

TNT Dynamite Soccer Club – Notes from the DOC Selecting Your Soccer Club

Tryouts for the Fall/Spring soccer year typically occur in mid-June and this process can be confusing and chaotic for several reasons: most if not all of the clubs conduct tryouts on the same day (some even at the same time); the time period for teams to select players and players to accept invitations is small; unprepared families may be left with unfavorable options; and many leagues do not permit players to transfer mid-year, so whichever team a player registers with may be their team for the entire year.

Listed below is information to consider for families to determine their best available soccer option.

Do Your Homework – the Four Key Variables

Families are encouraged to research the various options before the actual tryouts occur. This will help families better determine the club that best fits their child's needs.

When examining each club and what it has to offer, it's important to do so by looking at these four key variables that influence the player development process:

1. **The Team** – for a player to develop, he/she must train against and play with other similarly talented and competitive players. If they are under-challenged – the proverbial big fish in a small pond -- they will not develop the proper playing habits that will allow them to reach the next level; if they can merely hold their own, their 1-vs-1 abilities – the most significant attribute for a player -- will not develop to their fullest.

Some clubs will offer multiple teams in an age group – an “A” team and a “B” team. It's important that the team is a competitive match for your child, and to know that some club's “B” teams are more competitive than a neighbor club's “A” team. A competitive training environment alone will challenge players to improve.

2. **The Coach and Coaching Staff** - in addition to a competitive training environment, having a knowledgeable and experienced coach to lead the team is critical. Coaches should be well-versed in teaching technique, tactics (decision-making) and also aware of the developmental needs of children at each age. Oftentimes families believe the coach who is animated on the sideline and constantly instructing his players is effective; in reality, this coach is preventing the players from learning how to make decisions on the field for themselves, a necessary habit at higher levels of play.

You should also consider the entire coaching staff and their history – where they've played, their coaching experience -- high school, college, Olympic Development Program (ODP), etc -- and their accreditations (United States Soccer Federation National licenses such as “A”, “B” and “C.”). A team will typically be lead by multiple coaches over its lifespan – a diversity of voices is healthy for player and team growth – so examining the quality of the entire staff is important.

3. **The Competition** - to be the best, you have to compete against the best. The Michigan State Premier Soccer Program (MSPSP), a state-wide soccer league that begins at u13, has multiple divisions of competition. While some teams may consider themselves “Premier,” in reality they are not part of the top tiers in their age group. The better clubs consistently place their teams in the top two divisions of MSPSP, and teams in the Midwest Regional League (MRL), a region-wide league that attracts the top teams from Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and other Midwestern states.

It’s also important to examine the competitive level of opponents from u12 and younger. Teams that achieve early success (winning by large margins in these younger age groups) yet do not have the same success in older age groups (u13 and above) do so for one of the following reasons: they play against weak competition, they cut corners when developing players or both.

4. **The Club** - we must also consider the overall organization (the club) when looking at options. Clubs that have a history of success – in terms of league, State Cup and tournament victories, as well as individual player success at the ODP, high school and college levels – typically achieve these feats because of a sound, stable structure lead by full-time professionals dedicated to youth soccer. This is an important factor when considering your child’s options, as the club’s reputation and history typically indicates what you should expect in the future.

You should also consider these three areas within the club:

- A. Philosophy: how does the club prioritize winning vs. player development? How does the club manage playing time – is it equal or is it merit-based (determined by attitude, attendance, effort and performance in both practices and games)?
- B. Commitment: consider this by season – how many training sessions and games per week are required in the fall and spring, and how many are required during the winter months? How much travel is involved? Where are the practices and games held? Know that most programs require a full-year commitment. Club soccer can be a significant commitment for a young athlete, so it’s important for families to plan accordingly.
- C. Cost: what is the annual cost? Is there a payment plan? The old adage “you get what you pay for” typically rings true in youth soccer. Is the cost all-inclusive? Some organizations mislead their families by promoting a low club fee but fail to properly advertise the additional costs families will also incur, such as tournaments, indoor leagues and training, and other fees.

Research your options by contacting the club, checking their respective websites and asking families who have children playing club soccer. When asking around, you should speak with families who have children currently playing but also with those who had children participate but have now grown up. The feedback of families who have been through this process before and have more experience may be more valuable than the family who has children presently playing.

You might also consider asking the club permission for your child to attend a training session – either to participate or observe – to better experience what they have to offer. Many club websites will also publish teams’ game schedules; attending a game is another opportunity to see what the program has to offer.

