

THE Journal for Soccer

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
**NATIONAL SOCCER COACHES
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA**

COACHES

ANTONIO CONTE

THE NEXT
SPECIAL ONE?

PLUS

HOW TO PLAN YOUR
TEAM'S PRE-SEASON
FITNESS TRAINING

**PERFORMANCE
IMPROVEMENT**

TIPS FOR YOUTH
PLAYERS

**MAN WITH
A MISSION:**
JASON DEVOS
CANADA SOCCER'S
NEW DIRECTOR OF
DEVELOPMENT



**FORMER NATIONAL
TEAM STAR**

RHIAN WILKINSON
EMBARKS ON HER
COACHING JOURNEY

INSIDE:
SPECIAL 2017 TOURNAMENT
& FESTIVAL SUPPLEMENT

**YOUR NEW NSCAC HAS RE-LAUNCHED! SEE INSIDE FOR NSCAC
MEMBERSHIP NEWS & OUR FIRST OFFICIAL COACHING CLINIC
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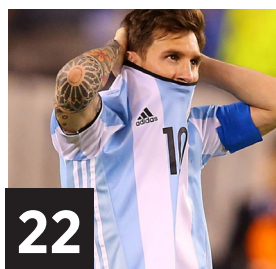
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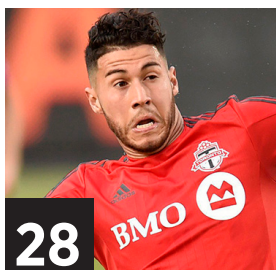
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SETTING A NEW COURSE

TONY WAITERS

NSCAC PRESIDENT & WORLD OF SOCCER FOUNDER

Welcome to the re-established National Soccer Coaches Association of Canada. When we first started the association in the 90's, we were living in a different world. Canada is a vast country and to meet on a regular basis in those days would mean driving or flying great distances which was time consuming...and very expensive.

Now we are well into the 21st Century and we have the opportunity of meeting on a regular basis...online!

We still have to face the four-and-a-half hours time difference between Victoria, B.C., and St. John's, NL. We can't change that if we want to go "live", but we could choose a convenient time of 5.00 p.m. (PST). At that hour, most people across this big country of ours will be able to tune in.

Please share with me your suggestions for a system of communication that can work for us all - both audio and visual - that could enable any member who wanted to join us online.

We've already looked at some, but we need to stay within budget and the better options are expensive.

One innovation that the NSCAC provisional committee has agreed to is to put in place an inner city program right across Canada.

OUTLINE FOR A NATIONAL CANADIAN INNER CITY SOCCER PROGRAM

Children in the inner cities of Canada are outside of mainstream soccer. Why?

1. They cannot afford to pay-to-play (as most middle class Canadians).
2. Many are in single parent families with no car for transportation.
3. Most are either refugees or from immigrant families. However, for most of them, soccer is their game:
4. As immigrants and refugees, it has been part of their culture.
5. They cannot afford to play hockey and, unlike American inner city kids, do not necessarily relate to football, baseball and basketball.

The plan is to start a pilot inner city soccer program in Burnaby, British Columbia and, if it shows promise, to expand it right across Canada.

Why Burnaby?

Burnaby has a large, but manageable, inner city area near Metrotown.

Many of the children live in high-rise buildings and, apart from school, often don't see much action, especially on weekends.

Burnaby has a community school program and some of these schools are in the inner city area.

Edmonds School is virtually at the centre of the inner city area and has a large lighted area

The Edmonds playing area is not used after school (from 3.15 p.m.) until the community clubs come on (5.15 p.m.), giving a perfect window for an hour-and-a-half program.

Derek Possee and Geoff McCormick already run their PASS soccer program within the Burnaby elementary schools - a soccer-themed Phys. Ed. curriculum as part of the school timetable.

Inner City program proposal:

Sessions should be centred on free play where staff coaches mentor the players - often one-on-one - rather than set up formal "academy-style", conveyor-belt coaching that is churning out mediocre players who may have sound basic skills but not much else.



work at the club level, but usually not until 5.30 or later. People such as Kevin Julian, Dale Mitchell, Eduardo Valente, Sara Maglio, Phoebe Trotman, Denis Kindel and Derek Possee, supplemented by younger coaches (appropriate fees per hour for the experienced coaches; less for the assistants).

Considerations and expenses to be factored into a budget:

Need for senior “minders” to volunteer to help police the program and to ensure the safety of the playing area.

Need to arrange transportation to bring children to the playing area and to get them back at 5.15.

Donated soccer balls, goals, pinnies and uniforms.

Potential sponsorship (in BC) from Vancouver Whitecaps FC so they can take players and their families to home games (buses, children’s section at BC Place, etc.) The Whitecaps FC would not be directly involved in running the program, but would generate goodwill and a desire for the better players to one day play for the ‘Caps.

Encourage BC Soccer to sponsor the players via insurance, which will allow teams from the Inner Cities to play against local opposition.

Fund Raising and Sponsorship

Consider grants available within BC, for instance, government lotteries.

Consider grants available nationally – Canada Soccer, Government (refugees), Sport Canada, etc.

Consider local and national sponsors – Save-on Foods, Safeway, Canadian Tire, etc.

When they see the potential of the program, the Whitecaps FC may wish to expand their role, but the program must operate independently of the Whitecaps FC – even though they will be the principal beneficiaries down the line.

A similar plan could be devised for many other cities across Canada. Your help is urgently needed. ■

Tony Waiters,

NSCAC President

If you would like to assist us with this program, please contact us by e-mail at: nscac@rogers.com

Groupings will be based, to a certain extent, on age but more on ability, so that better players could challenge one another.

The program should be available to all players after school three days a week to start. After a few weeks, a selection should take place and the more talented players will go five days a week.

Mentors will be made up of experienced coaches and technical directors who

TONY WAITERS

Tony Waiters is a former England international goalkeeper and Canadian national team head coach. Waiters was in charge when Canada qualified for the 1986 World Cup, their only appearance in the finals. Waiters was the first Director of the National Soccer Coaches Association of America’s (NSCAA) Goalkeeping Institute. He remains a NSCAA and U.S. Soccer National Staff Coach. He is also the President & Technical Director of World of Soccer, a soccer coaching & teaching system that generates team success through age-appropriate player development.



FROM THE SIDELINES

BY ALF DE BLASIS

NSCAC DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS



Coaching and educating children has always been a passion of mine but finding opportunities to do so over the years have been challenging simply because your career choice takes precedence and, oftentimes, life just gets in the way. When I was approached late last year with an offer to join the new NSCAC, I did not hesitate to accept because, at the very least, it would draw me closer to something I've been truly passionate about since I was in my teens.

When I was a very young man, I had an opportunity to coach a youth soccer team and I always tell people it was one of the most satisfying years of my life. The reward for me was teaching the kids new skills at practice and then watching them apply those same techniques in game situations. The improvement they displayed week after week demonstrated to me that proper instruction, guidance and education provided them with the tools and skills they needed to grow as players. The most frustrating part of coaching for me, however, was the difficulty in accessing new training methods and acquiring new information to make every practice stimulating and fun for the kids.

That's why an article I came across recently intrigued and inspired me. Several years ago Michele Kiernan, an Ohio mother and real estate executive, was in her backyard trying to help her son improve his field goal kicking but, as a parent with little or no coaching skills, she was frustrated at not being able to find coaching tips and other resources online to help her.

That inspired Michele to start **coachestribune.com**, an online "community" that allows coaches to share tips and techniques across a number of sports, all in one place. The website amalgamates videos, blogs and other resources designed to help coaches access training aids and information that can assist them in their particular sport.

The NSCAC has been revived with that same spirit of sharing and cooperation. After a number of years of inactivity, the NSCAC has been re-launched as a member-based organization designed to provide soccer coaches across Canada with educational opportunities, services, benefits and a collective voice through this publication. We want the "Journal" to be a resource for all coaches who would like access to the latest training aids and who yearn for more information on methodology and systems of play. That's why most of the contributors to the "Journal" are soccer coaches who are happy to share their knowledge and training techniques with others across the country, with the end goal of helping our young players reach the pinnacle of the sport in Canada.

The biannual "Journal" is just a starting point for our communications efforts within the NSCAC. The digital version of this publication appears on our new website, **nscac.ca**, which offers a wealth of additional information and resources for our member coaches to take advantage of. Our members will also have access to periodical e-newsletters and bulletins to provide them with the latest news on coaching clinics, webinars, symposiums and more. A podcast designed exclusively for coaches will also be introduced this spring.

The NSCAC will offer soccer coaches a wide-ranging, multi-formatted approach designed

to assist them in every aspect of their job. From software to videos, from insurance to job postings, the NSCAC will provide its members with the resources they need to excel in their profession and to impart their wisdom on our young soccer stars of the future.

I am very proud to be associated with the new NSCAC and I hope that, collectively, we can raise the profile of this organization and the coaching profession in general.

I look forward to collaborating with many of you in future issues of the "Journal" ■

Thank you

Alf De Blasis,

Managing Editor, The Journal for Soccer Coaches & NSCAC Director of Marketing & Communications

NSCAC members can view the digital version of the **Journal for Soccer Coaches** at our new website, **nscac.ca**, which also includes the latest membership news, information on coaching education and additional resources and content exclusively for our members. Our website will keep coaches across Canada updated on expanded member services and benefits as well as coaching clinics and activities being held in their area. Check it out today!

EXCITING NEWS FOR NSCAC MEMBERS!

BY JOHN DEBENEDICTIS

NSCAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Welcome to the NEW National Soccer Coaches Association of Canada (NSCAC). After a period of inactivity, we are excited to kick off with a host of new membership benefits.

Although we are still finalizing various initiatives, we are excited to announce that ALL NSCAC members will receive two high calibre and informative coaching publications as part of their membership fee. They will also receive our new publication, *The Journal for Soccer Coaches*, and a copy of Soccer 360 Magazine.

We are also working on adding a number of other benefits that will help Canadian coaches in various ways. These include Webinars, Podcasts, discounts on products and services, and special coaching information that will help create a better working environment for soccer coaches. Most importantly, we are always interested in promoting Canadian coaches across the country by giving them a voice to express and share their views, knowledge, and experience.

Here is a list of some of the specific benefits members will receive:

1) THE JOURNAL FOR SOCCER COACHES

You are reading the very first issue of *The Journal for Soccer Coaches*, our very own publication that will be published twice yearly to start and increased as we grow. This issue includes a Tournament and Festival Guide. Between issues, we will send members e-mail bulletins to communicate new coaching information to Canadian coaches.

2) AMPLIFIED SOCCER

Amplified Soccer is a quarterly publication. The regular fee to receive this publication is about \$26.00 (CND) per year. Amplified Soccer offers coaches many

in-depth articles and sessions that cover all aspects of the game. NSCAC member coaches will have access to Amplified Soccer as part of their membership.

3) PERFORMANCE CONDITIONING SOCCER

Performance Conditioning Soccer is a publication that focuses on the latest fitness research, exercises, articles, and sessions for soccer coaches. It is offered on-line at the yearly rate of approximately \$34.00 (CND) but will also be included at NO extra charge with membership to the NSCAC. Also, Performance Conditioning offers a library of the latest research papers as well as Performance Conditioning Junior. These additional publications will be available to NSCAC members at an exclusive discounted rate.

4) BYTE SIZE SOCCER

The Byte Size coaching program is a customization coaching website containing a balanced and progressive curriculum designed to benefit players and coaches alike. The initial target of Byte Size Coaching is the coach of players from 6 to 11 years of age. NSCAC members will receive a special code that will give them access to all the content of the Byte Size Coaching program until their membership expires.

5) SOCCER 360 MAGAZINE

Each member will receive 1 FREE issue of Soccer 360 Magazine as part of your membership. It will be mailed along with your first issue of The Journal for Soccer Coaches. As an NSCAC member, you will be entitled to purchase a subscription at a special discounted rate. NSCAC members will also

be able to receive a special team subscription rate for their players. Details will follow soon.

6) EXCLUSIVE MEMBERS' DISCOUNT OF 20% OFF UHLSPORT PRODUCTS

When you sign up for a NSCAC membership, you will receive an exclusive NSCAC Code that will entitle you to a 20% discount on selected UhlSport products. The discount will be valid on-line or through your specialty soccer retailer. The discount will apply to the regular price of the product and will be valid until your membership expires.

7) MORE OFFERS TO COME

The NSCAC is working on providing more details on all the membership benefits but we're happy to report that we're off to a great start for our members!

8) SPECIAL BONUS FOR FIRST TIME MEMBERSHIP

Become a member now by filling out your NSCAC membership form found in this publication or on-line at nscac.ca. As a bonus, your first NSCAC membership will expire 16 months after you become a member. This is a limited time offer so join the NSCAC now to take advantage!

We are always looking for coaches who wish to help us deliver some of these benefits and services. Please contact the NSCAC if you would like to assist us. ■

Thanks for reading,

John DeBenedictis
Executive Director

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

JASON DEVOS

CANADA SOCCER'S NEW DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT



Appearing several times each week on TSN's EPL and MLS game broadcasts, as well as SportsCentre inserts and digital updates for tsn.ca, Jason deVos developed a very high profile as a soccer commentator with the Canadian sports network for almost a decade.

The former Canadian international defender, who played most of his professional career in the UK, was a highly respected analyst who broke down game situations with ease and expertise. Midway through the 2016 MLS season, deVos began to scale back his TV appearances as he prepared to step into a new career path, one

that will likely become his biggest challenge yet. Since September 2016, deVos has been the Director of Development for Canada Soccer, overseeing all aspects of the game in Canada from player development to coaching education.

"The Journal for Soccer Coaches" Managing Editor Alf De Blasis recently conducted a wide-ranging interview with deVos, focusing specifically on his role in the development of coaches in Canada.

The Journal for Soccer Coaches: Congratulations on your recent appointment. In your role of Director of Development, what specifically are your duties and how much of your time is devoted to the development and assessment of coaches at all levels?

