

## Academy Developmental Program

The Academy Developmental Program helps children ages 10-12 shift from recreational to more competitive play, with an emphasis on teaching players fundamental individual skills. The goal of this program is to provide a high level of coaching, focus on individual techniques, and minimize the cost of traveling. While most games will be held in Bozeman, teams will travel to games and tournaments approximately once a month.

The largest overwhelming problem with youth soccer players coming from Montana, is they do not understand the basic techniques needed to play the game. As a result, soccer teams coming from Montana rely on pure athleticism to win games and the soccer on display is as exciting in quality as watching paint dry! The reason why Montana soccer is behind the rest of the country is simple; we are more focused on winning at the youngest age groups than learning how to play the game. While competition and winning are important, there is a difference between the two. Competition is the process of playing, and winning is merely the outcome. Competition is vital to a player's development, albeit winning does not need to be a focus until a later stage of life.

As a result of failing basic soccer education in the world, a new idea has been introduced by leading clubs in Europe called the Academy Program. This idea has slowly swept across the Atlantic, and has been embraced by US Youth Soccer and the leading youth and professional clubs in the country. The premise is simple:

- Focus on individual development in techniques
- Work on how and when those techniques can be used in a game
- Develop a soccer culture of hard work and a common goal to become better
- Remove winning as the primary objective. We want players to take risks and be able to make mistakes
- Remove players from their comfort zone, and put them in environments to work with many different players of ranging abilities

The idea is that if we focus on the individual at the youngest age groups, teaching them the basics, then no matter who they play with when they get older, they will be able to compete and excel.

Bozeman Blitz FC has embraced this philosophy and is moving forward to implementing an academy structure within our club. We believe that focusing on individuals, as opposed to teams, at these ages will better allow us to develop players, keep players interested in the game, and create a better pool to choose from for forming our older, more elite teams.