



# National Soccer Coaches Association of America

## Team Notebooks: Writing to the Next Level (Part 2 of 3)

*Part I of this series on team notebooks introduced the first two sections of a basic notebook. Those two sections of a player's notebook included:*

- *Pre-Season Thoughts: Guides players in thinking about the previous season and the coming season. Players write about their preparation and goals for the season.*
- *Match Analysis I: Guides players in reflecting on a match.*

*As explained in Part I, these notebooks provide players a place to reflect, analyze and set goals. This article focuses on the next three sections of team notebooks, including the Match Analysis II, Post-Season Thoughts, and Player's Notes.*

### **Match Analysis II (MAII)**

Have you ever shown a match film to your team and then during the discussion have only a few of your veteran players participate? This section of the Team Notebook guides all players and coaches in thinking about a match they have watched as a team. Used as a learning tool, the Match Analysis II (MAII) frontloads team discussions and adds to a player's emerging picture of that next level of play. Here are some ways of using the MAII with your team:

- **Next Level Matches:** When middle schoolers attend a high school match or when a college team attends a professional match, players may use the MAII to help unpack a match.
- **Tournaments:** During a tournament, select one match to observe and write about. You may wish to choose a match that features a team (or teams) you play during the regular season or may play in post-season. If a particularly dynamic team is participating, one that your side never will play, you may want to select that match for the pure learning value. Jonathan's analysis includes one team from our own high school conference.
- **First Team-Second Team:** Your club or school may field first and second teams. Once a season the first team could watch and analyze the second team's match using the MAII. The second team should have the same opportunity.

### **Falcon Soccer**

**Match Analysis II by:** Jonathan

**Fill out the following for matches that we watch together as a team.**

**Team #1:** FHS

**Alignment of Players (e.g. 4-4-2, 4-3-3):**4-4-2

**Strengths:** Outside midfielders made great runs

**Weaknesses:** They seemed to relax when they were up 2-0.

**Halftime Adjustments:** None??? They came out flat. Over-confident.

**Forwards:** Fast

**Midfielders:** Athletic

**Defenders:** Moved well together.

**Keeper:** Confident – great technique – team leader.

**Team #1 Man of the Match: Why?** #6 – left mid. His runs through the D opened up huge space. He always encouraged his mates. He's the kind of player I'd like to be. Great goal.

**Team #2:** THS

**Alignment of Players (e.g. 4-4-2, 4-3-3):** 4-4-2 1st half, 4-3-3 2nd half

**Strengths:** Individual players: Center Mid and Sweep

**Weaknesses:** Young. Didn't use space well.

**Halftime Adjustments:** Went to a 4-3-3- to get more targets up front.

**Forwards:** Lacked movement.

**Midfielders:** Lost composure – their talk was not constructive.

**Defenders:** Seemed spacey. Lost track of play.

**Keeper:** Poor positioning. No talk. Cried after second goal.

**Team #2 Man of the Match: Why?** Sweeper – he kept his cool. It's not easy managing younger players.

**Moment of the Match:** #6's run through the D and his one-touch to the near post. Sweet String Music! Magic!

**Final Analysis: Think as a coach about team strengths (e.g. athleticism, speed, coaching, motivation/heart) and/or weaknesses. What adjustments might you have made to either team if you were the team's coach?** THS needed to work on the simple things: move to space and play the way you face. They were a lot younger than FHS and just needed to try to play within themselves. It's like you told us over the last two years. Play the fundamentals – it's a simple game so keep it that way. As for FHS, they didn't stay focused for the whole match. Their coach needed to teach, not yell – the guy embarrassed himself.

The following is a team discussion activity called "Listening In" that takes place in a training session after a first team-second team match:

### **Listening In**

- The team that observed the match separates into groups of forwards, midfielders and defenders/keepers. Players discuss the match for 10 to 15 minutes using their individual MAII as guides.
- The coach calls the three groups together and leads them in a discussion about the match they observed.
- The team that played in the match sits outside the discussion and listens in. Those players may wish to take notes in their team notebook while listening.
- After the discussion, the team that listened leaves to discuss their match using both their observation notes from the discussion and their Match Analysis I sheets.

The rules of "Listening In" are clear-cut: Players analyzing the match are cautioned not to single out one player's performance, good or bad, or to critique the coach. The team being critiqued listens in and is not allowed to speak. The activity demands maturity and trust.

Another use for Match Analysis II is during film sessions: Whether using your own match films or World Cup selections, the MAII provides a mechanism for all players to reflect on a match. After the film, give players a few minutes to write the analysis. To change it up a bit, you may wish to group players by positions or year in school. Ask them to fill out one MAII as a group.

The MAII became especially useful on my travel teams. After attending professional matches in England, players would talk through the match on the tube (subway) and spend time in their rooms writing analyses. Later, we would sit in a hallway or hotel lobby to discuss the match. More than several times Londoners who heard our conversation joined in. Any coach or soccer fan would have enjoyed being a part of those deliberations; notebook analyses always raise the level of conversation and ratchet up the learning. As a bonus, spirited discussions with hometown supporters create lifelong memories.