Jason deVos: Everything I do revolves around coach education because I don't think you can separate development of the game and coach education into different categories. I think they essentially go hand in glove and so pretty much everything we're doing in terms of my new role and the direction of the game in Canada at the grassroots level revolves around coach education. Whether that is through our existing community stream courses or through our performance stream courses, the "C", "B" & "A" licenses or some new courses we're going to be bringing on line as soon as we possibly can that have never existed before in our country that I feel are essential.

The bulk of our players in Canada (85%) are under the age of 18, yet we've never really had an advanced coach education program for coaches working with youth players and children in our country. These are gaps that exist in our current coach education program we have to address.

For many years there's been talk of a children's license being created by Canada Soccer and I can assure you that is a big priority for me in 2017 - the development of not just a children's license but also a youth license. Those two courses will cover the needs of players between the ages of 5-12 and 13-17.

This is relevant education for coaches who are working with players in these categories because, for many coaches in our country, there's a real desire to get more knowledge about how to teach young players the game. To do that we have to understand those players and what their developmental needs are as opposed to what you get taught in an advanced license working with professional players. It's not necessarily relevant to coaching an 8 year old. Those courses are vitally important for us for the growth of the game in our country and something I'm certainly going to work very hard on in 2017 and beyond to put in place.

“ WE HAVE TO EMBRACE PEOPLE THAT WANT TO GET INTO COACHING, WHETHER IT'S SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY'RE VOLUNTEERING... OR IF THEY'RE GENUINELY PASSIONATE ABOUT COACHING. ”

JSC: From a coaching perspective, Canada has progressed significantly from a time when volunteer mums and dads were being tasked with coaching youth teams to a point now where most clubs have well paid coaches and technical directors and experienced staff. But is there still a place in the overall program for parents who would like to assist in a part time or volunteer capacity?

JdV: Absolutely! Volunteer parent-coaches get a bad rap and that's very unfair. I think every single parent-coach I've come across wants the same thing – to provide the best possible experience with the game, not just for their own child, but for all the children they're working with.

It's incumbent on us to give those parents the tools they need to succeed in that role. We haven't gone far enough as a governing body to be able to do that.

We have to embrace people that want to get into coaching, whether it's simply because they're volunteering to ensure their child has a place to play, or if they're genuinely passionate about coaching and want to be a soccer coach long after their children graduate to higher levels. I think it's important for us to put in place those programs so parents who want to get involved in coaching are given the relevant training they need to ensure they deliver the best experience of the game possible.

JSC: Where do you feel improvements can be made in the recruitment and education of coaches? Are we transitioning former players into the coaching ranks adequately? What are some of the challenges you see in the area of coaching education?

JdV: I think we can always do more in that respect, and one of the things we initiated very early in my tenure was a program for ex-National Team, ex-Pro, even current players who want to get into coaching. Traditionally, what has happened is everyone has had to start right at the beginning. And that can put off some players because you go into that environment and you're expected to be an expert.

In many respects, most ex-players are very much novices because they've never really coached before. They understand the game because they played the game for a long time. So in some ways they have a PhD in

playing soccer but they don't have a PhD in teaching soccer, and that's where they need to learn. But I find in my experience, it's always been that ex-pros have a very high capacity and desire to learn, they can advance very quickly.

What we've put in place is basically a placement program for those coaches where they'll be assessed individually on a 1 to 1 basis with a coach educator and placed at the appropriate level of the Soccer Canada coach education pathway. It's really about taking an individualized approach to coach education so our ex-players can be encouraged to come into coaching and be placed at the appropriate level for them.

JSC: You personally have earned coaching licenses in the US and diplomas abroad. Do you feel it's necessary for Canadian coaches to travel abroad to earn the experience and credentials or can we and should we be training our coaches properly here at home?

JdV: It's imperative we train coaches here in Canada. I took my coaching courses abroad simply because the courses that I wanted to take were never available when my schedule allowed me to take them. There wasn't really much flexibility in terms of the delivery of our coaching courses in Canada. I went abroad to experience the European coach education program and I was fortunate to go to the highest level. I

also did my "A" license in the US.

I think it's important to experience different things as well. If you go into any course with an open mind, you can always take something away from it that you can then apply. I look at our country and the unique challenges we face in Canada, it's important we take ownership of education of our coaches because we have a very unique ecosystem in soccer in our country. I think there are things we can teach about soccer in Canada that perhaps can't be taught in the US or Europe for that matter.

JSC: Long term player development is a key building block of Canadian soccer and has been for the past decade. What is the current status of the program and how successfully has it been implemented across for country?

JdV: It's one of the reasons why we launched a survey. We want to take some time to assess where the program is at. I'm a big believer in basing all decisions we make about the game on facts and we couldn't do that until we went out and did an assessment of where things stand with LTPD.

A lot of it revolves around education. What do people know about LTPD? How well is it being implemented at the grassroots level? Where are some of the question marks





around education? What do our clubs, administrators, coaches, parents know about LTPD and what are some of the realities of the program in our country?

I think it's important to assess where we are and where the program has taken us over the last decade before we make any changes to the game at the grassroots level. In my travels, I've been fortunate to go to almost every province and sit down with people and get a sense of how they deliver soccer in their communities and what some of the success stories and challenges are.

The one thing I've realized over the last six months is our country is extremely unique. Every province has its own unique set of challenges and success stories. The goal for us is to celebrate our successes and share our best practices across the country but also to take a very unique approach in each part of our country. The climate we face alone is an obstacle. In parts of our country for 8-9-10 months of the year, you can't play outside. How do we work around that? How do we modify our game formats to be able to allow people to experience the game at the grassroots level within the infrastructure that currently exists? Are we utilizing futsal enough as a development tool in our country?

Gymnasiums exist in schools, are we utilizing that vehicle well enough? These are all questions we need answers to and the only way to do that is going out to our membership and asking them.

JSC: What are some of your short term targets and what are the long range objectives that you have set for the development of the sport in Canada?

JdV: Short term, the overhaul of our coach education program is a big one for me. We have to fill in existing gaps that are there. Creation of a children's and a youth license, which is an advanced qualification for coaches working with our young players, is an absolute priority for us. We have to get this off the ground as quickly as possible but we have to get it right. It's going to take time to build and implement.

Some initiatives have come on board recently that are very important. Initiatives between MLS and Canada Soccer is really important for us because we're going to be able to create standards across the country in our most advanced development environment. Canada Soccer will license organizations who deliver youth soccer provided they meet certain standards which will then grant those players

domestic players status across MLS if they sign their first pro contracts in MLS or USL. That's a huge incentive for organizations that are genuinely serious about developing players. To give those players a more seamless pathway to the pro game is a big incentive.

Long term, I would love to be in a position where standards-based leagues that are in their infancy across the country are widespread, that we have a network from coast to coast of organizations who are doing the right things in terms of coach education and player development and we bring them together under a national network, a national development league so our young players, male and female, have a pathway to get to higher levels of the game. Right now that pathway is a very difficult one for many reasons. What we need to do is try and remove the many barriers and obstacles that are in our players' way and make that pathway as open and as accessible to all players as we can.

JSC: I'm sure you've been asked this question countless times since taking on your new role and the answer obviously depends on so many factors but I can't resist asking the question. What objectives must be met before Canada's Men's National team can return to play in a World Cup?

“ WHAT WE NEED TO DO IS TRY AND REMOVE THE MANY BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES THAT ARE IN OUR PLAYERS' WAY AND MAKE THAT PATHWAY AS OPEN AND AS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL PLAYERS AS WE CAN.”

JdV: I don't think it's all that revolutionary. We have to develop better players. We have to have a deeper pool of international class players. To go beyond that, we have to have a deeper pool of professional class players.

One of the things that really stands out for me with our CanMNT is how few of our players are actually playing regularly at the pro level. When you look back at the last qualifying campaign, we had large sections of our starting lineup not even playing regular games at the pro level. You simply can't make that jump from being a reserve team player in a pro environment to an international starter. It's too big of a gap. We need to do a better job of developing pro players in our country who are then going to push to get to the highest level they can attain professionally and then give whoever our next CanMNT coach is a selection headache.

It would be wonderful to think we've got 5 players at each position who are playing at a top competitive level either in MLS or around the world and our coach has difficult decisions to make. We can start having a debate in media about who should be playing and why but right now we don't have that luxury. Until we, as a nation, do a better job of developing players it's almost a moot point.

The other message, which people maybe don't want to hear or don't want to accept, is there is no quick fix. It doesn't happen overnight. There's no magic wand anybody can wave, myself included, that is going to all of sudden turn us into a conveyor belt of talent. It's going to take at least a decade just to put in place the right system. That will allow the vast number of people that are engaged with the game at the grassroots level to be able to develop into top players. It's a long-term process and it's one of the reasons I wanted this position.

I know it's going to take time but I'm enthusiastic about that challenge, enthusiastic about the future. In the few short months I've been in this job I've met so many people who want to help Canada move in the right direction. They just need a little bit of guidance and leadership and I think that's where we, as the governing body, can play a role to provide that leadership.

The reception I've received from coast to coast has been one of open arms. People want to be a part of a national development solution. It needed us to bring everyone together under the same system. We are all Canada soccer. Everyone who is involved in the game has a role to play in the development of the game. It's just about connecting people so everyone is pulling in the same direction. ■



EVERY NATIONAL TEAM PLAYER STARTS AT THE SAME PLACE, THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL. THAT'S WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO GIVE THEM THE BEST EXPERIENCE AT THAT LEVEL OF THE GAME.

JASON DEVOS



MY COACHING JOURNEY

BY RHIAN WILKINSON,

Retired Canadian National Women's Team Player & 2-time Olympic Bronze Medalist

I started getting my coaching badges while still a national-level player. Previously, when people asked me what I wanted to do after my playing career ended, I had always laughed at the idea of being a coach. I told them it was definitely not for me. However, when I had a few injuries during my last few years as a player, I wanted to use my time away from the field productively. I figured I should improve myself as much as possible, so why not get my badges, just for the fun of it?

My first forays into the world of coaching were not always positive ones. As a Canadian, I had never felt that my voice as a woman was less valuable than that of a man's. It didn't take long, however, for me to realize that this attitude is quite common in the coaching world, especially outside of North America. I am well aware that the sport of soccer, and particularly soccer coaching, is still very much male dominated. I was prepared for that, but I have to admit I had a hard time grinning and bearing the blatant sexism that is so overt in some aspects of the sport.

I play hockey on a men's team when I am back in Montreal, my father was a professional rugby player and coach, and many of my best friends are men, so I KNOW what is sometimes said "in the locker room," but there had always been a line that was not crossed. When entering the coaching world outside of Canada, I was suddenly confronted with the other side of that line, and it is not a great place.

I want to be open about the sexism in sport because it is real, and NO, I am not making a big deal out of nothing. My initial reaction to my first few, very uncomfortable encounters, was to want to get the heck out of there. Why should I put myself through it? Why would I jump from being a professional female player and having to prove myself to every man-boy I met, asking "want to go 1 on 1?", to coaching, where I would again always have to know more, be better, be more forceful than all my male colleagues just to be heard?

I have to be honest; it gets really tiring after a while. Did I really want to start a new career knowing that I would be jumping right back into a world that is not always ready to allow me to succeed? After giving it some thought though, it turns out that my answer is a resounding YES. I am just starting out on my coaching journey and it is still not clear whether it will end up being my forever career. What I do know though is that I like proving people wrong; I like taking fools 1 on 1; I like knowing more; and I like being an example to men and women alike that gender is one thing and soccer knowledge and ability another.

I am someone who always enjoys being challenged. In part I think this comes from being a twin and always wanting to be different and to stand out. Being a professional female soccer player has not always been easy, and I don't expect coaching to be any different. Times are changing though and the dinosaurs of the game are slowly becoming extinct, being replaced by a new generation of coaches. Coaches like John Herdman, Simon Eaddy and Danny Worthington; male coaches who love the game and see players as players and nothing more. These men have changed my life.

I tried to retire five years ago. I told my teammates, friends and family that 2012 would be my last year playing. My plans changed though when John Herdman became my national team coach. After only 11 months working with John and his staff we won the Olympic bronze medal in London; there was no way I could walk away after that. I had played for Canada for a decade, but in only 11 months John blew up everything I thought I knew about the sport. It was not always pretty, and I didn't always love him for it... there may even have been moments of hate, but there was no way I was not going to be a part of the next 4 years of his plans.

“DID I REALLY WANT TO START A NEW CAREER KNOWING THAT I WOULD BE JUMPING RIGHT BACK INTO A WORLD THAT IS NOT ALWAYS READY TO ALLOW ME TO SUCCEED?”

Every coach has an impact on a player, as they each teach you something about yourself. These experiences can be good or bad, but if you are open to it you



“JOHN (HERDMAN)
CONVINCED ME TO GET
INVOLVED IN COACHING
AND HE DID IT ALL
WITHOUT SAYING A WORD.”

will learn something. I was almost 30 when John came into my life. Physiologically, I was already at my peak, but I only became a really complete player under his tutelage. That statement makes me sad, as I wish I had had more years of playing under him, but it also makes me feel so insanely fortunate. To have enjoyed 5 years learning and playing for him, has been one of the greatest gifts of my life. Now I know that I want to coach with him, to continue to learn from him, so that I can eventually have the same impact on other players that he had on me.

A coach is no different than a teacher; their impact can be meaningless or earth-shatteringly life altering. John convinced me to get involved in coaching and he did it all without saying a word. He did it by showing me every day what the job really is, demonstrating the crazy hours needed to get things done right, as well as the genuine care and concern you need to have in order to build a highly functioning team. He also taught me about success and how to keep striving for more.

I officially retired from International soccer on 4 February 2017, and I started my first official coaching job on the 9th. While I have my National and UEFA B coaching licenses, nothing really prepares you for the real deal: the stress of trying to get everything done right and on time, while trying to balance giving players your time and energy with piecing together a practice plan. My coaching badges definitely did not prepare me for that!

Even though February 9th was my first official coaching role as a retired player, I had already gotten my feet wet. In 2014 I was one of the assistant coaches for the team competing in the U20 World Cup in Canada. I also had experience working as an assistant under John for the senior team. However, those experiences were tempered by the fact

I was still a player; this time it was for real. Bev Priestman was the head coach while Carmelina Moscato and I were her assistants. While the experience for me was exhausting and stressful, it was also fantastically rewarding and influential. I'm starting to think I might just like this coaching thing.

