The Football Coaching Process

An Official FFA Publication

Kelly Cross

'If you can't describe what you're doing as a process,
then you don't know what you're doing'

W. Edwards Deming

(All references to gender are intended to be neutral)

PREFACE:

Football is one of the most difficult games to learn and master. The range of skills and techniques required, using almost every part of the body, to control and move the ball through a 360-degree spectrum of possibilities, under regular pressure from opponents, means that a lengthy period of practice, training and development is necessary for each individual player. The additional complexity of the game in terms of decision-making and the constant challenge of correct off-the-ball positioning increase the difficulty of the learning process.

Players also need to learn how to function as part of a team, interacting with their ten team-mates while dealing with the actions of their eleven opponents; they need to be aware of the various tasks required of the team, and the many and varied individual player tasks.

It is perhaps stating the obvious to the reader when I stress how difficult it is to play football.

However, despite the widely-held acceptance that it takes a long time to learn how to play football, there seems to be a very common perception that it should not take very long to learn how to coach it.

If it takes around ten solid years of effort and practice to learn how to play, mastering perhaps one or two positions in the team, why should it take any less than that to be the one who knows EVERYONE'S role, the one who makes the WHOLE TEAM tick, the one who can plan and conduct training sessions to MAKE THE WHOLE TEAM BETTER, the one who can observe and analyse WHOLE TEAM PERFORMANCE ON MATCH-DAY, seeing the problems and IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS, the one who DRIVES, INSPIRES AND DEVELOPS ALL PLAYERS AND STAFF, with a special combination of PLANNING, COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS?

It is clear that learning to be an effective team coach, like learning to be a player, is a process that takes a lot of time, effort and practice.

This book is all about this PROCESS: by helping the reader to see and understand the logical and connected PROCESS which underpins the act of effective coaching, it is hoped that we will develop a much larger pool of successful and perceptive coaches who will push Australian players to a higher level.

Coaching is a profession, and a difficult one; however, we believe that our role in Coach Education is to make sure that learning the trade is not any more difficult than it needs to be. We hope the clear and logical process outlined in this book and on our courses will assist you in reaching your coaching goals.

In essence, this manual aims to provide the theoretical background for the practical application of the coaching art. The real learning is in the 'doing'; attending a coaching course is a key part of a coach's development, but there must also be a period of practice and reflection to ensure steady improvement.

This publication is intended as a resource for those attending FFA's Advanced Coaching Courses and also as a guidebook for all involved in football, whether as coaches or administrators.

We have a lofty long-term objective for football in Australia – 'world leader in the world game' - but the only way we will get there is with a united and concerted effort by everyone in the game.

I wish you the very best of luck in your coaching career and look forward to your support in driving Australian football towards world-class performance.

Kelly Cross
Assistant National Technical Director
Football Federation Australia

Contents

Links:

The National Football Curriculum (2009)
Updated Curriculum (2013)
The FFA Building Blocks
The 1-4-3-3 Rationale

Introduction - The FFA Coaching Expertise Model
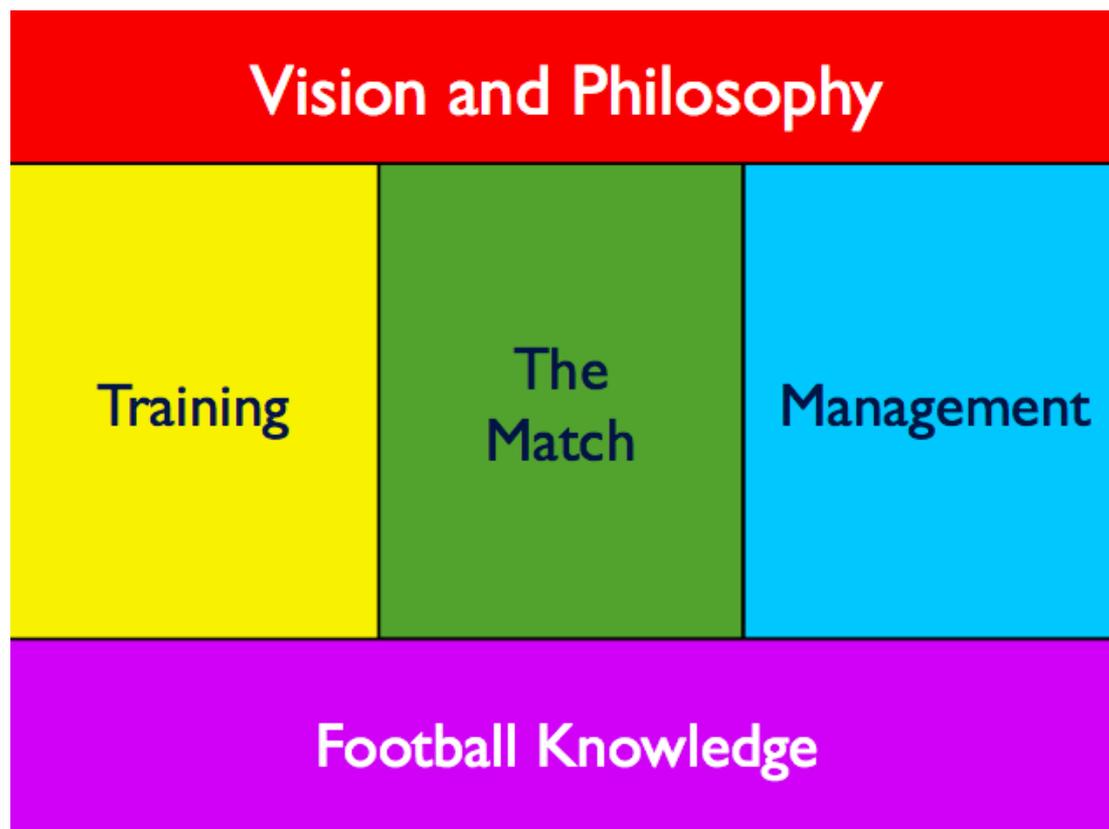
The FFA Coaching Expertise Model was developed to give coaches and coach educators a clear picture of what knowledge and skills are required to operate effectively as a football coach.

Our vision on **how to play football** has been well-documented, through the publication of the National Football Curriculum and FFA's Building Blocks of player development.

The next step required, then, was to articulate a corresponding philosophy on **how to coach football;** in other words, we knew the kind of football we want to play and the kind of players required to play that way, so we also needed to know what kind of coaches we need to produce those players and develop the teams they play in.

That is where the Coaching Expertise Model came in.

With a model in place, we were then able to logically plan a program of Coach Education, because we had all the necessary points of reference.
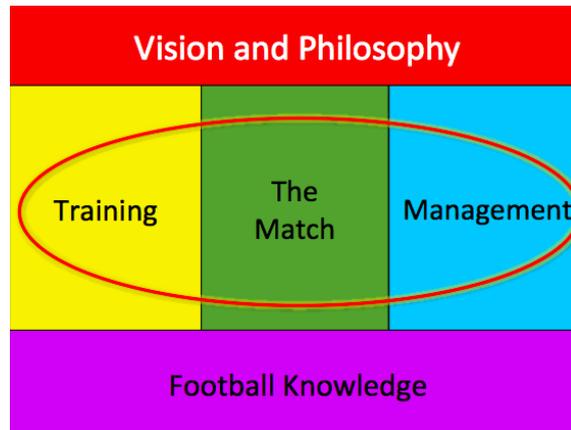
The FFA Coaching Expertise Model outlines the three main areas of competency the coach must develop:

- Training
- The Match
- Management

There are specific competencies related to all three of these. We call them the 'THREE PILLARS' of Coaching.

'The Match' is at the centre of the whole model in line with FFA's philosophical direction, as it is the focus of everything a coach does: it all begins and ends with the game of football. That also explains why the central pillar is green and looks like a football field. Match Day competencies have historically been neglected in Coach Education, but they are vital tools in the successful coach's toolbox.

'Training' only exists because there is a 'Match'; we train to become better when we play matches, and we measure the effectiveness of Training by evaluating performance in matches. Proper training, according to the age and level of the players, is critical for the future development of football in Australia.

'Management' encompasses all the skills and competencies involved in 'managing oneself', and 'managing others'. The main areas to be considered here are Communication, Planning and Leadership. Since the coach, regardless of the level they work at, is constantly interacting with others they need to develop competencies which will improve the success of these processes.
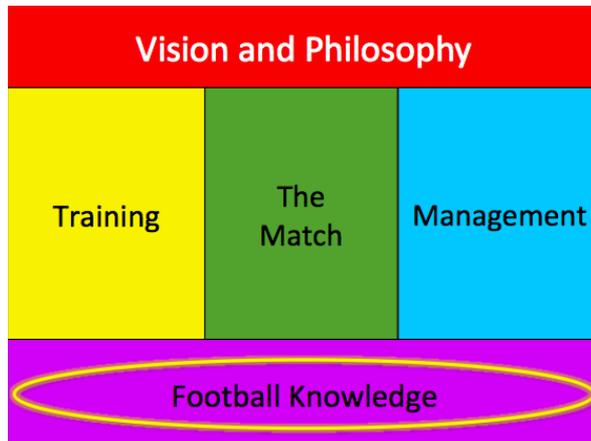
The foundation that supports the coach's work is **Football Knowledge**. This is gained in numerous ways, including playing football, analyzing football, coaching football and talking about football. Without in-depth Football Knowledge, the quality of what the coach does will be adversely affected.
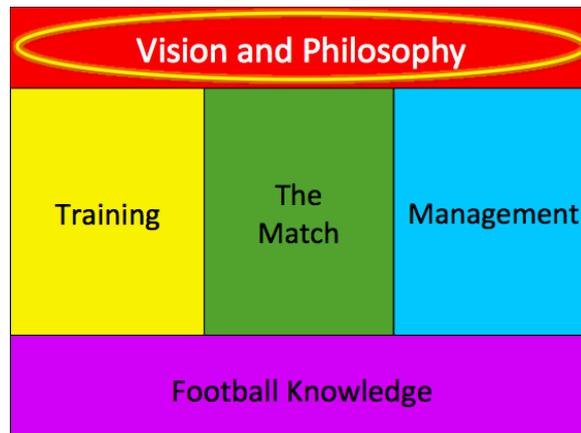
The overarching 'compass' that guides the coach is their Vision and Philosophy. In essence, this is where the potentially infinite range of possible playing styles and formations must be distilled into a 'personal preference.' The coach has to be able to say 'I am aware of the many different ways of playing football, but THIS is how I believe it should be played. I have a philosophy on football, and a vision for bringing it to life.'

A clear Vision and Philosophy are the product of extensive Football Knowledge and practical football experience. Therefore, our Advanced Pathway C and B Licence courses are conducted in such a way that the 'novice' coach is provided with FFA's Vision and Philosophy, based on the guiding principles of the National Football Curriculum.

When a coach progresses to the A Licence and Professional Diploma courses, and is by that time suitably experienced, they may choose to develop and articulate their own Vision and Philosophy as their frame of reference on these courses.

We believe that the Coaching Expertise Model is a strong one as it has a solid foundation, sturdy pillars and something at the top to hold it all together.
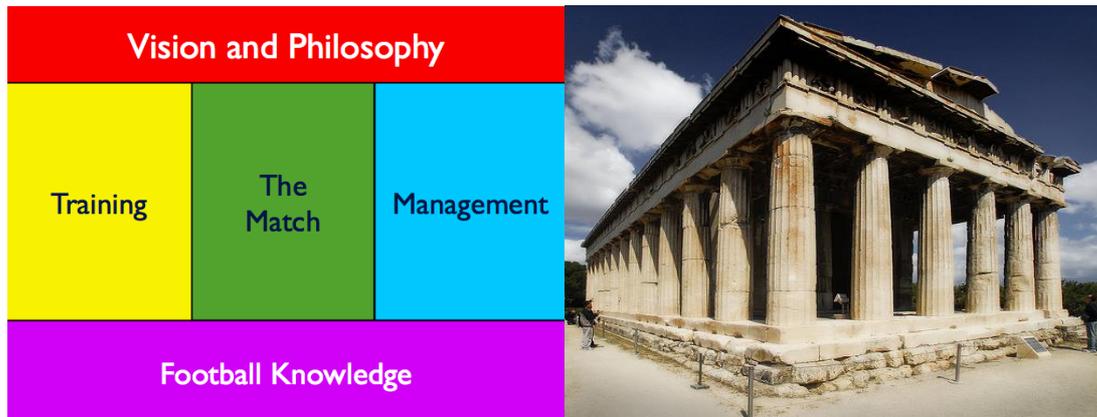
These qualities are also intended to give the model a timeless structure that will, we believe, only ever need adjustments in the details that define the elements: we firmly believe that the elements themselves are constants.

'It is a good model if it is elegant
and there are few arbitrary or adjustable elements.'
Stephen Hawking

(NOTE: the full detail of each element of the Coaching Expertise Model can be found in the Appendix of this manual)

Part One – Senior Football

This section primarily relates to coaches of players in the Performance Phase, approximately 17 years of age and older.

However, many principles and concepts outlined in Part One are universal and apply to the whole of football.

Part One – Senior Football

Chapter 1 - Why?

Why write and produce a coaching manual?

Why does FFA continuously strive to deliver world-class coach education?

Because FFA has an ambitious long-term mission:

'To make Australia a world leader in the World Game'

We sincerely hope all coaches in Australia have the same goal. That might answer another 'why?' question: 'Why are you reading this?'

There has to be a starting point, and there must also be a direction in which to head in order to fulfil the mission.

The National Football Curriculum, published in 2009 gave the background and the blueprint for this exciting journey. The Curriculum was updated in 2013. (Links to both these documents are in the Appendices of this manual)

For too long, there was no clear direction for football in Australia and the result was an obvious lack of progress towards a defined objective.

This applied equally to both **Youth Development and Coach Education**, which have now been identified as the two strategic spearheads to drive this country to its long-term goal.

The National Football Curriculum has set the road map and one of the major benefits of the Curriculum and its philosophy is that we now have clarity. We have realized that football isn't 'just football'; there are many styles and brands of football but we now know how **we** want to play. We can now talk about 'our football', which can be defined and visualized, and not settle for 'any football'. We are able to say 'any old football isn't good enough'.

That provides a solid platform for **Youth Development**, because we can logically define the types of players required to play the way we want to play.

From that point, we can then define what **Coach Education** should look like. There are many theories and philosophies on coaching; we can now set a clear direction on the kind of coaching **we** require to develop the types of players and teams **we** need in order to fulfill our mission.

Australia, given its population and the existing sporting landscape, has performed remarkably well to reach its current standing in world football. However, we strive for greater results, and to create a set of conditions in which Australia is competitive enough to challenge the best of the world on a regular basis.

To make that happen, we must maintain and develop the traditional Australian strengths, such as determination, winning mentality and a 'never give up' attitude. But a whole range of other changes and improvements are essential to make the big leap forward. We believe that minor, cosmetic changes will not be enough to make the difference: a **fundamental transformation** is necessary.

KEY POINTS:

'To make Australia a world leader in the World Game'

'Fundamental transformation'
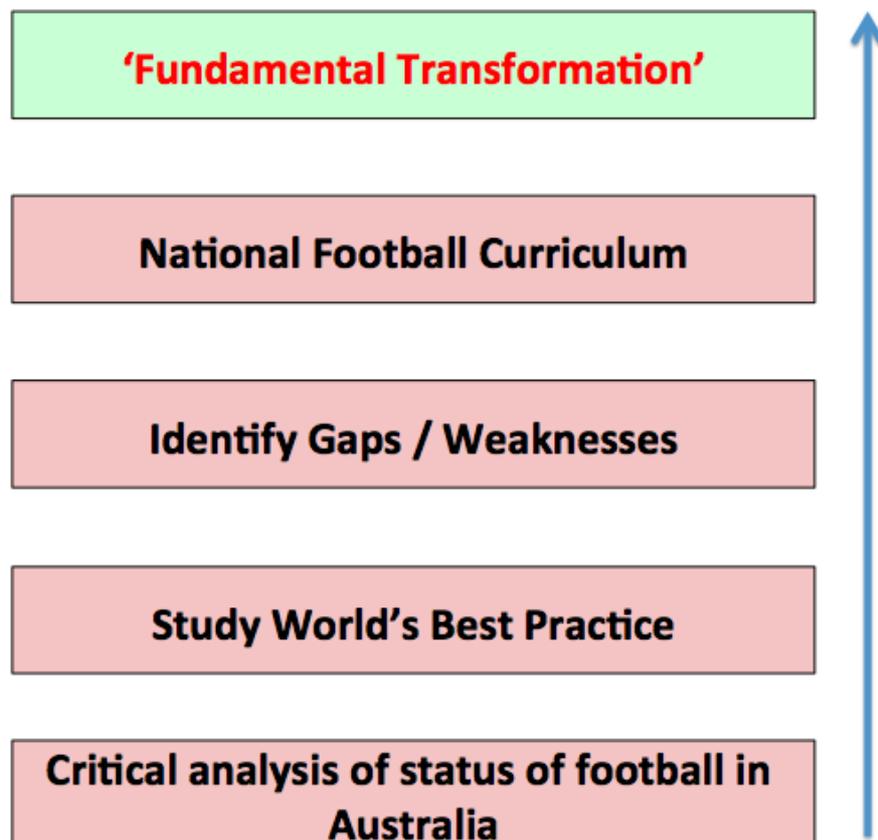
Chapter 2 – What is Football?

If we want to be a world leader in football, we need to have a clear idea on what football is.

One of the challenges in understanding football is this: there are many OBJECTIVE FACTS and also many SUBJECTIVE BELIEFS about this beautiful game.

Firstly, OBJECTIVE FACTS

1. Laws of Football

   There are 17 Laws of the Game; coaches must have at least a basic understanding of these laws by studying the latest Laws Book and passing an online Laws exam (or undergoing Referee training)

2. The Purpose of Football

   As the Laws state:

   'A goal is scored when the whole of the ball passes over the goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar, provided that no infringement of the Laws of the Game has been committed previously by the team scoring the goal'

   'The team scoring the greater number of goals during a match is the winner. If both teams score an equal number of goals, or if no goals are scored, the match is drawn'

   Clearly, the purpose of the game is to score goals, and it is obviously just as important to avoid conceding goals.

3. The Structure of Football

   There are TWO TEAMS in a game of football, and this, of course, keeps things interesting.

   However, the fact that there is only ONE BALL makes it FASCINATING!

   This one ball can naturally only be in the possession of one team at a time; there will be times when Team A has it, and times when Team B has it.

   There are many variables here: How long do they have it? What do they do with it? How hard do they try to keep it?

   But the fact is, when your team is playing football, sometimes you have the ball and sometimes your opponents have the ball.

   These two 'moments' are defined as:

   BALL POSSESSION   **(BP for short)**   **= we have the ball**
   BALL POSSESSION OPPONENT   **(BPO for short)**   **= they have the ball**

   When your team loses possession of the ball there is a period of time in which the team must change from its focus on its BP roles to a focus on functioning properly in BPO. Instead of BP tasks (making forward runs, taking up supporting positions to receive a pass, etc), players must now perform the tasks required in BPO (marking opponents, closing down space, etc).

This is called **TRANSITION**

There are two TRANSITION moments that the team goes through:

a) transition from having the ball to not having the ball   **(BP>BPO for short)**
b) transition from not having the ball to having the ball   **(BPO>BP for short)**

Football is a constant repetition of this cycle, from one of the four moments to the next.

BP – BP>BPO – BPO – BPO>BP – BP – and so on…

These Four Main Moments make up the <u>Structure of Football</u>

KEY POINTS:

There are OBJECTIVE FACTS and SUBJECTIVE BELIEFS in football

OBJECTIVE FACTS
1. Laws of Football
     17 Laws of the Game

2. The Purpose of Football
     Clearly, the purpose of the game is to score goals, and it is obviously just as important to avoid conceding goals.

3. The Structure of Football
     The Four main Moments

BP
Score Goals

BP>BPO
Counter the Counter

BPO
Prevent Goals

BPO>BP
Counterattack
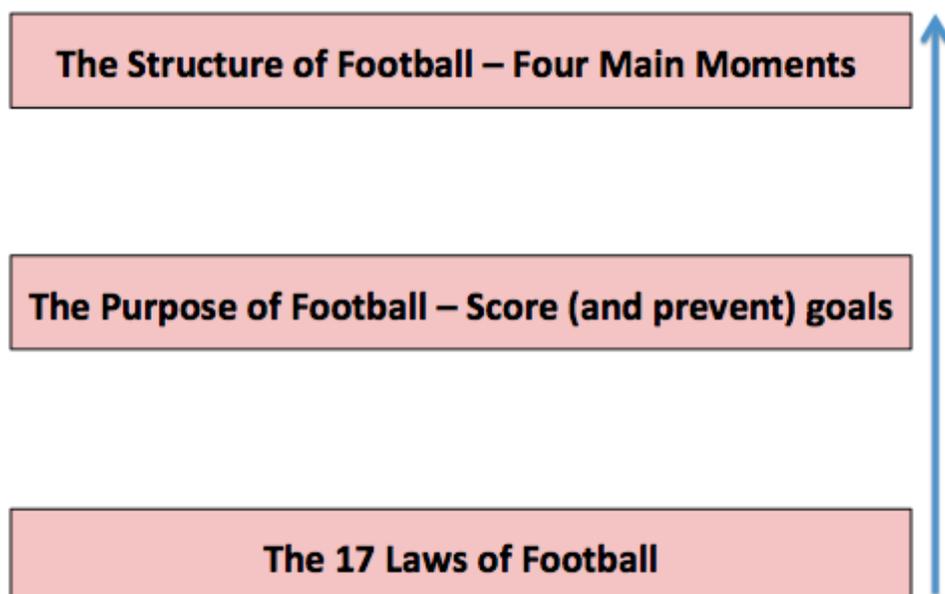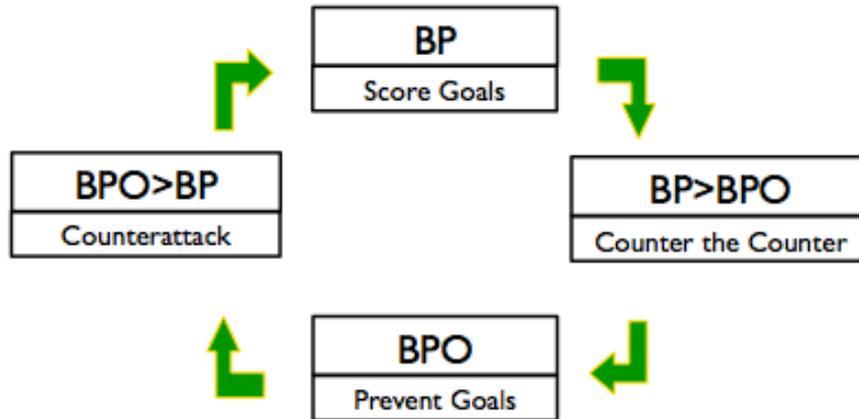
Chapter 3 - Football Philosophy and Vision

We previously looked at the OBJECTIVE FACTS about football and will now move on to explore the SUBJECTIVE BELIEFS.

The OBJECTIVE FACTS (the Laws, purpose and structure of the game) are key components of FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE. But there is a lot more knowledge to gather.

It is essential for a coach to have a broad Football Knowledge, which is gained in many ways: watching football, studying football, discussing football, coaching football, playing football, etc

We are forever expanding our Football Knowledge.

Coaches are always looking to see what other teams, other coaches, other countries are doing.

Luckily for all of us, football is a game that lends itself to a myriad of playing styles.

Think about the different types of football that you are aware of and the different players you have seen.

Reflect for a short while and consider how you would answer the following questions:

- What style(s) of football do you prefer and why?

- Who are your favourite teams (past or present) and why?

- Who are your favourite players (past or present) and why?

What you have just briefly explored is your own FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY.

You have a unique FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE, based on your own experiences, and from all that knowledge you have, perhaps unconsciously, developed your own unique FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY.

These are your beliefs, your preferences.

This is a filtering process: it is impossible to play like every good team there has been; there are too many different styles and types of football. What you have to do is SUBJECTIVELY filter through them and say:

'I have seen many types of football, but THIS is how I want MY team to play. This is MY philosophy.'

The **FFA PHILOSOPHY**

What FFA have done, as a key starting point for the Fundamental Transformation of football in this country, is the same as the individual coach does when developing a philosophy: study football and decide on the best way forward to achieve our goal.

The FFA Philosophy on Football - Opinions and beliefs

Opinions:

Football is a game:

- to be enjoyed by players, coaches and spectators
- which provides enjoyment for all when you play attacking football and try to score goals
- in which scoring goals is the key objective

Beliefs:

Principles for scoring goals:

- You must have the ball in order to dominate the game and create goalscoring opportunities
- 'Effective Possession' football is the best way to get the ball and our players into goalscoring positions
- Individual skill, unpredictable football and clever combination play are needed to break down defences

Principles for preventing goals:

- If we have the ball, our opponent cannot score
- If we don't have the ball, we must deny our opponents time and space to use the ball
- Winning the ball back quickly (ideally, as close to the opponents' goal as possible) restricts their ability to get the ball and their players into goalscoring positions

A philosophy can be seen as a set of guiding principles, for life in general not just in football. FFA's Football philosophy outlined above is a clear set of guiding principles.

The next step is to translate the philosophical principles into something more concrete:

From Philosophy to Vision

A vision is required in order to bring the philosophy to life. We now need to be able to implement the philosophy with our team in clear football terms.

The first thing we must do is articulate THE PLAYING STYLE.

'Pro-active' or 're-active'?

There are many successful playing styles in world football. Some teams take defending as their starting point. Their first priority is not to concede goals and their playing style and team organisation is attuned to that. They allow the opponent to have a lot of possession and defend as a compact unit in their own half. When the opponent loses the ball in these tight areas, they try to strike on the counter attack. We call this a *re-active* playing style and some teams have been and still are very successful playing the game this way.

