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Claudio Reyna: 'Coaches should sit down'

By Mike Voitalla

For many reasons, **Claudio Reyna** was the perfect choice to be named U.S. Soccer's Youth Technical Director one year ago.

The New Jersey product, who captained the USA at two of his four World Cups, played American youth club, high school and college ball before embarking on a career in Europe that saw him captain teams in Germany, Scotland and the English Premier League. After finishing his playing career with MLS's New York Red Bulls, which he also captained, Reyna traveled the world to observe the most successful youth programs – including FC Barcelona.

Reyna's research, and his own experiences, culminated in the Federation's new curriculum for youth coaches (available for download at USSoccer.com).

Upon the unveiling of "U.S. Soccer Curriculum," Reyna spoke to us about what had impressed him about the youth programs that he found worth emulating.

"The coaches were **guiding** the training," he said. "They were not controlling. They weren't on top of the kids. They were not stopping the play for every mistake.

"None of them yelled. The only time they barked was when kids were screwing around. That's when they said, 'Hey, cut it out!' And boom, the intensity went back up."

It's important, Reyna says, to avoid the temptation to focus on mistakes:

"When you first start coaching young players, you see so many things, because, yes, they make mistakes, and if you see a lot of mistakes you want to correct a lot of mistakes. But these coaches were really letting the kids learn the game."

In the United States, youth soccer struggles to stifle the influence of traditional American sports.

"In our country, we feel we have to do things because of our other sports, which are very much dominated by calling a timeout, writing up a play, 'do this, do that,'" he says. "There is more of an influence from the coach in those sports to solve a situation for the players."

Another trait of the youth coaches at clubs that succeed at producing top-level players was that they "were very organized, professional, very prepared.

"You could see that they knew what they were doing from one exercise to the next."

Reyna was struck by the humility of the youth coaches at the pro clubs:

"Very humble. Devoted to their jobs. I got to speak to so many coaches and it was almost when I asked them things they were embarrassed to talk about it. They'd say things like, 'We're a part of something else. The kids are students. We're their teachers. We have to do this job, then we pass them on to the next coach and he does his job, and I get the next group in.'

"And it was very, very powerful to see these guys who were working behind the scenes. They don't get any credit, no one knows who they are, and for me they were fantastic coaches."

During games, Reyna observed that "at the best places the youth coaches are sitting down. And if they get up to give instructions, they sit right back down again.

"When the game is going on, all the coaches should just sit down. I think if you ask any player at the youth level, if the coach is on the sidelines standing, it brings tension. You can sense it."

Coaches at the foreign pro clubs Reyna observed are judged by how many players end up reaching the highest level. And that's what Reyna says should be the measure for American youth coaches.

"For me, it's irrelevant if coaches win state cups, regional cups, national cups," he says. "We get a lot of resumes -- I don't mean people shouldn't put that in their resumes – but how many trophies they have in their cabinet isn't important to me. It's about the kids, it's not about you.

"We care about how many players you develop rather than how many trophies you win.

"What is the plan you have? What is your style of play? What's your philosophy? What do you teach them? What do you do with your staff? If you don't address that, then what are you doing? Going from week-to-week trying to win games?"

(Mike Voitalla, the executive editor of Soccer America, coaches youth soccer for [East Bay United](http://EastBayUnited.com) in Oakland, Calif. His youth