When asked to write this article, it was suggested that I talk about the important female coaches in my life and the impact they have had on my career. I have played for a number of women and all of them have helped shape me into the player I was. I can't hide the fact, however, that none of them impacted me half as much as John has. I am not overly bothered by whether I am coached by a man or a woman; I AM bothered by the fact that there are so few female coaches. The professional Women's league in the States has 10 teams, but only one female coach: that's an issue!

My coaching journey has only just started and it's an exciting time for me. It's hard to predict where the journey will lead me, especially as I've just stepped out onto the path. I do know, though, that I want to make a difference, to give it my all, and to be a role model for other women in sports. More than anything I want to be able to give some young player a gift like the one John gave me: confidence, a voice, and a soccer PhD. I want to help women to understand their worth and to encourage them to put themselves forward for top coaching jobs. The women's game is here to stay, and it is now time for female coaches to follow the pioneers of the game and to take the reins (Laura Harvey Reign reference not intended but still enjoyed).

Come on ladies; let's see what we can do! ■

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

TIP: WHAT PLAYERS AGED 9-12 SHOULD FOCUS ON - A 4 CORNER MODEL



IAN MCCLURG

Owner of 1v1 Soccer FC + Performance Coach + Author

I was raised in Northern Ireland and immigrated to Canada in 1981. In 2000, I founded 1v1 Soccer, motivated by the desire to provide young Canadian players with the same playing experiences provided by leading soccer nations. The company established itself as a leading private academy and we now enjoy a successful partnership with Wolves FC academy and Global Image Sports. I am a UEFA licensed coach & hold US & Canadian B license qualifications. I'm a former Toronto FC Academy & Ontario provincial team staff coach. My strength is as a performance coach and we are currently growing our Play the 1v1 Way training programs which includes small-group training classes, 1:1 coaching services and an online training academy.

In the future, the best players will be those who can excel in a fast-paced environment. There will be even greater demands on technique, tactical understanding and physical conditioning. Players today are faster and cover greater distances than previous generations. Passing combinations are faster and there is an increased importance on controlling possession. More goals are scored through quick counter-attacking play and decision-making is of critical importance.

I am often asked what young players, aged 9-12, should focus on. The effect of role models is very important at this stage of development. Young players should seek out role models and identify players and teams to follow. Young players should also begin to transition from being self-centered to being self-critical. This is the "golden age of learning" and the most important age for skill development. This is also an important time to start to understand basic principles of play.

TECHNIQUE:

It is important to establish a good strong solid base. Young players should continually work on their dribbling ability, passing and receiving and how to successfully execute individual skills under the pressure of time, space, and an opponent.

- Dribbling: Take risks! Develop your moves to beat an opponent
- Improve your ability to keep possession. Work on shielding, spin turns and changes of speed and direction to get away from opponents
- Receiving: Work on the ability to receive and have a quality 1st touch - when receiving on the ground and in the air. Receiving using all surfaces should be developed
- Shooting: Proper striking technique from

different angles should be worked on and taking shots on the volley and half-volley with both feet

- Passing: Proper technique - Laces, Inside, Outside, Short and Long; Crossing
- Heading: Jumping to head
- Tackling: Proper technique, in balance, no fear.

TACTICS:

Team tactics do not take priority at this age. Focus should be on knowing how to maintain balance in the team (between attacking and defending) and playing skillful soccer. Players should be open to playing a variety of positions to develop awareness and begin to understand basic principles of play such as:

- Retaining possession
- Taking players on 1v1 in proper areas of the field
- Off the ball movement to support teammates in possession and execute combination play

- Communication with teammates
- Apply proper defensive pressure from front/behind and be able to press and channel opponents

PHYSICAL:

All fitness work should be with the ball with an emphasis on developing :

- Flexibility
- Agility - with and without the ball
- Speed - teaching proper running technique
- Strength
- Endurance
- Balance

PSYCHOLOGICAL:

Enjoy the game and foster a desire to play.

Focus in on the following areas:



- Encourage decision making
- Imagination / Creativity
- Discipline
- Good academic study habits





2017 TOURNAMENT & FESTIVAL SUPPLEMENT

	Location	Gender/Age	Entry fee	Contact
GREAT LAKES COLLEGE SHOWCASE	Sandusky, Ohio April 7-9	U15-U19 Eligible teams - Open	\$995 / team Deadline - April 1	Patrick Farno T: 4104930024 info@sportsforceparcs.com sportsforceparcsandusky.com
NSC KICK-OFF CHALLENGE	National Sports Center, Blaine, MN April 28-30	U9-U19/U20 Eligible teams - Competitive	Varies on Age Group Deadline - April 7	Clinton LaBeau T: 763-785-3679 clabeau@nscsports.org kickoffchallenge.nscsports.org
NSC SPRING CUP	National Sports Center, Blaine, MN May 6-7	U9-U19/U20 Eligible teams - Competitive	Varies on Age Group Deadline - April 14	Jen Een T: 763-717-3235 jeen@nscsports.org nscspringcup.nscsports.org
5TH ANNUAL H.E.A.D.S. UP CUP!	Barbour Field Hillsburgh, ON May 26-28	U9-18 Boys U17-18 Girls Eligible teams - All star to Competitive (L4-L7)	\$395 Deadline - May 12	Michael Glogowski T: 647 236 2256 coachmike@theorthoticworks.com headsoccerclub.ca
STRATFORD CLASSIC TOURNAMENT	Festival Hydro Park June 3-4	Boys & Girls U13-U18 Eligible teams - Competitive (L5 & L3)	\$375 Deadline - May 15	Lori Misuraca T: 519-272-1482 admin@stratforyouthsoccer.com stratforyouthsoccer.com
NSC ALL AMERICAN CUP	National Sports Center, Blaine, MN June 16-18	U9-U19/U20 Eligible teams - Competitive	Varies on Age Group Deadline - May 19	Clinton LaBeau T: 763-785-3679 clabeau@nscsports.org allamericacup.nscsports.org
NATIONAL OUTDOOR TOURNAMENT 2017	Montreal, Quebec June 17-18	U8-U18 + Senior Eligible teams - Local, A & AA	\$300 - \$450 Deadline - May 8	Stephanie or Karim T: 514-631-5603 lacstlouis@soccerlsl.qc.ca tsisports.ca/sc/soccer/tournoi
KINGSTON UNITED FIRST CAPITAL BOYS/GIRLS TOURNAMENT AND FESTIVAL	Kingston, ON June 17-18	U9-12 U13-18 Male/Fem Eligible teams - Dev/Competitive	\$260 - \$430 Deadline - May 20	John Nador T: 613-389-2233 tournamentdirector@kingstonsoccer.ca kusc.ca
STRATFORD 6 V 6 TOURNAMENT	Festival Hydro Park May 17-18	Boys & Girls U13-U18 Eligible teams - Competitive	\$250 Deadline - May 23	Lori Misuraca T: 519-272-1482 admin@stratforyouthsoccer.com stratforyouthsoccer.com
 THE ROBBIE FESTIVAL	Scarborough, ON June 24-25	Boys & Girls U9-10 (7v7) U11-12 (9v9) Eligible teams - OSA clubs, ORNCA clubs, Interprovincial U11 & U12	\$325 U9-10 \$350 U11-12 Deadline - May 1	Candice Reinders, T: 289-923-8549 festival@therobbie.ca therobbie.ca
BARCELONA SUMMER CUP	Barcelona, Spain June 26 - July 1	Girls 2001 - 2006, Boys 2001 - 2006 Eligible teams - All	199 Deadline - April 30	Nick Simons T: +34 932 808 062 info@barcelonasummercup.com barcelonasummercup.com

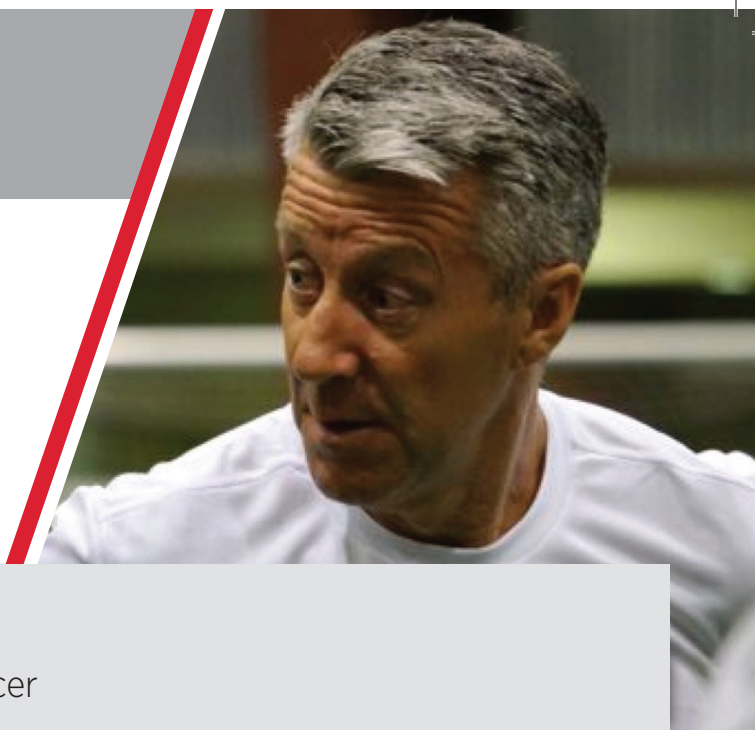
	Location	Gender/Age	Entry fee	Contact
INTERNATIONAL DEFI ENERGIE	Shawinigan QC Aug 25-27	U9-U18 Eligible teams - Local, A & AA	NC Deadline - April 1	T: 18192474693 admin@soccerenergie.com soccerenergie.com
 ROBBIE INTERNATIONAL SOCCER TOURNAMENT	Scarborough ON July 1-3	Girls-Boys U13-17/18 Eligible teams - Competitive	\$550 to Feb. 28 \$600 Mar. 1 and after Deadline - May 15	Candice Reinders T: 289-923-8549 tournament@therobbie.ca therobbie.ca
USA CUP WEEKEND	National Sports Center, Blaine, MN July 14-16	U9-U19/U20 Eligible teams - Competitive	Varies on Age Group Deadline - June 1	Aaron Schmidt T: 763-717-3889 market@usacup.org usacup.org
USA CUP	National Sports Center, Blaine, MN July 18-22	U9-U19/U20 Eligible teams - Competitive	Varies on Age Group Deadline - June 1	Aaron Schmidt T: 763-717-3889 market@usacup.org usacup.org
 DANA CUP HJØRRING	Hjørring, Denmark July 24-29	Boys 11-17,19 Girls 12-17,19 Eligible teams - All levels	215 €, Deadline - May 1	Dana Cup Hjørring T: 45 98 91 13 00 soccer@danacup.dk www.danacup.com facebook @ danacuphjørring Instagram @ danacup twitter @ danacuphjørring
STRATFORD FESTIVAL CUP MINI BOYS	Festival Hydro Park Aug 19	Boys U9-U12 Eligible teams - Mini teams	\$275 Deadline - Aug 4	Lori Misuraca T: 519-272-1482 admin@stratforyouthsoccer.com stratforyouthsoccer.com
STRATFORD FESTIVAL CUP MINI GIRLS	Festival Hydro Park Aug 19	Girls U9-U12 Eligible teams - Mini teams	\$275 Deadline - Aug 4	Lori Misuraca T: 519-272-1482 admin@stratforyouthsoccer.com stratforyouthsoccer.com
SHORE N SCORE CUP	Salmon Arm, BC Aug 25-27	U11-U18 Eligible teams - Open	\$300 U11-12 \$400 U13-18 Deadline - Aug 8	Kevin Harrison T: 250-833-5607 exdirector@shuswapssoccer.com shuswapssoccer.com
NMSC ALL STAR FESTIVAL & TOURNAMENT	Mississauga, ON Sept 9-10	Boys & Girls U8-18 Eligible teams - All levels	\$275 - \$375 Deadline - Sept 9	Kelly Langton-Trott T: 905-858-1227 ext.227 tournaments@nmsc.net nmsc.net
5TH ANNUAL H.E.A.D.S. UP CUP!	Barbour Field Hillsburgh, ON Sept 22-24	U9-18 Girls Eligible teams - All star to Competitive (L4-L7)	\$395 Deadline - Sept 08	Michael Glogowski T: 647 236 2256 coachmike@theorthoticworks.com www.headsoccerclub.ca
NSC FALL CUP	National Sports Center, Blaine, MN Oct 7-8	U9-U15 Boys & Girls Eligible teams - Competitive	Varies on Age Group Deadline - Sept 15	Jen Een T: 763-717-3235 jeen@nscsports.org fallcup.nscsports.org
COLUMBIA VALLEY CLASH OF THE TITANS INVITATIONAL TOURNAMENT	Invermere, BC May 28-29, 2017	U12-U18 Eligible teams - BC Bronze or Silver, AB Tiers 3,4,5 & House	\$450 Deadline - May 10, 2017	tournament@cvsoccer.ca www.cvsoccer.ca
3 BLIND REFS TOURNAMENT	Kalispell, Montana, USA June 3-4, 2017	U10-U18 Boys & Girls Eligible teams - All Levels	\$500-\$600 Deadline -	Marla Luce (406) 257-6631 admin@flatheadsoccer.com www.flatheadsoccer.org
CAF UNITED EASTER CLASSIC	Downsview Park, North York, ON Apr. 15-17, 2017	U8-U12 Boys & Girls Eligible teams - All Levels	\$195-\$395 Deadline - Apr. 10, 2017	info@cafssoccer.com www.cafssoccer.com
CAF UNITED EASTER CLASSIC	Downsview Park, North York, ON Apr. 15-17, 2017	U13-U17 Boys & Girls Eligible teams - All Levels	\$595 Deadline - Apr. 10, 2017	info@cafssoccer.com www.cafssoccer.com
FLORIDA WAVE CUP 2017	Premier Sports Complex, Sarasota, FL May 27-29, 2017	U11-U19 Boys & Girls Eligible teams - Competitive Teams Only	\$395-595 Deadline -	Tara Pielacet tarapielacet@soccershowcase.com www.wavecup.com

WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS?