Other teams take attacking as the starting point and their first priority is to score goals. Their playing style and team organisation is attuned to putting the opponent under so much pressure that they will make defensive mistakes and concede goals. These teams take the defensive risks of this playing style for granted, counting on the fact that they will always score more goals than they will concede. This **pro-active** playing style is generally more attractive but also more difficult to apply successfully.

Between these two extremes there exist of course also many successful 'hybrids'.

In defining FFA's Football Philosophy and Playing Style we looked closely at the Australian mentality and psyche, both in general life and in sport. It's obvious that a **pro-active** playing style corresponds best with the Australian mentality: the fighting spirit of Australian teams and athletes is renowned all over the world and Australians always want to 'go for it'.

'After the World Cup in 2006, we decided to concentrate more on ball possession and on initiating play. We set out to change our footballing culture and to move away from reactive play'
Joachim Löw, National Team Head Coach, Germany

'Possession-based' or 'Direct Play'?

A pro-active playing style can be applied in various ways.

- One extreme is the possession-based style of football made famous by FC Barcelona.
- The other extreme is 'direct play', which involves playing long passes from the back to the front, thereby taking the shortest route to the opponent's goal. This version of 'pro-active football' is the traditional approach to the game in Australia, perhaps because of the influence of the other Australian football codes.

The two extremes of pro-active football playing styles

Possession-based   'Direct Play'

Possession-based	Direct Play
• Dominating the game by controlling possession • Patient build-up • Break down compact defences with individual skill and creative combination play	• Putting the opponent under pressure by aiming long passes towards the strikers as quickly and as often as possible • Aerial and physical power to create scoring opportunities

	• 'Long ball – second ball' approach

Having expressed Australia's natural preference for 'pro-active' rather than 'reactive' football, we then had to decide which end of the above 'pro-active spectrum' would be the wisest choice for our national technical direction: 'possession-based' or 'direct play'?

In itself, there is nothing wrong with the more physical 'direct play' style of football, as historically some teams and countries have had a certain amount of success with it, but is it the right playing style for us to adopt if our aim is to challenge the best in the world?'

The English FA adopted a 'Direct Play' approach in the 80s and 90s, based on some statistics that showed most goals were scored following moves of 3 passes or less. If that was true, it was argued, then why bother with patient build-up and controlled possession? Why not simply launch continuous long passes towards the strikers, hope for 'second ball', and then score in 3 passes or less?

This approach led to some short-term success for teams who adopted it (Wimbledon, Norway, Republic of Ireland) but did not lead to any real success for England at National level; in fact, one might suggest that the opposite has occurred.

The English have long since abandoned their 'Direct Play' policy, and those responsible for it have been accused of 'poisoning the well' of English football.

To gain further information on 'possession-based' versus 'direct play', we took a close look at the best in the world, using FIFA's analysis of the 2010 World Cup, and the UEFA Technical Report on the Euro 2012 tournament.

FIFA's technical analysis of the top three teams in South Africa in 2010 (Spain, Holland and Germany) was as follows:

Spain (1st place)
- **Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield**
- **Excellent passing game**
- **Influential individual players (INIESTA, XAVI, VILLA)**
- **Comfortable in possession when under pressure**
- Disciplined, well-organised defence
- **Immediate pressure after losing possession**
- Winning mentality
- Good links between the team lines
- **Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good in 1v1 situations**

Holland (2nd place)
- **Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield**
- **Excellent passing game**
- **Influential individual players (SNEIJDER, ROBBEN)**
- Disciplined, well-organised defence
- Dangerous at set pieces
- Winning mentality

- Good links between the team lines
- **Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good in 1v1 situations**
- Midfield pressing
- **Immediate pressure after losing possession**

Germany (3rd place)
- **Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield**
- **Excellent passing game - good options for the player in possession**
- **Influential individual players (SCHWEINSTEIGER, OEZIL, MUELLER)**
- Disciplined, well-organised defence
- Dangerous at set pieces
- Winning mentality
- Excellent team spirit
- **Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good in 1v1 situations**
- Rapid transition from defence to attack
- **Effective use of full-backs**

There are several striking similarities between these three successful teams at the 2010 World Cup, but in terms of answering our questions about 'possession-based' football or 'direct play', the answer is clear. All three employed a 'patient build-up from the back through the midfield' and an 'excellent passing game', and no mention of long forward passing can be found. So direct play does not appear to be the way to gain success.

The UEFA report on Euro 2012 also states that the 'trend towards possession-based football is undeniable.'

In Euro 2008, Spain notched the tournament high of 510 passes in one game, and had the highest average of more than 450 passes. However, in Euro 2012, every team except Ireland averaged more than 450 passes, and Spain's tournament high of 929 passes was not far short of double the record in 2008.
Detailed data shows also that 'the trend is away from a long-passing game' (a 'long pass' is defined as one of 30 metres or more; a 'medium pass' is between 10 and 30 metres and 'short passes' are those which cover less than 10 metres)

- Long passes by the finalists throughout the tournament: Spain 8%; Italy 11%
- Most long passes: Ukraine (equal bottom of their group) 18%; Republic of Ireland (bottom of group, 0 points) 19%

The only teams that were described in 'direct play' terms were:

- Republic of Ireland (bottom of their group): 'Frequent use of long passes'
- Ukraine (equal bottom of their group): 'Attacks sometimes based on direct passes to Shevchenko'
- Sweden (equal bottom of their group): 'Blend of direct passing and combination play'

(The Czech Republic who lost their quarter-final to Portugal, are described as employing 'regular use of direct, back-to-front passes to lone striker Baroš', however, they were also analysed as having 'a possession game', 'clever combinations' and 'fluent, incisive middle-to-

front passing')

The evidence from Euro 2012 seems to add more weight to choosing the 'possession' end rather than the 'direct' one. 'Direct play', based on frequent long forward passes, does not appear to be a policy of the top-performing nations.

The analysis of these major tournaments in 2010 and 2012 clearly shows that with a direct playing style it is very difficult, if not impossible, to be successful in modern top football, and that the most successful nations can be categorised as preferring the 'possession' end of the spectrum.

Barcelona, the world's leading club team, appear to be the extreme in 'possession-based football', consistently averaging around 68% possession in the Champions League.

Spain, however, averaged 54% when they won Euro 2008, with only 48% in the Final; they averaged 59% at Euro 2012, and in the Final had 47% in the first half but thanks to an Italian red card finished with a marginal 52%-48% advantage.

What is important to stress here is that we should not start an 'obsession with possession': the crucial point is this:

Possession alone is not the key

It is foolish to believe that all you need to do in order to win football matches is end up with a higher percentage of possession than your opponent. We are all aware of matches in which the winning team's possession statistics are inferior to those of their beaten opponents.

At Euro 2012, Russia and Holland averaged 56% of the possession in their three games, but went home after the Group Stage. England, despite only 36% (25% during extra-time) against Italy, could have won the quarter-final shootout.

Possession is not an end in itself: it is a means to an end. What is the point in keeping possession in your own half for minutes on end, if there is no end product? The only statistic that matters is the scoreline!

What appears to be the difference with the really successful teams is how possession leads to scoring chances.

The Euro 2012 report puts it this way:

> **'As in the UEFA Champions League, the challenge was to translate possession and inter-passing into a positive attacking game'**

When one looks closely at the statistics from Euro 2012, one finds an interesting point: a key difference between the top teams and those eliminated in the Group Stage is in terms of the number of passes made in the attacking third of the pitch (and successful completion of those passes)

> Spain, Italy and Germany had 50% more passes in attacking third on average than those eliminated.
>
> Spain averaged 217 passes in the attacking third (80% successful), Germany 200 (80% successful) and Italy 135 (70% successful).

In comparison, Ireland averaged 90 passes in the attacking third, with around 54% success.

These 'successful passes in the attacking third' figures also translate to the real measure of effective football: shots on goal and shots on target:

> Spain, Italy and Germany = >25% more shots on goal on average than those eliminated.
>
> Spain, Italy and Germany = almost 60% more shots on target on average than those eliminated.

Recent data from the English Premier League supports this evidence.

'SUCCESSFUL PENALTY AREA ENTRIES'

> The Top 4 EPL teams were approximately 40% better than the teams placed 9th-20th

'TOTAL TEAM SHOTS'

> The Top 8 EPL teams were approximately 25% better than the teams placed 9th-20th (a reflection of significantly higher 'successful penalty area entries')

'TOTAL TEAM SHOTS ON TARGET'

> The Top 8 EPL teams were approximately 40% better on average than the teams placed 9th-20th (a reflection of the two points above)

The evidence therefore leads us to believe that the 'possession-based' end of the spectrum is the wisest choice. However…

> # the emphasis must be on
>
> # EFFECTIVE
>
> # possession.

Individual Skill and Combination Play

In modern football, more and more teams are able to defend effectively, and most have the ability to form a 'defensive block' of eight or more players in a compact unit. Therefore, successful teams have had to develop exceptional ability in breaking down these defences.

A key factor in defeating the 'block' is creativity. Teams need to have skilful individuals who can 'pick the lock' and find a way through the tight defences.

The top four teams at the 2010 World Cup all had more than one of these special 'matchwinning' players:

Spain: Xavi, Iniesta, Villa
Holland: Sneijder, Robben, Van Persie
Germany: Oezil, Mueller, Schweinsteiger
Uruguay: Forlan, Suarez, Cavani

Similar players in other successful teams:
Brazil: Kaka, Robinho, Luis Fabiano
Argentina: Messi, Tevez, Aguero, Higuain

As well as creative individuals, teams also need quick and clever combination play. This involves two or more players working together to produce unpredictable interpassing and mobility in order to penetrate the 'block'
These individual and combination qualities are key points in UEFA's analysis of the top four teams at Euro 2012. They are also mentioned in the reports on Croatia, Czech Republic, England, France, Holland, Russia and Sweden.

Australia must work to develop more of these types of player in order to improve performance.

Counter-attacking

What can also be deduced from World Cup 2010 and Euro 2012, is that top teams need to have the ability to launch quick counter-attacks. One can also observe the potent use of counter-attacking in successful club teams such as Real Madrid.

However, UEFA point out the 'declining effectiveness of the counter': in Euro 2008, 46% of the open play goals were from counters, but in Euro 2012 only 25% of goals from open play were derived from counters. This decline is also observed in the UEFA Champions League, where the percentage has steadily fallen to 27% in the 2011/12 season.

The evidence suggests that the ability to counter-attack quickly and successfully is a 'weapon' that successful teams have at their disposal. Even 'possession-based' teams will look for the opportunity to do so when their opponent is disorganised or slow in transition.

We must ensure that this 'weapon' is also developed. The danger of over-stressing 'possession, possession and more possession' is that players may not look for counter-attacking opportunities, and if they do, may not be equipped to exploit them.

Mental Strength

In the UEFA report on Euro 2012, reference is made to a theory that 'teams can be measured by their reactions to adversity.' Asked to name the factors that can make a difference in a contest between evenly-matched teams, Gérard Houllier responded: 'Heart, commitment and mental resilience.'

Croatia's coach, Slaven Bilić, echoed this opinion. 'We are not as strong mentally as teams like Germany or Italy. We need to improve this and we are working hard to do that.'

It is well-documented that Australia has always possessed this 'never-say-die' quality. Indeed, our National Team players themselves, in 'The Way of the Socceroos', singled it out as a major strength of Australian football. Whereas countries like Croatia apparently need to develop this attribute, it seems to be an in-built component in Australia. Therefore, we must ensure that we maintain this valuable asset of our players.

However, it should be stressed that 'mental strength' alone will not make us a world leader. It is a quality that supports good football, but it doesn't replace it. Houllier's words above define this 'X Factor' as something that will give an extra edge to one team, not as the only ingredient required for success.

UEFA's analysis of the teams at Euro 2012 gives special mention of mental strengths when describing Poland and The Republic of Ireland.

POLAND: 'Strong team ethic, fighting spirit and character'

IRELAND: 'Energetic and highly competitive; mentally strong; never-say-die attitude'

Both these teams, however, finished at the bottom of their respective groups, highlighting the fact that these qualities alone are not sufficient to bring success.

Here, it is interesting to look at some of the main points of the analysis of Ireland at Euro 2012.

Ireland Euro 2012
• Defence well equipped to deal with long balls and high crosses
• Frequent use of long passes
• Good 'second ball' mentality
• Emphasis on quick deliveries to classic twin strikers
• Heroic defending: blocks, interceptions, tackles

- Energetic and highly competitive; mentally strong; never-say-die attitude

Now consider the fact that Ireland played three matches, lost all three, scored one and conceded nine! What use is all that heroism and competitiveness when you finish bottom of your group? What use are all those long passes and a 'well-equipped' defence, if you rank 15th or 16th in all the key attacking statistics?

FIFA's analysis of Australia at the 2010 World Cup consisted solely of the following points:

Australia (21st Place)

- Deep defensive block
- Attacks using the width
- Immediate pressure after losing possession
- Strong, hard-working players
- Determination

Clearly, we too are noted for our physical and mental qualities and must never lose this strength. It is also clear, however, that we must work to ensure that future analysis of Australia at major tournaments also includes more prominent mention of technical strengths and that our key statistics reveal a more successful attacking threat.

Approach to Defending

FFA's philosophy is that it is preferable to be in possession of the ball as that will allow us to dictate what happens in the game. Obviously, if we have the ball then the opponent cannot score.

Logically, therefore, when we lose possession our objective is to get it back as soon as possible. This does not necessarily mean that we must continuously press the opponent high up the field and close to their goal. However, it does mean that we should defend in an intelligent manner, finding the best way to win the ball back according to the situation.

At Euro 2012, UEFA's Technical Report states, the priority for most of the teams was to transition quickly into defensive positions. At the same time, though, their intention was to put pressure on the ball carrier.

It was noted, however, that whenever it was possible many teams would engage in collective high pressing, based not only on pressurising the ball carrier, but by using additional players to cut off the short-passing options. In this way, they were able to restrict the game within small areas, with the players on the far side pushing across towards the ball to complete a back-to-front and side-to-side squeezing operation.

This ability to high press was closely linked to an attacking philosophy: those teams who were prepared to push a larger number of players forward to join in the attack were the ones who had players in place to immediately exert high pressure and win the ball back quickly. By contrast,

teams with a more 'direct play' approach, using long passes from back third to front third, were less able to utilize a high-pressing game.

Spain, the Champions, often used the high-pressing practices of FC Barcelona, but like many of the teams at UEFA EURO 2012 did not attempt to sustain this high-intensity pressure for long periods.

The FIFA Technical Report from the 2010 World Cup also identified a trend towards 'early pressing'. A link was suggested between this quick pressure and limiting opponents' ability to counter-attack.

There is no evidence from the last World Cup and most recent European Championship that 'retreat defence' is a tool used by leading football nations. In other words, top teams do not seem to react to loss of possession by ignoring the ball carrier and immediately retreating to defensive positions deep in their own half to wait for the opponent.

FFA's philosophical preference, then, for a 'pro-active' style of defending seems to be matched by trends at the top level of the game, while also fitting perfectly with Australia's traditional competitiveness and winning mentality.

Summary of key points:

- 'pro-active' rather than 're-active'
- 'possession-based' rather than 'direct play'
- 'effective possession' is the key
- creative combination play is required to break down defences
- unpredictable individuals are the matchwinners
- ability to counterattack quickly
- commitment and mental resilience
- pro-active defending

The challenge now is to define a successful 'modern' Australian playing style, which incorporates the analysis of the world's top teams and top-level football, while maintaining Australia's unique strengths. We clearly have to make **realistic** changes and adjustments to our traditional playing style while preserving our own identity. It's not realistic to try and make Australia play like Spain, Brazil or anyone else.

National Playing Style Statement

FFA's Football Philosophy can therefore be summarized in the following statement of a national playing style:

> *A pro-active brand of football, based on effective possession, with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals.*
>
> *Defensively the key components are quick transition and intelligent collective pressing.*
>
> *The Playing Style is underpinned by a strong 'team mentality', capitalizing on Australia's traditional strengths.*

This means we must focus on developing teams and players that are able to execute this playing style and we therefore looked at the main pre-requisites.

Pro-active Football	Pre-requisites
Dominate and control the game through effective possession	Quality positioning play
Get the ball and our players into goalscoring positions in a structured manner	High technical level (all players must be comfortable on the ball)
Break down compact defences through individual skill and combination play	Special players
Strive to possess the ball (the more we have the ball, the less we have to defend)	Willingness and ability of all players to immediately transition from BP>BPO and BPO>BP for 90 minutes (high-intensity football)
Win the ball back through quick transition and intelligent collective pressing	High level of football-specific fitness (the essence of the Football Conditioning methodology)

To explain further, a characteristic of possession-based football is to dominate and therefore control a game by retaining the ball. **Effective** possession means that keeping possession should not become an aim in itself but that it should be a means to getting the ball and our players into goal scoring positions in a controlled manner (as opposed to 'trust to luck'). Effective possession should also lead to a higher number of successful entries into the attacking third, more shots on goal and more shots on target.

To be able to do that **all players**, including the goalkeeper, must be technically proficient and **all players** must understand and be able to execute quality positioning play.

What is also important in breaking down compact defences, as well as combination play and individual skill, is stretching the opponent's defence and using the width of the pitch. The FIFA analysis mentions this as a characteristic of all of the top 3 teams of the 2010 World Cup. All three had creative and fast wingers, which is one reason why we have a preference for a 1-4-3-3 formation. Another reason is that pressing an opponent's defence is easier with three attackers who are spread across the width of the pitch rather than with two.

A high-intensity playing style like this is only possible if all players are able and willing to consistently execute the team and individual tasks during the whole game. Whether players are able to do that depends on their **football specific** fitness while their willingness to do that depends on discipline and perseverance: traditional Australian characteristics.

Playing Style comes before Formation

The next step is to choose a suitable formation to complement the chosen playing style. It is important to note that the formation is not the starting point: it is only the vehicle which animates the playing style. Many coaches make the mistake of first adopting a particular formation, usually because it is used by a top international team, and then thinking about how to play football within the structure of that formation. This does not make sense.

Logically, the chosen playing style must be carefully articulated first; then an appropriate formation can be chosen.

FFA believes that 1-4-3-3 is the most suitable formation to bring the National Playing Style to life. The rationale is explained in the relevant Appendix.

The 1-4-3-3 has been mandated for all development teams within the official State and National Talented Player Pathway.

(Experienced senior coaches may of course prefer a formation which is more suited to their own personal philosophy and playing style.)

Summary:

Football in Australia now has a clear destination and a **compass** to guide the direction of the journey.

This is a result of a logical process of study and analysis, leading to the articulation of solid philosophical principles; only then can the vision be defined, with the key components outlined.

KEY POINTS:

- Football Knowledge is the foundation, and it leads to the development of a personal philosophy
- Philosophy begins with opinions and beliefs
- Objective Facts > Subjective Beliefs
- The FFA Philosophy – based on analysis of world's top teams and respect for Australia's traditional strengths
- STEPS TO CONVERT A PHILOSOPHY INTO A VISION
  - 1 Playing Style (National Playing Style Statement)
  - 2 Formation   (1-4-3-3)

```
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│         Football Vision         │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
                 ↑
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│       Football Philosophy       │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
                 ↑
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│       Football Knowledge        │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
```
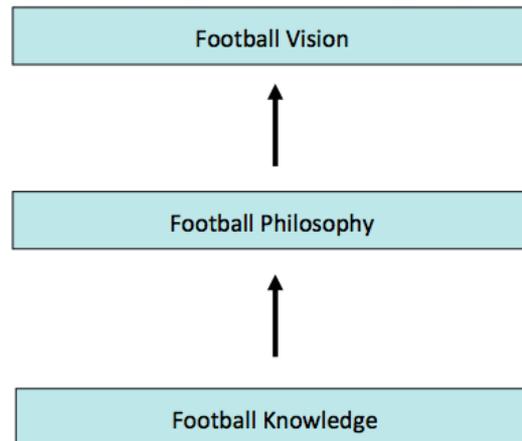
Chapter 4 - The Team Model

How we believe football should be played in Australia

The Objective Facts about Football

OUTCOME	WIN MATCHES			
OBJECTIVES	SCORE GOALS		PREVENT GOALS	
METHODS	GET THE BALL AND YOUR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS		PREVENT THE OPPONENT GETTING THE BALL AND THEIR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS	
MAIN MOMENTS	BPO>BP	BP	BP>BPO	BPO

Within the structure of football (main moments), two teams try to win the match by scoring one more goal than the opposition, and they score goals by getting the ball and at least one of their players into goalscoring positions.

These are incontrovertible truths about football.

The interesting part comes when you begin to elaborate the detail underpinning the 'objective facts' above. In other words, when you start to describe how your team operates in each of the four main moments.

This is what FFA has done in developing the FFA Team Model.

Based on a philosophy on football, emanating from a broad football knowledge and extensive study, a playing style was set out and an appropriate formation chosen.

Playing Style Statement:

A pro-active brand of football, based on effective possession, with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals.

Defensively the key components are quick transition and intelligent collective pressing.

The Playing Style is underpinned by a strong 'team mentality', capitalizing on Australia's traditional strengths.

Formation**:   1-4-3-3**

Main Moments and Key Principles

Now the stated playing style, within the chosen formation, can be expressed in a series of **KEY PRINCIPLES** that explain how the team will function in each of the four main moments.

MAIN MOMENTS	BPO>BP	BP	BP>BPO	BPO
KEY PRINCIPLES	Immediate transition into BP positions	Effective Possession 1. Structured Build-Up	Immediate transition into BPO positions	Win the ball back as soon as possible
	Quick forward passing	Effective Possession 2. Controlled Possession In The Middle Third	Press the ball carrier immediately	Deny opponents time and space to build up
	Quick forward movement	Combination Play 1. Organised Opponent	Limit opponent's passing options	Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances
	Make the field as big as possible	Combination Play 2. Disorganised Opponent	Make the field as small as possible	
		Individual Skill 1. To create scoring chances		
		Individual Skill 2. To convert scoring chances		

Already one can see that it is at this point that **subjective beliefs** and preferences appear. There are statements in the above Key Principles that would not be in every coach's Team Model. For example, 'Win the ball back as soon as possible' in BPO, is not a universal approach since, as we all know, many teams prefer to retreat when they lose the ball and are more concerned with closing up the spaces near their own goal.

So, we have now articulated seventeen Key Principles which should begin to paint pictures in one's mind of what we expect to see happening on the field.

'Pro-active football, based on effective possession, with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals.'

This over-arching statement of style is now given clear detail and colour; the statement is interpreted in stark football language.

What do we mean by 'pro-active'? Read the Key Principles again and you sense 'pro-active' in almost every one.

'Effective Possession'? You can see 'possession' in the Key Principles, but there is a strong impression that we mean 'possession for a purpose': keeping the ball to establish a structured method of getting the ball into the opponents' goal.

Because of the logical, football-language approach in the Key Principles, it leads to this conclusion:

- if that's the kind of football you believe in
- if that's what you expect to see when the team plays
- THEN NATURALLY THESE ARE THE THINGS YOU SHOULD CONSTANTLY BE DEVELOPING AT TRAINING

The Team Model now requires further elaboration and detail. Logically, each of the Key Principles needs to be clarified in order to guide training and coaching. In other words, it probably won't be effective to simply tell the players the Key Principles: 'OK, girls, I want a structured build-up. Off you go.'

Team Tasks, Player Tasks, Player Actions

To be able to help the players, we must be able to articulate what things the Team must try to do in order to make the Key Principles happen. If we answer that question, we are on the way to formulating training content: we will have Tasks for the Team.

Using our first principle in BP, 'Structured Build-up', we have listed below four possible **Team Tasks** to assist in its achievement:

Key Principle	Team Tasks
Effective Possession 1. Structured Build-Up	1. Get a back four player into the middle third in controlled possession 2. Create situations where we have equal or extra players 3. Position yourselves so the team shape is wide and long 4. Create the right moment for a forward pass

Breaking it down and clarifying further, the next logical step after tasks for the Team, is to construct appropriate tasks for individual (or groups of) players. What can players try to do in order to assist the Team?

Extending our work on 'structured build-up', focusing on 'Get a back four player into the middle third in controlled possession', we can add the **Player Tasks** below:

Key Principle	Team Tasks	Player Tasks
Effective Possession 1. Structured Build-Up	1. Get a back four player into the middle third in controlled possession	1. Goalkeeper, act as an extra field player by supporting the ball 2. 3 and 4, split to make it hard for one opponent to mark both of you 3. 2 and 5, push high and wide so you're not in line with 3 and 4 4. 6 and 8, start high to create more space for back four 5. Pass the ball with good ball speed to move opponents out of position 6. Give information to team-mates based on your observation of opponents and team-mates positioning

You will notice that some of the Tasks are 'Position-specific' (1-4) and some are 'General' (5 and 6)

Now we have tasks for the players, the next and final part of the model will answer this question:

What are the basic 'tools' the players use to accomplish their tasks?

PLAYER ACTIONS

Basically, the player moves around the field and interacts with the ball and his team-mates. These can be simplified like this:

PLAYER ACTIONS	
Ball Possession	Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating
Ball Possession Opponent	Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating

Here, interestingly, we move back to the realms of OBJECTIVE FACTS: the basic tools a player can use are universal. The subjective angle appears when your philosophy leads you to stress some actions more than others. This also becomes a major consideration in Youth Development: to develop players to function in the full team model, will you factor in all the possible actions equally or will you dedicate more time to those that are KEY to playing your particular style?

