Tips on finding the right club

There are a number of things to consider when it comes to selecting a youth soccer club, and the list of factors can vary from person to person. So, we are sitting down with some of the most respected club leaders from around the country to get their opinion on what you should do when it is time to find a soccer club for your player.

For some, choosing the right club can be as simple as staying with your current team, but for others it can feel like you are being pulled 100 different ways by apparent salesmen, who are each claiming to make your child the next Tim Howard or Abby Wambach.

My Tips: Jimmy Obleda

Find a coach that isn’t just passionate – they know the game.

Make sure the coach is continuing his/her teaching methodologies through structured, continuing education.

You want your coach to invest in your athlete and help the player learn from their mistakes.

A challenging environment can be a positive but you don’t want to overwhelm the player.

You want your athlete to enjoy the process of developing as a player – fun is important.

Don’t feel the need to jump to another club just because of ‘a good sales pitch’ – a good environment with a good coach is the key.

US Youth Soccer sat down with two-time US Youth Soccer National Champion and Director of Coaching for Fullerton Rangers Youth Soccer Club, Jimmy Obleda, who provided some insight on what players and parents should be looking for in their quest to find the right club.

“Coaching should be the biggest component. What is their history? What licenses do they have? What have they done with their past teams? These are questions that you have to ask,” Obleda said. “Some coaches will say come play for us because we have a good club, but ultimately the coach should answer how they are going to make the players better.”
Obleda explains that there are a lot of things that parents and players have to look at when evaluating the coaching. These include whether the coach simply monitors training or actively engages and teaches his or her players. Obleda points out that some coaches can be better salespeople than they are coaches, and the best way to differentiate between the two is to ask the coach and other parents multiple questions.

“You should be asking the coach these questions, but you should also be asking the parents of the kids who are already on the team,” Obleda said. “Coaches can say one thing, but other parents know if their player is getting better or not.”

Obleda expands on this by saying that sometimes you have to get very specific, asking which part of the player’s game he or she plans on improving. He also identifies licensing as an important factor when deciding between coaches.

“The game is changing, and we as coaches have to keep in line with what the world is doing to better develop soccer players,” Obleda said. “Just like with teachers and doctors, the methodologies are always changing and improving.”

Other than coaching, Obleda recommends using the environment the player will be surrounded in as a key factor when making a decision.

“For players, it is important to get in an environment where you are going to be challenged. When you are challenged and pushed to the limit, you become a better soccer player,” Obleda said. “You also want a club that will be invested in the player and isn’t putting a club together just to pay the bills. If the club is invested, then if a player struggles for a year, the club isn’t going to get rid of him or her.”

Obleda does emphasize that if the player currently is in a good environment, it often doesn’t make sense to jump ship.

“If the player is on a good team, not winning wise, but a good environment with a good coach and is continuing to get better and, most importantly, enjoying the game, then I don’t see why you would take the player out of it,” Obleda said. “The issue becomes when the player or parent thinks they have outgrown the club and have to leave. What can happen is the kid could miss a step in development and get lost.”

Obleda expands on this by saying the decision process focuses too much on who is a member of what, rather than who is developing the best soccer players.

“All of these titles, buzzwords and patches on your jersey, at the end of the day they aren’t improving the players,” Obleda said. “When choosing a club, you should focus on the coaching and the right environment to make the child a better soccer player and a better person.”