



SHANE STAY

WHY
AMERICAN
SOCCER
ISN'T *THERE* YET

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Why American Soccer Isn't *There* Yet

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BY SHANE STAY

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Why American Soccer Isn't There Yet

Maidenhead: Meyer & Meyer Sport (UK) Ltd., 2014
ISBN: 978-1-78255-694-7

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© 2014 by Meyer & Meyer Sport (UK) Ltd.
Auckland, Beirut, Budapest, Cairo, Cape Town, Dubai, Högendorf, Indianapolis,
Maidenhead, Singapore, Sydney, Tehran, Wien
 Member of the World Sport Publishers' Association (WSPA)
ISBN: 978-1-78255-694-7
E-Mail: info@m-m-sports.com
www.m-m-sports.com

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PREFACE

I was recently coaching at an American youth soccer camp. The kids were six to eight years old. Before everything got started and the kids were running around, I instructed a six-year-old shooting on goal. He had a friend playing goalie, who was also six. I was showing the shooter side volleys, and he was slowly getting the hang of it. However, each time the goalie would throw the ball back to me, he would gun it like a baseball, forcing me to catch it in self-defense. I told him, “Next time, throw it harder.” And the next time he threw the ball harder. Again, I told him, “Hey, next time, throw it harder.” And he did. Then it hit me: This kid has no idea what sarcasm is yet. He took my instruction literally, and he threw the ball harder each time.

It reminds me that kids are like little computer chips, waiting for information to be stored. So exactly what information we give them is very important. At younger ages, children will learn a second language with more ease than learning a second language as an adult. Their young minds are growing. They are impressionable, and what you say will sink in. In terms of soccer, it is very important we give them the correct information.

Later that day in camp, an instructor was telling the kids to dribble around and try to kick other players’ balls away from them. So they all gathered in a general space and had fun trying. At this point, the instructor stopped them and asked, “Why are you all bunched up?” He pointed out there was a lot of open space “over here” and “over there.” One thought hit me: *If they all run away to open space, how are they to knock each other’s ball away?*

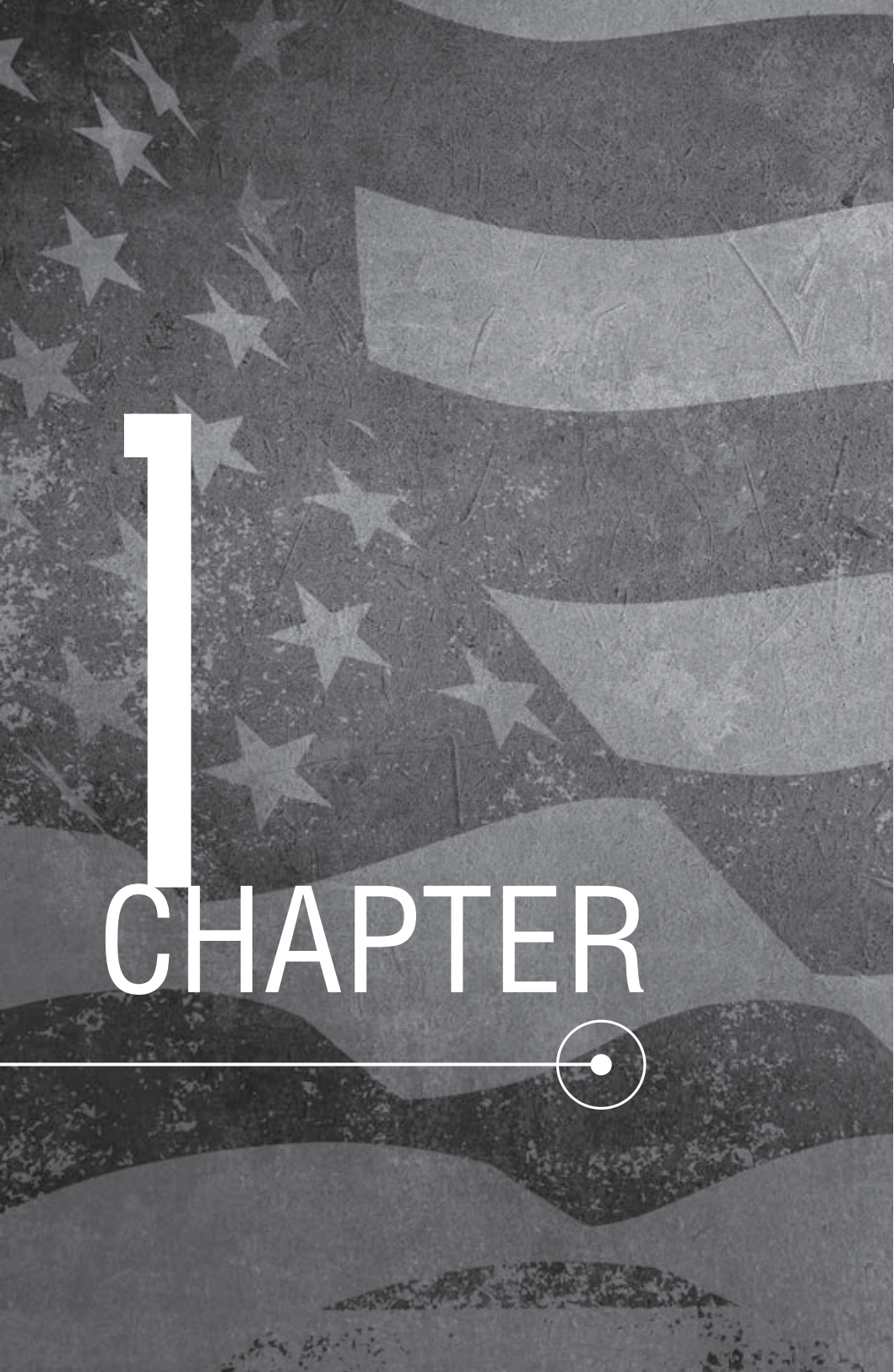
Later, in another activity, the instructor told the players to treat the ball like a hot potato—get rid of it! He told the players they were all bunched up. He told them not to pass into congested areas.