MAKING DECISIONS IS A CRUCIAL SKILL, NO MATTER THE LEVEL

BOBBY LENNOX

Manager, Coaching Development, Ontario Soccer



Bobby Lennox is currently Manager, Coaching Development with Ontario Soccer. Bobby has been instrumental in the creation and implementation of many technical Initiatives and resources to help improve the game in Ontario.

Bobby is the holder of both CSA and USSF 'A' licences, USSF Youth Licence and is a Master Coach Developer (MCD) and Coach Evaluator with Ontario Soccer and National Coach Certification Program (NCCP), conducting numerous coach education courses and coach assessments around the province. He is also the holder of a FIFA Grassroots Coaching award, FIFA Futsal award and is recognised as a Chartered Professional Coach (ChPc) with the Coaches Association of Canada.

For those of you old enough to remember when we played in the street, or in our backyards, or in the local park, you'll recall we played a variety of games: soccer, tennis, athletics, rugby, hide-and-seek; but who made the decisions?

There were no adults around to tell you how to play the game, what the rules were, what team we were on, or how many players were on each team. We made it up as we went along, and as new friends finished their dinner or homework and came to join us, we adjusted the constraints, the rules, to allow them to play.

I recall when our games of football (soccer) became lopsided that we would adjust the teams, maybe give a losing team an extra player or put one of the older, bigger, better players on the losing team. That allowed it to be more competitive, made it more challenging and therefore more fun. And yes, scores were kept but not to eliminate any team, or anyone from playing, or to promote or relegate a team and its players into another league or division, but simply to try our very best to win that particular game competing with and against our friends. And, regardless of the score, win, lose or draw, we came back the next night for more of the same.

One element or constraint missing from the scenarios above is the impact of...wait for it... us, adults!

When we were young, no one told us what, when, how or where. We decided on our own. The kids decided on their own, with no help needed or wanted from adults.

The environments I'm talking about above helped immensely in the creation of good athletes and, specifically to our sport, good footballers. I don't think there is anyone that would deny the ability to make quick, split-second decisions in the heat of competition can make the difference between a successful or unsuccessful action.

With the over-involvement of adults and their influence in children's and youth sport, inadvertently the players' abilities to make decisions has been, for the most part, taken away from them. Why, you ask? Because we adults know best. We know when it's best for our sons, daughters, nieces, nephews and players to pass, shoot, dribble, turn, run, etc. And we take great joy and satisfaction in telling them.

Think back to when we played in the street, park, or schoolyard. Who made the decisions then? Was it the children themselves? Did they continue to play, day-after-day, week-after-week, month-after-month?

Making decisions is fun. Being empowered and having the freedom to make decisions is liberating for a young person. Breaking free from being continually told what to, when to do it and how to do it, takes most of the fun

away from that particular activity. If we agree that making good decisions is important in our game and can lead to being a happy, successful footballer, we need to allow our young players to make decisions and to stop making the decisions for them.

"How is that going to happen?" I hear the coaches say. Well, what we can do is we can create environments and practices that, by design, encourage and promote decision-making by the players themselves.

For example a "drill" that asks player "A" to pass the ball to player "B", player "B" to pass to player "C" and player "C" to pass to "A" and then repeat over. How much decision-making is in this "drill?" How much fun is it? How challenging is it?

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“ WE ALL HAVE A BUILT IN, NATURAL LEARNING CAPABILITY THAT IS ACTUALLY DISRUPTED BY INSTRUCTION ”

- SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST SIR JOHN WHITMORE

But if we now introduce a defensive player into the same activity, we have introduced some decision-making by the players. Depending on the angle and speed of the defensive player, the mobility and support from my two teammates, the pass I've just received, all these factors plus some more will impact me and my decision-making. If we then introduce two goals and give the players these targets and direction, more decisions have to be made, on and off the ball, in possession and out of possession.

If we support, supervise, encourage and praise, teach by asking questions and using guided discovery techniques, we will now start to create the environment where decision-making will happen.

We have to practice decision-making. Much like we practice writing, reading, dribbling and shooting and we get it wrong a lot of the times, we continue to practice. Decision-making is no different. We must allow players to practice making decisions and understand that they will make wrong decisions but eventually, with practice and support, they will start to make better, quicker and more impactful decisions.

It can be difficult for us coaches to take a step back and allow the young player to make decisions, to relinquish that power and control over players. It can also be a challenge for some players who have relied on the adult guiding them through every practice and game to, all of a sudden, be empowered to make decisions for him or herself. It can be a daunting task at first asking. But with good coaching, in a positive, supportive environment, the players will rise to the challenge and may eventually surprise you with what they are capable of executing.

Coaches, I leave you with a challenge: can you devise practices that include activities and games that encourage the players to make decisions? Can you assist them, not by making the decision for them, but helping them use the tools required to make good decisions on the soccer field?

Watch the world's top players - what do they do that allows them to make split-second, mostly accurate decisions?

NSC CUP	National Sports Center, Blaine, Minnesota, USA May 27-29, 2017	U9-U19/20 Boys & Girls Eligible teams - Competitive	Varies per age Deadline - May 5, 2017	Clinton LaBeau (763) 785-3679	clabeau@nscsports.org nsccup.nscsports.org
2017 CHALLENGE CUP	North Bay, ON May 13-14, 2017	U13-U16 Boys & Girls Eligible teams - Competitive	\$400 Deadline - May 7, 2017	Giuliano Celebre (705) 477-3148	tournamentdirector@selectsoccerclub.com www.selectsoccerclub.com www.facebook.com/nbssc
PETERBOROUGH CITY SA GIRLS CHALLENGE	Peterborough, ON June 3-4, 2017	U13-U18 Girls Eligible teams - Inter Provincial	\$450 Deadline - May 20, 2017	Bruce Rowe	challenge@pcsasoccer.com www.pcsasoccer.com/tournaments
PETERBOROUGH CITY SA BOYS CHALLENGE	Peterborough, ON June 17-18, 2017	U13-U18 Boys Eligible teams - Inter Provincial	\$450 Deadline - June 2, 2017	Bruce Rowe	challenge@pcsasoccer.com www.pcsasoccer.com/tournaments
PETERBOROUGH CITY SA GIRLS FESTIVAL	Peterborough, ON June 3-4, 2017	U9-U12 Girls Eligible teams - District	\$250 Deadline - May 20, 2017	Bruce Rowe	challenge@pcsasoccer.com www.pcsasoccer.com/tournaments
PETERBOROUGH CITY SA BOYS FESTIVAL	Peterborough, ON June 17-18, 2017	U9-U12 Boys Eligible teams - District	\$250 Deadline - June 2, 2017	Bruce Rowe	challenge@pcsasoccer.com www.pcsasoccer.com/tournaments
HEART OF YORK SUMMER CLASSIC FESTIVAL	Newmarket, ON Aug. 12-13, 2017	U9-U18 Boys & Girls Eligible teams - Tier 1,2&3 plus All-Star	\$250-\$400 Deadline -	Krysti Clark (905) 836-8761	krysti@newmarketsoccer.com www.newmarketsoccer.com/Default.aspx?id=tournament&l=1

SAT TRAINING



A SOCCER JOURNEY HAS MANY POSSIBILITIES

By Joe Corapi, Founder/Director, www.SATtraining.ca

As soccer fans we all love the beautiful game. We marvel at the passing ability of Pirlo, we admire the pace at which Messi competes for 90 minutes and we study the tactical movements of Pep and Mourinho. While we all aspire to reach the highest level as players or as coaches, very few ever will. But professional soccer is only one option. There are many other rewards and opportunities which may appear as we complete our soccer journey.

As a young boy growing up in Mississauga, Ontario, and as a child of immigrants, hockey was never an option for me. Of course, the more recognizable, and simplest, option was playing soccer. Like so many other children of Canadian immigrants, I was registered at the local soccer club, supported by parents and sisters along the way. From the beginning, many young soccer players show promise, skill and enthusiasm for the game. I was fortunate enough to be recognized early on and shifted into the world of “rep soccer” or “travel soccer”.

After spending a few years in competitive soccer, I was soon selected to train as a member of the provincial team. Now the commitment to soccer becomes greater, the workload increases and the support from the family environment becomes invaluable. As my time with the provincial program continued, other significant accomplishments soon followed. I was selected to represent the province at the Canada Games held in Saskatoon. Soon after, I participated in training camps with the youth National team in Vancouver and tournaments in Mexico, Italy and Holland.

These soccer commitments require dedication and sacrifice along the way. Eventually, the commitments create conflicts in other areas of life. To remain dedicated at the highest level takes a great deal of time. As a young athlete, this meant making sacrifices from some family events or social activities with friends. Sacrificing time from family seemed to happen regularly, whether it was being out of town or training on weekends when certain family events were taking place. Sacrificing social

activities was necessary as your body needs to rest on a Friday or Saturday evening when training occurs every weekend early on a Saturday and Sunday morning. I remember those training sessions well. Of course, while making these sacrifices, my education could not be compromised.

It wasn't easy to remain focused during my high school years as things happened very quickly. Travelling for weeks at a time put a strain on my schoolwork, but my parents expected me to meet my educational needs. Thankfully, I had teachers who were supportive and siblings that would also support me at home. Education remained a focus.

As my soccer pursuits expanded, I continued to balance my education as well. Eventually the dream of heading overseas to play professional soccer took a backseat, and the more realistic future presented itself in the form of an NCAA athletic scholarship to the U.S. This offered me an opportunity to continue training and playing soccer at a high level. Thanks to the help of a forward-thinking club coach at that time, Bob Graham, many of my teammates and I secured NCAA soccer scholarships. We represented various programs such as Clemson, Drexel and Winthrop, to name a few. I signed at Penn State University, where I had a tremendous experience for 4 years. During my time there, we qualified for the NCAA Tournament 3 times and I served as Captain my senior year. Of course, to secure an athletic scholarship, athletes must complete a standardized test known as the SAT Test or the ACT Test. The tests are not easy and focus primarily on Math, Reading and Writing. These test scores are taken into consideration along with high school transcripts. To perform as well as possible on these standardized tests, you need to be diligent throughout high school and prepare for the tests as much as possible. Just like a soccer team prepares for an important match, a prospective student-athlete must prepare for the SAT/ACT Test appropriately to meet the admissions requirements and secure an NCAA athletic scholarship. Once you are

fortunate to be awarded a scholarship, you must continue to work hard on and off the field to maintain your scholarship for the next 4 years.

Fast forward to today, I am now a high school math teacher in Ontario and former club coach. Recently I began collaborating with a teaching colleague and we now provide an SAT Training service to athletes who are pursuing an athletic scholarship. Through this service, I can combine my math teaching skills and my NCAA scholarship experience while helping student-athletes prepare for the test as they chase their own dreams. Based in Ontario, we have built, in a very short time, some strong relationships with many local soccer organizations such as the TFC Academy, Sigma Academy, CAF and many OPDL clubs as well.

As part of our service, we provide an Information Session to players, coaches and families to educate them on the academic requirements necessary to pursue an NCAA scholarship. After we educate the families, we work with the athletes in our SAT Training program to prepare them for the SAT/ACT Tests. We review the content of the tests, connect the tests to the high school curriculum and provide a diagnostic test to gauge where any deficiencies may exist. Following our program, we also provide the groups with a full Practice Test to again better prepare the athletes for the actual test day, which lies ahead. Our program has seen very positive results for many of the athletes we have worked with and we look forward to helping more athletes succeed in the future as they pursue their own dreams. To become an NCAA student-athlete requires hard work and sacrifice, but the rewards are worth it. Good luck on your soccer journey. We have been fortunate enough to share our service with the soccer community and we are now bringing our service to other youth sports organizations. Please contact us to schedule an Information Session for your team or organization. We would be happy to tell you more about our programs and how we can work with your athletes.



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2016: THE YEAR OF THE MISSED PENALTY KICKS BY SUPERSTARS AND THE STRESS ON COACHES

By John De Benedictis, NSCAC Executive Director & Founder, GoldenGoalScoring.com

It was the 2016 MLS Cup Final and the game went to penalty kicks. Michael Bradley, the captain and arguably the best player on the field over 120 minutes for Toronto FC, stepped up to take his penalty shot. He missed. Stefan Frei, the goalkeeper and arguably the best player on the field over 120 minutes for Seattle, made the save to his left seem simple, as if he had read Bradley's mind. A few moments later, Seattle scored on their last penalty kick to win the game and the MLS Championship.

But on the bench for Toronto FC was Sebastian Giovinco, arguably the best player in MLS and the league's top goal scorer over the past 2 seasons. He was substituted off in overtime with the game tied.

It was a coaching decision that was filled with stress, I'm sure. And it created controversy in the media and bar room discussions after the game. Fortunately for coach Greg Vanney, it was the first time Toronto FC, in its 10-year history, had reached an MLS Final. He will not lose his job. Others may not have been so lucky.

That, my friends, is the pressure that is on the coach when it comes to deciding who is going to take the team's penalty kicks. After looking at all of the superstars that missed penalty kicks in 2016, maybe Vanney's decision should not have been so widely criticized. Maybe it was the best decision he could have made.

Giovinco's substitute, Tosaint Ricketts, created the chance that could have won Toronto the game by beating a defender and crossing the ball into the box. Jozy Altidore got to the cross with a brilliant header that was on its way to the top corner of the goal. Sounders' keeper Frei flew backwards and across the goal to make a hair-raising save that was seen around the world on the highlight reels.

People tend to remember most when a missed

task to step up to take a penalty kick in their quarter-final match at Euro 2016 and both did not score. Fortunately for Germany, they won but their superstars could have caused their team an early exit from the round of 16. Based on those statistics, Vanney was correct in replacing Giovinco, wasn't he?

Obviously, on the field, most of the pressure in taking penalty kicks is on the shooter.

“ IT'S A BATTLE OF THE MIND ”

penalty kick costs you the game. At the 2016 Copa America Final, none other than the great Lionel Messi missed a penalty kick for Argentina against Chile and probably cost his team the Championship. The pressure was so great that he promptly announced his retirement from the National side.