So, the full model looks like this:

OUTCOME	WIN MATCHES			
OBJECTIVES	SCORE GOALS		PREVENT GOALS	
METHODS	GET THE BALL AND YOUR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS		PREVENT THE OPPONENT GETTING THE BALL AND THEIR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS	
MAIN MOMENTS	**BPO>BP**	**BP**	**BP>BPO**	**BPO**
KEY PRINCIPLES	Immediate transition into BP positions	Effective Possession 1. Structured Build-Up	Immediate transition into BPO positions	Win the ball back as soon as possible
	Quick forward passing	Effective Possession 2. Controlled Possession In The Middle Third	Press the ball carrier immediately	Deny opponents time and space to build up
	Quick forward movement	Combination Play 1. Organised Opponent	Limit opponent's passing options	Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances
	Make the field as big as possible	Combination Play 2. Disorganised Opponent	Make the field as small as possible	
		Individual Skill 1. To create scoring chances		
		Individual Skill 2. To convert scoring chances		
TEAM TASKS	(Fundamental Tasks to make the Key Principles happen)			
PLAYER TASKS	(General and Position-specific)			
PLAYER ACTIONS	Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating		Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating	

This is, obviously, a one-page overview of the full model. The coach must expand the detail for each Main Moment and associated Key Principles, outlining Team Tasks and Player Tasks in depth.

As stressed earlier, if it is a useful model, its contents can be used to guide the training and coaching program. All the necessary themes are within the model.

For example, in BP the coach should naturally focus their attention on developing these elements (extracted directly from the model) in order to bring the Playing Style to life:

Structured Build-Up
Controlled Possession In The Middle Third
Combination Play v Organised Opponent
Combination Play v Disorganised Opponent
Individual Skill to create scoring chances
Individual Skill to convert scoring chances

The coach does not need to trawl the internet to find training content that works for someone else's team, someone else's playing style, someone else's formation, someone else's players. The answer is in the model.

Important Points:

- it is not a random collection of general football activity

- IT IS A LOGICAL AND THOUGHTFULLY CONSTRUCTED STRUCTURE, BASED ON A CLEAR PHILOSOPHY AND AN EXPLICIT VISION

Clubs that operate under a guiding structure such as this are able to plan their Youth Development programs more effectively and are also able to perform scouting and recruitment in a more methodical manner.

KEY POINTS:

How we believe football should be played in Australia
Elaborate the 'subjective' detail to underpin the 'objective facts' of football
How to score and prevent goals within the four main moments in order to win games
Playing Style>Formation>**Key Principles > Team Tasks > Player Tasks > Player Actions**
Not a random collection of general football activity, but a logical and thoughtfully constructed structure, based on a clear philosophy and an explicit vision

TEAM MODEL	**Player Actions**
	Player Tasks
	Team Tasks
	Key Principles **In all the four main moments**
	Formation **1-4-3-3**
	Playing Style **'Pro-active football, based on effective possession,** **maximising Australian strengths'**

Subjective Beliefs
How we believe football should be played

Objective Facts
Laws, Purpose and Structure of Football

Steps to success

AUSTRALIA

Successful Team

↑

Quality Players

↑

Effective Training

↑

Smart Coach

The Foundation of Coaching

Using the FFA Team Model as a guide, you can now observe and analyse football with 'FFA glasses'

This means you are looking at football in a certain way, clearly focused on a particular style of football and the Key Principles in each of the four main moments.

By the time coaches in Australia proceed to the A Licence and the Professional Diploma, they may well have 'changed the lenses in their glasses' and therefore look at football in their own way, expecting to see a different style of football.

ANALYSING FOOTBALL

When a coach analyses football, their primary focus is on:

Identifying Football Problems

The difficulty for coaches is seeing order and process in the 'chaos' of a football match. However, football 'fault detection' is simpler and much more effective when based on clear principles.

Within the Four Main Moments of the Game, the coach is expecting to see the Key Principles of the Team Model come to life. If not, there is a 'football problem'.

(Note: the Senior coach may also identify Football Problems with the *next opponent's* playing style, in other words, things they don't do well which may be exploited by their own team.)

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION:

Which Main Moment?
What Key Principle?

PROBLEM DEFINITION:

The process for defining a Football Problem is then:

THE 5 Ws:

WHAT?   **What** is the problem?
WHO?   **Who** are the key players involved?
WHERE?   **Where** on the field?
WHEN?   **When** does the problem occur?
WHY?   **Why** does the problem occur?

The experienced coach is able to quickly and efficiently analyse their team's performance in ALL Four Main Moments

---

Practice: Define hypothetical football problems.
Examine these stills from the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa and other selected games.
For each of the images, imagine you are the coach of one of the teams and then try to identify a football problem with that team.

Then, imagine you are the coach of the other team in the same image: can you identify and define a football problem for that team?

(Note: naturally, you cannot see all the players and might have to assume which players are in which positions, as well as assuming where the ball is: however, this is not a 'right or wrong' exercise but an opportunity to practice going through the process in a hypothetical, but reality-based scenario)

Australia v Serbia (red)

Team:		
Main Moment:		Key Principle:
What?		
Who?		
Where?		
When?		
Why?		

Team:		
Main Moment:		Key Principle:
What?		
Who?		
Where?		
When?		
Why?		

Brazil v Chile (white)

Team:		
Main Moment:		Key Principle:
What?		
Who?		
Where?		
When?		
Why?		

Team:		
Main Moment:		Key Principle:
What?		
Who?		
Where?		
When?		
Why?		

Spain v Chile (Red)

Team:	
Main Moment:	Key Principle:
What?	
Who?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

Team:	
Main Moment:	Key Principle:
What?	
Who?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

England v Germany, U-17 WC, 2011

Team:	
Main Moment:	Key Principle:
What?	
Who?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

Team:	
Main Moment:	Key Principle:
What?	
Who?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

England v France, Euro 2012

Team:	
Main Moment:	Key Principle:
What?	
Who?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

Team:	
Main Moment:	Key Principle:
What?	
Who?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

Borussia Dortmund v Werder Bremen, 2004

Team:	
Main Moment:	Key Principle:
What?	
Who?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

Team:	
Main Moment:	Key Principle:
What?	
Who?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

KEY POINTS:

Identify football problems in the context of your Football Vision
Which main moment? What key principle?
THE 5 Ws (What? Who? Where? When? Why?)

Identify Problems

How well is the team executing the Playing Style?

Analyse football through your own glasses

5Ws

What?	Who?	Where?	When?	Why?

Key Principle?

Main Moment?

Define Problem

Problem Identified
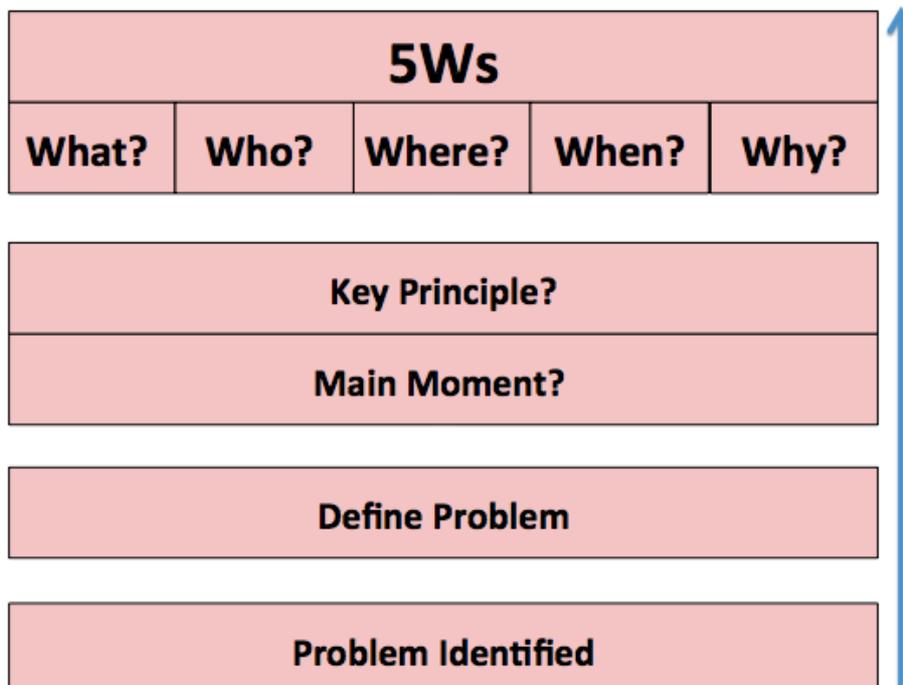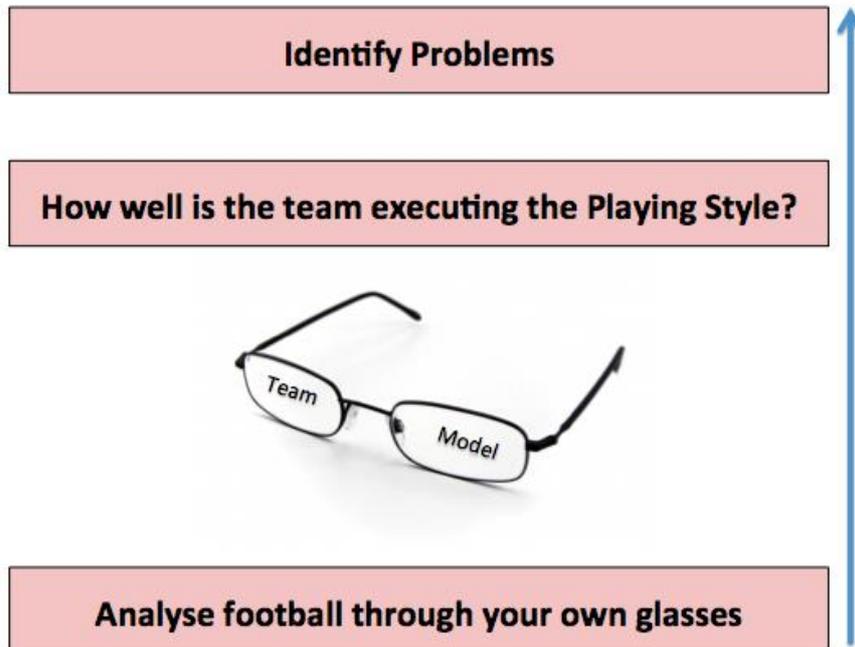
Chapter 6 - Age-appropriate stages in developing football players

Chapters 1 to 4 covered Australia's mission to become a world leader in the world game and the steps that were detailed in the National Football Curriculum in order to fulfill the mission. Stating a clear philosophy was the starting point for defining a vision which provides the compass for the journey ahead.

Part of that definition included the articulation of a national playing style:

A pro-active brand of football, based on effective possession, with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals.

Defensively the key components are quick transition and intelligent collective pressing.

The Playing Style is underpinned by a strong 'team mentality', capitalizing on Australia's traditional strengths.

In Chapter 5, we outlined a process for identifying problems with the football you observe.

So the question now is: HOW DO WE **FIX** PROBLEMS WITH OUR TEAM?

What do we hope to do? CHANGE BEHAVIOUR (specifically Team Performance)
Changing someone's behavior takes time, as well as requiring a proper process.
Some problems cannot be fixed quickly because they require the establishment of deep-seated patterns of behaviour that should have been developed when the player was a schoolboy. Or, they require the *changing* of patterns of behaviour that are so deeply ingrained that correcting them is close to impossible.

A key issue here, relative to Youth Coaching, is:

IT'S BETTER TO PREVENT FOOTBALL PROBLEMS!

In other words, establish the necessary patterns of behavior and associated player actions in the early stages of development.

As a general rule, simplifying things:
Senior Coaches: Short-term problem solution (improving a current fault in team performance / preparing for a specific opponent)

Youth Coaches: Long-term problem solution (preparing the players for senior football)

Whatever age-group you are coaching, what is the main way we try to improve player behaviour or team performance?

TRAINING

Without the existence of the match, there would be no training.
Training exists to prepare players for the match.

Simple overview:

SENIORS = training for a match next week
JUNIORS = training for a match in the future (or 'the match' in general)

So, because we are going to **train** the players, we can now look at:

FFA's Vision on HOW FOOTBALL SHOULD BE COACHED

Chapters 6-10 put **Training** into context

FFA'S NATIONAL VISION

The National Football Curriculum set out the blueprint for improving Australian football.

A National Philosophy was outlined, and also a National Vision for bringing it all to life.

The practical implementation of much of the curriculum's content was further elaborated by the publication of:

The FFA Building Blocks

The Building Blocks clearly articulate what football should be about at each of the four development stages.

AGE	PHASE
5-9	DISCOVERY PHASE
9-13	SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE
13-17	GAME TRAINING PHASE
17+	PERFORMANCE PHASE

Detail for each Building Block:

AGE: 5-9	DISCOVERY PHASE
Role of the Coach	'To facilitate the players' discovery of the objectives of football and the basic player actions required by providing a fun football environment'
What parts of the model?	SEE BELOW

OUTCOME	WIN MATCHES			
OBJECTIVES	SCORE GOALS		PREVENT GOALS	
METHODS				
MAIN MOMENTS				
KEY PRINCIPLES				
TEAM TASKS				
PLAYER TASKS				
PLAYER ACTIONS	Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating			

	AGE: 9-13 SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE			
Role of the Coach	'To prepare players for team football by developing the functional game skills'			
What parts of the model?	SEE BELOW			

OUTCOME	WIN MATCHES			
OBJECTIVES	SCORE GOALS		PREVENT GOALS	
METHODS	GET THE BALL AND YOUR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS		PREVENT THE OPPONENT GETTING THE BALL AND THEIR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS	
MAIN MOMENTS	BPO>BP	BP	BP>BPO	BPO
KEY PRINCIPLES		Effective Possession, Combination Play, Individual Skill		Win the ball back ASAP, deny time and space, limit scoring chances
TEAM TASKS		Basic Team Tasks		
PLAYER TASKS		General Only		
PLAYER ACTIONS	**Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating**		Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating	

Those parts of the model that contain grey text and shading are the elements that are introduced by **HIDDEN LEARNING.** These aspects of the game are not necessarily stressed and coached, but automatically built-in, especially in the 1v1 and small-sided game context.

	AGE: 13-17 GAME TRAINING PHASE			
Role of the Coach	'To prepare skilful players for performance phase football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting'			
What parts of the model?	SEE BELOW			

OUTCOME	WIN MATCHES			
OBJECTIVES	SCORE GOALS		PREVENT GOALS	
METHODS	GET THE BALL AND YOUR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS		PREVENT THE OPPONENT GETTING THE BALL AND THEIR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS	
MAIN MOMENTS	BPO>BP	BP	BP>BPO	BPO
KEY PRINCIPLES	Immediate transition into BP positions	Effective Possession 1. Structured Build-Up	Immediate transition into BPO positions	Win the ball back as soon as possible
	Quick forward passing	Effective Possession 2. Controlled Possession In The Middle Third	Press the ball carrier immediately	Deny opponents time and space to build up
	Quick forward movement	Combination Play 1. Organised Opponent	Limit opponent's passing options	Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances
	Make the field as big as possible	Combination Play 2. Disorganised Opponent	Make the field as small as possible	
		Individual Skill 1. To create scoring chances		
		Individual Skill 2. To convert scoring chances		
TEAM TASKS	(Fundamental Tasks to make the Key Principles happen)			
PLAYER TASKS	(General and Position-specific)			
PLAYER ACTIONS	Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating		Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating	

The Game Training Phase prepares players for the Performance Phase, so all the elements must be present. However, there should be a phased and structured development over the four years that this phase encompasses. This is covered in depth in Part Two of this manual

	AGE: 17+ PERFORMANCE PHASE	
Role of the Coach	'To prepare successful teams'	
What parts of the model?	SEE BELOW	

OUTCOME	WIN MATCHES			
OBJECTIVES	**SCORE GOALS**		**PREVENT GOALS**	
METHODS	GET THE BALL AND YOUR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS		PREVENT THE OPPONENT GETTING THE BALL AND THEIR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS	
MAIN MOMENTS	BPO>BP	BP	BP>BPO	BPO
KEY PRINCIPLES	Immediate transition into BP positions	Effective Possession 1. Structured Build-Up	Immediate transition into BPO positions	Win the ball back as soon as possible
	Quick forward passing	Effective Possession 2. Controlled Possession In The Middle Third	Press the ball carrier immediately	Deny opponents time and space to build up
	Quick forward movement	Combination Play 1. Organised Opponent	Limit opponent's passing options	Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances
	Make the field as big as possible	Combination Play 2. Disorganised Opponent	Make the field as small as possible	
		Individual Skill 1. To create scoring chances		
		Individual Skill 2. To convert scoring chances		
TEAM TASKS	Fundamental Tasks to make the Key Principles happen			
PLAYER TASKS	General and Position-specific			
PLAYER ACTIONS	Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating		Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating	

The Performance Phase is the full expression of football in a competitive environment, where winning games is the prime focus. So, naturally, the total structure of football is evident.

KEY POINTS:

We have looked at HOW FOOTBALL SHOULD BE PLAYED
Now we will look at HOW FOOTBALL SHOULD BE COACHED
The coach identifies Football Problems with the team's execution of the Playing Style
The main way we try to fix Football Problems is by TRAINING
First step towards putting Training into context: THE FFA BUILDING BLOCKS
The Building Blocks clarify:

- What coaching football should be about at each of the four development stages.
- What parts of the FFA Team Model should be taught at each stage

AGE: 5-9 DISCOVERY PHASE	
Role of the Coach	'To facilitate the players' discovery of the objectives of football and the basic player actions required by providing a fun football environment'
AGE: 9-13 SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE	
Role of the Coach	'To prepare players for team football by developing the functional game skills'
AGE: 13-17 GAME TRAINING PHASE	
Role of the Coach	'To prepare skilful players for performance phase football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting'
AGE: 17+ PERFORMANCE PHASE	
Role of the Coach	'To prepare successful teams'

Players!

Analysis of Football leads to the following conclusions:

- Football is a team game in which two teams try to win the game by scoring one more goal than the other
- Therefore, scoring and preventing goals are the main objectives for the team
- The team has a number of Key Principles and main Team Tasks in attacking, defending and transitioning to achieve these objectives
- The player has a range of general and position-specific tasks to perform in order to assist the team in the accomplishment of the team tasks
- The player executes a range of individual **'Player Actions'** to successfully perform their tasks

Therefore, at its most basic level, football is all about **'Player Actions'** – the things a player does. These are the things the coach is trying to influence. If all goes to plan, the actions a player executes will bring the desired playing style to life.

A player's actions are easy to see (and hear, in the case of communication) and analyse, but we must also look at what *makes* a player do what they do. The answer lies in the brain.

Perception – Decision – Execution

Imagine for a second that you are a player on the field of play, and you are standing waiting for the referee's whistle to start the game. You are at first stationary, but when the whistle blows you immediately begin to move: what made you move at that speed and in that direction?

Imagine you are a player involved in a game of football, and a team-mate has just passed the ball to you: how do you decide what to do with it?

During a match, you shout information to a team-mate: what made you do that?

In order for a person to move or to talk, muscles must contract. It may be a voluntary contraction, when we decide to kick a ball, for example, or involuntary, when we blink our eyelids. Football coaches focus on the voluntary contractions, those things a player chooses to do.

Muscles only contract when the brain sends a signal to them.

So, when you moved at the start of the game, when you did something with the ball that was passed to you or when you shouted at a team-mate, the brain sent signals to the appropriate muscles.

What led to the brain sending those signals?

1. you saw and/or heard something within the game; key factors = the ball; team-mates; opponents; space; the goals	Signals from the eyes and ears processed by **THE BRAIN**	**PERCEPTION**
2. you analysed the situation and/or the communication you received	The information was processed and a decision made by **THE BRAIN**	**DECISION**
3. you did something	**THE BRAIN** sent a signal to the muscles	**EXECUTION**

In detail:

The player **Perceives** what is happening in the game, processes the information based on the Objectives and Tasks of football, **Decides** what should be done, and then **Executes** the action.

The three stages of Perception, Decision and Execution (PDE) can be quite clearly distinguished, but are so closely inter-dependent that they cannot be separated .

This explains why we have a holistic philosophy on coaching, and why we question the value of isolated exercises. This is covered in the next module.

Anticipation:

'Reading the game' and 'predicting what will happen' are abilities that all top players require. In our PDE model, this skill of anticipation is developed in the Perception and Decision phases: the player analyses the situation that is evolving on the field and, based on prior experience and previous feedback and/or questioning, chooses a plan of action that is 'ahead of the game.'

(NB: This process does not even begin to happen in isolated exercises.)

	Looking at FFA's Team Model, at the base we outlined the individual player actions:

PLAYER ACTIONS	Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating	Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating

These are clarified and extended below:

	CORE SKILLS		PLUS
In BP		1. First Touch 2. Running with the Ball 3. 1v1 4. Striking the Ball	Positioning Communication
In BPO		1. Pressing 2. Marking 3. Intercepting 4. Tackling	Positioning Communication

(There are also, of course, Core Skills for Goalkeepers; these are covered in our specific Goalkeeper courses)

These are the basic actions a player performs, and therefore we must look closely at the
PERCEPTION – DECISION – EXECUTION
that leads to the right action at the right time.

The coach is trying to affect:

- how the player PERCEIVES football situations
- what football action the player DECIDES to perform
- the quality of the football action the player EXECUTES

All of these are governed by the brain.

Therefore, it is the coach's explicit role to stimulate and improve the relevant processes within the brain

KEY POINTS:

Football is all about 'Player Actions' – the things a player does will bring the desired playing style to life
To influence a player's actions the coach must affect processes that take place in the brain.
Perception – Decision – Execution
The coach is trying to affect:
- how the player PERCEIVES football situations
- what football action the player DECIDES to perform
- the quality of the football action the player EXECUTES

Analyse the Process

The player does something

What makes
him do it?

Based on
what?
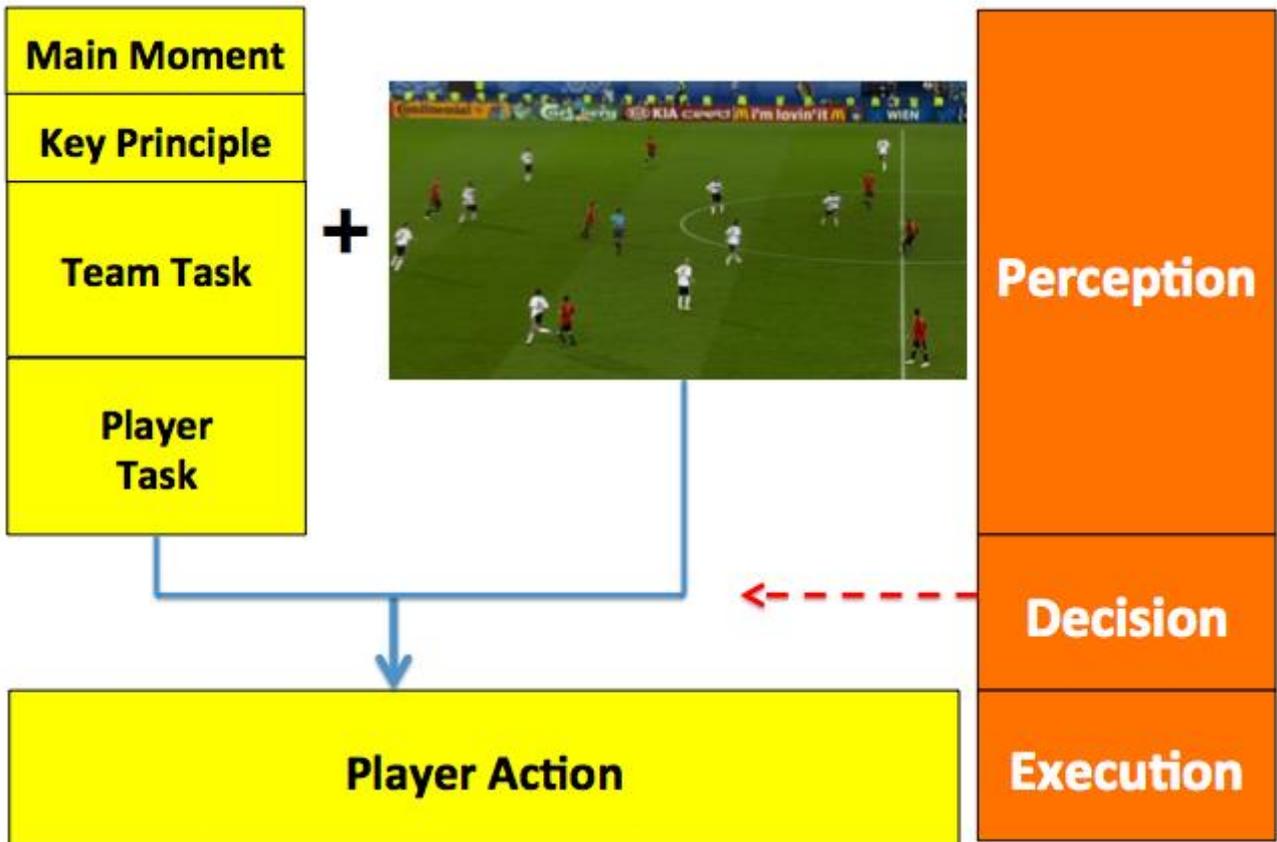
Chapter 8 - How should we coach?

The National Football Curriculum has provided the platform for **Coach Education** because, since we now know the football we want to play and we know the players required, we can logically define the kind of coaches we need to produce.

We can now define 'The Australian way of Coaching'. We are able to say 'any old coaching isn't good enough'; there are many methods of coaching football, but we now know how we need to coach.

The **Football** We Want to Play (in Order for Australia to Be a World Leader)	**A Philosophy on Football** (National Football Curriculum)

$\downarrow$

The **Players** We Need (in Order to Play That Way)	**A Philosophy on Football** (National Football Curriculum)

$\downarrow$

The **Coaches** We Need (in Order to Produce Those Players and Develop the Teams They Play In)	**A Philosophy on Football Coaching** (Coaching Expertise Model)

The Curriculum clearly states our philosophy: that we believe a 'Holistic' approach to coaching football is the best choice. Our belief is supported by analysis and scientific research.

The 'Holistic' v 'Isolated' debate

Just like there are many different philosophies on how to play football, there are also different philosophies on what is the most effective way to coach football.