Calling the ball a “hot potato” is the wrong message. We do not want the players to treat the ball like a time bomb. We want them to be comfortable with it.

Telling the players they are bunched up and not to pass into congested areas is wrong. As older players, the defense makes all areas on the field congested. The game of soccer is playing skillfully and confidently in congested areas and then finding an open area. Once you find that open area, then the defense will collapse, and you will have to play skillfully and confidently in congested areas again. Goals will come either from skillful play in congested areas or from finding a player in an open area.

To put this wrong information in the brain’s of children is a big problem with American soccer. They keep this engrained in their psyches—their souls, if you will—for the rest of their lives. As do their parents, the coaches, and other observers.

At a young age, we need to stress to American soccer players the importance of dribbling, controlling the ball, juggling, passing, technique, and playing confidently in congested areas, while enjoying the game.



1 CHAPTER



INTRODUCTION

The United States men's national team will inevitably lose early in the World Cup, and then the questions will begin: What are we doing wrong? How can we get better?

American soccer will someday be a consistent power like Brazil, Germany, and Argentina. However, in the past and currently, the majority of American players have some sort of built-in counteracting mechanism when it comes to creativity on the field. How can the men's national team get over this? How can America, as a soccer-playing nation, get over this?

To improve soccer in America there are many things that will need to change. In order to answer this creativity problem America faces in soccer, the following is a broad guideline to a few salient points that will need to be recognized.