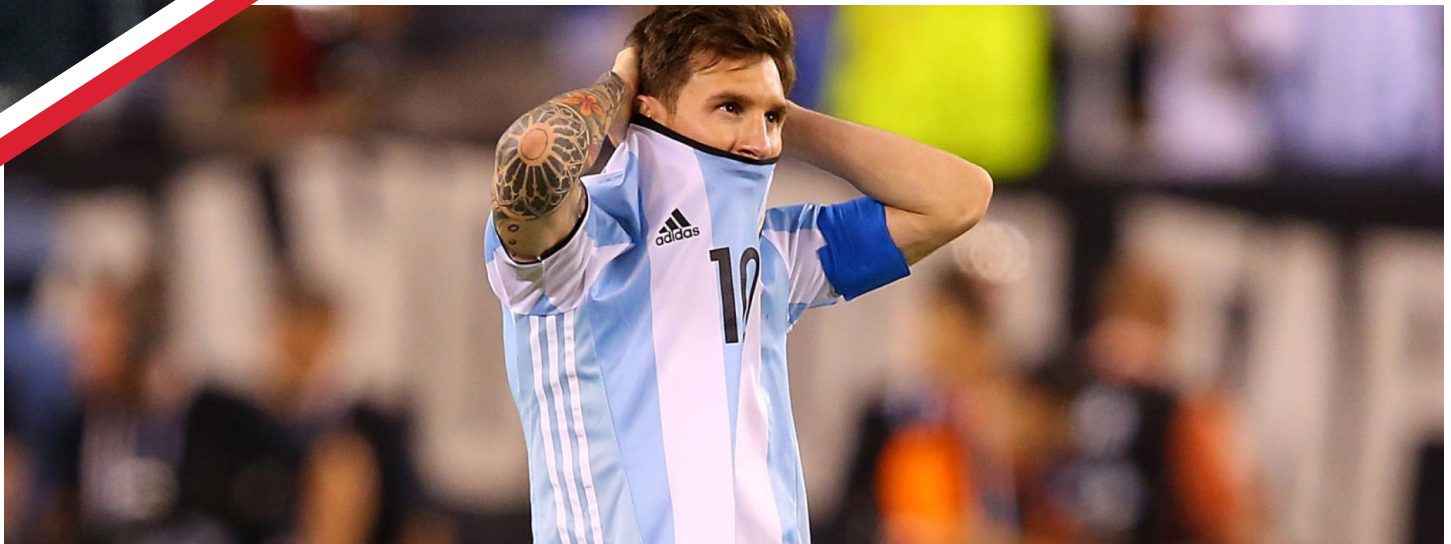
At Euro 2016, his counterpart from Portugal, Cristiano Ronaldo, also missed a penalty. Now you wouldn't expect two of the best players in the world to both miss penalty kicks at two huge competitions within a week, would you?

In the game between Germany and Slovakia, Ozil and Mueller, also superstars, were given

In my book, *The Last 9 Seconds*, I spend a full chapter on the psychological aspects of the penalty kick. In a quote from the book, Alan Shearer said: "When you miss a chance in open play, people don't remember. When you miss a chance on a penalty, people remember." Shearer is the all-time leading goal scorer for Newcastle United of the EPL. "It's a battle of the mind", Shearer continued. "When I missed in one game, it was my responsibility that everyone went home miserable that evening. It took a while to get over that. Penalty kicks don't get any easier just because you have taken lots."

Decades later, people will still talk about a missed penalty kick. Italians still talk about Baggio's missed penalty kick at the 1994 Men's World Cup Final in the USA. Jokes are based on it.

In the 1999 Women's World Cup Final, Brandi Chastain scored that memorable penalty kick goal that got her so excited that she took



her shirt off after the ball went in the net to give the USA the World Cup. But fortunately for her, she had taken a shot on the Chinese goalkeeper before. Chastain said: “She (Gao Hong) had psyched me out earlier. I looked up and caught her eye. Her gaze rattled me and my shot dinged off the crossbar.”

In her book ***It's Not About the Bra***, Chastain said: “There is no way I’d look into her eyes again. A penalty kick is as much a mental challenge as it is a physical one. No one really expects a keeper to save a PK, so she has nothing to lose. All the mental pressure weighs on the shooter.”

But the pressure is not only on the shooter, how about the coach who has to decide who will take penalty kicks? His job could be on the line. A player like Messi or Ronaldo will not lose his job on a missed penalty kick. But the coach? It could very well cost his team a victory and cost him a job and his ability to earn an income. Now that’s pressure.

The 2016 Copa America Final was decided on penalty kicks as Chile went on to win after Messi missed his shot. At Euro 2016, Italy was eliminated in the quarter-finals on penalty kicks. In that game, Italian coach Antonio Conte decided to make a substitution in the 119th minute specifically to bring in Simone Zaza, an expert on taking penalty kicks. Zaza did a dance-like approach to the ball before he shot and failed to score. Video clips of his ridiculous approach and kick are all over YouTube garnering millions of views and the brunt of all jokes. Italy went on to lose. But it was coach Conte who specifically put him in to take one of the penalty kicks. Does Conte get blamed for the loss? Extreme pressure weighs on the coach.

The coach has to decide which players to pick who will decide the fate of the game, possibly championship, and maybe his career. Now that’s pressure. Does the coach pick a proven goal scorer or change things up a bit? Who will buckle under pressure and who will stay calm? When Italy won the 2006 World Cup against France, mostly defenders were picked to take the penalty kicks.

In a rare case when a player misses a penalty kick and another one is awarded in the same game, what would you do if you were the coach? (See the text box below for a chance to have your say).

It’s not often that a player gets a chance to take two penalty kicks in one game but when it happens, the coach has a big decision to make. In one way, you would assume that your best shot taker will regain their composure to do what they have done for you many times. In another case, you figure that their confidence may be a bit shattered and you cannot put them under that kind of pressure. Penalty kick taking is all in the mind, isn’t it? Even for the coach!

In a recent MLS match between the New York Red Bulls and the Vancouver Whitecaps, the Red Bulls coach gave striker Bradley Wright-Phillips a second chance at taking a penalty kick in the game after missing his first. Consequently, Wright-Phillips became the first player in MLS history to miss two penalty kicks in the same game. The Red Bulls lost 2-1 and ultimately, Wright-Phillips’ two missed scoring chances cost his team the game.

In that case, as much as the player will receive criticism for missing two shots, how about the coach? Fans and the media will want his head. How unfair!

So as we watch any match, think of the pressure not just on the shooter but also the coach or manager whenever a penalty kick is awarded. You can bet that they are the biggest cheerleaders for their chosen shooter. It could mean their job!

Thanks for Reading,

John DeBenedictis
www.thelast9seconds.com ■



WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE COACH?

Tell us what you would do in this situation. Go online at www.nscac.ca and write your answer in the comments section below this question. We’ll select some of your answers and review them in our next issue.

A random number of replies will also be eligible for a special NSCAC prize package. Good Luck!

THE INTRIGUING “MISTER” ANTONIO CONTE

Will success continue to follow Conte as the new Chelsea boss?

By Raffaele Tomarchio

When Antonio Conte announced his move to Chelsea, I was a bit intrigued. As an avid follower of the Italian Serie A, I was well aware of Conte's career success as a player and coach.

As a player, Conte won five league titles and one Champions League with Juventus, and had many appearances with the national team. His successful playing history is equally matched as a coach with two promotions to Serie A with Arezzo and Siena, three consecutive league titles with Juventus, and a quarter final placement with the Italian National team at Euro 2016.

In his young coaching career, Conte has built a reputation as a well prepared coach and a great motivator that gets the best out of his players by putting them in the ideal conditions to perform.

His success is a byproduct of clear ideas on how he wants his teams to play, supported by a detailed training plan and coaching methodology. Players are indoctrinated in the culture of hard work and unconditional commitment to the plan.

He has proven himself to be a winner, someone special, but in going to the EPL, a foreign league, would he be able to replicate his successful winning formula and become the next “Special One”? Coming to Chelsea, Conte was assuming a broken team, full of talented players in search of an identity, a real challenge, somewhat similar to the situation that he encountered with Juventus in 2010. Still, despite all his success, and notwithstanding my full admiration for him as a coach, I had some doubts.

“ONE OF CONTE'S BEST QUALITIES HAS BEEN THE ABILITY TO CONVEY TO HIS PLAYERS HIS STRONG DESIRE TO SUCCEED.”

1. Lost in translation...

Would Conte be able to be an effective leader and motivator in a foreign country, in a totally different culture and language?

One of Conte's best qualities has been the ability to convey to his players his strong desire to succeed. As Head Coach, he becomes the leader of the group, with an uncanny ability of reaching his players' inner desires of personal success.

He unites his players by creating a common goal of success, requiring their unconditional commitment to him and his ideas and a willingness to do what is asked in order to achieve the team's objectives. This is evident when listening to his former players talk about him. They consider Conte a demanding, almost obsessive coach, but in their words, one of the best in the business.

An example of the impact he creates in his teams came during Euro 2016 at the helm of the Italian National team. A mediocre team at best, definitely one of the least talented Italian National teams of recent times, Conte, in a span of 45 days, had them believe that they could win Euro 2016. That belief was evident in the reaction of many veterans in the squad, tearing up after their loss to

Germany in the quarter-finals on penalty shots.

2. British...no grazie.

How would his personality be perceived in a somewhat conservative soccer environment like the EPL?

Of all the coaches available for Chelsea, Antonio Conte is the least “British” of them all. Even by Italian standards, he is considered somewhat unusual and unorthodox. He lives the game like he was still a player on the field, with lots of emotion, more as a 12th player than a coach on the sidelines. His fully immersed coaching style starts

with the first whistle, with a constant flow of instructions to his players, comments to his assistants, and an occasional hug to his nearby fans after a goal. Theatrical behaviour is not something new for the Stamford Bridge fans, when Jose Mourinho was at the helm. Ironically, even the “Special One” took exception to Conte’s coaching passion and excessive celebration during the last encounter between Chelsea and Manchester United, accusing him of “trying to humiliate him in front of his former fans”.

His personality can be fiery off the field as well. He cannot be described as a media friendly coach in his previous experiences in Italy. Always wearing a dark look on his face, he was ready to do battle at each post-game interview. Part of it I believe was an act, part of the greater plan of that “us against the world” mentality that he created as a motivational platform for his players. However, the English media is not known for their kindness, and that approach could have been disastrous for a new foreign coach at Chelsea.

3. Soccer...not a problem.

In his brief but successful career, Conte has proven to have clear ideas of his personal philosophy of soccer, and how to implement it with his teams. He is known to be maniacal in his preparation, leaving nothing to chance.

As a player, he had the fortune to learn the trade from coaches like Carletto Mazzone, Giovanni Trapattoni, Marcello Lippi, Arrigo Sacchi, and Luigi De Canio, all successful coaches, each of them contributing to his growth as a player and coach.

While some of his colleagues were fortunate to jump directly from playing in a big club to coaching one, Conte started his coaching career in the Italian Serie B (Second Division) where he had an

opportunity to develop his beliefs and to hone his coaching skills. On August 15, 2016, Antonio Conte made his EPL official debut with a 2-1 win over West Ham United. At press time, after 22 games, Chelsea led the EPL with 18 wins, 3 losses, and 1 tie, good for 55 points. Despite all the skeptics, including yours truly, Conte has been able to win over everyone and do what he does best... win.

Like with Juventus, he has been able to generate a desire to win amongst his players, resulting in total commitment to his ideas and abilities to lead them to the Premiership title.

He has been a breath of fresh air for the EPL, and winning has helped the cause. His somewhat flamboyant, non-British coaching style and personality has made him quite a character and, despite my reservations, fans and media have come to accept and enjoy his celebrations.

After an initial assessment and experimentation with different systems of play, he has introduced the 3-4-3 to the EPL, which allowed him to tie the record of 13 consecutive league wins set by Arsenal.

He has also been very smart in changing his approach in the media relations department. He smiles more and has become less abrasive, trying to communicate his thoughts in a professional manner, even with his limited English vocabulary.

In January 2017, Conte was named the Premier League manager of the month for December, becoming the first coach to win the award in three consecutive months. He is definitely winning this new challenge in his coaching career, and on his way to possibly becoming “The Next Special One”. ■

RAFF TOMARCHIO

For the past 17 years, Raff has been a Club Head Coach/Technical Director with Pickering SC, Markham SC and Oshawa Kicks SC. He has also been a learning facilitator with Ontario Soccer and has won Gold and Bronze Medals as Head Coach of Team Ontario. Raff was also an associate coach with Toronto Inferno of the W-League and a Technical Director for the Durham Soccer Academy. Raff has UEFA A & B Licenses as well as a CSA A License. He is currently the publisher of and regular contributor to icoachsoccer.org, a technical training website.



CONTE OVER THE YEARS

Club	Appointed	In charge until	Function	Matches	W	D	L	Players used	⚽-Goals	PPG
Chelsea	16/17 (Jul 1, 2016)	expected 30.06.2019	Manager	24	19	1	4	22	2,25 : 0,92	2,42
Italy	14/15 (Aug 19, 2014)	15/16 (Jun 30, 2016)	Manager	24	14	6	4	50	1,38 : 0,83	2,00
Juventus	12/13 (Dec 9, 2012)	14/15 (Jul 15, 2014)	Manager	86	61	13	12	33	1,80 : 0,69	2,28
Juventus	11/12 (May 31, 2011)	11/12 (Jun 30, 2012)	Manager	43	26	16	1	26	1,79 : 0,60	2,19
AC Siena	10/11 (May 23, 2010)	10/11 (May 30, 2011)	Manager	44	22	14	8	33	1,61 : 0,86	1,82
Atalanta	09/10 (Sep 21, 2009)	09/10 (Jan 7, 2010)	Manager	14	3	4	7	24	1,00 : 1,50	0,93
Bari	07/08 (Dec 28, 2007)	08/09 (Jun 23, 2009)	Manager	67	32	22	13	50	1,46 : 0,94	1,76
Arezzo	06/07 (Mar 13, 2007)	07/08 (Jun 30, 2007)	Manager	15	8	3	4	22	1,47 : 1,13	1,80
Arezzo	06/07 (Jul 1, 2006)	06/07 (Oct 31, 2006)	Manager	12	3	5	4	23	1,17 : 1,50	1,17

THE 2017 NATIONAL SOCCER COACHING CONFERENCE: A BRIEF REVIEW

By Anthony Capotosto



The 2017 National Soccer Coaching Conference, held over three days in late January, was presented by Bell in partnership with Toronto FC and Canadian Soccer. The goal of the conference is to provide coaching education to soccer coaches from across Canada to ultimately raise the standard of play across the country. This year, there were over 400 attendees with 8 Provinces represented, making it our biggest conference since we began in 2012.