Many coaches, and indeed countries, still hold the belief that football must be broken down into its many small components and that these components should then be practised in isolation until the techniques are deeply ingrained: we call this the '**Isolated**' approach.

Supporters of the isolated approach believe that the best way of improving a player's ability in, for example, 'passing with the inside of the foot' is to take 'passing with the inside of the foot' out of its natural game context and practice it in pairs or in lines; their reasoning is that this isolated training provides the opportunity for 'repetition'. However, this type of practice removes the realism required for proper learning, as there are no longer 'game-specific resistances' such as opponents: it may look a bit like football, but it isn't really football. In terms of Perception-Decision-Execution, isolated training only touches on the Execution; by removing the Perception and Decision, it is Execution without relevance.

Research has shown that this type of 'drills-based' practice (i.e. repetition without decision making) is not the most educationally effective way to teach football. Players may learn to 'perform' the techniques, but do not learn how to 'apply' them in the game.

This makes sense if you think about it for a little longer:

A player who looks great performing a prescribed technique on the training pitch but does not recognize when to use it during the game has the same problem as the player who sees the right moment to use it but lacks the technique to execute it.

In order to reach a level of excellence in football, one needs thousands of hours of purposeful practice.

The Holistic Approach

Purposeful practice for football is practice that develops the players' technical and perception/decision-making skills, as well as the required football fitness, <u>in conjunction with each other</u> instead of developing the individual components in isolation.

We call this the **Holistic approach** of coaching.

The isolated approach is successful, and perhaps necessary, for specific sports, such as golf and gymnastics. Football demands the holistic approach by its very nature; it is an incredibly complex game, with unpredictable situations and the player is regularly required to rapidly select from a wide range of possible options and execute them under pressure.

Daniel Coyle, in his much-acclaimed book 'The Talent Code', explains the difference in the brain processes involved in, on the one hand, activities like golf and violin-playing, compared to activities like football.

'Skills like football are flexible-circuit skills, meaning they require us to grow vast ivy-vine circuits (in the brain) that we can flick through to navigate an ever-changing set of obstacles. Playing violin, golf, gymnastics and figure-skating, on the other hand, are consistent-circuit skills, depending utterly on a solid foundation of technique that enables us to reliably re-create the fundamentals of an ideal performance.'

The point can be made by considering two contrasting ways of teaching a child to solve a jigsaw puzzle.

Method One (Isolated Approach):

Lesson 1: Take one piece out of the box, close the lid, and then take that piece to the child. Ask her to keep looking at the piece until she is totally familiar with it. Then take that piece away and put it back in the box.

Lesson 2: Take another jigsaw piece out, close the lid, and take the second piece to the child. Again, ask her to keep looking at the piece until she is totally familiar with it.

Lessons 3-60: Repeat the process until she is familiar with all the separate jigsaw pieces.

Lesson 61: Finally, empty the whole box of pieces on the child's desk, and take the box away. Ask the child to arrange all the pieces into a rectangular picture.

Method Two (Holistic Approach):

Lesson 1: Put the jigsaw pieces together according to the picture on the front of the box. Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture.

Lesson 2: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on one quarter of it.

Lesson 3: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on a second quarter of it.

Lesson 4: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on a third quarter of it.

Lesson 5: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on the final quarter of it.

Lesson 6: Take the jigsaw apart, put the pieces on the child's desk and ask her to put it back together.

Which child do you think would finish the jigsaw quickest? It is feasible that the 6 lessons of the 'holistic' approach would be more successful than 60 lessons of 'isolated' because the child has always been presented with the 'big picture', and can therefore see the links and make the connections between the pieces much more quickly and efficiently.

Here lies another problem with the 'isolated' approach: there are so many elements to the game of football, that the coach can end up with a list of, say, 60 separate elements to work on. If the coach then proceeds to address them all individually in an isolated way, the whole training program becomes totally removed from the real context of football. To compound the problem, by the time you work on the 60th 'jigsaw piece', the players have forgotten what the first piece looks like!

Repetition is of course important in developing players, but we must strive for:

repetition of football-specific situations with a focus on a particular aspect

The players must always be playing football by 'perceiving-deciding-executing', and the relevance to the 'big picture' must always be apparent. The coach makes this happen by designing training exercises with game-specific resistances, by manipulating things like:

- the number of opponents
- the number of team-mates
- the size and position of the goals/targets
- the size of the space to work in
- the objective of the exercise

These are all usually absent in isolated training.

However, this is not to say that there is absolutely no place for isolated training. In specific circumstances, for a specific player, when the coach has exhausted all holistic means to improve him, the only remaining solution is for the player to work individually on 'technique'. Isolated exercises should be the last resort for certain players, when necessary, not the fundamental basis of training for all players.

It is FFA's belief that this kind of isolated, remedial work is best utilized as 'homework': in fact, all players should clock up a large number of hours mastering the ball at home, for example, using a wall to help develop passing and receiving technique, or trying out 1v1 moves in the back yard.

Holistic Teaching

In terms of teaching players, there are two main ways in which the holistic approach is implemented:

i) Training Session Content: Clear guidelines are provided to assist coaches to design game-related and football-specific exercises which maximize learning and lead to the development of the kind of players we need

ii) Coach Intervention: FFA has developed a clear process by which the coach can plan and conduct training sessions that use a task-based approach to give players real learning opportunities; fundamentally, we believe that if the players are challenged to solve problems at training, there is a greater likelihood that they will be able to solve problems in the game.

Our approach also aims to drastically reduce the amount of time players have traditionally spent standing still in training, while coaches give one long-winded speech after another. When conducting training sessions, it is important for the coach to remember 'it's all about the players'. The focus should be on helping the players to improve. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, the most common method employed by coaches in Australia is to constantly stop the training session to give long-winded

speeches to the players. We have even observed this happening in the warm-up stage and in the 'training game' at the end of a training session.

All coaches are well-meaning, keen to help their players, but the fact is that this approach is misguided and simply doesn't work. Players learn by 'doing' and the coach must guide and facilitate this learning process. The coach has to learn when to stop the players, how long for and how often. They must also learn what to say and how to say it in order to achieve the best possible outcome. Stopping the players *too* often, and talking for *too* long are not only non-educational, but they also frustrate the players and take away their enjoyment of training. Perhaps more worryingly, they take away valuable training time, compounding the problems caused by too much isolated training.

Outcome:

The Coaching Expertise Model

In terms of educating coaches, the Coaching Expertise Model provides the framework, which is clearly visualized and easily articulated:

VERBAL:

> *'The Coach uses the competencies required at TRAINING, on MATCH-DAY and in MANAGEMENT to develop players and teams according to a clear VISION AND PHILOSOPHY, and the whole process is supported by a broad FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE'*

VISUAL:

Vision and Philosophy

Training	The Match	Management

Football Knowledge
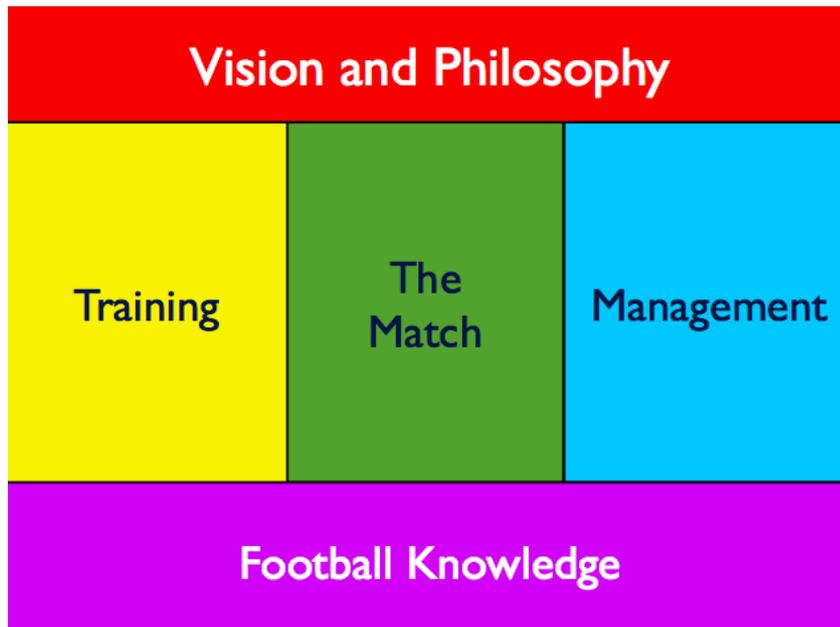
(The elements of the Coaching Expertise Model are outlined in detail in the Appendix of this manual)

KEY POINTS:
The **Football** We Want to Play> The **Players** We Need> The **Coaches** We Need
A philosophy on playing football> A philosophy on coaching football
Our belief, supported by analysis and scientific research, is that a 'Holistic' approach to coaching football is the best choice.
Purposeful practice for football develops the players' Perception-Decision-Execution in conjunction with each other instead of developing the individual components in isolation.

The Coaching Expertise Model: The Coach uses the competencies required at TRAINING, on MATCH-DAY and in MANAGEMENT to develop players and teams according to a clear VISION AND PHILOSOPHY, and the whole process is supported by a broad FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE.

Vision and Philosophy

Training	The Match	Management

Football Knowledge
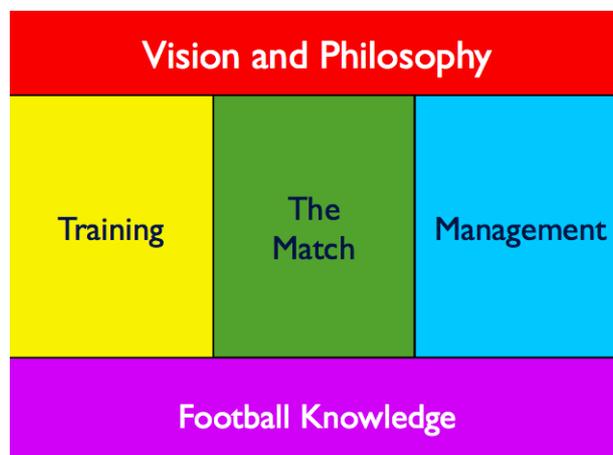
'Most coaches do not reach further than **creating general training exercises** which hardly have any relation to problems that occurred in the match'

Rinus Michels, FIFA Coach of the Century

As outlined in the FFA Coaching Expertise Model, there are four components to the TRAINING competency:

1. PLAN
2. PREPARE
3. CONDUCT
4. EVALUATE

Since:
- We know the type of football we want to play
- We have defined the different development stages of players
- We know that the coach has to influence players' actions
- We have analysed 'our team' playing football
- We have identified problems that need fixing at Training
- And we have a vision on coaching

…we are **now** in a position to move to the first step in Training:

Unfortunately, the vast majority of coaches go to the training field with just one or two, and more often than not, NONE of these points clear in thier mind.

That is why so much football training is GENERAL, and not SPECIFIC. It is not that difficult to plan and deliver general training exercises that look like football and which keep players active and enthused. An unqualified coach can do that. They can find a million practices on the internet and conduct any number of them, in any order. They can even appear to be 'qualified' by stopping the play and talking about what just happened, or what the players should perhaps have done. If you played football or have watched football, that is not hard to do.

Why SPECIFIC?

Because the professional coach has:

- A specific philosophy and vision
- A specific playing style
- A specific team model
- A specific level of competition
- Specific players
- Specific problems
- Specific opponents
- Etc, etc

GENERAL is not good enough. Working in a SPECIFIC context is what sets the professional coach apart from people who can 'put on some football practices.'

So, having defined a whole range of SPECIFIC factors, we are **only now** in a position to move to the first step in Training:

PLAN

PLAN has two parts:
      1. DEFINE
      2. DESIGN

Let's look at number 1 first.

      1. DEFINE
          o Define the Football Problem
          o Write the Session Objective

We have practiced identifying and defining Football Problems earlier in Chapter 5.

The Session Objective

Let's now look at 'writing a session objective'

Too many coaches do not actually plan their training sessions. This is inexcusable for the serious coach.

Too often, those that DO plan their training sessions do not plan them with a specific football outcome in mind.
As outlined above, players are very often put through a series of random activities or general exercises.

Writing a session objective is a sign that you know what you're doing. It is a principal part of the whole process of improving your football team.

'If you can't describe what you're doing as a process, you don't know what you're doing'

W. Edwards Deming
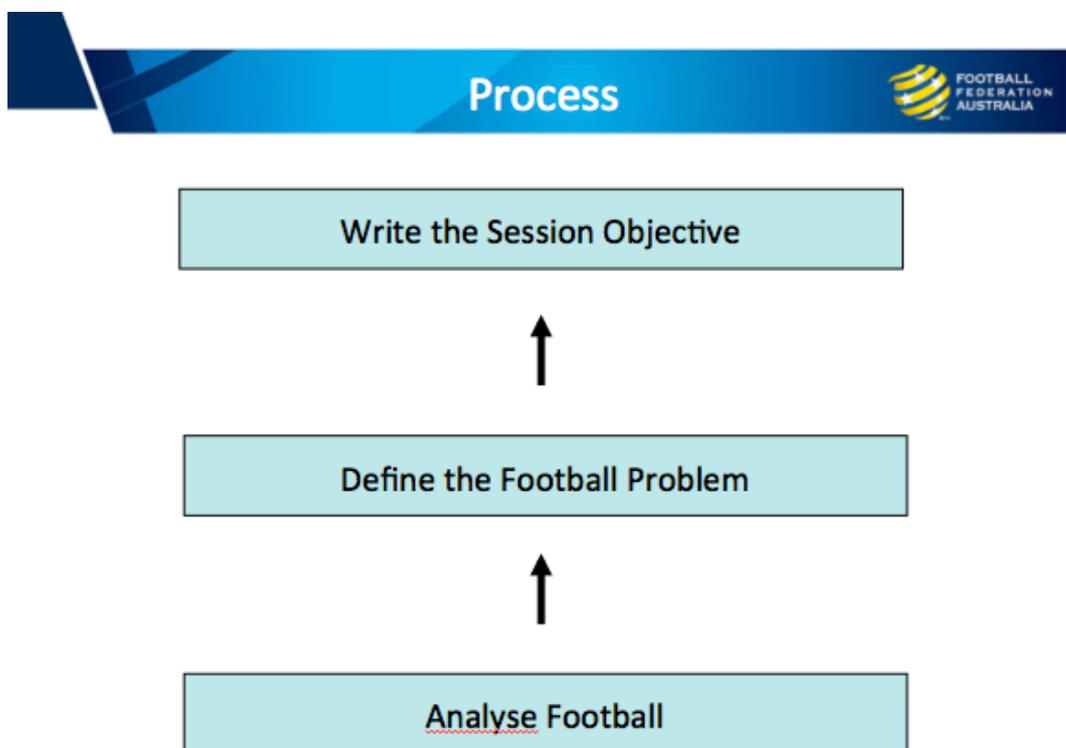
When we identified the Football Problem, after analysing our team, we followed these steps:

WHICH MAIN MOMENT:
WHICH KEY PRINCIPLE:

Then, we used THE 5Ws to clearly define the problem.

WHAT?   **What** is the problem?
WHO?   **Who** are the key players involved?
WHERE?   **Where** on the field?
WHEN?   **When** does the problem occur?
WHY?   **Why** does the problem occur?

Using what you wrote down in that stage of the process, complete the relevant parts of the below FFA Session Plan (standard form for the Performance Phase)

Main Moment: _____

Key Principle:
_____

What is the problem?	
Who are the key players involved?	
Where on the field?	
When does the problem occur?	
Why does the problem occur?	

Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve my team's ability to:
_____
_____
_____

By focusing on: Player Tasks (General / Position-specific):
_____
_____
_____
_____

Remember, the fourth component of TRAINING is 4. EVALUATE. How can you evaluate something if you didn't write down what you were setting out to achieve?

KEY POINTS:

1. PLAN
2. PREPARE
3. CONDUCT
4. EVALUATE

PLAN / 1. DEFINE
PLAN / 2. DESIGN

1. DEFINE a) Define the Football Problem b) Write the Session Objective
Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve>Team Task>Player Tasks/Actions

How can you evaluate the success of a session if you didn't write down what you were setting out to achieve?

Now we can think about planning a training session
SO...
We have a vision on coaching
We have defined the different development stages of players
We know the coach fixes team problems by affecting players' actions
We have identified problems that need fixing at Training
We have analysed our team playing football
We have defined the type of football we want to play

Write the Session Objective

↑

Define the Football Problem

↑

Analyse Football
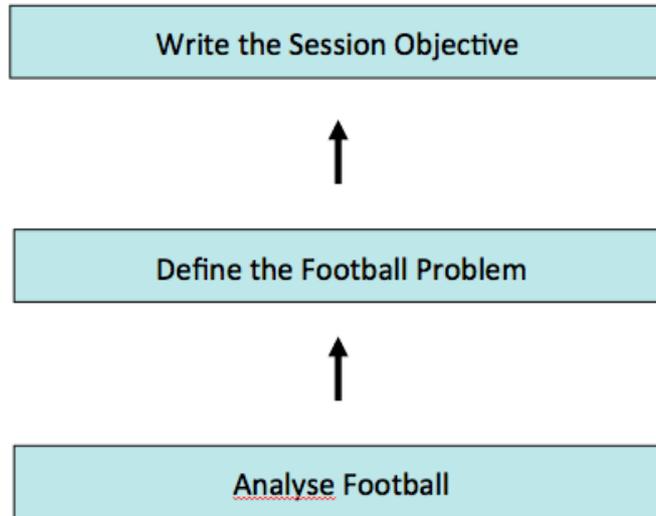
PLAN has two parts:
    1. DEFINE
    2. DESIGN

Now, let's look at number 2

2. DESIGN
    a) Design the Session Content

Previously, we defined a football problem which led us to write our Session Objective.
This is the first thing we write on the Session Plan:

Session Objective:
'In this session I aim to improve…'

Now we must DESIGN the SESSION CONTENT which will maximise the possibility of achieving this Session Objective.

Training Session Content

Whatever your philosophy and wherever you come from, there is generally agreement on what a Training Session is made up of.
Most coaches would consider a session to consist of 3 or 4 separate parts, the first of which is a warm-up and the last of which is a game.

We believe an ideal training session for players 13 years and older consists of four components.

So let's consider what the purpose of each component should be, proceeding under the assumption that 1. is a warm-up and 4. is a game.

1	WARM-UP	
2	???	
3	???	
4	GAME	

Starting Point:

- The purpose of Training is to improve **Match performance**
- Training activities must therefore **resemble the Match**
- The coach must provide game-related exercises, preparing players for the Match (solving football problems)

This whole session is being designed to achieve a stated session objective, which is aimed at SOLVING A FOOTBALL PROBLEM.

So, logically, the most important consideration is the part of the session in which the problem is specifically addressed.

If the problem from your analysis occurred in a football situation, it makes sense that the best way to fix it in training is in a football situation. So:

**THE TRAINING EXERCISE SHOULD REPLICATE
THE ACTUAL FOOTBALL SITUATION
IN WHICH THE PROBLEM OCCURRED**

Coaches who fail to understand this principle will stray into, at best, less effective training, and at worst, irrelevant training.

So, how can we design a training exercise that replicates the actual football situation in which the problem occurred?

The answer is here

The answer is here

The answer is here
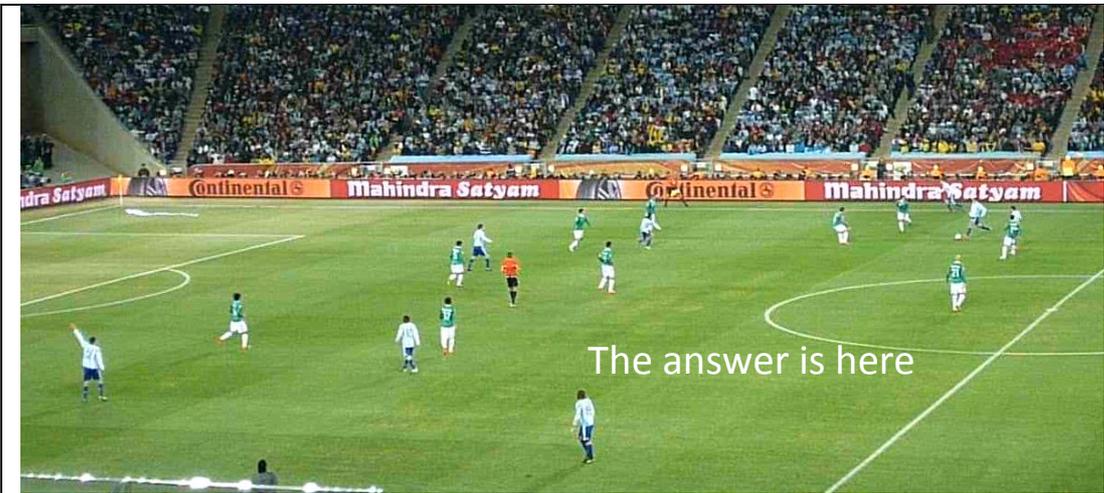
Professional coaches should not refer to a book or 'app' in order to find their training exercises. The author of a coaching textbook does not know your playing style, your players, the specific problem you are trying to fix nor your philosophy on coaching.

The secret to designing the 'right' exercise is in the game.

PUT THE PLAYERS AND THE BALL
IN THE SITUATION THAT NEEDS FIXING!

Here's a hypothetical problem.

MAIN MOMENT: BP
KEY PRINCIPLE: Controlled possession in the middle third

5W Definition:

WHAT?   We are struggling to get good possession with midfielders facing forward
WHO?   Key players to improve: 6, 8 and 10
WHERE?   In the central part of the middle third
WHEN?   When we get 3 or 4 out of the back third in possession
WHY?   Our midfielders aren't positioning themselves between defenders and between the lines

Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve:

(Team Task:) the use of effective short passing to get the ball to the strikers in a structured manner

By focusing on: Player Tasks (General / Position-specific):
- 6 and 8, position yourselves between the lines and between defenders
- 6 and 8, avoid blocking the passing lane from 3 and 4 to 9
- 10, take up a starting position in advance of 6 and 8 where you can receive the ball in space and/or quickly support 9 when they receive the ball

Below is a visual representation of the kind of situation that occurred regularly in the game we analysed.

('We' are the yellow team)
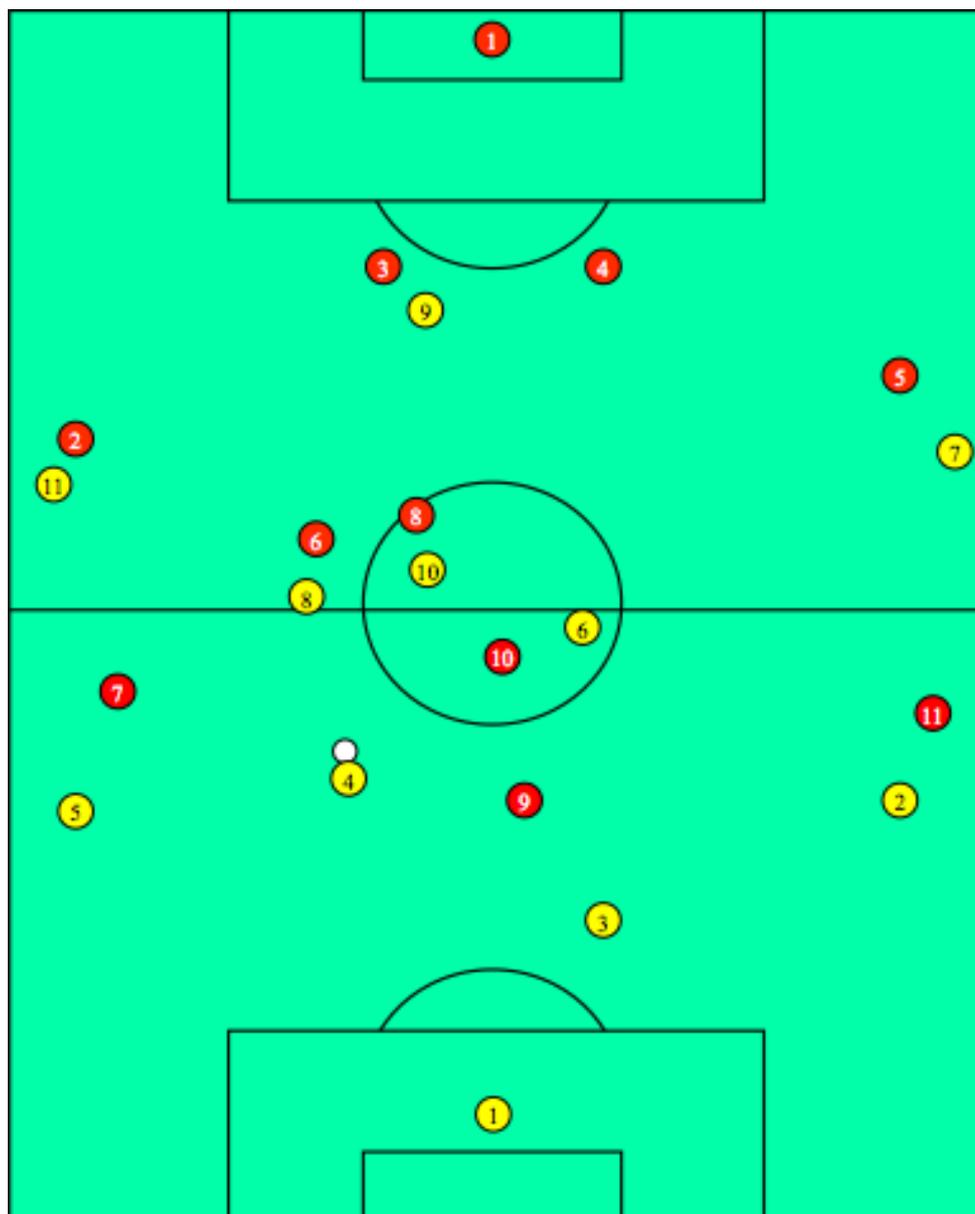
So, the coach must design an exercise that replicates and recreates these situations.

