

The level of play throughout the state is steadily increasing. Leagues outside metro Atlanta are becoming more competitive and are fielding more select teams in the Classic and Athena divisions. As a result of this, teams need to cover longer distances while traveling to away games. For example, Savannah teams traveling to Atlanta or Columbus teams traveling to Savannah or Augusta. This increased travel begs the question: Does traveling on the same day as the game affect the performance of the players? Most teams try to keep the cost of travel down. When faced with playing a game that is 4 hours away, as in Atlanta to Savannah, the parents will probably leave early in the morning and try to arrive at the field at least one hour before the start of the game. When this happens, the chances are high that the traveling team's performance will suffer. Sport experts agree that most players' performance will be adversely affected by same day travel. I cannot provide you with a scientific explanation for this phenomenon, but the fact is, sitting in a car or a bus for an extended length causes the body to undergo a certain loss of coordination and balance. My own experience of traveling with teams validates this phenomenon. I am also certain that many youth coaches experienced the frustration of watching their players struggle through an away game involving long travel, unable to execute even simple passes. Many coaches who have little experience traveling long distances with a team are totally unprepared for the sharp drop in their team's performance and are perplexed by it, usually reduced to muttering "I don't know what happened to my team. This is not my team!" So what can be done to eliminate the adverse effects of travel on performance? The obvious best solution is to travel the day before the game and go for a light practice or at least a light jog upon arrival. If this is not possible because of financial or time issues, the next best thing is to schedule the game as late in the afternoon as possible and arrive at the destination at least 4 to 5 hours before game time. This will allow for a 45 minutes light practice upon arrival to regain coordination and balance lost. If the game cannot be scheduled in late afternoon, making it difficult to arrive 4 to 5 hours prior to kick-off, the only solution left is to intersperse the travel with light workouts with the ball (juggling, passing and dribbling). A good rule of thumb regarding the breaks in travel is a 15-20 minutes workout at the end of every hour traveled. This can be done in any flat grassy patch away from the road or at one of the many rest areas on the highways. Try these solutions and let me know the result. Good luck. - See more at: <http://www.georgiasoccer.org/coaches/travel-and-play-same-day.aspx#sthash.ARPCCD98.dpuf>