

What Are The ODP Coaches Looking For?

By Mike Barr

Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer
Director of Coaching

What are the evaluators looking for when they observe players during Olympic Development try-outs? Players attending tryouts for ODP should recognize what the coaches will be looking for when they observe play. Often times there may be information provided to players that may not benefit their identification. Hopefully, this information may assist parents and players alike.

1) **SPEED**

Pure speed is a huge benefit in any sport but often times in soccer, mental speed (decision-making with and without the ball, under pressure) can allow players to compensate for lack of pure speed.

2) **TOUCH**

First touch may be the most critical technique for a soccer player. Receiving balls on the ground or air swiftly and in preparation for their next decision, with a sense of comfort, makes the game easier to play. Balls bouncing in the air from an inside of the foot collection and balls received in the air with

the wrong surface and not moved to space or to feet are areas we examine consistently.

3) The use of both feet in passing and finishing makes for more opportunities for every player. Watching a player take extra touches to get the ball to his or her strong foot may result in losing possession or a poor decision. Using the proper foot surface inside or instep for passing or shooting also comes into play.

4) **TRANSITION**

Moving from attack to defense and defense to attack quickly, from any position, is a strong indicator of a high level player. If a coach notices a player who does not seem involved, he or she will obviously be overlooked.

5) Determined play on 50-50 balls (tackles and especially on head balls) adds to a player's worth in the eyes of evaluators. In tackles we are looking for the player to go in hard and regain possession.

6) Overall comfort with the ball, with no sense of panic when in possession, is critical to the ODP-level player. Confidence and enthusiasm are recognized quickly.

7) **DECISION MAKING**

When to possess the ball or take a player on with no sense of panic — especially in the attacking third, is an attribute that will assist a player in making the ODP team.

8) Talk from an individual, especially on the defensive side of the ball, makes the game easier for the entire team.

9) Passionate play within the 18, whether on attack or defense, brings out notice from the coaches in attendance.

10) Pace and endurance during the try out, and recognizing when there is a time to recover, are also areas that we look for during evaluations.

Evaluations during our tryouts cannot replace watching a player participate in a significant match. EPYSA coaches are always looking for players we have missed in try-outs while attending club games. Remember, we will be attending Indoor Cups this winter also, searching out players for ODP. Should a player not be chosen for ODP, it is not the end of the world. Physical changes, maturation and confidence change within months and may result in your identification next year.