The 5Ws and the visual picture from the actual game guide the coach, in conjunction with the Session Objective.

Arguably, the ultimate method of replicating the game situation is to recreate it in an 11v11 training match. However, there are several snags with that:

- most coaches rarely have 22 players available for a training session
- if the coach is going to focus on improving a small number of key players, that will probably result in a large number of other players being less involved, or not involved at all, for much of the time
- how many moments in an 11v11 game will there be when you see the specific problem situation and can get some repetition of the improved behaviour?

So, the coach must design a viable and effective training exercise that lends itself to learning for the key players and the team.

The Game Training Exercise

11v11 is not an ideal solution for most coaches. Therefore, the coach has to decide how to modify the 11v11 picture above:
- which players to take out of the picture?
- how to modify the size of the area?

One hypothetical solution is to remove players and modify the area as represented in the diagram below, and set up a practice that looks something like the green area (of course, there are many other possibilities too)
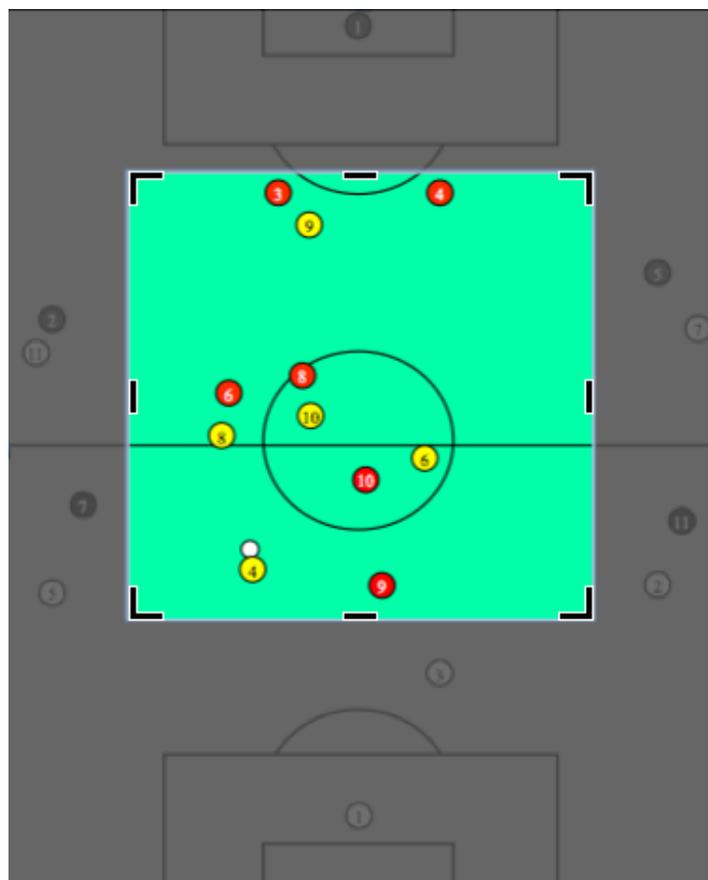
The coach may also choose to take out one or more of the defenders that are currently in the green area, if that is the right decision based on what they know about their team and their players and the nature of the problem.

When they have decided which players and what area, they must also decide:
- how the practice starts and ends
- what the targets/objectives are for both teams (eg, in the above exercise, do the yellow team try to get the ball across the end line, or does the coach extend the area and allow the yellows to try to score in the normal goal? And what do the red team do when they win the ball….?)

By this process, the coach ends up with their own SPECIFIC training exercise which has evolved:

- from analysis of football and clear definition of the football problem

We call this session component the **GAME TRAINING** exercise. Logically, it sits in box 3 (see below), as it is only one step removed from the GAME in box 4. It wouldn't make sense to conduct a Game Training exercise, like the hypothetical one above, then move 'backwards' to something LESS LIKE the GAME, and then 'up' again to a GAME.

GAME TRAINING DEFINITION:

- Practices are specific and game-related exercises designed to develop, improve or reinforce team understanding and player roles.
- They must have direction and realistic opposition which can be gradually increased.
- The coach should situate the practice in the area of the field where the desired actions usually take place.
- The area can have modifications (such as 'corridors' and additional boundary lines) and constraints can be placed on the players (e.g. limited touches, restricted areas).
- Each team must have targets (e.g. Small goal, big goal, cross a line in possession)

So, we have decided on the nature of the main part of the session, **we have planned it first**, and we have made it the third session component.

1	WARM-UP	???
2	???	???
3	**GAME TRAINING**	**The main part of the session, where optimum learning and teaching take place**
4	GAME	???

Which component should we plan next?

Perhaps the answer to these questions will help us:

How is 'training effectiveness' measured? How can you tell if you have really achieved your session objective?

ANSWER: When they are able to do it in the Match.

So, what tells us they **might be able** to do it in the Match?

ANSWER: Something at Training resembling the Match, that allows us to assess the possible success of our Session.

The Training Game

It needs to be as close to the Match as possible, and should be designed in such a way as to allow the coach to determine whether the players can independently apply what was learnt in the earlier parts of the session.

The players are focusing on playing a realistic game, which will contain situations where they can demonstrate an improvement in the part of the playing style that was at fault.

The professional coach does not say, 'any old game will do', as they want to assess the following:

- How successfully did the Session meet its objective?
- Was there **'observable improvement'** in the player actions identified as a problem (EXECUTION)?
- Do they make the right football decisions **independently** (PERCEPTION and DECISION)?

The right Training Game provides the REALISM for these questions to be accurately answered

TRAINING GAME DEFINITION:

- A game involving two even teams (or one extra player on one team) used to conclude the session
- Both teams can score (in big or small goals)
- Both teams must build-up, attack, defend, transition; all four main moments must be present.
- Players in game-specific positions and areas
- All players inside game area (since 'channels' and 'marked zones' for players are not part of the Field of Play in a match)
- Closely resembles the real game or a section of it, with as many of the 11v11 rules present as possible.

So, we have decided to plan the fourth component next (it makes sense to plan the Training Game next, as it usually closely resembles the Game Training and is a logical and natural progression.

1	WARM-UP	???
2	???	???
3	**GAME TRAINING**	**The main part of the session, where optimum learning and teaching take place**
4	**TRAINING GAME**	**The part where the players play competitively and freely, while the coach assesses the success of the session**

Clarification of terminology:

Game **Training**

- **Training** that relates to the game

Training **Game**

- A **game** that is conducted at training

Now, what is component 1. WARM-UP, all about?

What are the key factors? A generic description of a sporting warm-up looks like this

- *prepare the player for the upcoming activity*
- *help prevent injury*
- *increase the body's core temperature*
- *increase heart rate*
- *increase breathing rate*

The warm-up should incorporate the muscle groups and activities that are required during training

The intensity of the warm-up should begin at a low level gradually building to the level of intensity required during training

Passing Practices

But reflect for a minute upon FFA's Philosophy on how football should be coached:

- a holistic approach, to ensure training affects the player's PERCEPTION – DECISION – EXECUTION
- Make **better use of every minute** of the session to make it more successful

The inference here is that we believe coaches should avoid 'wasting time' in the warm-up component of a session by performing isolated, non-relevant activities.

The balls should be used straight away (or as soon as possible after some light, general warming up)

Question: What else would most coaches incorporate in every session, as well as a Warm-up at the start and a Game at the end?

Answer: **Passing**

Why? Because that is the basic action required to play football – passing the ball to a team-mate.

So, when we introduce the balls at the start of a session, or soon after the start, the players should be engaged in **Passing Practices**.

Rather than a general, non-relevant warm-up without the ball for, say, 20 minutes and THEN beginning the 'football parts' of the session, we recommend that Passing Practices ARE the Warm-up (The usual principles of a safe warm-up still apply, and of course the intensity and explosiveness of the Passing Practices must be considered)

However, the overwhelming benefit of using Passing Practices in the traditional 'warm-up' stage, is that the coach, **because they know what their session objective is,** can design a **specific** Passing Practice to **begin the process of successfully achieving their objective**.

There are two key points to be remembered here:

The professional coach, by the use of smart Passing Practices, can provide for the players:

- **Hidden learning**

- **Repetition**

This is why it is recommended to plan the Game Training first, because it gives session components 1 and 2 some context. Now you know what you are preparing the players for.

Having planned the main part of the session first, the Game Training, the coach knows the required:

- Player actions
- Elements of Perception
- Decisions
- Interaction between players

Therefore, they can design exercises that contains as many of them as is possible in a warm-up with Passing Practices.

Refer back to the generic description of a sporting warm-up, and consider the parts in bold type below.

- ***prepare the player for the upcoming activity***
- *help prevent injury*
- *increase the body's core temperature*
- *increase heart rate*
- *increase breathing rate*

*The warm-up should **incorporate the muscle groups and activities that are required during training***

The intensity of the warm-up should begin at a low level gradually building to the level of intensity required during training

What better way to **'prepare the player for the upcoming activity'** and '**incorporate the muscle groups and activities that are required during training'** than a specifically-designed passing practice?

Far too many warm-ups do not prepare the player in any other way but physically; when you analyse football, and see the brain's role in PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION, you can see the importance of engaging the player in more than just running.

Football players are 'unconscious' runners; they do not have to, or want to, think about the act of running, but are thinking about the ball, their team-mates, their opponents, the score, etc.

When coaches prescribe running activities without the ball and without a football context (in warm-ups or conditioning exercises) the players become 'conscious' runners; they start to think about the act of running as there is nothing else to think about. That is why very often the players lose focus or become harder to manage: they don't like having to think about running. Track and field athletes are 'conscious' runners – football players, as a general rule, do not want to be track and field athletes.

PASSING PRACTICES DEFINITION:

- Technical exercises designed to develop, improve or reinforce the two most important functional game skills, passing and first touch.
- They are conducted as part of the warming-up, and there should be a focus on passing and movement (the coach may decide to conduct a brief, general warming-up without the ball first)
- They are unopposed (NB. The use of a rotating, passive defender may assist in encouraging perception and decision-making)
- **The coach structures the exercise to encourage specific behaviours and achieve specific outcomes, related to the Session Objective**

It also makes sense to recommend Passing Practices in every session when 'pro-active, **possession-based**' is FFA's stated Playing Style.

*(NOTE: Designing a Passing Practice for a **BPO or BP>BPO** Session Objective is challenging, but achievable. The process is covered in a practical setting on FFA's Advanced Coaching Courses.)*

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: If someone were to observe most of your warm-ups, would they be able to hazard a guess at YOUR session objective?

1	PASSING PRACTICES	The warm-up, incorporating specific passing, first touch and football-related movements, designed to help achieve the session objective
2	???	???
3	GAME TRAINING	The main part of the session, where optimum learning and teaching take place
4	TRAINING GAME	The part where the players play competitively and freely, while the coach assesses the success of the session

Now, reflect:

- we have planned a main part of the session (Game Training) with real game situations in which to improve the team's match performance
- we have planned a game to assess the level of team improvement
- we have planned a warm-up with specific passing practices incorporating repetition of some of the behaviour required in the Game Training part

So, in the light of what we have planned so far, what might the purpose of the component following the passing Practices be?

ANSWER:

- A link in the **chain of learning** between 'passing practices' and 'game training'

Positioning Games

What elements might need to be present to make a link in the chain of learning between 'passing practices' and 'game training'?

- opposition
- closer resemblance to game-specific situations than in Passing Practices
- opportunity to succeed more than in Game Training and Training Game
- more repetition of situations requiring PERCEPTION and DECISION

As stated earlier, conducting a training session with four components is not a novel phenomenon; many coaches already do it.

If one observes coaches at work, you will often see them:

- start with a warm-up followed by some passing practices
- move on to something like a 'possession game'

Our first recommendation was to bring the passing into the warm-up, to fit our 'holistic' philosophy, touch more on PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION (P-D-E), and optimise the use of football training time.

Our next philosophical suggestion is to move on from the unopposed Passing Practices to an exercise with 'limited opposition', rather than a standard 'possession game' which often comprises of two teams of equal numbers.

So, we need an exercise with limited opposition and uneven numbers, with game-specific resistances, requiring P-D-E.

Solution?

POSITIONING GAMES

Positioning Games are based on the importance of players 'positioning' themselves in an effective manner in order to ensure the team maintains possession. Given that the vast majority of a player's time on the field is spent WITHOUT THE BALL, correct positioning is a vital part of a player's required competencies (this applies to all four main moments)

In BP, a basic requirement is for players to position themselves where the ball-carrier can easily pass to them without the pass being intercepted. This often means: 'one on the left, one on the right and one in the middle'
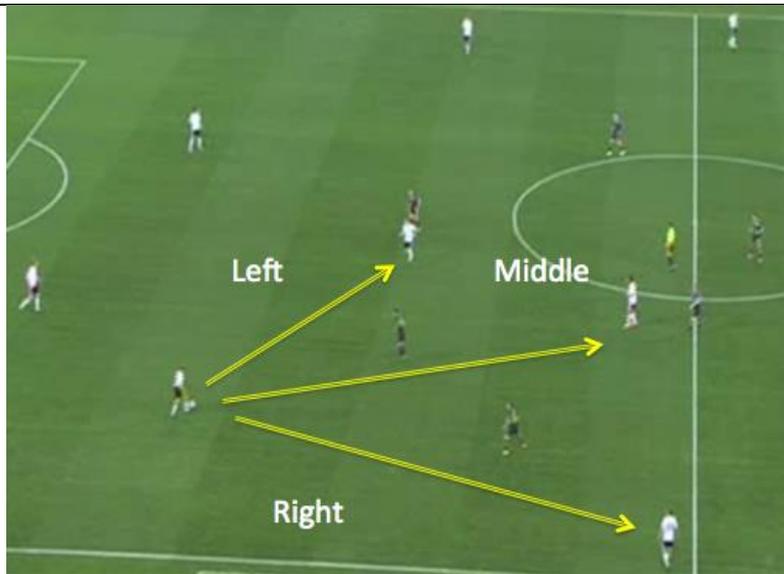
Players, especially midfielders, should be given some key tasks/actions to remember, such as: 'Get between the lines!'; 'Get between defenders!'

'Get between defenders'
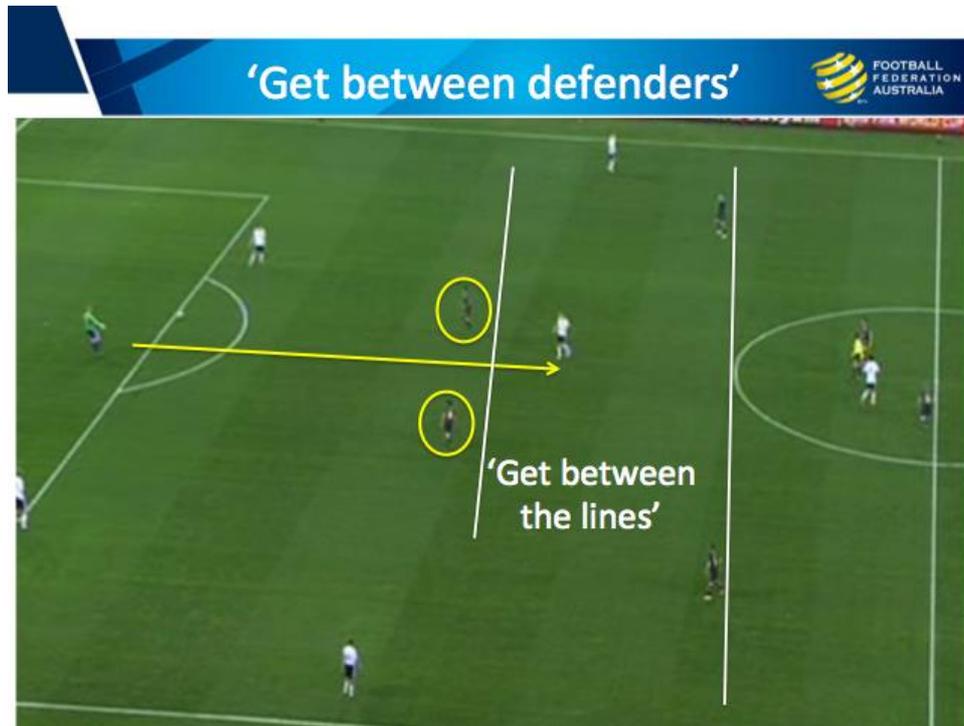
'Get between the lines'
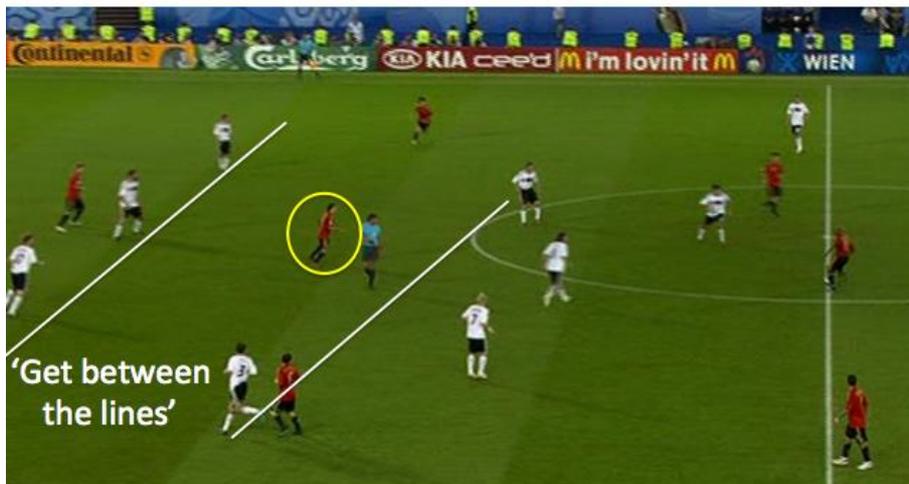
There are some basic forms of Positioning Games, designed to develop these, and other, required qualities in players.

Providing 2 options for player on the ball: left and right

3 v 1
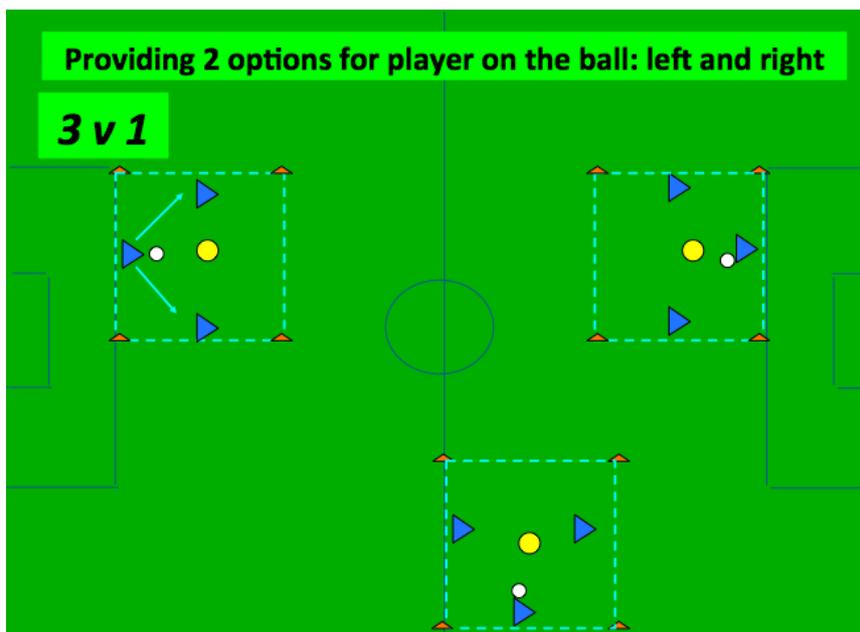
Providing 3 options: left; right and middle (through-pass)

4 v 2
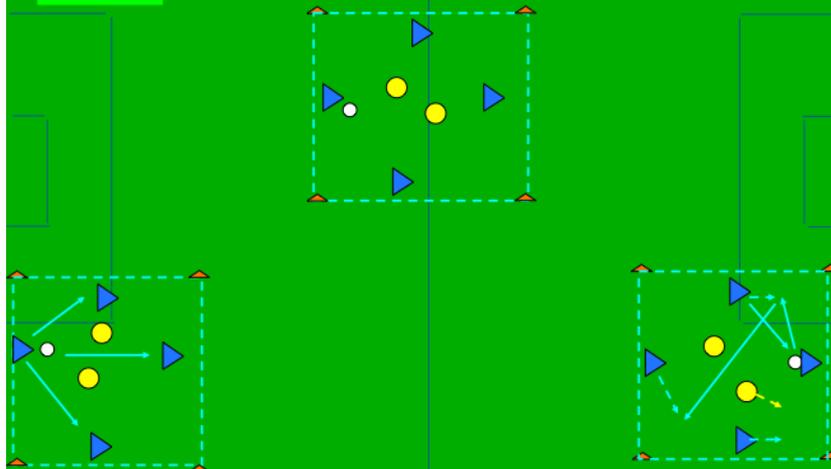
Providing 4 options: left, right, middle and far

Ideal level – THREE defenders trying to mark FOUR options for ball carrier

5 v 3
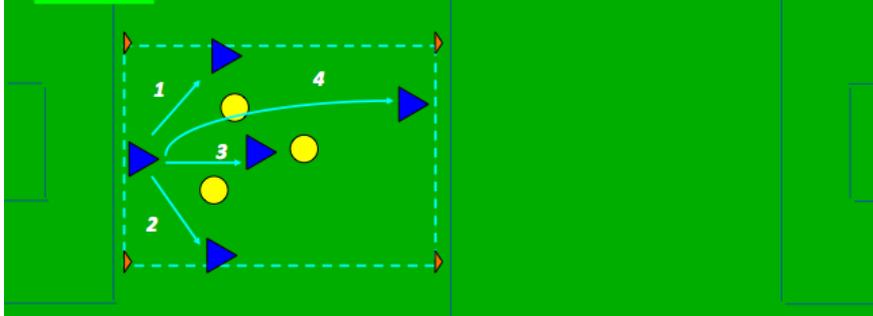
POSITIONING GAMES DEFINITION:

- Passing practices with added game-related resistances.
- They are designed to further develop passing and first touch under pressure.
- Players are now required to develop, improve or reinforce their positioning, handling speed and decision-making.
- They are always opposed, but usually with numerical superiority to the attacking team. The degree of opponent resistance can be gradually increased.
- **The coach structures the exercise to encourage specific behaviours and achieve specific outcomes, related to the Session Objective**

So, we have now outlined the nature of our four Training Session components (see below)

1	PASSING PRACTICES	The warm-up, incorporating specific passing, first touch and football-related movements, designed to help achieve the session objective
2	POSITIONING GAMES	The theme is developed by the introduction of limited opposition, providing opportunities for appropriate Perception and Decision-making in a realistic setting
3	GAME TRAINING	The main part of the session, where optimum learning and teaching take place
4	TRAINING GAME	The part where the players play competitively and freely, while the coach assesses the success of the session

NOTE: Designing a Positioning Game for a **BPO or BP>BPO** Session Objective is challenging, but achievable. The process is covered in a practical setting on FFA's Advanced Coaching Courses.

KEY POINTS:

DESIGN the SESSION CONTENT which will maximise the possibility of achieving the Session Objective.
The purpose of Training is to improve Match performance, therefore training activities must closely resemble the Match

4 components:

1	PASSING PRACTICES	The warm-up, incorporating specific passing, first touch and football-related movements, designed to help achieve the session objective
2	POSITIONING GAMES	The theme is developed by the introduction of limited opposition, providing opportunities for appropriate Perception and Decision-making in a realistic setting
3	GAME TRAINING	The main part of the session, where optimum learning and teaching take place
4	TRAINING GAME	The part where the players play competitively and freely, while the coach assesses the success of the session

Plan in this order:
Game Training>Training Game>Passing Practices>Positioning Games
Game Training = Re-create the Football Problem = Context for the other three components

PRACTICE!:

It would be a valuable exercise for you now to design a whole training session to achieve the hypothetical Session Objective from this chapter, following the whole process outlined so far

IMPORTANT:

Principles of safe warming-up and injury prevention

Reducing the risk of injury in football is important. We have a responsibility to take care of all our participants.

A sound warm-up, as well as preparing the players for the upcoming activity, will also assist in injury prevention.

FFA recommends the implementation of the principles outlined in the FIFA 11+, a proven success in reducing football injuries.

(SEE http://f-marc.com/11plus/home/)

The 11+ is a set program for warming-up which takes 20 minutes to conduct. However, there is no football-specific passing or technique component.

In keeping with FFA's holistic philosophy on coaching, we suggest that many of the FIFA 11+ exercises can be modified (eg, passing practices including running sequences; 1-leg balance exercise involving volleying, etc) as a means of incorporating the 11+ principles within an ideal football training session.

Below are some specific suggestions:

11+
Part 1 = Running exercises, 8 minutes

We suggest that depending on the Passing Practices planned, the coach either begins the session with a low-intensity, short-distance passing practice, or several of the 6 suggested running exercises incorporating the ball. If starting with passing practices straight away, the coach may decide to briefly intersperse the activity with some of the 11+ running exercises.

It is assumed that most coaches include similar activities to the 11+ running exercises in the early part of their session, often with a ball involved.

11+
Part 2 = Strength – Plyometrics – Balance, 10 minutes

We are not totally in favour of giving so much of your training time to these areas. Over a whole season, this would add up to a huge amount of lost 'football development.'

FFA's philosophy leads to the following suggestion:

Exercises 7, 8 and 9 may be recommended to players as 'homework', following the guidelines on the F-MARC website.

Exercises 10 and 11 may be incorporated within breaks in the Passing Practices, or given as 'waiting time' activities (i.e. 'when you get to the back of the line, do …….' or 'after you pass the ball to the player on that cone, do…..')

Exercise 12 can be incorporated late in the 'warm-up' stage, that is, towards the end of the Passing Practices.

11+
Part 3 = Running Exercises

Exercises 13 and 15 can be conducted with the ball (eg, to replace exercise 15, players can perform 1v1 step-over exercises with the ball, involving a change of direction and 'cutting.')