### **Post-Season Reflections**

This end-of-the-season section promotes closure, assists players in setting preliminary goals for the off-season and helps coaches think about the next season. If you conduct post-season debriefing sessions with individual athletes, the sheets help guide these discussions.

Jonathan's Post-Season Reflection reveals his growth: "This year I really felt like I led the team." And he had. Through his play, Jonathan emerged as an on-field captain even though he did not wear the armband. The next season, his senior year, he would captain our side.

During our debriefing session, we spoke about his need to earn money for college; that discussion led us to talk about his potential for playing beyond high school. We reviewed the winter indoor season and discussed recruiting players. Jonathan was acutely aware of the value of indoor play in the off-season. Another discussion point focused on Jonathan's perceived weakness in dealing with players who "make excuses and whine about everything."

### **Falcon Soccer**

**Post-Season Reflections by:** Jonathan

**My strengths this season as a player:** Last year I felt like I directed the defense pretty well. This year I really felt like I led the team. It's such a cool feeling to be able to "orchestrate" (thanks for the word) an attack. I saw the full field – I knew what to say and how to say it – I felt confident on the ball – I loved the one-on-one moments with great players. Ryan and I worked well together.

**My weaknesses this season as a player:** – I made some bad decisions during matches and I let those decisions get to me. I pouted during the Winthrop match after I got toasted. – The last 15 minutes or in OT, sometimes I felt tired. Like you said, I need to think about preserving energy. – I just don't like players who make excuses and whine about everything. I have to learn to talk with them better.

**In the off-season here's what I plan to do to improve as a player for the next season:** Train! I've got the whole year planned and I'll show it to you in our debrief. I'm playing indoor with Central. Ryan and I designed a weight program – we're going to be HUGE! Summer camp to be sure. I'll co-coach community center soccer – I have to work more hours this summer – College \$\$\$\$.

**When I review the goals I set for myself at the beginning of the season in my notebook, here's how I think I did:** I wrote about talk, composure and leadership on and off the pitch. I feel good about everything except off-field leadership. I have to learn to talk with kids who aren't into it. They just bug me.

**This year our team strengths included:**

- We had good movement off the ball
- Good talk
- Positive attitude
- Seniors
- Great pregame, good stretching
- Making the finals and playing tough.

**This year our team weaknesses included:**

- Seniors - haha, just kidding. I'll miss them.
- Maybe we're too polite sometimes. I know – we'll have to talk about this one.
- Playing quicker...that will come with age.

**Here's how I'm doing in my classes this season:**

Classes-How I'm doing

Pre-Calculus-B (I'll get an A 2nd Qtr.)

Physics-B+

Writing Center English-A (This class is easy. Ha!)

US History-A

Psychology-A

**Other thoughts:**

How about a 2-day minicamp in preseason at the lake? Ryan and I will organize it. It'll be great for getting everybody together. Thanks for everything, Coach. See you in English!

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### **Player's Notes**

The pages of this section prove to be more useful if the outline of a pitch is photocopied on them. This way, a player could design a free kick, sketch an opposing team's goal-scoring attack or take notes. Here are three examples for utilizing Player's Notes:

- While watching the Premier League's Goal of the Week Virtual Replay ([www.premierleague.com](http://www.premierleague.com)), ask players to take notes on the five goals of the week. Direct them to identify defensive lapses or diagram the attack to point out what makes the build-up and resulting goal special. This writing activity gets every player involved and serves to prepare players more thoroughly for team discussions. End the session by voting on the goal of the week.
- At the halfway point of your regular season, after playing every opponent once, ask your players to create an all-star team selected from league opponents (do not include your own players on this list). Use the following sequence:
  - o Provide your players with a list of the starting 11 from each league opponent (it'd be best if you printed their names and numbers on a pitch in their starting positions).
  - o Ask players to select their all-star starting 11, list the player's attributes below their names, and sketch-out the all-star team on a Player's Notes page.
  - o Ask your forwards, midfielders and defenders to come to consensus on an all-star team.
  - o Share the lists with the rest of the team.
  - o Using the lists, discuss the candidates and come to a consensus of a final league all-star team.

This exercise begins with an individual player's thinking, moves to small-group discussions and ends up in a full-team dialogue. Such a progression creates a unique training session. It helps players think about the qualities and skills of next-level players and heightens awareness of power players on other teams. As they think about all-star players and review your first-half matches, your team members are preparing themselves for the season's second half.

After explaining a new concept to your team (e.g., zonal defense of 3-5-2), give players a few minutes to write about the concept as a way to gauge their understanding. You might suggest that the players write as if explaining the concept to a less-experienced player (e.g., college players write to high school players). Next, have your players read and discuss their writing with a partner – usually, if there's any confusion, it'll surface during this time.

Part III of Team Notebooks: Writing to the Next Level will feature additional sections that coaches could add to the basic team notebook. The educational theories and research that support the use of team notebooks will be highlighted in the final article as well as an FAQ section.

*Editor's note: Richard Kent is an assistant professor of literacy and director of the National Writing Project site at the University of Maine. A soccer and ski coach for three decades, Kent researches writing to learn in athletics and serves as a consultant to athletes, coaches, and teams. A National Educator Award recipient, Kent is the author of seven books.*