



Practice vs Games: The impact on individual player development **Tom Turner, Ohio Youth Soccer Association North** **September 2009**

Soccer is a long-term athletic development sport, requiring approximately 10,000 hours of training to reach a level of excellence. Before the modern era, in the days when free play was the normal path to competence, youngsters would regularly compete in soccer activities for 2-3 hours a day, seven days a week. It was not uncommon for enthusiastic kids to log 10-20 hours of soccer per week in isolated skill development and in unstructured games of varying configurations with players of varying ages.



In practical terms, conservatively assuming ten months of soccer and only 15 hours per week, 10,000 hours of training would take around 14 years to accumulate.

In all countries around the world, the top young professionals typically break into

their club's first team in their late teens or early 20's and reach their prime by their mid-to-late-20's. For the top goalkeepers, the learning curve is much slower and many compete well into their 30's.

In the American soccer environment, it is not uncommon for aspiring young players to compete in over 100 games during the calendar year; invariably at the expense of a sound long-term individual training program designed around the principles of the 10,000 hour rule. Many adults and coaches believe that game play is more important than training at the youth level.

The numbers say otherwise....

A top level professional soccer match lasts 90 minutes. Each team is allowed a maximum of three substitutions. Once a player leaves the field, they cannot return. The "active" time, when the ball is in live play, is approximately 70% of the game time. Each player is in direct contact with the ball for an average of just over two minutes

Level	Game Form	Game Roster	Game Time	Active Time	Ave. Participation	Ave. Playing Time
Professional	11v11	14	90 mins	63 mins	78%	2.25 mins

The corresponding numbers for youth games are noted below.

Level	Game Time	Active Time	Game Form	Max. Roster	Ave. Participation	Ave. Time Possession
U-10	50 minutes	35 mins	6v6	12	50%	1.46 mins
U-12	60 minutes	42 mins	8v8	14	57%	1.50 mins
U-14	70 minutes	49 mins	11v11	18	61%	1.36 mins
U-16	80 minutes	56 mins	11v11	18	61%	1.56 mins
U-18	90 minutes	63 mins	11v11	18	61%	1.75 mins

Assuming maximum game rosters for each age group and also assuming equal playing time, the figures show that playing 100 youth games per season produces a maximum of around 175 minutes of ball possession. At the professional level, playing 100 games in a season would only raise the average to around 225 minutes.

Even for the very best players who rarely leave the field, the average time of possession is still less than 3 minutes per game; or less than 300 minutes per 100-game season!

Level	Game Time	Active Time	Game Form	Player to Ball Ratio	Ave. Participation	Ave. Time Possession
U-10	50 minutes	35 mins	6v6	12:1	100%	2.92 mins
U-12	60 minutes	42 mins	8v8	16:1	100%	2.63 mins
U-14	70 minutes	49 mins	11v11	22:1	100%	2.23 mins
U-16	80 minutes	56 mins	11v11	22:1	100%	2.55 mins
U-18	90 minutes	63 mins	11v11	22:1	100%	2.86 mins

The table below highlights the value of training. Well organized youth training sessions maximize ball contact and provide players with repeated exposure to standard game situations.

The figures demonstrate that players can routinely enjoy more than 20 minutes of ball possession in just under two hours; and the 300 minutes of maximum ball possession for

the top players can be achieved in approximately fourteen well-organized training sessions, which would take just over a month.

Training Activity	Player: Ball Ratio	Ave Time	Active Participation	Ave. Time Possession
Warm-up: Free Play (3v3)	6:1	15 mins	100%	2.5 mins
Individual Skill Development	1:1	15 mins	100%	7.5 mins
2v2 Ladder	4:1	20 mins	100%	5 mins
4v4 Games	8:1	30 mins	100%	3.75 mins
Game Form Practice 6v6 / 8v8 / 11v11	16:1	30 mins	100%	2.5 mins
Total Average Time of Possession				21.25 mins

Stated another way, attending well planned training sessions for SIX MONTHS can produce the same number of ball possessions as SIX YEARS of playing 100 games per season.



In the Games vs Practices Debate over Long-Term Individual Development: Who's Kidding Who?