

A Guide to LSA Tryouts and Player Selection

As *coaches*, tryouts will always be the most difficult part of the season. We must make decisions that are controversial. As a coach and administrator, I can assure you that there is not one single coach in the LSA family that has not made a decision that I *very* much disagreed with. As administrators, Bob and I don't always see eye-to-eye either, so you will sometimes get a different answer from the two of us. We can agree to disagree on certain issues. That is why he takes the lead on certain issues and I on others. However, tryout decisions and player selections are, and must remain, the coaches' decision.

As *players*, tryouts will always be the most difficult part of the season. Even if you make the team, you may not be all smiles. Sometime your best friend may have been cut. It is never easy to see a player that may have been involved with a team for many years being passed over for a new player. It is an unfortunate circumstance that sometimes occurs. Of course, if it was you that was not selected for the team that you hoped, you must deal with the more direct feeling of rejection. Just know that some other coach will need your talents.

As *parents*, tryouts will always be the most difficult part of the season. They are full of anxious moments and strange feelings. If your child makes the team, you are very happy until you realize that you must also take a child home in your car pool that did not make it. You must deal with the feeling of helplessness. You know beyond a shadow of a doubt that your child was good enough to make the team but the coach did not see it that way. What can you do? How do you respond to your neighbor whose child did not make the team when you are full of joy because your son or daughter did?

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to select a player for our men's team who was 6'3" tall or so and weighed around 235 lbs. Ron Bell was a middle linebacker and the place kicker on the University of Louisville Fiesta Bowl Championship team. He still had some educational requirements to complete after his eligibility ran out and he decided to play a little soccer to stay in shape. Not many people saw him as a soccer player when he tried out. Although his foot skills were good, they were probably the worst on our team. His speed was good but not the best. His quickness, while great for a man weighing 235 lbs., was a little below par for the reigning state champion men's team.

My decision to displace a strong player with Ron Bell was not well received. Even after the first two or three games, it still did not appear to have been the best choice even though we were winning our games easily. Later however, in the BIG games that were close and came down to a last-minute defensive stop, Ron Bell was the best. He always found a way to get a toe in to make that desperation play. He was our "enforcer"; there were very few amateur players that were ever going to beat Ron Bell. By the end of the season, my decision proved to be a good one.

Of course, I have also made some bad decisions. But this one worked nicely and I related this one to you so that you can see that there is a need for a player that may not possess great skill to fit within a team structure. The decisions that we have to make may not always be clear to everyone and it is impossible to make everyone happy. It takes many different styles and types of players to make a team.

LSA goes to great lengths to get the best coaches and soccer educators to work with our club. And note the two words I used above, “educators” and “coaches”. The two words are different. Not all coaches are educators and not all educators are coaches. We try to place our people where they best fit. This holds true for coaches as well as players. We have a plan in which we try to teach our youngest players certain individual skills required to move forward, then beginning around the 14 and 15 year old age levels we start coaching them with respect to how to win. All of these aspects of the game go into our decisions with regard to tryouts. At the younger level, we try to spread the talent across all the teams, while at the older age groups we must concentrate the talent on a top team. It all works and is part of a much larger plan than any one individual can see on a single Saturday in June or November.

So please understand that there are no hidden or political agendas involved and you are not being discriminated against. These tryouts are a very difficult process. The decision to leave one child off a roster in favor of another could be easily reversed the next year by a new or different coach. Even the same coach may see that a player has grown or changed in the last year, so never give up! The most important thing is to know that LSA is trying to do what is best for the majority of the players that come to our tryouts while growing the sport that we all love.

So in conclusion:

1. **Coaches:** please don't lose site of our club goals in favor of your personal growth.
2. **Players:** please see that you do your best and are prepared for the worst. LSA will do everything that we can to help you progress as a player and team member. Just remember that the team is much bigger than you and your own age group.
3. **Parents:** don't lose sight of the overall club goals and needs while you try to protect your child. As parents, we have a strong temptation to become defensive in order to protect those who are closest to us without giving much thought to the bigger picture. So, like your son or daughter, come to the tryouts optimistic and hopeful but be prepared for the alternative if faced with it. Be ready to be very calm and cool no matter what the outcome. We don't want to be too excited when our next-door neighbor is struggling with not making it and we don't want to show dismay because we aren't happy with a decision we think is incorrect.

Good luck during what is a very anxious period for all involved,

Mike Hayes and Bob Ramsey