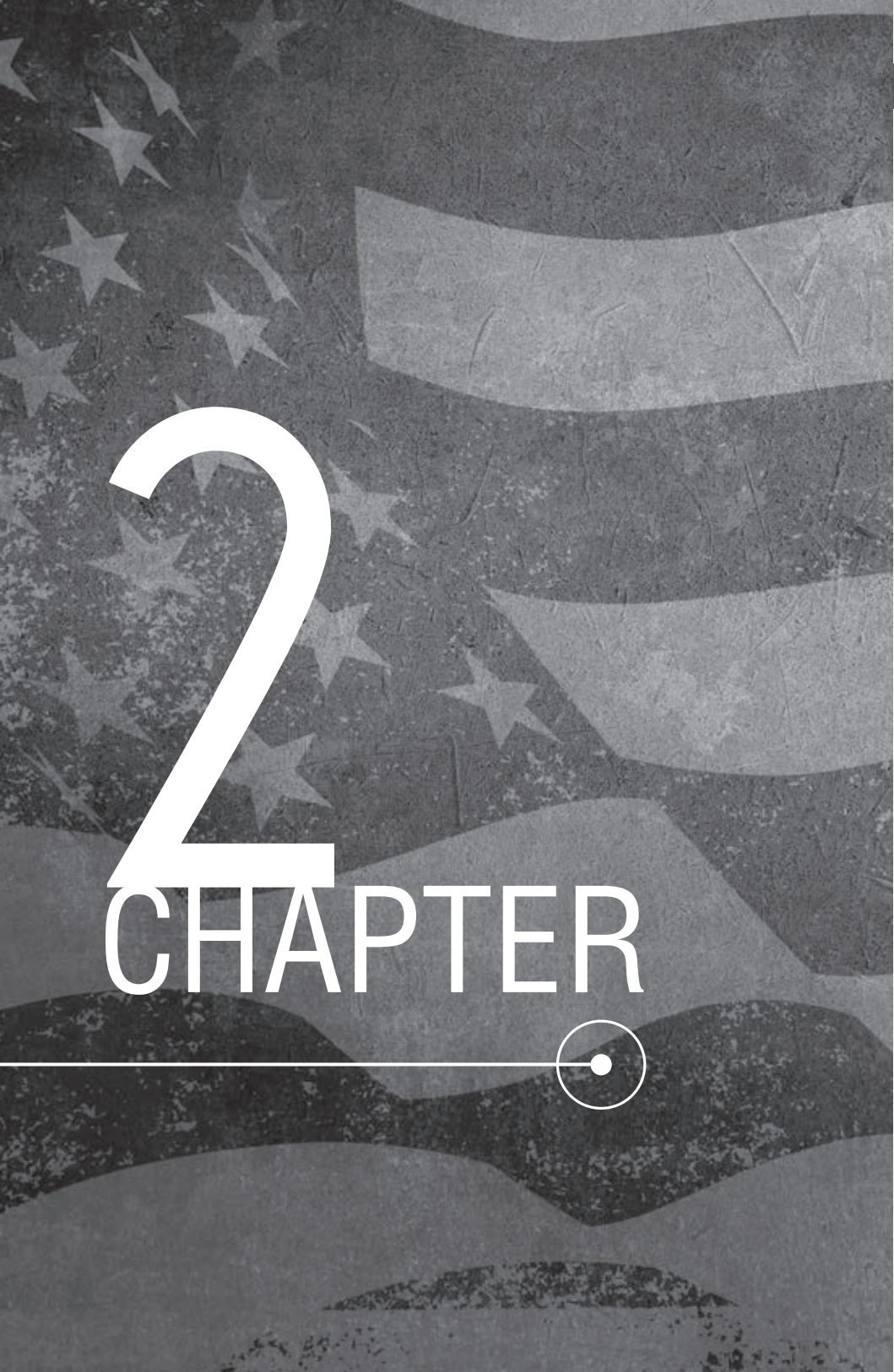
In order to improve as a soccer nation, we must:

1. Encourage players to dribble.¹
2. Encourage players to be creative.
3. Encourage players to improvise with each other.
4. Have players practice shooting inside a racquetball court.
5. Construct futsal courts and beach soccer courts in the major cities around the country.

1 To understand this skill, know Anson Dorrance's method of success.

6. Have players play futsal and beach soccer as much as outdoor soccer.
7. Emphasize passing the ball back to the player that just passed to you.
8. Ensure all four defenders are skilled.
9. Emphasize with the defenders that everything starts in the backcourt.
10. Emphasize with the defenders that offensive success depends on the backcourt.
11. Encourage inside defenders to study film of Franz Beckenbauer.
12. Encourage outside defenders to attack, attack, attack, dribble, dribble, dribble, and shoot, shoot, shoot (studying film of Jorginho and Cafu).
13. De-emphasize crossing.
14. Emphasize posting up forwards with their back to goal and improvising.
15. Emphasize playing across the field.

Because soccer in the United States is growing more popular, the next generation of dads will pass on skills and confidence to their sons. Major League Soccer (MLS) will give kids hope and confidence in their personal future and a decent example of how to play.



2

CHAPTER

