"Seeing the Big Picture"
By: J.J. Ruane, PSA Director of Coaching

I was in a meeting a couple of weeks ago, sitting with several professional youth soccer coaches from the area. The topic of discussion was the top 100 players in the world. The first 25 players were pretty easy to figure out as we went down the list and most everyone listed the same 25 players. As we went down through the top 100, our players were significantly different, but there was one constant through everyone's list, there was not one American player.

I visited the IYSA Expo this past weekend and was able to watch some different sessions. One of the presenters was from the Everton Youth Academy which has a senior team in the English Premier League. The one thing that really impressed me was his comments about youth soccer and soccer as a whole in this country. "The United States is a sleeping giant in the soccer world; the country has all the tools to win the World Cup. The problem though is that you are using a hammer to unscrew a light bulb."

I think these two examples show a number of things. The first is that our potential as a country is huge. The problem is we want immediate results. As a director of coaching, it is ironic to hear that a group of youth players are the 3v3 National Champions meaning they are the best 3v3 team in the country. The shocking thing about this entire thing was that the kids were U8. We don't see past tomorrow. As a director of coaching, my primary job is to make sure that the professional staff is doing their jobs to the best of their ability. Another part of that is to make sure that they are able to move on in their coaching if they so choose, staff development. My other primary job is to do the same thing with the players. My job is not to look at a U10 player and pick him for the national team. My job is to take the appropriate steps to take that gifted U10 player and get him to love the game, so he can play the game for a long time and get to the national team, but only if the player so chooses: player development.

The other problem that the opening story suggests is that there are no American players presently that the world respects. I believe this problem exists as an extension to the above problem. We put too much pressure on our youngest players to produce results at a young age. We don't allow our players any time to make mistakes. Let players be creative, let them make mistakes, let them solve problems on their own, and let the game teach itself. This is in no way to say that as coaches, we do not give the proper tools to our players to be good technical players. An infant must fall down on its bottom several times before it learns how to walk on its own. A player must take players on hundreds of times until they develop the confidence needed to be successful. Legends coaches preach this in training and also in games.

It is the staff coach's job to develop players and prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead, hopefully making them better people along the way. These challenges may be making them a confident player, getting them to a top team level, preparing them for the high school level, and obviously the ultimate goal and challenge for us as coaches is the college level. All of us coaches love to win and really take it to heart when we lose. I

don't know how many times I have taken that long road trip wondering what I could have done better to help my team be more successful. The thought I always come back to though is did the players do what I asked them to do, did they get better at things we worked on in training the week before, did they work hard, and most times the answer is yes.

In closing, soccer is a funny game. This is not like basketball or football where the best team wins 90% of the time. Most time in soccer, the best team does not win. I watched Arsenal (England) play PSV Eindhoven (Netherlands) last week. Arsenal was far superior in almost every facet of the game except when it came time to finish. They missed 10-12 chances throughout the match. Arsenal scored one goal. PSV had 3-4 chances and they scored two goals. How many times has this happened to Legends teams that has been far better skill wise, but lose because the team they played did not really play soccer correctly and were just bigger and much faster? The Legends staff will always instruct our players to play the game the best way possible and we ask that our parents do the same and not be blinded by who was the better team because of the score.