There were 8 clinicians/guest speakers who presented both on-field demonstrations, as well as lectures on various topics. In total, there were 16 on-field/classroom sessions as part of the conference. Ontario Soccer showed great support by providing accreditation points for the attendees towards their Provincial coaching licenses. Toronto FC opened the doors to the KIA Training Ground and offered a behind the scenes tour of their facility as well as a lunch for all the coaches that attended. KwikGoal was the official equipment supplier for the conference and provided each attendee with a welcome package. We also had a coaches' social at the Duke of York Pub on the Saturday night where approximately 80 coaches enjoyed complimentary food and a chance to network with other coaches at the conference.

The feedback that we've received from the coaches that attended the conference has been very positive. Preparations are already underway for the 2018 NSCC with the expectation of making next year's event even better. For more information about the 2017 conference you can visit our website at: www.nssc.utoronto.ca



Anthony Capotosto serves as head coach and manager of soccer operations at the University of Toronto. As a player at the U of T, Capotosto was named an OUA all-star defender in all five seasons he spent with the Varsity Blues. Capotosto holds a Canadian National 'B' coaching license and United States Soccer Federation National 'B' and 'Y' licenses. In 2016 he was awarded the Elite French Coaching License through the French Football Federation and Major League Soccer.

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THE POTENTIAL AND THE EXECUTION

By Ian Barker, Director of Coaching Education,
National Soccer Coaches Association of America

In the summer of 2014, a group of US and Canadian coaches, on a study trip with the NSCAA, had a chance to visit with the Belgian FA (KBVB). Given the current quality of player development in Belgium and the host of star players it is producing, it was a logical site for a visit. Our host was the head of their coaching education department, Mr. Kris Van Der Haegen, and his opening remark pointed to the significant advantage Belgium had over North America in coach and player development. At this point, it might reasonably have been guessed he would point to the professional leagues and clubs, access to sending players around Europe, a street soccer culture and a long history of soccer as the nation's number one sport as reasons for his contention. That was not the case, however. Instead, Kris simply identified that Belgium was much smaller than North America and, as such, they can manage all their programs far more easily, creating nationwide buy-in and achieving consistency in programming.

The absolute longest one-way drive you can make in Belgium is 306km (Vancouver to Quebec City is a distance of 4809km). So for the Belgian FA to implement and support a national playing model of 2v2 to 5v5 to 8v8 to 11v11 that is universally adopted is quite easy. Likewise the Belgian FA offers coach education that is extended over far longer periods of time than typical North American

programs as coaches can drive into central education centers for an evening and return home that same day.

Circa 2000, the German FA (DFB) revamped their player development and coach education programming. The success of this initiative is seen in the 2014 World Cup men's championship. One aspect of the German program is a nationwide grassroots to pro club adoption of agreed-upon best practices that everyone observes. This is achieved, in part, perhaps by German discipline and drive, but also by government funding that is provided at all levels for compliance in the national programming.

The French Men's senior team is among the most talented and diverse currently in world football. From Griezmann to Pogba, from Payet to Kante, talent abounds. The athleticism and the technical and tactical brilliance of the French is identified and supported by a vibrant professional league and the leadership of the French Football Federation. It is also the case that soccer is the number one sport for young men in France and, consequently, the best athletes, physically, cognitively and socio-emotionally, are most likely to find soccer at a young age and be placed into youth development programs.

North American soccer is conducted over

six time zones, if you include Hawaii. Distances are huge and uniformity and consistency is not only impossible to achieve and monitor, it is arguably nonsensical, given the diversity of resources and cultures. Our players and coaches cannot enjoy the frequency and quality of elite training and competition without massive commitments of time and money. In Canada and the US, federal funding for soccer down to the grassroots does not exist and elite young team athletes are likely to find baseball, hockey, basketball and football as frequently, and in reality, more frequently, than they do soccer.

So the obvious conclusion is to throw our arms into the air and give up. The gap between North American soccer and top soccer playing nations, including Brazil, that can point to a soccer mad culture, massive population and incredibly adverse socio-economic conditions which breeds competitive and savvy players, is simply too big to reconcile. The notion to give

“OUR PLAYERS AND COACHES CANNOT ENJOY THE FREQUENCY AND QUALITY OF ELITE TRAINING AND COMPETITION WITHOUT MASSIVE COMMITMENTS OF TIME AND MONEY.”



up, however, is not our collective mentality, nor does it appreciate our uniqueness and strengths.

Canadian soccer clubs are typically much larger than US ones and are built around large communities and youth to adult programs. The sheer scale of Canadian clubs has excellent potential for player development, financial support and broad engagement within large connected populations. Both the US and Canada have amazing facilities. A few summers ago, Real Madrid played Manchester United in a friendly in front of over 100,000 fans and the host city was not LA, New York or Dallas, but Ann Arbor, Michigan. European soccer people struggle to grasp the magnitude of these facts. I recently did an unscientific study and counted at least 48 stadia in the US that could host a full international soccer game and seat at least 70,000 fans.

In MLS, NWSL and next tier men's leagues such as the USL, North America has young but flourishing professional leagues that are now investing heavily in youth soccer and youth player development. The US Men's senior team is a force within CONCACAF and the Women's team are World Champions. Canada recently hosted a World Cup and, while its senior teams have achieved modest success recently, Canadian youth national teams are increasingly competitive.

Qualification for FIFA events out of CONCACAF is never easy, but it is a more "friendly" confederation than say, UEFA, for progress to major events. Good athletes are gravitating to soccer in North America and media engagement and sponsorships grow along with the growth of leagues and player participation.

So as North Americans, we may not have many of the advantages of our European and South American soccer counterparts. We do, however, have other advantages and opportunities that are beneficial. In my opinion, the biggest threats to the ongoing growth of the game and elevation of the US and Canada to higher echelons of world soccer, is often our own defeatist attitudes and failure to control the controllable and recognize our potential. Many of our challenges will persist; no one can make either country smaller and we must accept this. At the same time, many of our achievements and progress are fantastic, but also fragile and liable to slip if we do not work to our strengths and embrace our North American community of soccer pioneers who enjoy competition with one another and also celebrate collaboration amongst us. ■

IAN BARKER

Ian Barker has been at the NSCAA since 2012. Before joining the NSCAA he served as Men's Soccer Coach at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn. He also has collegiate coaching experience at the University of Wisconsin, serving as an assistant coach from 1989-1996. In an eight-year span with the Badgers, Coach Barker joined the squad in four NCAA tournament appearances. In the 1995 season the Badgers won both the Big Ten and NCAA National Championships.

From 1997-2007 Coach Barker served as Director of Coaching and Player Development for the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association (MYSA), a state

association representing over 140 clubs and 75,000 members.

Coach Barker has served on the national instructional staff for the NSCAA, US Soccer and US Youth Soccer. His formal coaching qualifications come from the NSCAA, US Soccer, US Youth Soccer, the English FA and the German DFB.

As a coach and coach educator, Coach Barker has traveled extensively in Europe, South and Central America, and Africa.

You can reach him on Twitter at: [@barkernscaa](https://twitter.com/barkernscaa)



PRE-SEASON PERIODIZATION - HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

BY RICHARD BUCCIARELLI, PRESIDENT, SOCCER FITNESS INC.

Richard Bucciarelli, MS, B.Kin, R.Kin, CSCS, CSEP-CEP, USSF "A", is a sports scientist, fitness coach, coach educator, and President of Soccer Fitness Inc., a company which provides fitness testing, training and coach education to soccer players, parents and coaches in the Greater Toronto Area. For more information about Richard and Soccer Fitness Inc., visit www.soccerfitness.ca.



The dawn of another outdoor soccer season is approaching, and with it comes the need for youth soccer coaches to begin planning their teams' pre-season training period.

Typically, although many teams will resume practicing soon after the start of the new year in January, the pre-season period – during which the frequency (number of training sessions per week), volume (amount of time per training session) and intensity (how hard players train in practice) are all significantly increased – will start around 8 weeks prior to the start of the competitive season. Since the typical Canadian outdoor competitive soccer season starts in the month of May, this 8 week pre-season training period will most likely begin sometime in late March or early April. Most coaches probably understand the importance of a pre-season training period, and how – if it is planned appropriately – it can be of great benefit to their team throughout the duration of the competitive season. A challenge that can come up for coaches when putting together their pre-season, however, is how exactly to plan and implement the physical part of their training regime.

Regarding physical fitness, if the ultimate aim of the pre-season is to get players at or close to their peak level of physical conditioning, then the relationship between frequency, volume, and intensity of training must be carefully thought out during this time period. Get it right and your team will improve their physical fitness, reduce their risk of injury, and likely out-perform their competition. Get it wrong, however, and you are setting your team up for decreased physical performance, in addition to a significantly increased risk of injury.

So what does an ideal pre-season physical training plan look like? And how exactly

should a coach go about planning the specific amounts of frequency, volume, and intensity of their training sessions?

At the top of the list of priorities must be the development of “aerobic” fitness and, more specifically, the ability of the aerobic energy system to help players improve their recovery in between the frequent bouts of sprinting and high speed running they must perform in games. There is considerable evidence (including some recent studies we have published at Soccer Fitness Inc.) demonstrating that improvements in aerobic endurance can be made in 4-6 weeks, with as little as 2 high intensity training sessions per week.

Thus, the first component of training that should be included into a pre-season training plan is a minimum of two training sessions per week which include some form of aerobic endurance training. Considerable evidence also exists indicating that a volume of training of between 20-30 minutes, and a relative intensity of training between 70-80 percent of maximal oxygen uptake in each workout, is sufficient to elicit improvements in aerobic fitness over the course of a 4-6 week, 2 training sessions per-week training program. Small progressions with slight increases in intensity can be made each week, with the best and most effective changes being those which increase work time and/or decrease rest time.

Because the sport of soccer is played with frequent, intermittent bouts of high intensity activity, interspersed with rest periods and/or periods of lower intensity activity, the type of aerobic training that is most specific – and thus most suited – to this activity pattern is high intensity aerobic interval training. And finally, because the most specific way to

perform high intensity aerobic interval training for soccer players is to actually have them play soccer, the use of conditioned, controlled small-sided games is the ideal way for coaches to train the aerobic energy system and develop aerobic fitness in soccer.

Below is an example of simple weekly progressions of small-sided soccer games that can be used in the aerobic phase of the pre-season periodization plan:

- Week 1:
 - o Session 1: 4v4: 3 sets of 3 minutes game with 3 minutes rest
 - o Session 2: 2v2: 4 sets of 2 minutes game with 2 minutes rest
- Week 2:
 - o Session 1: 4v4: 3 sets of 4 minutes game with 4 minutes rest
 - o Session 2: 2v2: 4 sets of 2.5 minutes game with 2.5 minutes rest
- Week 3:
 - o Session 1: 4v4: 4 sets of 4 minutes game with 4 minutes rest
 - o Session 2: 2v2: 5 sets of 3 minutes game with 3 minutes rest
- Week 4:
 - o Session 1: 4v4: 4 sets of 4 minutes game with 3 minutes rest
 - o Session 2: 2v2: 5 sets of 3 minutes game with 2.5 minutes rest

The second priority/component of soccer-specific fitness that must be developed during the pre-season is speed and power, or “anaerobic” fitness. Improving these physical abilities will allow players to improve the quality of the frequent, intermittent bouts of high intensity activity they must perform in games – that is, they will be able to run faster and jump higher throughout a game. Including speed and power development into the pre-season plan can be tricky, because

they engage a different energy system – the anaerobic system – than aerobic interval training does. This can mean that, if both types of training are performed during the same time period, improvements in one energy system may minimize or even counteract improvements made in the other one.

Thus, if coaches have 8 weeks to devote to pre-season training, it might make sense to begin with 3-4 weeks of aerobic energy system training, and then progress to 3-4 weeks of anaerobic energy system training. Research into the effectiveness of different methods of anaerobic training (also including some recent studies we have published at Soccer Fitness Inc.) has indicated that improvements in speed and power can be made with 2-3 training sessions per week, and with volume ranging from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 50 sprints or high intensity activities per training session.

Accumulating sufficient rest in between each high intensity activity of an anaerobic energy system training session is also important, because insufficient rest does not allow the body's energy stores to recover and produce enough speed and power in subsequent repetitions. An optimal work-to-rest ratio for the development of anaerobic fitness is between 1:6 and 1:10 (that is, for each second of work, there must be at least 6-10 seconds of rest).

Since the high speed, high intensity "anaerobic" movements in soccer are performed in a variety of ways (from forwards, backwards, and lateral running, to jumping, tackling, striking and heading movements), the best and most specific way to train to improve the quality (speed and power) of these movements is also to use some form of soccer drill or small-sided game.

Thus, coaches should try to design soccer drills or small-sided games for the anaerobic phase of their periodization that include 10-50

short sprints, jumps, or other high intensity activities, while being mindful of the rest between repetitions and keeping the work-to-rest ratios within the 1:6 to 1:10 range. Small progressions with slight increases in intensity can also be made each week, but with anaerobic training the best and most effective changes are those which increase the number of repetitions.

