

**Gemma Dattilo**

**From:** Michael Hayes [mehayes3@att.net]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 13, 2013 9:51 AM  
**To:** 'Gemma Dattilo'  
**Subject:** FW: Youth Soccer Insider: 'Crazier than it's ever been' (Jimmy Obleda, Fullerton Rangers, Q&A)

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**From:** Soccer America [mailto:news@socceramerica.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 13, 2013 8:18 AM  
**To:** mehayes3@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Youth Soccer Insider: 'Crazier than it's ever been' (Jimmy Obleda, Fullerton Rangers, Q&A)



Wednesday, March 13, 2013

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## 'Crazier than it's ever been' (Jimmy Obleda, Fullerton Rangers, Q&A)

Interview by Mike Voitalla

According to **Jimmy Obleda**, the 2011 [NSCAA Youth National Coach of the Year](#), the U.S. Soccer Development Academy has made the youth soccer landscape an "absolute mess." The Director of Coaching of Southern California's Fullerton Rangers, who have won back-to-back U.S. Youth Soccer national titles, Obleda also explains why he believes **Lionel Messi** wouldn't have made it through the U.S. system.

**SOCCER AMERICA: How does not being part of the U.S. Soccer Development Academy affect Fullerton Rangers?**

**JIMMY OBLEDA:** It keeps us on our toes. It encourages us to work harder and make our product even better, to raise the standards of our training, of our coaching education, of the environment we work and train in. ...

But [the Academy] has definitely changed the landscape, making it an absolute mess. Youth soccer in America, I speak from my experience in Southern California, is crazier than it's ever been.

**SA: How so?**

**JIMMY OBLEDA:** The Academy is only for an "elite," selected few. "Elite" I



say in quotations because there are clubs in it that shouldn't be in there. And there are clubs that aren't in that should be in. It's an entitlement status where – "You have great players, they need to play for me. ... You need to play with us if you're going to have any chance of making anything."

Well, they don't want to come play for you, because you don't provide for them what they see as beneficial to them, regardless of what people are saying. And it's being found out.

If they're doing the right things, let's encourage those people. It should be about who's doing the right thing, not who got baptized or was blessed with a patch, or a special status.

**SA: Why would you think Fullerton Rangers might provide a better environment than an Academy club?**

**JIMMY OBLEDA:** We have 40 teams. So as a director, I'm able to manage 40 teams and their coaches. I'm able to observe them, to come out weekly, daily -- and know exactly where they're at. My staff and I know every kid in the club and we have a direct impact on every kid. And we can have a discussion about each one and where they stand in their development.

To play in the Academy, we'd need to field 200, 150 teams. That takes away the integrity. I'm not going to sell myself out to that, franchise myself like that – because we maintain a manageable group.

**SA: But the giant club model has become very popular ...**

**JIMMY OBLEDA:** Everyone talks about Europe and the youth systems there. Clubs have one team per age group. You know the coach who's working in those age groups. You put the coaches in the right positions.

It's become a money issue when you have clubs with 200 teams. There are not 200 phenomenal coaches in one club.

We've been successful because of the quality of what we provide for our kids and I don't want to take away the integrity of what's made us successful – and the only way to support an Academy program is to grow to 200 or 150 teams.

I'm amazed. You have parents whose players are playing in the seventh team in an age group and paying top dollar to play in these elite clubs. And those kids will never be on their top teams, because they're going to take that money and they're going to try and recruit my players.

**SA: Non-Academy club coaches are complaining that when their players go to a youth national team camp, they're highly encouraged to leave their clubs for Academy clubs. Do you believe that's the case?**

**JIMMY OBLEDA:** Absolutely, every time a kid goes to the national team. Every time a kid comes back [I hear that]. One in particular got called in and they asked him twice to leave and he said, "No, I want to stay."

**SA: And you believe a player may not be invited back to a national team camp because he didn't change clubs?**

**JIMMY OBLEDA:** Yes. It could affect me to speak out on this – but I'm at a point where people need to know what's going on.

*[Editor's note: U.S. Development Academy Director of Scouting **Tony Lepore**, in a previous YouthSoccerInsider, [said "it would never happen"](#) that a player wouldn't be invited to a national team camp because he didn't switch to an Academy team.]*

**SA: They deny that something like that would happen ...**



**JIMMY OBLEDA:** Sure, but it's out there. If you don't leave [your current club], you will not get called back in.

I'm not an anti-Academy person. I know some of the things are great from the soccer standpoint. But it's become this, "If you're not with us you're against us." Well, you're not allowing us to be with you.

I'm doing everything you're telling me to. Our teams train four days a week. We have speed agility training. We do everything they want, and on top of it we're getting punished.

**SA: If you look at the U.S. national team and compare it to the squads of the last three decades -- we really don't see an increase in the number of truly exceptional, creative players. Why would that be considering the increase in players, coaches and investment at the youth level?**

**JIMMY OBLEDA:** Those kids exist. I see those kids. But what happens when they get a certain level of our hierarchy of American soccer?

They don't fit our system. Do we want those guys who are attacking and dribbling? No, we don't. We want big, strong, athletic kids. If you dribble too much, dude, you're out.

Our system pushes the exceptional players out.

Would have **Lionel Messi** made it in this country? No. He wouldn't have, because he's short and he dribbles too much. He's a ball hog so he doesn't fit in our system. "We need a guy who's going to defend more here ..."

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