NOTE:

The 11+ principles should not be introduced until the age of 15 in males and 13 in females (during the Game Training Phase)

TRAINING COMPETENCIES

'PLAN'

Outcomes from 'Define' and 'Design' so far

PLAN			SESSION PLAN
1. DEFINE	Football Problem Identified Football Problem Defined		SESSION OBJECTIVE
2. DESIGN	Four Session Components		SESSION CONTENT

DESIGN	4. Design Positioning Games
	3. Design Passing Practices
	2. Design Training Game
	1. Design Game Training exercise
DEFINE	Session Objective
	Football Problem

Training Session Components

FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA
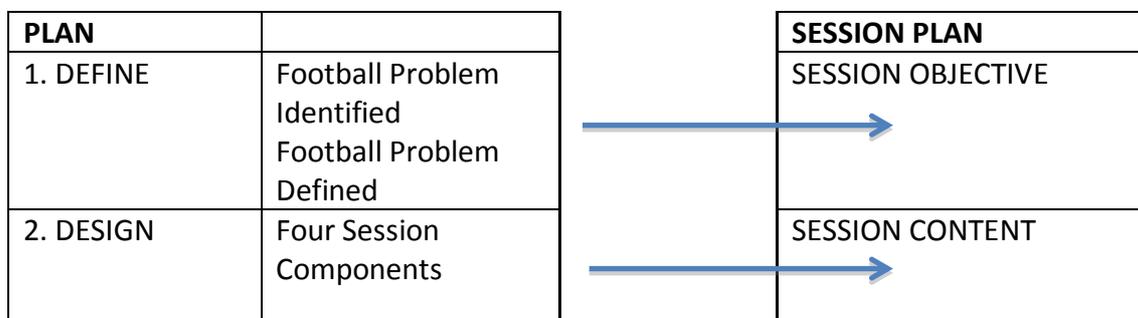
Session Objective		
Session Content		
1	Passing Practices	A 'chain of learning'
2	Positioning Games	
3	Game Training	
4	Training Game	'Did they learn?'

Chapter 11 - Conducting a Training Session 1

We started by looking at FFA's Vision on HOW FOOTBALL SHOULD BE PLAYED

We then looked at FFA's Vision on HOW FOOTBALL SHOULD BE COACHED

We investigated the first part of the TRAINING competency ('PLAN'), and closely examined the four Session Components

REVISION:

TRAINING is made up of:

      1. PLAN
      2. PREPARE
      3. CONDUCT
      4. EVALUATE

1. PLAN: We now have exercises planned
2. PREPARE: Preparing for the training session is now easy, because the Plan contains all the information you need in terms of People, Equipment and Environment.

So, let's now look at no. 3:
How the coach should **CONDUCT** a Training Session.

As we do so, we will discover that we will need to re-visit the 'Plan' stage to add some more detail. If you PLAN a session properly there is more chance that you will CONDUCT it effectively. By looking at the best way of conducting it first, we will then be better informed in how to construct this additional detail in the plan.

Consider the purpose of each of the four session components:

(NB: when planning a training session we recommended that the third component, Game Training, be planned first. We will now look in *sequential* order at how each of the components should be conducted)

1. PASSING PRACTICES

The warm-up, incorporating specific passing, first touch and football-related movements, designed to help achieve the session objective

Please remember, this is a warm-up!

Too often, coaches use the warm-up stage as 'teaching time': they repeatedly stop the players and correct them, getting all the players to stop and listen. If this occurs, it is not really a warm-up any more.

Revision of Key Points:

The professional coach, by the use of smart Passing Practices, can provide for the players:

- **Hidden learning**
- **Repetition**

Having planned the main part of the session first, the Game Training, the coach knows the required:

- *Player actions*
- *Elements of Perception*
- *Decisions*
- *Interaction between players*

So, the coach can carefully think about how to construct a SPECIFIC passing practice to incorporate those actions, interactions and elements of P-D-E. Far too often, we see players engaged in random passing exercises which can often be boring, or so-called 'fun' activities which have little relevance to real football or, more importantly, the objective of the session.

It is also useful to consider, for each session component, what should be the main behaviour of both the players and the coach.

Main behaviour in Passing Practices:

PLAYERS: warming-up
COACH: influencing

How does the coach INFLUENCE the players?

i) by smart design of the passing practices, incorporating hidden learning and repetition

ii) by giving key technical points related to the session objective (without interrupting the warm-up) to players who need it. In terms of PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION, passing practices will focus on EXECUTION, as they are unopposed or use a rotating passive defender, but the clever coach tries to build in some PERCEPTION and DECISION.

So, what additional notes should the coach write down on this part of the Session Plan?

They should note the key points of P-D-E might make 'on the run' where necessary, related to the session objective.

Below, write down the points you would look for in the passing practice you designed for our hypothetical session at the end of the previous chapter:

Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve:

(Team Task:) the use of effective short passing to get the ball to the strikers in a structured manner

By focusing on: Player Tasks (General / Position-specific):
- 6 and 8, position yourselves between the lines and between defenders
- 6 and 8, avoid blocking the passing lane from 3 and 4 to 9
- 10, take up a starting position in advance of 6 and 8 where you can receive the ball in space and/or quickly support 9 when they receives the ball
-

Perception (Seeing/Hearing):	
Decision (Recognition/Anticipation/ Options/Choices):	
Execution (Timing/Speed/Quality/Clarity):	

2. POSITIONING GAMES / 3. GAME TRAINING:

We will now look at the second and third session components (POSITIONING GAMES and GAME TRAINING) together, as they share the same ideal behaviours for the players and the coach:

Main behaviour in Positioning Games and Game Training:

PLAYERS: learning
COACH: teaching

2. POSITIONING GAMES

The theme is developed by the introduction of limited opposition, providing opportunities for appropriate Perception and Decision-making in a realistic setting

3. GAME TRAINING:

The main part of the session, where optimum learning and teaching take place

You have created a learning environment by designing an appropriate Positioning Game and Game Training exercise, derived from the Match situation.

If the players are learning then, by definition, THE COACH SHOULD BE TEACHING

How does the coach TEACH the players?

(Note: the following guidelines and suggested three steps apply to both Positioning Games and Game Training. Obviously, because of their differing nature, they are applied slightly differently in each component)

Key points from FFA's Vision on Coaching:

- Holistic (reflected in the design of session components)
- must affect the player's PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION
- aim to develop improved subconscious behavior
- task-based rather than prescriptive
- challenging
- coach the whole team, focusing on certain players (rather than 'coach a few players, forget the rest of the team')
- training should focus on CONSISTENTLY DEVELOPING THE PLAYING STYLE

Helping players PERCEIVE

- Which Main Moment?
- Which Key Principle?
- Which Team Task?

These all emanate from your definition of the football problem, using the 5Ws. You observed that something was wrong with the execution of the playing style, based on the Team Model. So, from our definition, something is going wrong with the players' PERCEPTION, DECISION and EXECUTION. Therefore, the coach must guide the players by means of a training session to improve their PERCEPTION and DECISION so that they EXECUTE correctly.

To help players perceive, there needs to be a game situation for them to interpret. To achieve a specific session objective, therefore, there needs to be SPECIFIC GAME SITUATIONS FOR THEM TO INTERPRET. We have provided this by carefully designing our Positioning Game and Game Training exercise.

PERCEPTION is the processing of visual and aural stimuli: the player sees and hears things in the game, then analyses and interprets them very quickly. Then there is a DECISION to do something.

The coach tries to simplify the process for the players by clarifying what the team is trying to achieve. This gives a context for perception and decision, and gives a clear focus to the activity. The coach makes this happen by establishing a clear, pre-determined 'Team Task'.

Step 1: Set the Team Task

The Team Task is crucial, because it switches on all the players to help achieve it, even though you may only focus on a small number of players who are key to fixing the problem.
You may set a Team Task that is word for word from the Team Model, or a modified version of it to add clarity for the specific problem in mind.

It is important that setting the Team Task is your first 'coaching intervention'. Let everyone know what this practice is focused on before you start telling them what they're doing wrong; by setting the Team Task (following up all the other input you have made earlier in the session) the key players are already in learning mode and hopefully taking the first steps to solving the problem themselves.

It is counter-productive and illogical for the first intervention to be anything other than a clear Team Task. Why?
If the coach is going to be correcting players, it makes sense to let them know 'this is what we're trying to do', rather than being the 'policeman' who catches them doing something wrong.

It also prevents situations where the player thinks, or says, 'why didn't you tell me that before?'

Effective coaching is about finding ways to stop them less often, not more often; it's about guiding them to find solutions, as that is what will have to happen in the game: they won't be able to look at the bench and say 'what do I do now, coach?'

'Sometimes you can tell a player they are doing something wrong without actually telling him'
Arsene Wenger

More importantly, the Team Task keeps the whole team focused on developing and improving the playing style.

So, you've set a Team Task. Obviously you don't expect 100% success in the achievement of the task; if that happens, then it clearly was not a Football Problem in the first place.
What you do expect is the key players identified in the 5Ws, and the Session Objective, to require some guidance.

Step 2: Player Tasks / Actions

You must be able in advance to select and write down the key Player Tasks and Actions that you will need to stress to the key players.

The professional coach is, to a large extent, able to predict the future (in training, at least!) By designing and conducting the session in a logical and structured way, they are as certain as they can be that situations will arise in the Positioning Game and Game Training which will facilitate player learning through the coach's guidance.

The Player Tasks and Actions are embedded in the Team Model but again, as with the Team Task, the coach may need to create slightly different (or even new) Tasks/Actions based on the specific problem.

There is another good reason for setting a clear Team Task first: when you are giving feedback to a player, or using Question and Answer, you can now refer back to the Team Task: 'so, if we're **trying to create a 1v1 situation** for ourselves, who might have been a better option for you to pass to then?' This reinforces the whole process and Player Tasks naturally evolve.

So, the Team Task has everyone focused on developing the playing style and has led to the coach giving some necessary guidance to certain players by the use of key Player Tasks and Actions.

However, given that the identified players (in the 5Ws) were having problems in the Match, it is still possible or perhaps likely that further guidance is required.

In other words, the Team Task is clear, they understand their Player Task, but they are still unable to Perceive and/or Decide correctly.

Step 3: Cues

In order to Perceive and Decide (and then Execute) correctly, the player often requires a **cue.**

A cue is a phrase that usually begins with **'If', 'When', 'As'** or a similar word. A cue helps the player perform their Player Task.

Example:

Team Task: 'Use controlled possession in the middle third'

Player Task: 'No. 6 and 8, look to play killer passes for our 7 and 11'

Cue: 'No. 6, **WHEN** our 7 is level with and outside their full-back, pass to the space behind the full-back for 7 to run on to'

The cue assists the **perception** of 6, as it is guiding him to look for something in the game situation (No. 7 level with full-back) and also assisting with the **decision** (pass to the space behind)

The experienced coach can construct and write down clear, concise and clever cues that players can understand and apply.
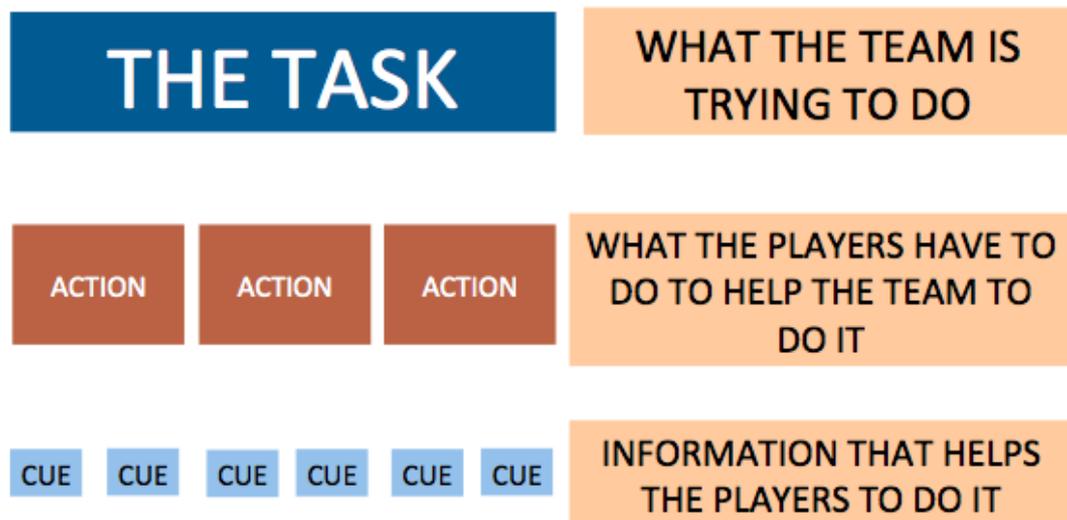
Based on the Positioning Games element of your Session Plan from the previous chapter, now insert the content below (remember the Session Objective):	
POSITIONING GAMES	Team Task: Player Tasks / Actions: Cues:

Based on the Game Training element of your Session Plan from the previous chapter, now insert the content below (remember the Session Objective):	
GAME TRAINING	Team Task:
	Player Tasks / Actions:
	Cues:

4. TRAINING GAME

The part where the players play competitively and freely, while the coach assesses the success of the session

Main behaviour in Training Game:

PLAYERS: playing
COACH: assessing

To assess the success of the session, the coach asks himself questions like:
- Can the players apply what was learned in the first three components?
- Are the players making better real-game decisions independently?
- Are there signs that training behavior can be transferred to the Match?

He can only do this by **OBSERVATION**.

Unfortunately, many coaches in the Training Game engage in constant shouting, telling the players what they want them to do.

There are at least two major issues with this behaviour:

1. The players need to learn how to play independently, making their own decisions
2. HOW CAN YOU OBSERVE AND EVALUATE IF YOU'RE CONSTANTLY SHOUTING?

The professional coach sees the Training Game as the players' opportunity to 'play football' and implement what has been learned. Therefore, they observe very closely, especially at those aspects of the game that were the focus of the first three session components. If they fees it is necessary, however, they may give some brief reinforcement or reminders, or even perhaps make one key intervention.

The only indicator of real success is when there is improved team performance IN THE MATCH within the identified Main Moment, Key Principle and Team Task.

So, in the Training Game the coach is looking for evidence that tells him how effective the session was.

Then, when the coach EVALUATES (TRAINING = PLAN, PREPARE, CONDUCT, **EVALUATE**) the session after it has finished, they can answer the necessary questions:

Session Objective achieved?

- yes
- partially
- no

Football Problem solved?

- yes
- partially
- no

Next steps?

- Based on the above answers, the coach starts to plan what to do next.

(There is space for answering these three questions on FFA's standard Session Plan form.)

Summary:	
SESSION COMPONENT:	**MAIN BEHAVIOUR:**
PASSING PRACTICES	**Players: Warming up** **Coach: Influencing**
POSITIONING GAMES	**Players: Learning** **Coach: Teaching**
GAME TRAINING	**Players: Learning** **Coach: Teaching**
TRAINING GAME	**Players: Playing** **Coach: Assessing**

'Framing' the session

What happens at the start of a Training Session?

Do we just immediately start with the Passing Practices?

Of course not: the coach usually addresses the players before training. This address will often include greeting and welcoming the players.

It should also include some information about the content of the session. Ideally, 'why we are doing this today' will become apparent to the players.

The professional coach uses this pre-training briefing as an opportunity to take the first steps towards achieving their Session Objective. By delivering the right information in an effective manner, they can initiate the players' learning process before the session even starts.

The coach outlines the focus of the upcoming session by describing what aspect(s) of the team's play will be addressed and perhaps which players will be key to the success. We call this the 'FRAMING THE SESSION'. This is because team football is a complex event, with a whole range of possibilities; so the coach in effect puts a 'picture frame' around the part(s) that will be looked at closely.

It is also good practice in the 'FRAME' stage to link **PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE**

In other words, something like this:

'Last weekend, we had major problems retaining possession and playing forward from the middle third, especially centrally (**PAST),** so tonight we will look at some strategies to position ourselves better before receiving the ball, mainly you three in midfield, and to deliver the right kind of passes from the back four, especially from you, John, and you, Mark **(PRESENT).** If we can improve as a team in this aspect of our play, we will develop our playing style to the next level and become much more successful in our ability to get the ball to the strikers in a structured way. That will lead to more goalscoring opportunities, and therefore more goals scored. **(FUTURE)'**

Linking Past, Present and Future gives players a sense of 'moving forward'; it promotes a feeling that the team is constantly growing and improving.

Another benefit of effectively FRAMING the session before starting it, is that it confirms to the players and staff that the coach is a professional. They KNOWS WHAT THEY ARE DOING: they have analysed the team's and/or the opponent's performance, decided on an objective for the session, planned accordingly and let everyone know what will be happening.

To deliver all these messages effectively, the coach must take a number of things into consideration. Some of these will be covered in the Communication module.

At this point, however, it is worth noting that different people have different preferred learning styles, and these are briefly outlined below:

VISUAL – prefer to see images, graphics, movies that explain the concept
AUDIO – prefer to hear about or discuss the concept
KINESTHETIC – prefer to just 'do' the thing to experience and understand the concept

It is difficult for the average coach to put thier players through appropriate tests which determine their preferred learning style. So, the best approach for the coach is to try to constantly deliver their messages in a range of ways, with a range of tools, in order to maximise the possibility of their message getting through to all their players equally.

In the case of the FRAME, the professional coach will strengthen the message above by:

- Supporting the delivery with **visual** aids (whiteboard, video session, powerpoint presentation, etc)
- Speaking clearly and concisely for the benefit particularly of **audio** learners

Kinesthetic learners are best catered for in the practical training session itself.

So, now we have a Pre-Training element prior to the Four Session Components:

PRE-TRAINING	FRAME
PASSING PRACTICES	**Players: Warming up** **Coach: Influencing**
POSITIONING GAMES	**Players: Learning** **Coach: Teaching**
GAME TRAINING	**Players: Learning** **Coach: Teaching**
TRAINING GAME	**Players: Playing** **Coach: Assessing**

'Wrap up'

What happens after the Training Session?

Do we just say 'goodbye'?

Of course not: the coach usually addresses the players before they leave. This address should include some information about what happened in the session and the coach's overall feedback to the players. The professional coach was already cementing some thoughts on how successful they were in achieving their Session Objective during the Training Game. They can include some of their observations during this address.

So, here is the full outline of the Training Session, including the post-training Wrap-up

PRE-TRAINING	FRAME
PASSING PRACTICES	Players: Warming up Coach: Influencing
POSITIONING GAMES	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching
GAME TRAINING	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching
TRAINING GAME	Players: Playing Coach: Assessing
POST-TRAINING	WRAP-UP

The 'Animation' stage

Looking at these six elements, one can clearly distinguish two central components where learning/teaching are the main focus. This is the stage, by means of Positioning Games and Game Training, where the specific theme of the session is brought to life. Therefore, we call this stage the 'ANIMATION' stage ('anima', Latin = 'life')

NAME:	ACTIVITY:	STAGES OF 'CONDUCTING A SESSION'
Pre-training	FRAME	
PASSING PRACTICES	Players: Warming up Coach: Influencing	
POSITIONING GAMES	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	**ANIMATION**
GAME TRAINING	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	
TRAINING GAME	Players: Playing Coach: Assessing	
Post-training	WRAP-UP	

The 'Foundation' stage

Looking at the six elements again, one can see that the first two play a preparatory role for the learning/teaching in the 'ANIMATION' stage.

Therefore, we call this stage the 'FOUNDATION' stage, as these two components build the platform for a more effective 'ANIMATION'.

NAME:	ACTIVITY:	STAGES OF 'CONDUCTING A SESSION'
Pre-training	FRAME	**FOUNDATION**
PASSING PRACTICES	Players: Warming up Coach: Influencing	
POSITIONING GAMES	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	**ANIMATION**
GAME TRAINING	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	
TRAINING GAME	Players: Playing Coach: Assessing	
Post-training	WRAP-UP	

113

The 'Conclusion' stage

One can also see that after the learning/teaching of the 'ANIMATION' stage, the last two elements finish the whole session off in a logical fashion. Therefore, we call this stage the 'CONCLUSION'.

Now, the whole session can be looked at in the following way:

ELEMENT:	ACTIVITY:	STAGES OF 'CONDUCTING A SESSION'
Pre-training	FRAME	FOUNDATION
PASSING PRACTICES	Players: Warming up Coach: Influencing	
POSITIONING GAMES	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	ANIMATION
GAME TRAINING	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	
TRAINING GAME	Players: Playing Coach: Assessing	CONCLUSION
Post-training	WRAP-UP	

Reflect:

During the process of examining the four session components, on the way we have discovered the major elements and sub-details of the TRAINING competency pillar of the Coaching Expertise Model.

FFA Coaching Expertise model:

114
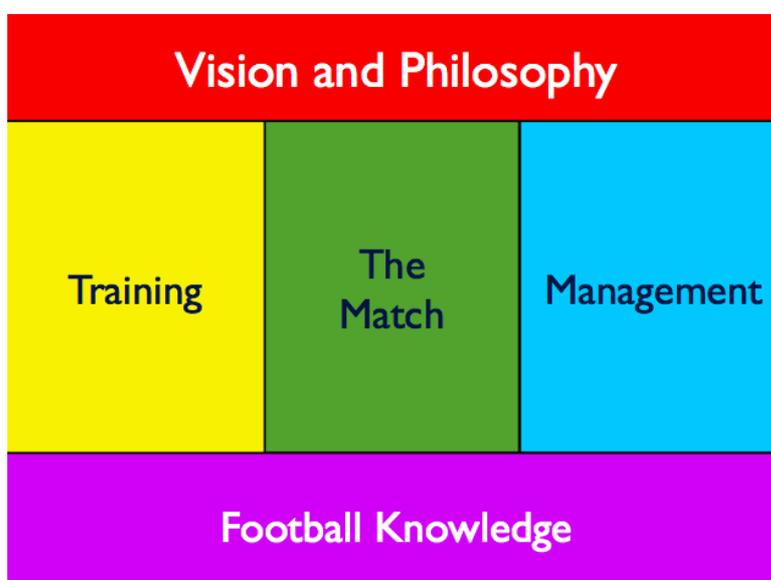
The TRAINING pillar in detail:

TRAINING			
PLAN	**PREPARE**	**CONDUCT**	**EVALUATE**
1. DEFINE a) Define football problem b) Define session objective 2. DESIGN a) Session components b) Script	1. PEOPLE 2. EQUIPMENT 3. ENVIRONMENT	1. FOUNDATION 2. ANIMATION 3. CONCLUSION	1. SESSION OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED? 2. FOOTBALL PROBLEM SOLVED? 3. NEXT STEPS

While looking at **PLAN / 2. DESIGN / a) Session components** and providing guidelines for conducting them, we touched on the three other elements of TRAINING. (PREPARE, CONDUCT, EVALUATE)

It became clear that the professional coach, as well as drawing exercise diagrams and describing how they operate, should write down some other key things to help him conduct the session effectively.

The most important of these are those associated with the Positioning Games and Game Training:

- **TEAM TASK**
- **PLAYER TASKS/ACTIONS**
- **CUES**

In this way, we have already explored **PLAN / 2. DESIGN / b) Script**

We call it the Script, because it is a pre-determined series of phrases and questions that the coach plans to say.

Far too often, the words that the coach uses have a detrimental effect on the session. This is usually because they did not give any thought to what they were going to say.

The quality of a coach's communication is vital; it is their main coaching tool. Given that fact, it is clearly not professional to rely on your ability to 'wing it' and 'make it up as I go along'. Perhaps some experienced coaches can get away with that, but it is not the ideal course of action for most coaches.

Constructing smart and effective Tasks, Actions and Cues is an acquired skill, and a valuable one. But it has to be undertaken before training, during the PLAN stage.

You underwent a hypothetical 'script' development during this chapter.

So, now you have completed the DESIGN part of the TRAINING:
- **you have designed your training session components**
- **you have also written your SCRIPT.**

KEY POINTS:

Final element of PLAN = Script

PLAN			SESSION PLAN	
1. DEFINE	Football Problem Identified Football Problem Defined		SESSION OBJECTIVE	
2. DESIGN	Four Session Components **SCRIPT**		SESSION CONTENT	

ELEMENT:	ACTIVITY:	STAGES OF 'CONDUCTING A SESSION'
Pre-training	FRAME	**FOUNDATION**
PASSING PRACTICES	Players: Warming up Coach: Influencing	
POSITIONING GAMES	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	**ANIMATION**
GAME TRAINING	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	
TRAINING GAME	Players: Playing Coach: Assessing	**CONCLUSION**
Post-training	WRAP-UP	

Chapter 12 - Communication

At the end of Chapter 11, we had established the four components of a training session, with a pre-training Frame and a post-training Wrap-up. The coach clearly has some messages for the players, and a script to help him with most of it. So, it is logical now to look at what the coach must be aware of when delivering their messages:

COMMUNICATION

We are now taking our first close look at the MANAGEMENT pillar from the Coaching Expertise Model.

MANAGEMENT has two main areas, with two sub-areas:

1. Manage self
    o Know yourself
    o Develop yourself
2. Manage others
    o Know others
    o Develop others

As part of 'Manage Self', the coach assesses their own Communication skills (know yourself) and improves any identified weaknesses (develop yourself).