Below is an example of simple weekly progressions of small-sided games that can be used in the anaerobic phase of the pre-season periodization plan:

- Week 1:

o Session 1: 1v1 to goal: 10 repetitions of 5-10 seconds, work-to-rest ratio = 1:8

o Session 2: 1v1 counter-attack game: 3 sets of 6 repetitions of 3-6 seconds, work-to-rest ratio = 1:8

- Week 2:

o Session 1: 1v1 to goal: 11 repetitions of 5-10 seconds, work-to-rest ratio = 1:8

o Session 2: 1v1 counter-attack game: 3 sets of 8 repetitions of 3-6 seconds, work-to-rest

ratio = 1:8

- Week 3:

o Session 1: 1v1 to goal: 12 repetitions of 5-10 seconds, work-to-rest ratio = 1:8

o Session 2: 1v1 counter-attack game: 3 sets of 10 repetitions of 3-6 seconds, work-to-rest ratio = 1:8

- Week 4:

o Session 1: 1v1 to goal: 14 repetitions of 5-10 seconds, work-to-rest ratio = 1:8

o Session 2: 1v1 counter-attack game: 4 sets of 8 repetitions of 3-6 seconds, work-to-rest ratio = 1:8

Planning and executing a successful pre-season periodization will always be a challenge to soccer coaches and fitness coaches. Ultimately, understanding the basic scientific principles behind aerobic and anaerobic energy system training, as well as the optimal combinations of frequency, volume and intensity of training for these systems, will help soccer coaches and fitness coaches to design training sessions that can elicit optimal performance on the pitch.



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MAKE THEM THINK WHILE THEY TRAIN!

By Tony La Ferrara, NSCAC National Staff Head Coach

Arsene Wenger, Coach of Arsenal FC once stated: “There are an infinite number of different situations within anyone’s game and each situation is different than the one before. During the game players must perceive the situation and then select what they believe is the correct decision, and then execute.” You can probably come up with a few more quotes from some of the greatest coaches and players in the world that specifically address the importance of decision making when it comes to soccer or to any other type of invasion games.

One of the most difficult tasks for the brain of an athlete during the course of a game is to recognize and assimilate complex moving objects (opponents, the ball, teammates) while dealing with these moving, unpredictable objects in the various parts of the field and making a correct decision. Players who have rapid perception or awareness and understanding of specific situations in the game of soccer have more time to act and can usually act faster because of this awareness or perception. To see is one thing but to see and act accordingly is another and highly desired in all athletes.

For the past 30 years, I have had the good fortune of coaching youth and senior soccer at every level of the game. Technical ability and individual creativity on the ball has improved and is more advanced than it was 10-15 years ago. Thanks to YouTube and other such social media tools today, players are learning skills on their own and practicing tricks they’ve seen online. Not long ago, players had to learn tricks in other ways but now this type of information is more readily available than ever before. However, what has also become clearer is we are developing more individually skilled players that have very little idea how to play the game as a team.

I am not sure that today’s players can make

better decisions when they have the ball and have a better understanding of how to play the game “without the ball” when attacking, defending, and in transition. How much time are coaches dedicating to teaching and developing decision-making, a very critical component of player development? Not much, I am afraid.

“THE GREAT JOHAN CRUYFF ONCE SAID ‘FOOTBALL IS A GAME YOU PLAY WITH YOUR BRAIN.’”

I have seen too many coaches spend hundreds of dollars on purchasing software to create very colorful looking session plans but then they deliver a very rigid, very mechanical training session. They follow the script. In doing so they also facilitate and encourage young players to train in a very rigid and emotionless fashion. That type of training will ultimately reflect on the field through a lack of imagination, lack of creativity, focus, improvisation, overall effective team play, and poor decision-making. Just watch both boys’ and girls’ youth games and it will be quite evident that there is a lack of all these extremely important elements of the game. The same can be said for senior and youth National teams. Club coaches now have more resources and support than they have ever had in the past and yet we are still not producing quality players. Time and money are wasted on activities and programs that may produce short term results that everyone can brag about, but the long term enjoyment and future development of players is seriously jeopardized.

I am not a scientist, far from it! But during my research, I have learned that, depending on the task, different brain networks will

be recruited and will work as a team to get the job done. Imagination, creativity, focus, improvisation, and decision-making are all brain functions that can be trained and developed. So the question is: If imagination, creativity, focus, improvisation, and decision-making are all brain functions and are so crucial to the development of proficient and clever soccer players....WHY DON’T WE ALSO TRAIN THE BRAIN IN THE SAME WAY AS WE TRAIN PLAYERS TO KICK, RUN, JUMP, PASS, DRIBBLE, etc.? Given that players will spend less than two or three minutes per game (depending on the position they play) in possession of the ball, the most sought after skill will be that of “Decision Making”. Figuring out how to exploit space, for optimum advantage, in real time. The same can be said when the team is trying to win the ball back. Players are always making decisions as individuals, as a group or unit, and as a team. If one member of the team does not make the correct decision, it could be a disaster.....in Trumpian terms, it would be a “HUGE” disaster. The following is a citation from SoccerEyeQ.com: “An increasing body of sports science research highlights the importance of the cognitive skills of players when playing the game. These studies are consistently showing that it is the mental abilities, not necessarily physical prowess, that is the differentiating factor between elite and non-elite players. It is the “soccer brain” that is the key determinant factor in achieving elite level performance, and subsequent success or failure in competition” I believe there is more than one factor that is responsible for the development of players and their ability to make positive decisions in training and during a game. It is not just about playing the game and building up lots of training and playing time to reach the recommended 10,000 hours. Decision-making is also about accumulating a variety of soccer

An invasion game is the term used for any game where the aim is to attack an opponent's territory and score a goal or point. Usually consisting of teams of equal players these fast paced games focus on teamwork, keeping possession, scoring and defending. Invasion games are the most strategic types of games with many transferable skills.



experiences, knowledge, attitudes, together with a varied and comprehensive library of images and mental pictures that a player builds up over time. All these experiences and the collection of a mental "soccer data bank" will eventually help them make better soccer decisions and become more competent soccer players. Young players during the course of a game are confronted with situations for which they can't come up with a solution because they have never experienced that particular situation in training. Understanding that it is very difficult to create every possible picture during training, it is very likely, however, that a young player who is accustomed to problem solving during training can find a possible solution to a new and unexpected situation that has developed during the game.

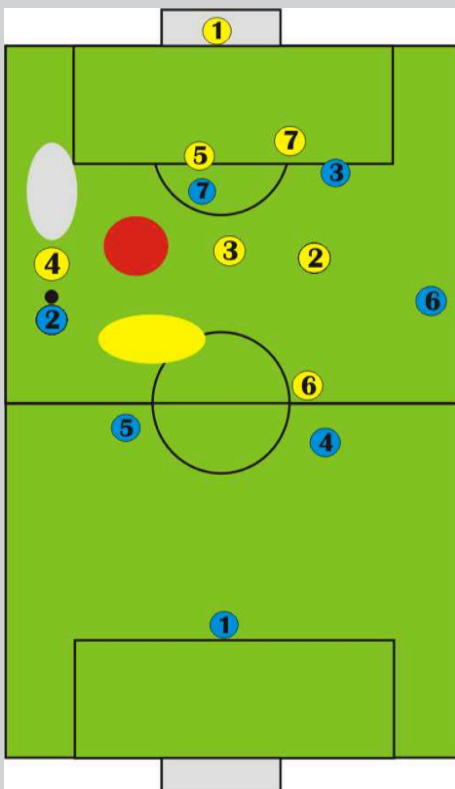
My line of reasoning is that, unless these players have been exposed to and trained to recognize these potential solutions, they will never be able to make an intelligent assessment of the situation and come up with a possible rewarding solution. To further complicate things, as soon as the ball moves or as soon as players move, the picture changes and there are a whole new set of possibilities that need to be identified and new decisions to be made.

The brain is always working. Constantly taking pictures, assessing the environment and deciding on potential outcomes. Skilled players can recall and recognize patterns of play more effectively than their less-skilled opponents, and they have a better idea of

what is likely to happen under different sets of circumstances. If players are trained and encouraged to think and are wisely and gradually guided to problem solve in training and in games, there is a very high possibility that they will make the correct decision more often than not. As they continue to mature and grow in this kind of environment, they will be able to make sound positive decisions time after time.

I used to give this exercise to my players as a homework assignment. At first they only had to write the potential decisions as they applied to one or two players. As they got older and matured as players, they were required to identify more and more potential decisions and solutions both on the defensive and attacking side of the ball. We often had classroom sessions where we would do this type of analysis as a team. On several occasions we also looked at professional soccer games and analyzed their decision making in addition to other elements of the game. Everybody was encouraged and expected to participate in the discussions. Not all learning and teaching takes place on the soccer field.

Let's have a look at the diagram below:



In this 7v7 game, player #2 in blue has the ball. We are looking only at the attacking phase. The blue player #2 is faced with a few options and needs to make a decision.

- He can decide to attack the gray space behind yellow #4 and take on the defender 1v1.
- He can also decide to come inside and attack the red space to the side of #4
- If blue #7 recognizes that there could potentially be a 2v1 situation against #4, then #7 can make a run into the red area and offer to play a wall pass with #2.
- If blue player #5 recognizes that there is space in front him, he can make a run into the yellow area and call for the ball.
- Blue player #5 can also initiate an overlapping run around #2 blue.
- Blue player #2 can also pass the ball back to blue #5 who will have time and space in his favor.

We could go on with a few more potential decisions that could be made on the attacking phase with Blue in possession... but we will stop here.



“WE ALWAYS THOUGHT SPORTING ACTIVITIES WERE MECHANICAL ACTIVITIES, BUT WE KNOW THERE ARE INTERVENTIONS FROM THE BRAIN MICHEL BRUYNINCKX - BELGIAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION”

Joma

I also did this activity with team coaches and technical staff. I always found this type of exercise to be very stimulating for the coaches and it provided everybody with an opportunity to learn and share their knowledge at the same time. Another very important factor to consider when working with young players is the soccer environment in which young players train and play. This environment will also have a big influence on the ability of players to learn to read the situation and make positive decisions. Players who are over-coached during training and games become robotic in their performance and cannot make tactical decisions fast enough.

The over-coaching comes not only from coaches, but also from parents and spectators. They constantly yell out to the players what to do and when to do it. This further stifles the player's decision-making ability. In order to train the brain to make positive soccer decisions, players require a healthy soccer environment in which to grow. That environment requires less coaching during matches and better coaching during training sessions.

Too many coaches of young players are constantly telling their players where to run, when to pass the ball, and where to pass the ball. Making decisions for your players may result in short term wins for the team but it holds back or completely eliminates player development. Players from a young age should always be encouraged to make decisions for themselves, to experiment and not worry about the consequences. They will turn out to be more skilled and capable players in the long term.

LONG-TERM TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL DEVELOPMENT

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE "WELLNESS TO WORLD CUP, VOLUME 2: LTPD TECHNICAL" FROM CANADA SOCCER:

TRAINING DECISION-MAKING

Small-sided games and drills form a critical component of the technical and tactical development of soccer players. During game-like training situations, players learn to combine their technical skills with tactical decision-making under realistic playing conditions. Moment-to-moment decision-making is critical to their long-term success in the game. (Note: Players must first have technical mastery of the ball in order to practice their decision-making in games and game-like training!)

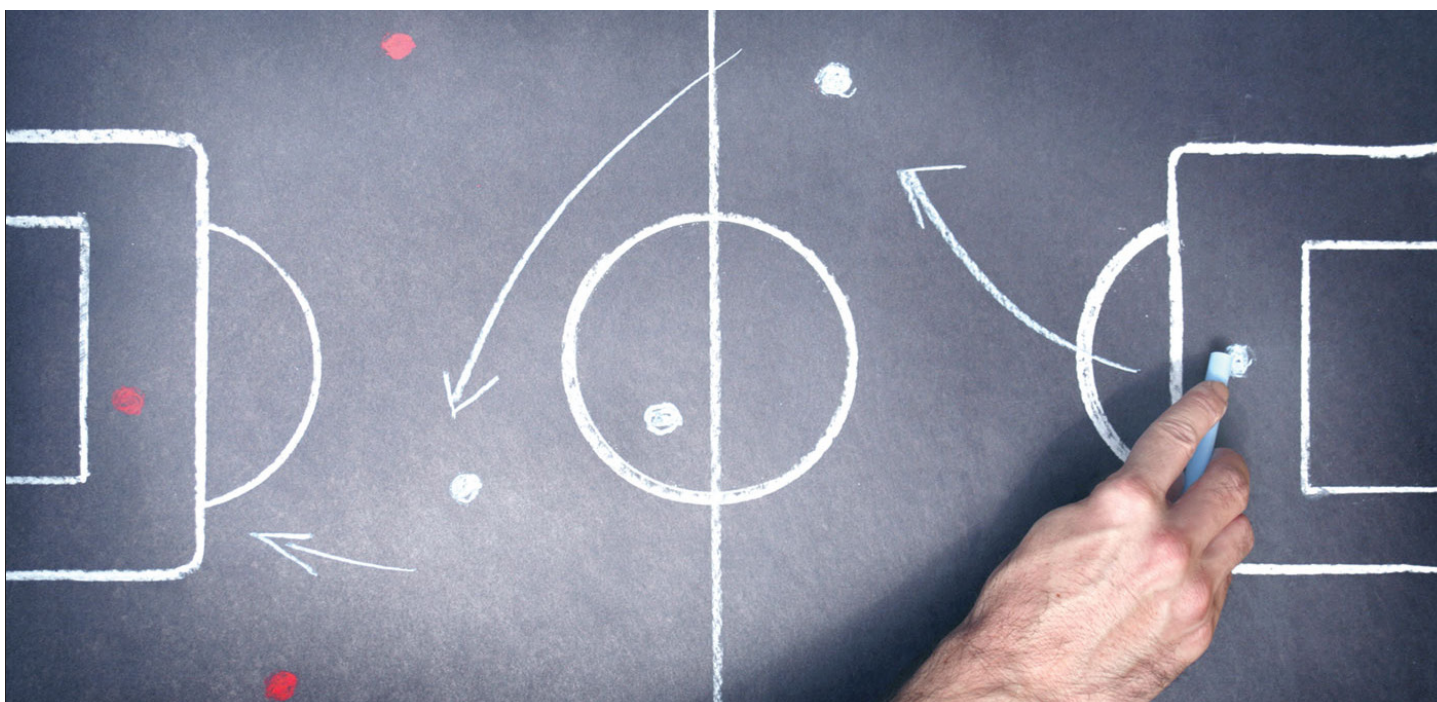
The best way to develop fast and accurate decision-making is to provide players with ample opportunities to practice decision-making in scrimmages, games, and game-like drills. Beyond brief coaching interventions during training to provide additional insight and awareness, players must be given the chance to make decisions on their own and witness the outcomes, good and bad. Sometimes "mistakes" can be the best teacher.

