience in sport
- Traveled to Spain to finalize a project with decision-making that will be implemented with our teams
- Attended 8th World Congress on Science and Football in Copenhagen, Denmark and participated in a roundtable discussion
- Participated in the Leaders in Performance Conference in New York City (see the next newsletter for more information)

Emily Galvin, M.S., Assistant Director of Sport Psychology:

- Traveled to Indianapolis in June to provide sport psychology support for the three Union Academy teams in the U.S. Soccer Development Academy Showcase and Playoffs
- Presented to elite youth soccer players at the Future 500 ID soccer camps at Eastern University on the topics of Winning the Mental Game and Habits of Effective Leadership with Sport Psychology Staff members Marina Giolas, Ph.D. and Ryan Sappington, M.S.
- Presented to coaches earning their U.S. Soccer B License in July on the topic of getting the most out of their players through effective coaching styles

Finn Gundersen, Director of Coaching Education:

- Helped to bring in Dr. Patrick Lucey, of Disney Research, for soccer sport analytics presentation for coach training seminar
- Attended 8th World Congress on Science and Football in Copenhagen, Denmark; captured hours of video and information for distribution to YSC/Union coaches
- Helped to coordinate the NSCAA Master Coach Diploma course at YSC
- Attended the European Congress on Sport Science in Malmo, Sweden

Bill Knowles, Director of Athletic Development:

- Worked with Scottish rugby player reconditioning from a knee injury as he prepared for the Rugby World Cup
- Worked with Championship Division soccer player to continue reconditioning work started at YSC Sports in March this year
- Provided specialized training to Australian Rugby League player recovering from a broken foot in order to prepare him for upcoming competition



FINAL THOUGHTS BY IAIN



The Value of Getting Involved in Summer Soccer Camps

Youngsters want to have fun all summer and enjoy their holiday from school. Getting involved in summer soccer camps is a good way for players to have fun, while still having contact with the game.

The more contact players have with the game, especially at a young age, the better. In our camps at YSC, the groups are varied. Some players are taking the field with little experience, while others have played for a few years already. We expect each player to come to the camp with the goal of becoming a better player. We also emphasize practicing leadership skills, and using their time at camp to step up and try to help to make their teammates better. But above all else, we want these youngsters to enjoy themselves and continue to develop a love of the game.

Unlike any club team or the Union Juniors and Futures programs, our YSC summer camps allow players to play the game in a more lighthearted environment. The weather is nice, the kids are on holiday from school, and there is just generally a different feeling about the environment. The kids have a chance to learn, play, and compete in a less serious atmosphere that encourages them to have fun, while still meeting high standards of effort. Playing with high standards does not get in the way of having fun, and it helps players develop good habits. We want players to relax and try out new things and not be afraid of not getting something quite right. These summer camps help players learn to differentiate between competing under pressure, and competing in a more relaxed setting. Many players work nearly year round with Sport Psychology and Athletic Development Training learning new skills, but they might not get a chance to use them. For example, in Sport Psychology they learn how to manage their emotions, deal with stressful situations, and regain focus. The more relaxed feeling of summer camps provides an opportunity for players to take risks – and make some mistakes – and actually put those ideas into action to help them recover. At the same time, these young players learn the difference between just messing about and playing *relaxed*. The difference lies in the effort they put forth and the standards of play they aim for. The final major benefit for players is that having this fun contact with the game throughout the summer can increase their enjoyment and interest in the game, and keep them wanting to come back time and time again.

Part of our responsibility at YSC is to connect more people to the game. With these camps, we're cultivating a love of the game. No matter each player's goals with the game, or where each one might eventually end up, we are working to improve the quality of the game and fuel a passion for the game. Some players who walk off of our fields might end up playing professionally, some at the collegiate level, and some just for fun. But, it's likely that they will be supporters of the game, and perhaps supporters of our home team, the Union.

