

**The Discovery Method**  
by  
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One of the modern trends in coaching young players is the need to allow the players to find answers or solutions to soccer problems, given to them by their coach, on their own. A skilled coach should do less instructing of his players', instead he should provide them with questions that trigger an interaction between coach and player that guides the player to find the answers on their own. This method of coaching is referred to as "**The Discovery Method**".

Bobby Clark, former Scottish international player and current University of Notre Dame men's coach, offers a few examples of how a coach of young players can use the "Discovery Method" in an effective manner. Here are a couple of excerpts from Coach Clark's book, The Baffled Parent's Guide to Coaching Youth Soccer:

*Teaching a Skill through the Discovery Method*

One of the most effective ways of teaching children a skill is to use the discovery method- where they discover the answer for themselves. Here's how it works: you give players a demonstration of a technique you want them to learn. For example, if you wanted to teach them how to head the ball properly, instead of saying, "This is the part of the head you should use to head the ball," you say, "Watch this. You tell me which part of the player's head is being used to head the ball." Let the players tell you what is going on with the drill; let them explain it to you. (p.16)

*Teaching Positions through the Discovery Method*

The best bet for teaching positioning is to use the discovery method with six-on-six. Let the players play for a while and see how they are starting to sort themselves out. Then call them in around you and ask what they see going on out on the field- how could they work together better? If the players don't come up with the right answers, direct them a little by suggesting they go wide to make an outlet for the ball, since it's so busy in the middle of the field. Ask them what happens when the other team gets the ball and how their own team could prevent the other team from scoring. You'll be surprised how quickly your players will come up with answers and solutions to the problems on their own. (p.48)

*A final thought*

The great thing about the discovery method is that all the players are concentrating on what is in front of them. You ask them questions before the demonstration so you are leading them to the important concept of the skill, but they discover it for themselves. Children (and adults) have a much greater chance of remembering things that they discover themselves. Don't spoon-feed them- let them discover. (p.56)

Coach Clark is not alone in his endorsement of the "Discovery Method". The landscape of soccer changed when "street soccer" began to be a thing of the past. Street soccer provided players the freedom to discover, and attempt, things on their own without a

coach barking instructions. Through repeated opportunities to make decisions, and the ability to make mistakes, players learned what worked and what didn't, while developing, a greater imagination in finding solutions to the problems the game presents. US Soccer, and the various federations throughout the world, have moved to a small-sided format of training our youth to counter the loss of street soccer. This has been a great and important step in furthering our players' development and enjoyment of the game, but it mustn't be the final step. It is imperative for coaches to begin to, as Horst Wein says, **“stimulate, rather than instruct”**.

We often refer to the statement that “the game is the greatest teacher”, but far too often we make that statement hollow by our actions. Let's allow the game to teach and stimulate our players by posing questions instead of providing answers. If we can do this, we will go a long way in helping develop more creative players, and in the end a higher level of soccer.