

HOW TO BE A STUDENT OF THE GAME

by April Heinrichs, Head Coach, US Women's National Team

I would like to suggest that you add something special to your game. It will raise your level of performance. It's fun, easy and unique because too few players do it regularly. It can make a positive impact on your personal development as an elite soccer player. What is it? Wait...



I speak with young female soccer players all over the country that share your love for the game of

soccer. I ask them if they want to play for the U.S. Women's National Team or for a WUSA Professional Team. The response is always, "YES!"

These young players are smart. They know they have to be fit, develop their skills, and play in the most competitive environment possible. I ask them to name other things they can do to reach their dreams. Only a few mention what I want to suggest to you today. Women's National Team players Brandi Chastain and Ali Wagner have done it for years. U-19 National Team player Lindsay Tarpley does it regularly. It shows in all of their performances at the international level. What is it?

I'll tell you! These U.S. National Team players watch as much soccer *in person* and *on television* as they can. I recommend that you do the same. You will improve significantly by watching and learning from the best female players in the world.

HOW TO BE A STUDENT OF THE GAME:

- Observe the players who play your position
- Focus on the skills that make them successful
- Study the decisions they make with and without the ball.
- Observe how much time and space they do or don't have
- Notice their first touch — Does it solve pressure or create pressure?
- Examine their fitness level — How fast, strong, and agile are these players?
- What kind of emotional intensity do they bring to the game?

These are all critical components of your development as a player. If you want to be great, you should watch great players play! Observe what they are doing and how they do it. Take this information to your backyard, practice or game field, and add it to your game. It will provide you with an important edge as a young soccer player. Whenever possible, attend a U.S. Women's National Team or a WUSA game! There is nothing like absorbing the exciting atmosphere experienced in person at the highest level. You will see the best players in the world playing for their countries and for the top women's soccer league on the globe. Another avenue to watch high level soccer is our college game,

and everyone has a college team playing near their home. Ask your mom, dad, brother, sister or coach to take you to the best and highest level game in your area.

If you cannot attend a game, watch it on television. You can enjoy watching these great players and teams from your own home. Check out the U.S. National Team schedule at www.usoccer.org and the WUSA schedule at www.wusa.com, or in the Fall, college soccer at www.ncaa.com. If there isn't a women's game on TV, watch a men's game!

When you use what you learn from these talented players, you will take your game to a new level.

Keep Kicking! ⚽

HOW TO OUTLAST YOUR OPPONENTS

by Thomas Rongen, formerly Head Coach, DC United

Don't be fooled by the ball. In terms of its physical demands, soccer shares more in common with marathon running than it does with other ball sports such as basketball and tennis. Soccer has a bigger playing field than any other major sport and less stoppage. In a typical game, a soccer player might spend a cumulative two minutes in possession of the ball and more than 30 minutes running, covering three or more miles in the process. For all of these reasons, there are few greater advantages one team can have over another than better game fitness, or endurance.

Nevertheless, most soccer coaches approach fitness as a potential liability rather than as a potential advantage. In other words, they seek to make their players fit enough to "survive" a full game rather than seeking to make them fitter than their opponents. Finding this advantage does not require that you force all your players to run 30 miles a week or neglect skills and strategy in favor of conditioning work. It requires only that you do the following five things better than the average coach does.

BUILD A SOLID BASE

Many coaches make the mistake of assuming that because soccer involves a lot of anaerobic work, soccer conditioning should be primarily anaerobic, as well. While anaerobic training is essential for soccer players, this training is actually much more effective when preceded by a phase of fitness "base building" that is primarily aerobic in nature. The improvements in oxygen consumption capacity, muscle glycogen storage, and fat burning efficiency that come with aerobic training are the foundation for later gains in strength, speed, power, and anaerobic endurance.

Ideally, this base phase should last at least six weeks and should take place during the off-season and preseason periods. Encourage your players to jog, bicycle, swim, skate, or undertake any other aerobic activity they enjoy on a regular basis during the off-season. But you can't assume all your players will follow this

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