



Redefining “Winning” in Grassroots Soccer

Aligned to the new Grassroots Standards, Canada Soccer continues to endorse the removal of scores and standings from grassroots soccer up to Under 13. The goal of grassroots soccer is to create the best possible learning and development environment for all young players in Canada. While the removal of scores and standings does not diminish children’s desire to compete, it shifts the focus of grassroots matches from the adult concept of rewarding performance measured by result toward development and the participant experience, which are more appropriate emphases in children’s sport.

More information on [Competition in the early stages of Long-term Player Development](#).

In support of focusing more on the environment created in grassroots soccer, research confirms that winning is much less important to children’s experiences in sport than might be expected. [Research from the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University](#) tells us that children cite ‘fun’ as the primary reason for participation in organized sport and its absence as the number one reason for youth sport attrition. While winning games and championships can be fun, [further research from George Washington University](#) with young soccer players defines fun through their eyes. Of the 81 “fun-determinants” identified, trying your best and getting playing time, playing well together as a team and getting along with your teammates, and exercising and being active ranked highest, while winning ranked only 48th.

This research has recently been re-enforced by Étude de l’Observatoire international en management du sport (OIMS) de l’Université Laval, which found that the three most important elements for young people playing soccer are fun, having a good coach, and being healthy. Winning ranked last out of the 8 motivations that were measured.

Understanding that winning is not the priority of children participating soccer and that an unhealthy focus on winning over the experience of young players can cause them to leave sport, it is time to re-define winning in grassroots soccer.

Aligned to the principles of the [Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program](#), winning can be defined as providing the best possible environment for young players and focusing on attracting children to play soccer, supporting them to continue participating throughout adolescence and into adulthood, developing them to progress to higher levels of play as they age out of the grassroots stages of LTPD, and providing pathways to allow them to transition into other meaningful roles in the game like coaching and officiating. Aligning all programming and approaches for children in the grassroots stages to the [Canada Soccer Grassroots Standards](#) is required in advance of the 2026 playing season and creates environments focused on the development and experience of young players.