Training decision-making under game-like conditions is the thrust behind contemporary research into Decision Training (DT). Traditional coaching has focused on Behavior Training (BT) where athletes are drilled repeatedly with the same specific skills and responses to specific situations, with the objective of creating "automaticity" in skills execution and decision making to reduce "errors".

Sports research since the 1990s has encouraged a movement away from this approach towards Decision Training (DT). While Behavior Training often provides positive short-term results that satisfy coaches in winning games at young ages, research has shown that Decision Training develops better decision making and hence better athlete performance over the long-term (Vickers, 2003).

Decision Training is an approach to coaching that increases the opportunities the athletes have to make decisions in training similar to those encountered in competition (i.e. games). The underlying premise to this approach is that coaches create learning environments and employ tasks that develop creativity, attention, anticipation, problem-solving and other mental skills required to perform at a higher level.

“THE GOAL OF PRACTICE SHOULD BE TO IMPROVE A PLAYER'S PERFORMANCE AND TO SUPPORT THE TRANSFER OF THE TRAINING TO GAME PERFORMANCE”



During the course of a season you prepare your coaching session and diligently plan out all the details of the session. You set out to teach a particular skill. You have all the necessary equipment and all the appropriate progressions well illustrated. Players seem to get it, they are performing this new skill the way you want them to. There is immediate improvement. It was a successful session. A few days, weeks, or months later however, you notice that they have gone back to their old habits and have forgotten what you so carefully planned and taught. “What is going on!....How is this possible?” you say.

How many times have you found yourself in this situation?

Numerous researchers have consistently concluded that many of the teaching methods used by coaches are not as effective at accomplishing the goal of transferring training to game performance and improving long term retention. Additional studies have also consistently concluded that random practice makes players better over the long term and prepares players more effectively to perform in competition. It is also significantly better at leading to long-term skill retention and application.

Behavior Training (BT) occurs when a player performs a single skill over and over, with repetition being the key to this activity. Variations in training are minimized or nonexistent. The player then moves on to practice another single, specific skill in the same way. Known as Blocked practice, this involves the repetition of performing a skill again and again. For example, passing the ball between two cones 12 times. On the first few repetitions the player may have to think, but after that the drill becomes mindless and performed without much thought or attention. There are lower demands on active problem-solving and engagement during blocked practice so these are best used to help beginners learn new motor patterns and basic skills.

Decision Training (DT) occurs when players work on a number of different skills in combination with each other, randomly working trials and patterns of one and then the next and the next. The random element means the players are forced to be on their toes and not falling into a repetitive routine. Known as Random practice, this involves practicing multiple skills in a random order with minimisation of the number of consecutive repetitions of any one skill.

Blocked practice is marked by low levels of brain activity, while random practice

is marked by high levels of brain activity. In simple terms, this means that random practices challenge the player's ability to switch from one task to another using different motor skills. While dealing with these changes in the activity, it keeps the player focused and always trying to regenerate the solution to that particular task. The brain is always working. This type of training allows for greater long term retention and skill transfer.

During random practice, when players are forced to work through various skills that are presented randomly in a single session, their cognitive system must adapt, rethink, and solve the problem of choosing and executing appropriate motor patterns, in other words, technique on demand.

Repetitive blocked practice leads to a kind of rote learning that allows for better performance during training sessions but less skill transfer to competitions and new situations, as well as lower retention levels over time. Because the task and goal are exactly the same on each attempt, the player simply uses the solution generated on early trials in performing the next skill. Hence, blocked practice eliminates the player's need to “solve the problem” on every trial and the need to practice the decision-making required during a game.

Blocked practices give a false sense of accomplishment and confidence to the players, coaches, and parents because it leads to better performance during training sessions in the short term. However, during competitions when predictability and rote learning are no longer guaranteed, players are not able to adapt, rethink, and solve the problem of choosing and executing appropriate motor patterns.

I found an interesting quote from the author of a study regarding the effectiveness of blocked and random practices: “It's natural to think that when we're making progress, we're learning, and when we're struggling and making errors, we're not learning as well. So people who are responsible for training can often be pushed toward training conditions that are far from optimal...The problem is that if people confuse the current sense of ease with learning, they'll tend to prefer training conditions where things are kept constant and predictable—conditions that act as crutches to prop up performance without fostering learning” (Simon and Bjork - 2001)

WHY IS DECISION TRAINING (DT) (RANDOM PRACTICE) MORE EFFECTIVE?

- Random practice forces players to become more actively engaged in the learning process by preventing simple repetitions of actions.
- Random practice gives the learner more meaningful and distinguishable memories of the various tasks increasing memory strength.
- Random practice causes the learner to forget the short-term solutions (from working memory) to the movement problem after each task change. Forgetting the short-term solution forces the learner to generate the solution again on the task's next trial, which is beneficial to learning and long-term retention.
- Random practice forces players to come up with a suitable motor pattern given the demands of the specific task they are faced with.
- Random practice forces players to generate a new solution to the new task for every trial. This allows for flexible and adaptable motor recruitment and fosters problem-solving skills in the heat of the moment, when competition and other variables are introduced.

Flexible Thinking is the Thinking Skill that focuses on a child's ability to adapt to new situations, improvise, and shift strategies to meet different types of challenges. Flexible thinking can be trained and improved.



Behavior Training vs Decision Training	
Blocked Practice	Random practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part to Whole training • Simple to Complex Drills • Easy first instruction - Introduction • Technical emphasis • Low level of video model • Lots of feedback • Low levels of questioning • Low levels of athlete detection and correction of errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactical Whole training • Competition-like drills • Hard first instruction • Decision making emphasis • High level of video model • Reduced, delayed, summary feedback • High levels of questioning • High levels of athlete detection and correction of errors.
Low levels of athlete cognitive effort	High levels of athlete cognitive effort

“WHAT TYPE OF COACH ARE YOU? ARE YOU A BEHAVIOR TRAINER OR A DECISION TRAINER?”

Some coaches will probably feel uncomfortable with this methodology because they are accustomed to conducting practices in a very direct manner, controlling all possible aspects of the training session. Behavior Training practices are easier to do, obviously, and will make coaches look better in practice. In addition, this traditional method often leads to quick improvements in the short term and produces an artificially high level of performance that gives coaches and players an immediate (false) sense of accomplishment.

One of the biggest benefits to players when using the Decision training approach is that it will also develop Flexible thinking skills. When kids engage in flexible thinking, they're better able to cope with change and new information, both within the classroom and

on the soccer field. Kids with weak flexible thinking skills are more rigid in their thinking and struggle to take on new tasks and have difficulty solving problems.

When kids develop flexible thinking skills they are better able to solve problems, engage in positive peer interactions and focus during training. When they learn to shift their thoughts in the face of new information, they can work through change and transitions. It takes time to develop this important skill set, but it helps kids thrive for years to come. Kids who are able to think about a problem in a new way engage in flexible thinking, while kids who get stuck in their ways tend to engage in rigid thinking. Guided discovery is an excellent tool that coaches can use to develop and promote flexible thinking skills.

Two of the best coaches I've had the pleasure of working with who are able to inspire, challenge and stimulate creative thinking in young players are Nixon Bernardino and Alfonso Garcia.

Did you know that video games can help improve Flexible thinking by allowing kids to practice their Flexible thinking skills while in the midst of a fun and immersive game experiences? Many games require players to shift their thinking and game play strategies with each new level in order to advance and “beat the opponent.” Video games provide a great opportunity for children to learn from their mistakes, shift their approach, handle frustration, and think creatively about new ways to solve problems.

With many of the teams that I have coached, I have often organized soccer tournaments using video games.

We rented a room at the club or community center, players brought their own hardware, we set up 3 or 4 stations and the team spent an entire afternoon playing 2v2 soccer while having fun and learning about the game. Pizza was also a big part of the event!

“ FLEXIBLE THINKING COACHES WILL INSPIRE, ENCOURAGE AND STIMULATE PLAYERS TO BECOME FLEXIBLE THINKERS. ”

Are you a Decision Coach or a Behavior Coach?

Circle T or F for each of the questions below.

1	It is important to master the fundamental or basic skills of a sport or activity before more complex skills or tactics are introduced.	T	F
2	A lot of feedback to every player is required in every practice. More feedback is always better.	T	F
3	Players don't need to be experts at analyzing their own performance - that's the responsibility of the coach.	T	F
4	Technical and physical skills should be mastered before decision-making skills are introduced	T	F
5	Using video model (players view another player) or video feedback (players view themselves) as a coaching aid is too distracting and time consuming.	T	F
6	It is critical that the same skill be practiced over and over until perfection is achieved. Being able to perform without thinking is ideal.	T	F
7	Using a questioning style where you ask your players to think about their movements and suggest improvements is too time consuming and detracts from training.	T	F

Add the number of FALSE statements

Answering FALSE to 6 or 7 statements	-	You are using a lot of Decision Making Methods
Answering FALSE to 4 or 5 statements	-	You are using some Decision Making Methods
Answering FALSE to 3 or fewer statements	-	You are using few Decision Making Methods



I always found this to be a very positive learning experience for all the players. It was always difficult to get them to talk about the game during practice, but when they got together to play the video game there was a lot of excitement and “soccer related” talk between players. As I walked from group to group, I could hear them say things like:

- “you should have gone to the near post...”
- “why don’t you pass it back to me so we don’t lose it (the ball)?”
- “you dribble too much....pass the ball....I am open”
- some of them even developed a ‘secret code’ for a short corner

Think about all the other positive outcomes from this “Flexible thinking” exercise:

- Players set up their own playing formation
- Players set up their own team strategy
- They can change strategy and formation during the course of the game
- They are able to see and experience many of the elements of the game
- Collaboration and Teamwork is encouraged
- Strategize - Manipulate - Organize
- Have fun
- Stimulates competition in a fun and controlled environment
- Better understanding of the game and its rules.
- Team bonding

Flexible thinking exercises don’t always have to take place on the field of play or in the gym. I am sure that you can come up with many other creative ways to stimulate and inspire young soccer players off the field of play. I strongly believe that “flexible thinking” exercises and activities on and off the field are essential in developing a shrewd, scheming, astute, smart soccer player.

Become a Flexible Thinking Coach and help your players have more fun and become more engaged while they train. Help them develop the ability to perform independently in competition and become astute problem solvers on and off the field of play.

One of my goals as a coach is to continue to learn about Decision Training and Flexible Thinking. I have a keen interest in learning new things. I am excited about what I will discover and learn as I go through research and as I seek out and talk with fellow coaches who have experience and knowledge about these subjects.

It is my plan to continue to share this with you. My next goal is to create and share training sessions that deal with decision training and encourage flexible thinking. Hopefully I will be able to do this in the next issue.

I also encourage you to share your ideas and experience with all of us. Knowledge sharing plays a very vital role in creating awareness within the coaching community. It also can help to build a stronger working relationship and provide us with more tools and resources. It can only make us better coaches.

MAKE THEM THINK WHILE THEY PLAY!

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BOOK REVIEW

He was one of the most iconic soccer stars of the 20th century and his play epitomized the revolutionary Dutch system of “Total Football”. Johan Cruyff had few equals as an innovator and creative force in world soccer. Before he passed away last March 2016, Cruyff published a thoroughly engrossing autobiography, **“My Turn: A Life of Total Football”**.

The book recounts his rapid rise through the Ajax youth ranks to become one of the Netherlands’ most gifted and most admired players worldwide. Cruyff takes us on the pitch to re-live memorable moments like leading Ajax to three straight European Cup titles or inspiring the Netherlands to the 1974 World Cup final. But he also describes his career as a head coach at both Ajax and Barcelona, whom he led to eight domestic and European titles.

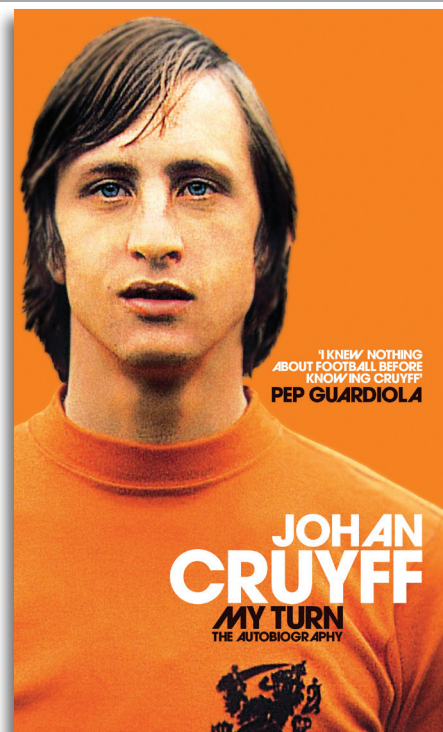
Cruyff also describes in detail the boardroom battles he experienced after returning to his beloved Ajax as an advisor and stepping away from the game after a particularly

bitter dispute with the directors of the Dutch Eredivisie club.

Cruyff looks back fondly on his brief time in the North American Soccer League. He expresses his admiration for the structure and organization within the American pro league that left a profound impact on him.

Coaches will enjoy Cruyff’s emphasis on the simplicity of the game and how effective teams can be when playing with five lines and forming triangles. He shares his love for inspiring youth players but he bemoans the fact that Dutch football has regressed, in his mind, to a more pedestrian style of game. **“My Turn: A Life of Total Football”** is an engaging, enjoyable journey through the many careers of one of the most powerful figures in world soccer.

“My Turn: A Life of Total Football”, Johan Cruyff. Published by Nation Books, \$34.99 CAN. ■

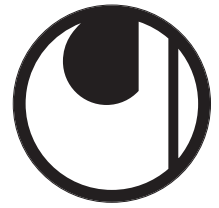


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