The coach is constantly interacting with, and very often leading, other people. The success of thier work lies in the product of both sides of this equation.
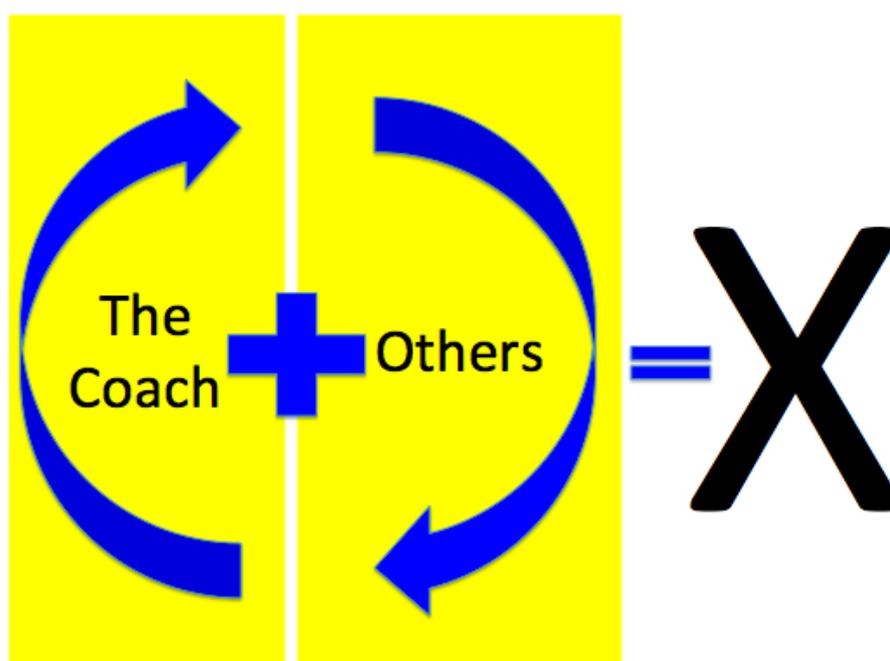
The coach is constantly striving to make the 'X', the result, greater.

In order to do this effectively they must increase the 'value' of both factors: 'the coach' and 'the others'.

For the majority of coaches, 'others' means 'the players'. As one progresses further in professional coaching, more groups of people are included: coaching staff, support staff, medical staff, administrators, the board, the media, the fans, etc, etc.

If you're constantly dealing with other people, you have to be very good at communicating with them.

Communication is the main means by which a coach achieves their objectives; therefore, the best coaches are usually the best communicators.

Clearly, the coach must aim to be as good as possible at communicating with people.
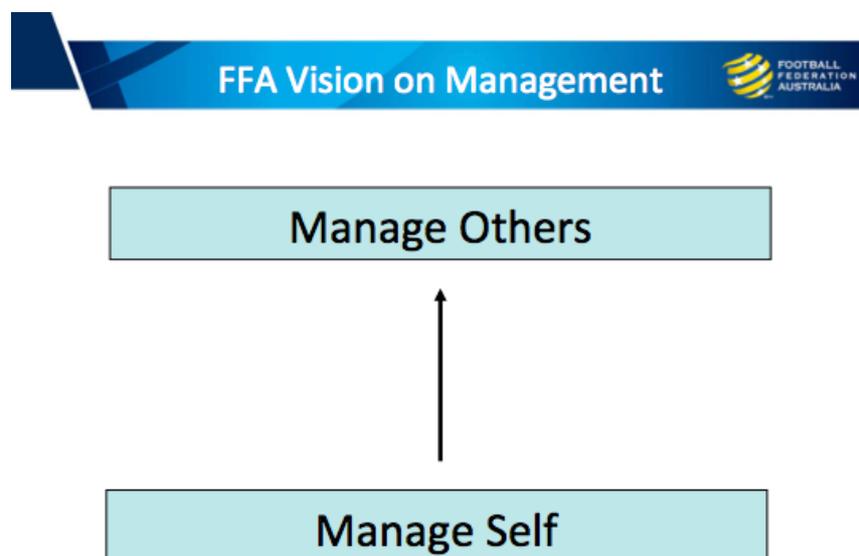
In this module, we focus on:

Manage Self

As Communication is such a vital tool for the coach, they need to be aware of how to do it effectively.

Based on that knowledge, they can 'know themselves', by evaluating their own Communication skills, then 'develop themselves, by improving those skills.

Consider:

What's the real message in this commonly-heard question?

Coach to player: 'How many times do I have to tell you?'

We hear exasperated coaches shouting this at players who 'just don't get it.' However, the reality is that the fault lies with the coach: if the player still doesn't get it after being told so many times, there is obviously a problem with the quality of the coach's communication. Good coaches realize quickly that if a player doesn't understand, you should try a different way of delivering the message (rather than repeating the same message over and over, louder and louder!)

Coach to player: 'How many times do I have to tell you?'
Player to Coach: 'Only once, if you tell me properly!'

Of course, most players are unlikely to say this to their coach, but they could be excused for thinking it.

Communication is key.

<u>FFA's Vision on Communication</u>

We believe in a simplified approach, which we call

'Words and Pictures'

Here's how we explain it:

Why does the coach communicate with people?

Because they want them to:

- Understand something
- Do something

For them to 'understand' or 'do' something, some kind of process needs to take place in their brain
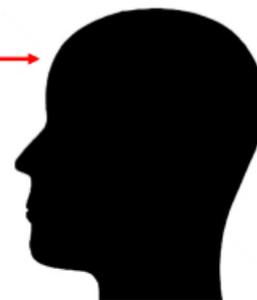
How do humans connect with the world?
We use our 5 senses: touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing.

The Human Senses of most relevance to the coach

Hearing
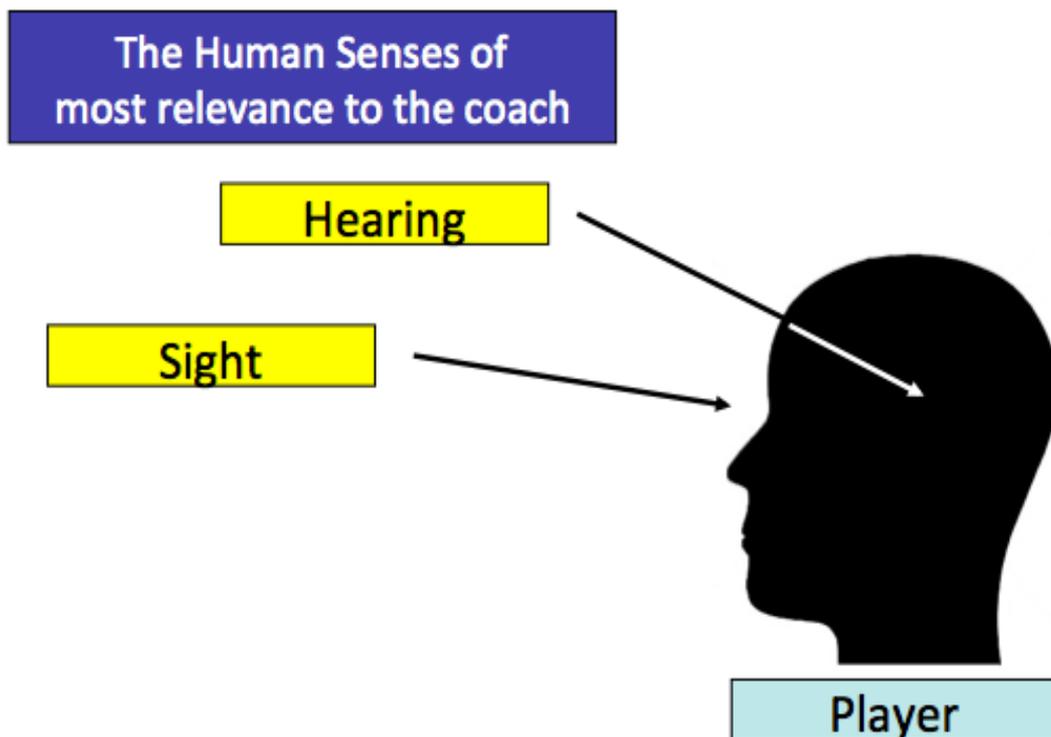
Sight

Player

Senses respond to physical stimuli and send signals to the brain where the signals are received and interpreted.

So, if hearing and sight are the most relevant senses, then the two main ways to get inside the player's head are through the **EYES and EARS.**

The challenge for the coach is to make sure the player's eyes and ears send the brain signals it can easily interpret so your message gets through clearly

So, what are the main two things you can use to send a signal through the ears and eyes to the player's brain?
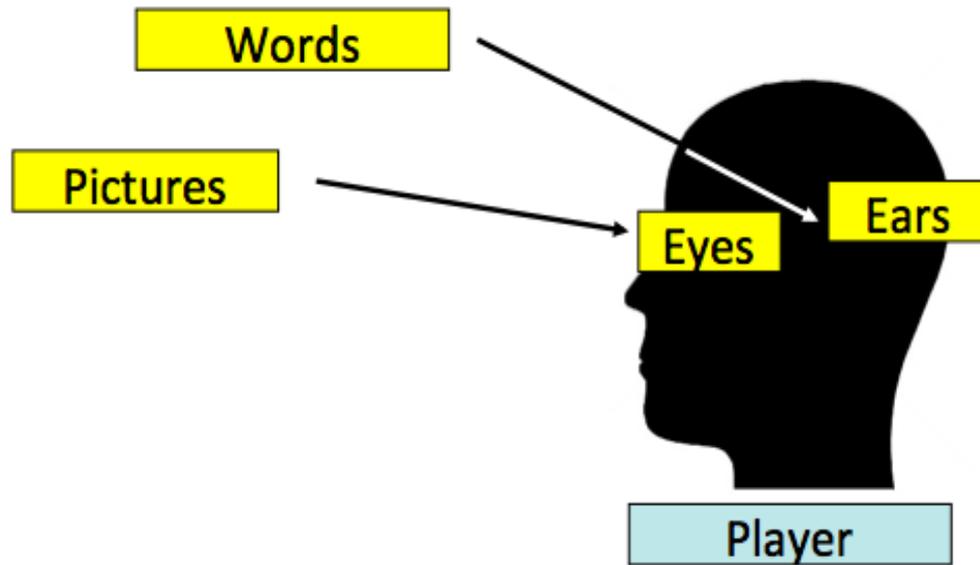
We simplify Communication into 'Words and Pictures', so the coach is always conscious of:

- What the player can see
- What the player can hear

'Pictures' does not obviously mean something the coach draws, but a whole range of possible VISUAL images.

- Diagrams
- Whiteboard illustrations
- Movie clips
- A situation at training: the coach gives the player feedback (words) while the player looks at the situation in question (picture)
- Many others

Body language is also important, because that is what the player sees (picture) while they listens to you (words)

In providing clear words and pictures when communicating, there are three considerations:

- ATTENTION
- INTEREST
- UNDERSTANDING

Below are some of the relevant considerations for the coach.

FACTOR	WORDS (Ears)	PICTURES (Eyes)
Attention	Do they know you're talking to them? Can they hear clearly? Possible audio distractions?	Can they see clearly? Possible visual distractions?
Interest	Tone of voice (variety, impact)	Body language positive Appropriate setting?
Understanding	Clearly spoken Not too many words Key words stressed/repeated Key point clear (not buried)	Clear demo /replay/rehearsal? Clear image on screen / whiteboard / tactic board, etc?

In essence, when the professional coach communicates:

- they have a clear message to deliver
- they keep the message simple
- they are efficient in their use of words: **less is more**
- they speak with an appropriate volume, tone and pace of delivery
- they avoid losing the key message by burying it amongst some other less important messages

You may have a wealth of knowledge, years of experience and wonderful insights…..

…but if you can't communicate effectively, you've got nothing.

KEY POINTS:

COACH + OTHERS = X (The coach is constantly striving to make the 'X', the result, greater)

If you're constantly dealing with other people, you have to be very good at communicating with them.

'Words and Pictures' (What do they hear, what do they see?)

Hearing and sight are the most important of the player's senses, so the two main ways to get inside the player's head are through the **EYES and EARS.**

Manage Others

Manage Self

The Coach + Others = X

Words

Pictures

Eyes

Ears

Player
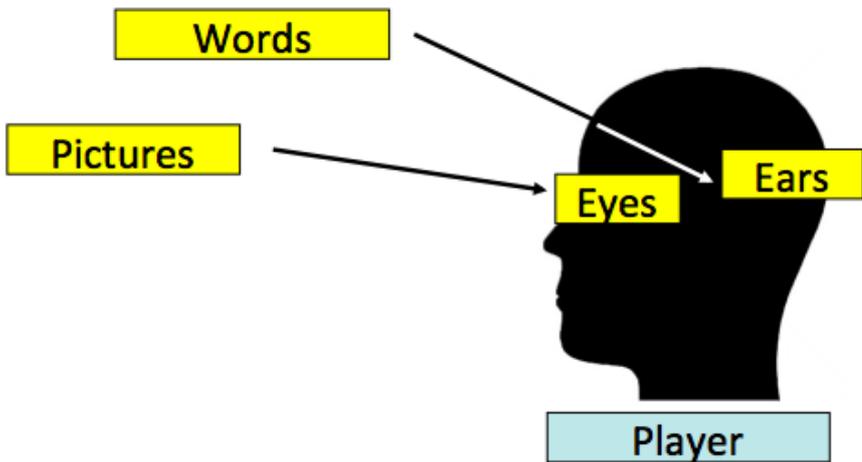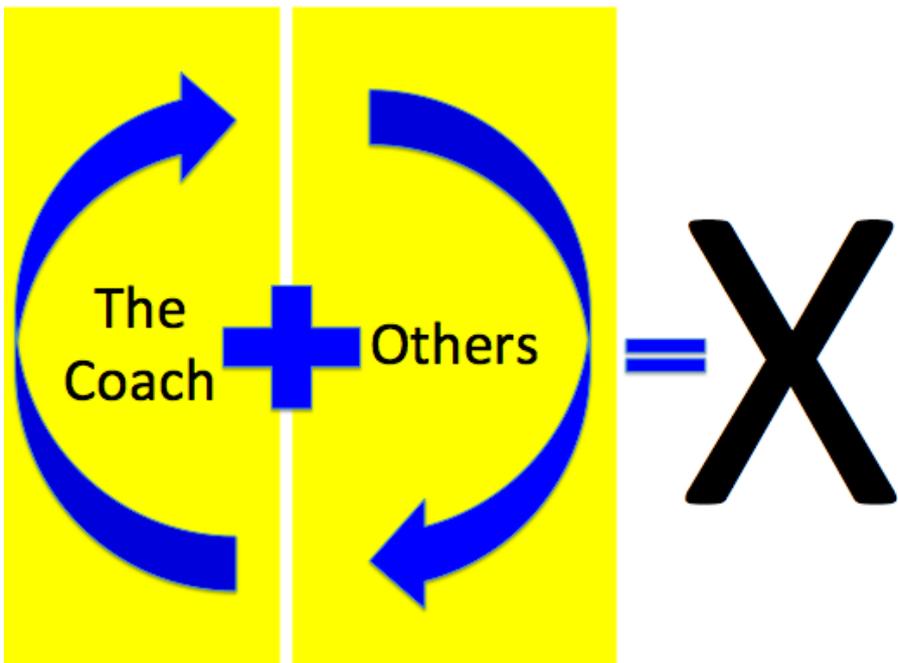
Refresh: Coaching Expertise Model
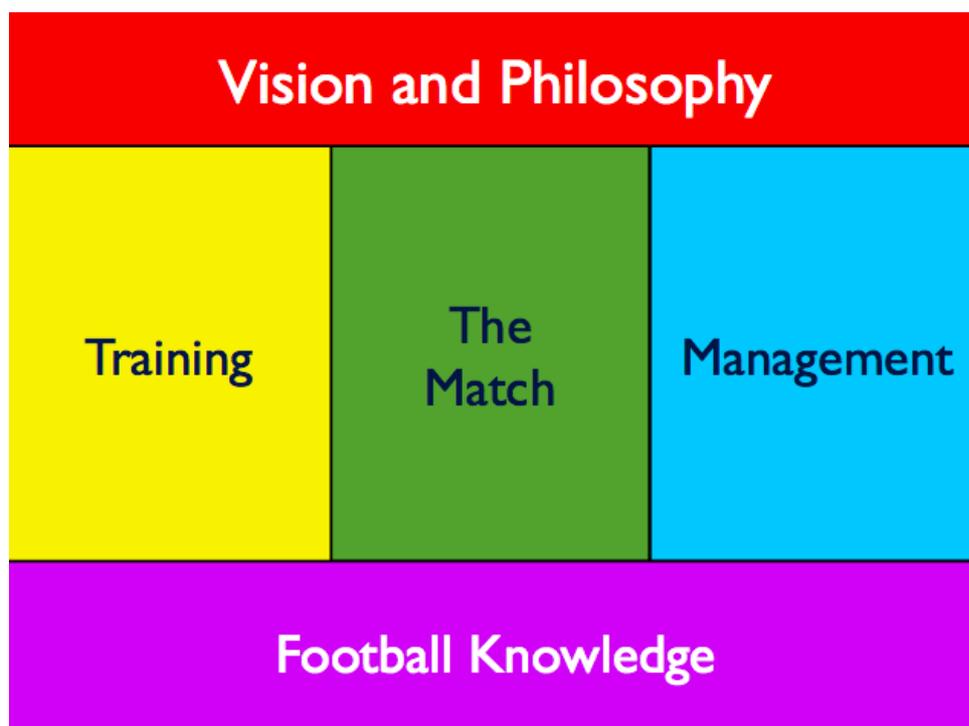
Overview of the TRAINING pillar

TRAINING			
PLAN	**PREPARE**	**CONDUCT**	**EVALUATE**
1. DEFINE a) Define football problem b) Define session objective 2. DESIGN a) 4 session components b) Script	1. PEOPLE 2. EQUIPMENT 3. ENVIRONMENT	1. FOUNDATION 2. ANIMATION 3. CONCLUSION	1. SESSION OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED? 2. FOOTBALL PROBLEM SOLVED? 3. NEXT STEPS

Let's look in more detail at the elements of CONDUCT that we touched on earlier:

FOUNDATION – ANIMATION - CONCLUSION

Revision:

ELEMENT:	ACTIVITY:	STAGES OF 'CONDUCTING A SESSION'
Pre-training	FRAME	**FOUNDATION**
PASSING PRACTICES	Players: Warming up Coach: Influencing	
POSITIONING GAMES	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	**ANIMATION**
GAME TRAINING	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	
TRAINING GAME	Players: Playing Coach: Assessing	**CONCLUSION**
Post-training	WRAP-UP	

Now, with added detail:

ELEMENT	STAGE	ACTIVITY	DETAIL
Pre-training	**FOUNDATION**	FRAME	Session briefing (Why?) Link past-present-future Switch on aural and visual learners
PASSING PRACTICES		WARM-UP	Passing Practices Hidden learning / repetition Players 'influenced'
POSITIONING GAMES	**ANIMATION**	CHECKLIST	Start, Organisation, Attitude, Ability, Understanding, Shape, Self
GAME TRAINING		TEACHING PROCESS	Task Observation Intervention
TRAINING GAME	**CONCLUSION**	APPLICATION	Players apply the session's learning in the Training Game
Post-training		WRAP-UP	De-brief, Cool-down, Re-generation

127

Most of this has been explored in previous modules, but we now need to focus our attention on the ANIMATION

Since you have:

- Identified and defined a football problem
- Written a session objective
- Planned four session components and described how they operate
- Set out a 'script' of Tasks, Actions and Cues to optimise the learning and teaching effect
- Considered the key elements of communicating these messages

..you can now go the field, comfortable that as a professional coach you have taken all possible steps BEFORE THE TRAINING SESSION to ensure that things go well DURING THE SESSION.

With a detailed, professional PLAN, it is now possible to PREPARE properly. PREPARE involves organising the necessary PEOPLE, EQUIPMENT and ENVIRONMENT, and these should all be clearly outlined in the session plan.

But we now need to consider how we should CONDUCT the main teaching parts of the session (Positioning Games and Game Training), which we call the ANIMATION.

| ANIMATION | CHECKLIST | **Start** **Organisation** **Attitude** **Ability** **Understanding** **Shape** **Self** |
| | TEACHING PROCESS | Task Observation Intervention |

Given that we are now at the stage of the session where the main teaching and learning take place, and that the performance of the team depends on the success of this session, it is crucial that nothing goes wrong. We do not want to waste time by conducting inefficient training.

When you ask coaches what kinds of things have gone wrong in their sessions, you tend to get answers like this:

- Too long to get started – players lost focus and enthusiasm
- Area not correct; cones missing or moved; areas not clear; size of area too big/small, etc
- Players' attitude wasn't right; not 'on task'
- Players couldn't do what I was asking of them
- The group (or some of them) didn't understand the rules of the practice, eg 'you can't go in that zone'; 'you have to get one of your team across that line for a goal'; 'player X has two touches but you can have as many as you like', etc
- It didn't look like football; didn't resemble our team structure
- I didn't focus on my topic; I lost my way

The principal question the coach must ask himself here is: 'Could I have prevented these things going wrong?'

Purpose of the Checklist?

So, you don't get to the end of the session with a poor outcome FOR REASONS THAT ARE PREVENTABLE!

It is not realistic to expect every training session to be perfect, but that does not mean you should not take steps to **maximise the chances** of every session being successful.

The 7 steps in the Checklist

1. START

Get it started quickly and efficiently

(NB: At this point, the coach allows the practice to flow without 'coaching' as such, while they go through points 2-6, which address the players and the set-up of the exercise. Some points may need addressing, or every point may be OK: the coach should, however, always go through the process of checking.)

2. ORGANISATION

All equipment in the correct spot? Area right size, etc

3. ATTITUDE

Are the players in the right frame of mind? Focused?

4. ABILITY

Are the players able to do what I'm asking of them?

5. UNDERSTANDING

Do the players understand the rules of the practice? Their roles?

6. SHAPE

Are the players in realistic positions relative to the way we play? This is obviously much more relevant in the Game Training stage, but does not mean it is not a consideration for the Positioning Game. The smart coach gives thought to the organization of their Positioning Games, and will often give certain players a certain role (or position) within it, to help achieve the desired learning.

It is true to say that the 'shape' part of the checklist is where many coaches lose their way. If the team shape in a Game Training (or Training Game for that matter) looks nothing like how the team is expected to play at the weekend, WHAT IS THE POINT OF THE EXERCISE?

Senior Team coaches must also pay attention to the shape of the 'opposition' in training. Often, it is vital for the shape (and actions) of the 'training opposition' to closely resemble the shape and actions of our next 'real opposition.'

(NB: At this point, having checked through to Point 6, the coach can be reasonably sure that everything is as ready as it can be, and they have built a steady platform for the teaching part. Now, point 7 concerns the coach himself….)

7. SELF

Am I in the right frame of mind? Am I focused on my Session Objective? Do I have a clear grasp of my Script? Do I have a Team Task ready?

(The coach should answer these with 'Yes')

A final consideration is to ensure that you are wearing training gear that distinguishes you from the players. Some may not see this as a life and death issue, but the professional coach is ALWAYS TAKING CARE OF THE DETAILS.

He therefore wants to avoid a situation where an activity at training breaks down because one of the players passed the ball to the coach, thinking him to be a team-mate.

CHECKLIST INITIALS:

S O A A U S S

Start
Organisation
Attitude
Ability
Understanding
Shape
Self

MNEMONIC? An easy way of remembering them in the right order….

S O A A U S S

'So
Obviously
All
Australians
Understand
Sporting
Success'

(feel free to make up one that works for you!)

The Checklist might take a few minutes to go through, but it has to be done to ensure quality. The coach should not be in a rush to 'start coaching'.

Question: What do the players need at the start of PG and GT exercises to ensure quality in THEIR performance?

Answer: **Time**

Time to get used to it (the numbers, the spaces, the rules, bounce of the ball, pace/tempo, their role, etc)

In other words, THEIR OWN PLAYING CHECKLIST! It probably takes the players a few minutes to go through their checklist.

So, the CHECKLIST stage is for both the coach AND the players.

You are now ready to **TEACH**

ANIMATION	CHECKLIST	Start Organisation Attitude Ability Understanding Shape Self
	TEACHING PROCESS	**Task** **Observation** **Intervention**

The Script from your Plan kicks in. The TEACHING PROCESS makes The Script work

- TEAM TASK
- PLAYER TASKS / ACTIONS
- COACH'S CUES

(Here we will consolidate what was covered in earlier Chapters when we looked at the purpose of the Script)

Step 1: Task

Set the Team Task - Loud and Clear!

You will be referring back to this Task regularly, so:
- Stress it!
- Repeat it!
- Make sure it gets through to them

Effective communication – WORDS and PICTURES
What do they hear and see?
Attention, Distraction?

Step 2: Observation

- Let them think about the Team Task and try to achieve it for a short while (you may even need to re-state the Team Task for certainty of their awareness)
- Think about what you expected to see and what you actually observe.
- If the whole process has been sound, from the very start, you should see the situations you saw in the Match and now have a platform to start improving Team Performance

What not to observe?
- Other problems

What if you see major issues not related to the session objective?
- 'Park' them – mental note (address later)
- In extreme cases, you may decide to make brief mention of it, but you should be reminding yourself 'I set out to achieve something in this session: how much will I allow myself to be distracted from successfully achieving it?'

Remember your Player Actions from the Plan, and observe the players in question.

- You should be seeing things that need fixing

The question is: HOW TO FIX THEM?

Step 3: Intervene

When a player needs assistance to reach the desired level of performance, the coach has to INTERVENE. If they don't, one can only assume that the player will continue to make the same mistake.

But what type of intervention?

The most common mistake many coaches make is to simply tell the player they are not doing what they should be doing. Very often, just to make things worse, the coach's tone is critical and the player is made to feel less than competent.

The only real outcome here is that it becomes clear to everyone that the coach 'knows what they want'; sadly, though, they don't know how to GET what they want!

This is unfortunate, because very often these coaches have correctly observed a fault with performance, which is a good skill to have; however, their error is in not knowing how to correct the fault.

Try to remember:

Telling them isn't teaching them

Our philosophy here is, once again, holistic. Training should always be about improving the team's performance; so when we correct a player, it is in the context of clarifying their role within the whole team.

- Training always revolves around the Team Model.

- We are always developing and fine-tuning the Playing Style.

So, by setting a Team Task first (Step 1), the coach establishes a point of reference: when they observe the football problem occurring (Step 2) and decides to intervene (Step 3), they can refer to the Team Task.

