

## Paying Players to Score: A bad idea for so many reasons Part 1 – The coach and player perspective

Recently, Cal North got a question via email from a concerned parent: “What is your stance on a coach that pays their child money to score goals during a game?”

I came from a league that frowned on this very much to the point of removing coaches that acted in this manner. I feel it is something that takes away from the whole team spirit and teaches one to become a one-man team.

I have recently become involved in a league that not only allows this but was surprised to find that all but one of my fellow board members also practiced this same act with their child.”

Having been a player, coach, sport psychology consultant, and now a father, my stance is that this is a bad idea. I will back up this stance from 3 perspectives: the coach, the player, and the sport psychology consultant.

As a coach during the last 14 years, it has never crossed my mind to offer money to a young athlete to score a goal. Ever. If my players are not trying as hard as they can to score goals, then I am doing something wrong. However, I have experienced a couple situations in which a parent offered money to players, and none of them ended positively.

In North Carolina, I coached a boys’ team from U13-U15. It was a good team and a great group of kids. One of our players was an ODP player – big, athletic, fast, and overall a good player. As a forward, he was one of our leading scorers. The problem was that his dad paid him per goal.

And while he did score plenty of goals, he did not continue to develop. He took shots from bad angles, passed up chances for assists, and didn’t give his all on defense. His work-rate in training was decent, but he was not interested in focusing on improving other parts of his game. Not only that, but sometimes after wins, as the team celebrated, he would sulk because he didn’t score. These things created a certain amount of jealousy and resentment among his teammates, which led to *them* not passing to *him* at times.

For two years in a row, this team finished in 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Division I, just missing out on moving up to the Premier league. Just before the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, the dad pulled his son off of this team. Without him, and his goal scoring abilities, the team won the 1<sup>st</sup> division and was promoted to the Premier league. The team was better without him.

It was easy to come up with my coach-specific reasoning as to why this is a bad idea. But what about the kids? What do youth soccer players think about this issue? To find out, I did an informal survey of 40 players from a youth soccer club in Portland, OR.

Below are the **questions** and a sampling of the answers. My comments are in italics.

### **What motivates you to score?**

- Feels good (16)
- Winning / when we're losing (16)
- Pride / reputation / attention (14)
- For the team / coach (10)
- Confidence (5)
- Love the game (4)
- Support / crowd (4)
- Possibility to start / more playing time (2)
- Money (2)
- To impress girls; so my dad won't yell at me; music (1 each)

*Both respondents who said "Money" were 12-year-old boys. Congratulations - paying your players to score puts you at a rational and emotional level equivalent to that of a 12-year-old boy.*

### **What qualities do you look for in a coach?**

- Authoritative / strict / discipline (9)
- Experienced / knows the game (8)
- Good skills and drills (7)
- Good communicator / honest (7)
- Nice (6)
- Dedicated (4)
- Patient; relaxed; supportive; respectful; motivator (1 each)

*Seems like these should be enough. No players mentioned money.*

**Have you ever had a coach offer you money to score?** 4 yes, 26 no

**Have you ever had a parent offer you money to score?** 12 yes, 18 no

*Although the original question addressed coaches, I wondered about the parental role in this. It looks like parents are much more likely than coaches to offer their players money to score.*

### **What would you think if your coach offered you money to score?**

- "It's a lame motivation tactic." – 17 yo girl
- "I'd think they were coaching for the wrong reason" – 14 yo boy
- "They are not a good coach" – 12 yo boy
- "Think it was funny and desperate." - 15 yo boy

*Coaches might consider using that money to take a coaching course or two!*

- "Probably nothing would change because I need to keep all characteristics of playing, not just mentality of scoring. Other things are necessary." – 17 yo girl
- "I'm a defender and it's too hard" - 12yo boy

*Are you only paying for goals? What about the defenders? What about the other areas of the game?*

- ❑ “I would score more” – 14 yo boy
- ❑ “I would want to score because I wanted the money.” – 17 yo girl
- ❑ “I would be happy because I’m good.” - 11 yo boy
- ❑ “I think it would be like the pros except with less money” – 12 yo boy

*This question was on the second page of the survey. Notice that only 2 boys mentioned money as a motivator in the first question. But several said it would motivate them when asked specifically. This illustrates the influence of adults, for better or worse.*

### **What would you think if your parent offered you money to score?**

- ❑ “My parents wouldn’t give me money for a sport they pay \$1000 for me to play anyways.” 17 yo girl

*Easily the best quote of the survey!*

- ❑ “It shouldn’t happen. Players should have their own motivation.” – 16 yo girl
- ❑ “I’d think their priorities were messed up” – 17 yo girl
- ❑ “They are trying to motivate you in a bad way” – 12 yo boy

### **What would you do if your coach offered money to anyone who scored a goal, but you were a defender?**

- ❑ “I would be angry.” – 12 yo boy
- ❑ “I would feel like it was unfair.” – 17 yo girl
- ❑ “I would feel unfairly cheated.” – 12 yo boy
- ❑ “I’d be disappointed because I think it’s disrespectful and selfish.” – 14 yo boy
- ❑ “Feel left out, defenders are as important as a forward.” – 16 yo girl
- ❑ “Get a little mad because I didn’t get money for stopping a goal.” – 17 yo girl

*How will this effect defenders and keepers’ motivation?*

- ❑ “I would not stay in my position.” – 12 yo boy
- ❑ “I wouldn’t play unless I was a forward.” – 15 yo girl
- ❑ “I would try to play more offense.” – 12 yo boy
- ❑ “I would make a deal with a forward to get part of the money, or dribble the ball up to score.” – 17 yo girl

*This shows how these players would go against the team goals. So the “positive” you may experience from paying a player to score, is negated by defenders not focused on their job and allowing goals at the other end.*

Hopefully the picture painted here couldn’t be clearer – paying a young soccer player to score goals is a bad idea. There are two more questions in this survey that will be covered in Part 2 of this article in the next edition of Soccer California. I will also tackle not only the sport psychology arguments against paying a player to score, but will also give ideas on what to do instead to foster solid team goals, positive and effective motivation, and strong team cohesion.

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