Task – Observation - Intervention

The coach's intervention can then sound more like 'how can you help the team achieve its task here?', rather than 'you're not doing what I want you to do.'

Why Intervene?

The primary purpose of intervening is to provide **FEEDBACK** to the player.

'Feedback is the rocket fuel that propels the acquisition of skill, and without it, no amount of practice is going to get you there'
Matthew Syed, 'Bounce'

Providing feedback / guidance

You have prepared for this role by carefully constructing a Script: this is where the Player Actions and Coach's Cues will be used

- Usually need to make clear what Actions are required first (they may not need the cues)
- 'So, if we are trying to …*Team Task*…, you have to try to …*Player Action*…'

Intervention 1

'Remember the Team Task? Here's what **you** should look to do to help us do it' (what you just did was not the best choice to make in order to help us)

Intervention 2

'Remember what we said you should try to do (Player Task/Action)? This was when you should have tried to do it (or you did try but it still needs improving): here's some guidance on how to do it successfully (Coach's Cue)'
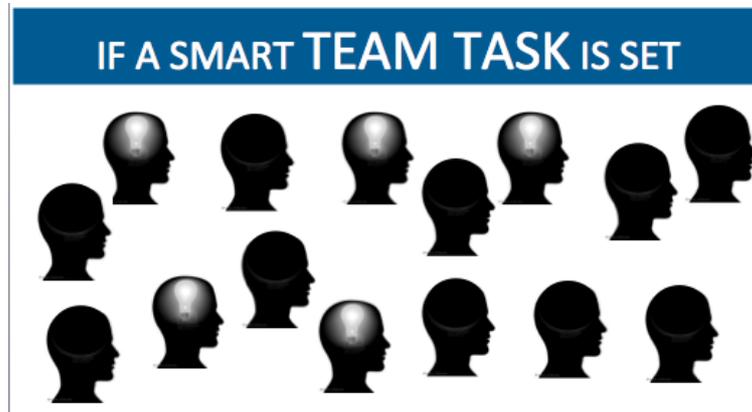
A number of light bulbs are switched on, as several of the players already 'get it'; the task makes sense to them and they understand their role in achieving it

Additional light bulbs are switched on, because more of the players 'get it'; TASKS/ACTIONS clarify their role in achieving the task.

IF THE COACH PROVIDES
EFFECTIVE CUES
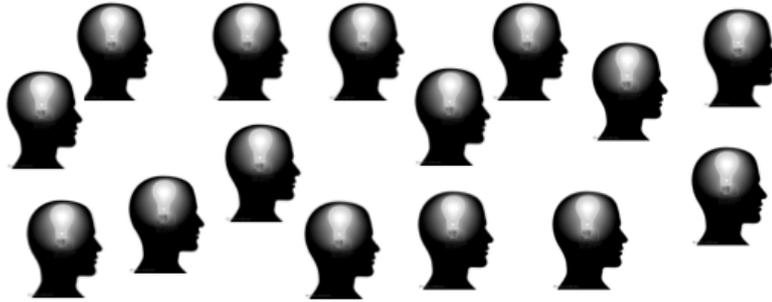
It is feasible that, by the end of the session, all the light bulbs are switched on, because now all of the players 'get it'; the coach has now given the right cues to those players who weren't sure how to properly perform their task to help the team succeed.

So, how do we make all this happen? What kind of interventions can the coach make?

As outlined earlier, analysis of football leads to the conclusion that the coach has to affect the player's PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION (P-D-E)

Therefore, it is logical that the coach, when providing feedback and guidance, should try to touch on all of them.

For this reason, questioning is a very useful tool.

Asking the player questions:

- involves him in the process
- allows them to express their views
- gives you an insight into the P-D-E that took place in their brain
- allows the coach to influence their P-D-E

Examples of questions:
PERCEPTION
'What did you see?'
'Can you see a space anywhere that would be a better place to show for the ball?'
'What didn't you like about the run Ben made?'
'What calls did you hear from your team-mates?'
'If we're trying to create a 1v1 situation for ourselves, where can you see some possibilities?'
'See how close the defender is: what does that tell you?'
DECISION
'So, our task is to get a back four player into the middle third in possession: what would have been a better pass to help make that happen?'
'You've ended up in this position here: can you tell me why you made that run?'
'What else do you think you could have done to help him lose their defender?'
'Obviously, we need to get someone into that space unmarked: How are we going to do that?'
EXECUTION
'Do you agree that if that pass was hit much harder, they could have turned before the defender arrived?'
'That was an excellent decision; can you now see that if you had arrived earlier you would have had a much greater chance of scoring?'
'Why did you use your left foot then?'
'What would have been a better way of getting that ball behind the defence?'

There is a definite skill required in dealing with how the player answers your questions.

Perhaps the most important and often neglected part of this skill is to actually LISTEN to what they say.

By answering the question you have cleverly worded, they are giving you an insight into the things you need to influence, their P-D-E.

Their answer may tell you where the issue is, which means you don't have to make assumptions on why they did what they did.

This is especially true when assessing their PERCEPTION: we cannot know how they perceived the situation just by watching the play. All that is apparent is what they actually did (EXECUTION), and that often gives a good indication of what choice they made (DECISION)

But their PERCEPTION is hidden from us.

Good questioning can help the player reveal what they made of what they saw and heard. Their answer often requires another question or a point of clarification from you to solidify the process.

137

To provide feedback the coach does not always have to use questioning. The intervention may be short and to the point: 'Shaun, that was the right decision, but if you play it earlier next time, we'll create more space. Everyone tune in: when you see that space and the pass is on, PLAY IT IN QUICKLY! OK, ball to the keeper and start again.'

The intervention may also be designed to give positive feedback and perhaps praise.

'Hold it there please, girls. That was excellent! We moved the ball quickly from the left side to the right, and as the defence shuffled across, Rob saw the gap between their two central midfielders, and that was the perfect time to deliver the ball to our number 10. That's where that goal chance came from. Well done!'

'Command' Style of Coaching

Otherwise known as 'direct instruction', this is a style of coaching that is not preferred by FFA. When you look at the main elements of the 'command' style listed below, it should be apparent why it is not suggested as a useful tool to our coaches.

- Decisions are made by the coach
- The player just has to listen and follow instructions
- The player is merely a vehicle for the animation of the coach's wishes, and therefore doesn't need to think
- The player focuses on ensuring they do what the coach wants to avoid annoying them

We have seen how Perception- Decision-Execution is at the root of all player activity in football; the coach who commands their players removes the need for a Perception-Decision stage by simply saying 'do this' (Execution)

This is not to say that a coach should never tell a player what they wants from them; it is a question of understanding. Does the player know WHY you want them to do it?

'When you get your head up and face forward, DO THIS!'
'If you're 1v1 against their centre-back, DO THIS!'

If the player knows WHAT you want them to do, WHY they should do it, WHERE, WHEN and HOW to do it, and you've provided them with a WHAT IF?, then you have coached them, not COMMANDED them.

<u>Other reasons for intervening:</u>

- Give feedback to individuals / whole group. Sometimes, the coach provides feedback as a 'progress report' rather than within a specific coaching situation, eg 'We've been managing to keep possession well, but in the last six phases of play we have only seen one pass behind the defence; I still think our midfield isn't looking early enough for that space we discussed, but the strikers also have to make sure they time their movement right.' This could also be extended into a question and answer with the players, in which they describe how they review their progress and suggest possible reasons for what's been happening. Naturally, this kind of feedback could also be given to an individual or small group.

- Adjust the constraints of the practice (the experienced coach will know when this is the most effective way of affecting what the players are doing; by changing the size of the area, limiting the number of touches, etc, the coach causes automatic and immediate changes in player behaviour)

- Modify the Task (eg, 'We're still trying to get the ball behind their back four, but now let's see how often we can do it while keeping the ball on the ground.')

When and how to deliver your messages?

WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY SHOULD SEE WHILE YOU'RE GIVING THE MESSAGE?

The Football picture

(everyone in the right position <u>AND THE BALL</u> in the right position)

FREEZE the action!

Now you can Communicate with WORDS (eg, required Player Actions) to accompany the PICTURE you're providing

= EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION!

Freezing the action:

Powerful tool, but must be done efficiently:
If you're sure this is the right moment to stop it…

- Give a loud and clear signal to 'freeze' (whistle; 'stop there!'; 'freeze!')
- The players and ball were in motion and it's too difficult to stop in a split-second, so it's important to say: 'Ball back! Everyone back where you were when I said Stop'

CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING STOPPING THE PLAY TO INTERVENE
It is a powerful tool to stop the players and show them the football situation; but it should not be over-used.
'Stop! Stand still!' has become the favourite tool for Australian coaches, but to a large extent it is being over-used and abused.
We have observed an overwhelming tendency to constantly stop the play and give long-winded, rambling speeches to the players. It has almost reached the point where it is an epidemic.
It has also given rise to the notion from outside the coaching fraternity that 'coaching isn't that difficult – all they seem to do is keep stopping the players and talking to them about football: I could do that'

Freezing the action is useful to give players a clear visual image of the football picture, which gives strong support to the verbal message being delivered. Usually, the coach is providing these 'words and pictures' to show something that needs improving. Therefore, it is recommended to reinforce the effect by demonstrating the desired outcome; in other words, allow them to 'see what you mean' by giving them 'proof.' This visual evidence is a solid foundation for learning.

'So, <u>this time</u> when the ball comes to you, take your first touch this way and NOW you can see and play that pass to John: OK, Dave will play the same ball to you again, and you try to make that happen.'

This doesn't mean the coach must physically demonstrate the action himself; ideally the player can do it after good verbal and non-verbal communication from the coach. In the example above, the coach may deliver the first sentence while demonstrating the key part of the message, 'FIRST TOUCH THIS WAY.'

Sometimes, the player(s) need more than one chance to actually perform things the way they should have happened. Bear in mind, the point of the whole intervention should be clear to all the players and they should be convinced that your preferred outcome is the better outcome. In addition, especially with senior players, they should feel that the point you spent that time and effort making was actually worth stopping the exercise for.

When the point has been made, the coach must make it clear to everyone that this 'controlled football situation' is over and they can play freely again. One simple way of doing this is to say 'OK, the ball is with Mike, he will play it to Sally and when Dave touches the ball we're all LIVE again'

Players will get used to the word 'LIVE' meaning that they are back playing for real again. Make sure that the play re-starts with the same situation in which you stopped it; we should see the same scenario as before, with the required adjustment being made. This confirms that your message has been delivered, understood and applied.

We often refer to this coaching tool as 'Freeze-Replay'

Steps:

FREEZE
SHOW/EXPLAIN WHAT NEEDS IMPROVING
DEMONSTRATION/REHEARSAL OF PREFERRED ACTION
GO LIVE

FREEZE / REPLAY

Prime considerations:

Avoid using it too often

When you do use it, limit the length of time each intervention takes

When to deliver the message?

'Freeze / replay' is one method.

There are two other possible moments:

- **During the action** (without freezing, 'on the run')

- **When the action has stopped** (Re-starts; drink break, etc)

These are most effective if used to reinforce key messages previously established (i.e. in 'freeze-replay')

Weaknesses of using these moments?

- *During the action:* do they even know you're talking to them? / can they hear what you're saying? / are you distracting them from their role in the game?

- *When the action has stopped:* can they visualise or even remember the situation you're referring to?

KEY POINTS:
The Checklist: Start, Organisation, Attitude, Ability, Understanding, Shape, Self
So, you don't get to the end of the session with a poor outcome FOR REASONS THAT ARE PREVENTABLE!
ANIMATION = TASK-OBSERVATION-INTERVENTION
The coach has to affect the player's PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION (P-D-E)
Questioning is a very useful tool.
Freeze/Replay is a powerful way of providing a 'picture' for players, but must not be misused; avoid using it too often and when you do use it, limit the length of time each intervention takes

CONDUCTING A TRAINING SESSION

Three Stages:

Foundation

Animation

Conclusion

Animation	Checklist	Start, Organisation, Attitude, Ability, Understanding, Shape, Self
	Teaching Process	Task – Observation - Intervention
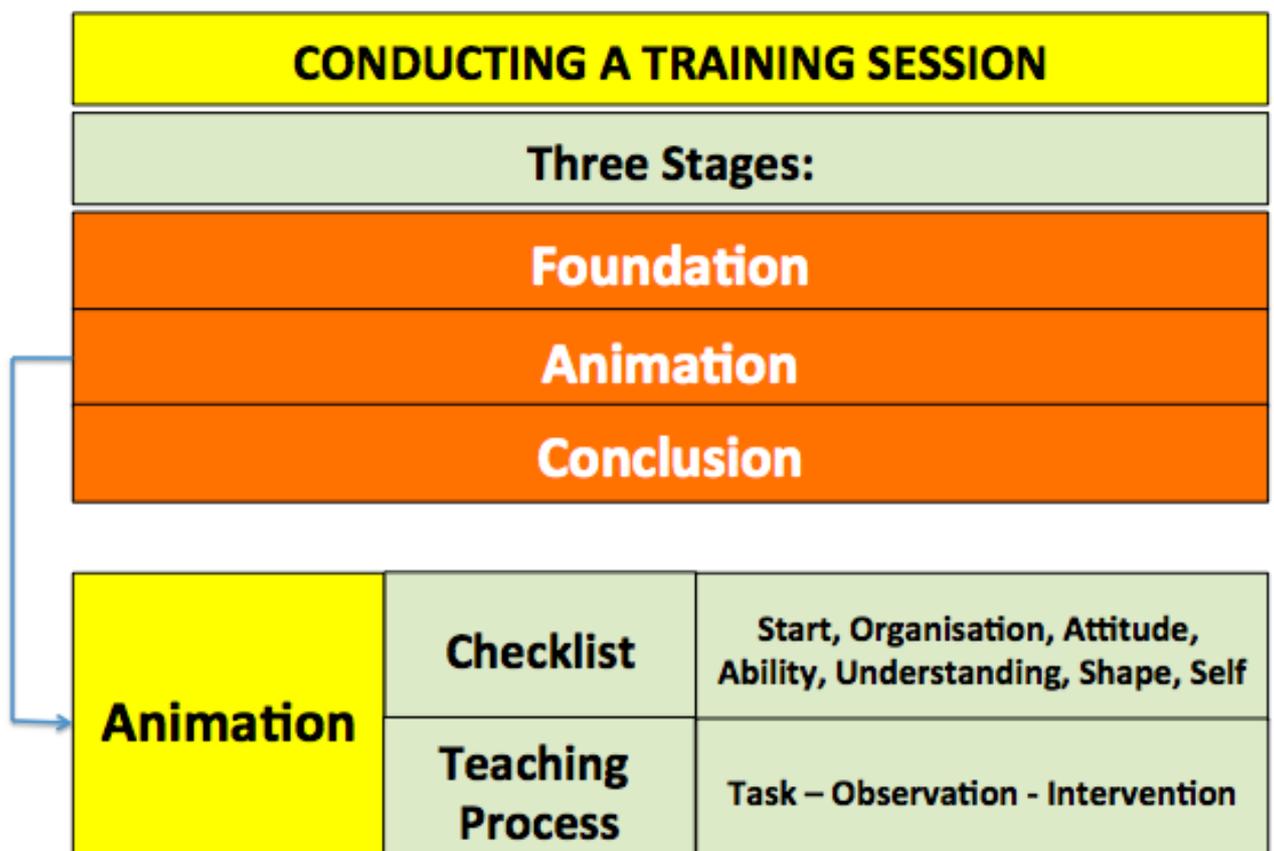
Chapter 14 – The Whole Process

This Part of the manual has guided you on a journey. As you travelled along the path, the intention was that you would be able to clearly see how everything is linked. By understanding the links from one element to the next, it is hoped that you have now experienced the nature of the processes involved in training football players effectively.

'If you can't describe what you're doing as a process,
then you don't know what you are doing.'
W. Edwards Deming

The process for planning a Training session:

Now you can go the Training Field
Write Script
Design Session Components
Define Session Objective
Define Football Problem
Analyse Football
Team Model - Playing Style
Football Vision
Football Philosophy
Football Knowledge

The process for conducting a Training session:

Evaluate the Session
Wrap-up
Training Game – Assess the success
Game Training Checklist – Teaching Process
Positioning Games Checklist – Teaching Process
Passing Practices – technical points
Frame the Session
Prepare – People, Equipment, Environment
At the Training Field

Operating as a professional coach demands the close management, and often the construction, of a number of logical processes. So far, we have looked at just a few.

As your career and your education as a coach progress, more processes will be required to be explored.

Part Two – Youth Football

This section primarily relates to coaches of players in the Skill Acquisition and Game Training Phases, approximately 9-17 years of age.

There are links and overlaps with Part One, naturally, because we are still talking about football and talking about coaching: it is the same game.

In some instances, the reader is directed back to certain sections of Part One and, in others, points made earlier are extended and consolidated.

Chapter 1 - Who are we trying to develop?

Physical and Mental characteristics of 9-17 year olds

In the FFA Coaching Expertise Model (below), 'Management' is made up of two elements:

1. Manage Self
2. Manage Others

Each of these has two parts.

1. Manage Self
   a. Know Self
   b. Develop Self
2. Manage Others
   a. Know Others
   b. Develop Others

In other words, Management for a coach is about developing yourself and the people you interact with, especially your players. The coach must 'Know Others' before they can 'Develop Others'

Before working with Youth players, therefore, the coach must try to know as much about them as possible. It is important to be aware of the specific characteristics of young people so that the coach can operate ethically and responsibly.

Following the Building Blocks methodology, the two phases we are concerned with in the Youth Development are:

SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE   9-13 years of age
GAME TRAINING PHASE   13-17 years of age

**So, what physical and mental characteristics
do we need to take into consideration?**

The most important aspect with youth players, in terms of safety and responsibility, is Growth.

GROWTH

Human growth is characterized by a long childhood from the age of 2 to the onset of puberty in which there is a fairly uniform increase in height of about 5 to 6 cm per year. This steady linear growth rate begins to increase at approximately 9 to 10 years of age in girls and 11 to 12 year in boys.

This point marks the start of the adolescent growth spurt in which the rate of growth dramatically increases. The rate of growth continues to increase until it reaches peak height velocity (PHV) then there is a rapid decline until linear growth eventually ceases (see diagram below)

Rate of height increase
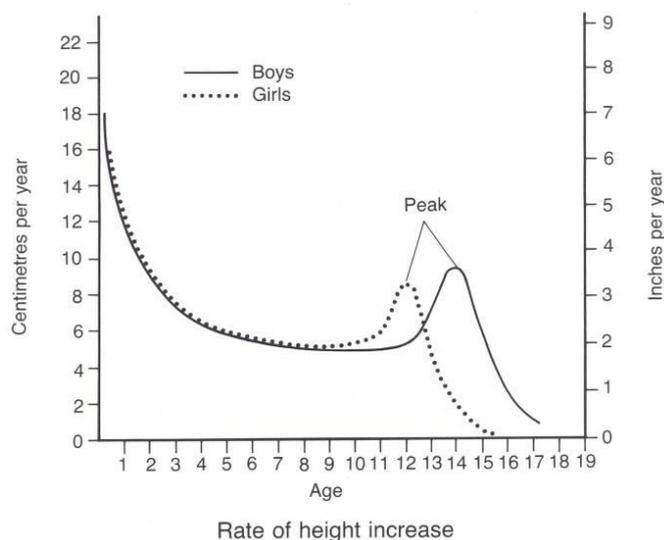
There is a wide variation in the onset of these maturation events, which is further complicated by the fact that there is also a wide range in the length of time taken to progress through the full process of maturation (see comparison of two males of the same age below)

AGE	MALE A (height in cm)	MALE B (height in cm)	DIFFERENCE
7	128	120	+ 8cm
14	173	156.5	+ 17.5cm
40	179.3	180.1	- 0.8cm

This uneven spread in maturity status in children of the same chronological age creates a major challenge for coaches in youth football. These differences must be considered particularly when selecting players in trials and when deciding on training loads.

- When trialling players, far too many youngsters are selected because they are early developers and have a temporary physical advantage, rather than on their potential for long-term success; this is often referred to as the Relative Age Effect
- It is often a mistake to provide the same training demands on a whole team simply because they are of a similar chronological age, especially during the growth spurt

Coaches must bear in mind that the start of the growth spurt will usually occur during the Skill Acquisition Phase (9-13 year-olds) and Peak Height Velocity will usually occur during the Game Training Phase (13-17)

They must also remember that within any one age-group (i.e. one team) different players will be at different stages of the growth spurt.

Key points to note:

- During the growth spurt, many teenagers shoot up so fast that their brains cannot keep up. As their height increases, their centre of gravity lifts. This happens so quickly that the brain does not get a chance to calculate the new rules for balancing. Clumsiness is often unavoidable.

- Children require energy for their body to grow. If they are submitted to excessive training loads, there may not be enough energy left for the body to perform its growth functions. This can lead to irregular growth patterns and potentially damaging effects. It is possible that youth departments of football clubs have been responsible for interfering with the natural growth of young players, and that is inexcusable.

The simplest solution is to measure the height of every player in the 9-17 age groups every month on the same day (eg, first Monday of every month). If a player has grown 1cm or more in a month, it might be a signal that this player is in a growth spurt (or a mini-growth spurt). Given that 'Prevention is better than Cure', a sound and responsible rule of thumb is to excuse the player from one training session per week, preferably the most demanding session.

If, as indicated by the 1cm increase in height, growth is indeed a priority, the player will keep growing during the period of reduced training (as more energy is available for growing).

Once the growth slows down to **0.5cm/month or less** the growth peak is clearly over and it's time to (gradually) increase the training volume/intensity again. This gradual approach is crucial as the body is a little vulnerable after a period of growth. Bones have grown quickly but muscle length adapts slower. Therefore, the tension in the tendons is temporarily higher.

Also, as mentioned earlier, the co-ordination and control over the body is temporarily lower after a growth spurt. This is another reason for choosing a gradual, rather than a quick return to full training.

Remember, it is only a rule of thumb and there will always be exceptions to any rule. Consultation with medical experts and the child's parents is always recommended.

We will now provide an overview of physical and mental characteristics for both of the relevant Building Blocks.

SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE (9-13 year-olds)
The characteristics of children this age are:
They are highly motivated and enthusiastic
They are competitive, like challenges and want to show they're the best
They are well balanced and coordinated (prior to growth spurt)
They are very adaptive to learning motor skills (prior to growth spurt)
Although still self centred, they start to learn how to work together
They are sensitive to criticism and failure (praise is important)
They are physically and mentally ready for a more structured approach of training

As mentioned above, in the period before entering the growing spurt that goes hand in hand with puberty, children are well balanced and coordinated. This makes them very adaptive to developing motor skills (techniques) especially since this also is the brain's key development period.

This is the **'Golden Age of motor learning'**.

In no other development phase in life will motor learning happen faster than here. As a logical consequence of the above it makes sense that we make optimal use of this period to lay a sustainable technical foundation.

TECHNIQUE MUST BE DEVELOPED NOW (if we miss out here it will hamper us for the rest of our playing career)

GAME TRAINING PHASE (13-17 year-olds)

The most important aspect of this age bracket is the fact that these players are in (or entering into) the **puberty** phase which is a phase of radical mental and physical changes.

Huge changes in the hormonal system cause confusion while the physical changes also unsettle the youngsters.

Physically they may sometimes suddenly look like adults but mentally they often are still children, something that may also confuse coaches.

Another aspect for coaches to consider is that girls enter the puberty phase in general slightly earlier than boys.

GAME TRAINING PHASE (13-17 year-olds)
The main **mental** characteristics of children this age are:
Uncertain in adopting an attitude
Sudden mood changes
Resistance against authority
Impulsiveness (acting before thinking)
Accelerated intellectual development
Identity search which leads to a desire to be part of a team
They are physically and mentally ready for a more structured approach of training

GAME TRAINING PHASE (13-17 year-olds)
The main **physical** characteristics of children this age are:
Highly increased production of the hormone testosterone which accelerates **growth**
Some of the consequences of the **'growth spurt'** are a temporary deterioration in co-ordination and reduction in strength
Players are prone to **overuse injuries** like Osgood-Schlatter's disease during this phase

Because suddenly the bones start growing fast and the muscles and ligaments as well as the nervous system need time to adjust to the new proportions, players suddenly may look 'clumsy'. (Players who are in this stage of maturation during trials may often miss out on selection, since many coaches mistakenly view their clumsiness as a sign that they are not good enough)

It goes without saying that it's of ultimate importance that coaches working with players this age have knowledge and understanding of all these aspects to be able to guide youngsters through this critical development phase in a well-considered way. While during the puberty phase players' physical and technical development temporarily stagnates or loses ground, their intellectual development accelerates as does their understanding of and appreciation for teamwork.

This makes the Game Training Phase exceptionally suited for developing tactical awareness (perception and decision-making)

Common Sense Principles:

- Coaches must remember that they are dealing with children, not adults
- Physical training should not form part of the training program; exercises should be ball-related emphasizing the development of skill and decision-making rather than fitness qualities such as endurance, speed or power
- The coach MUST instil a culture in which players will ALWAYS report minor injuries; they should not be afraid that if they miss any training or matches it will affect future selection when they've recovered
- There should be a culture across all Youth Development of taking minor injuries seriously, rather than dismissing them as 'nothing to worry about' or, worse, telling the player to 'toughen up and get on with it'
- Players should be recommended to a Sports Doctor or Physiotherapist for any chronic or recurring pain/swelling

Chapter 2 - What is Youth Development?

Properly-planned Youth Development

The importance of an effective system that develops quality players cannot be overstated; the youth of today are the Socceroos of tomorrow. If the long-term goal of Australia is to be a world leader in the world game, then it is absolutely essential that we have a world-class Youth Development system.

How could one define a world-class Youth Development system? Fundamentally, such a system could only be measured by the quality of the players it produces: if it is a world-class system, it would produce world-class players. Those players would play for Australia and consistently deliver world-class performances, keeping Australia in the top 20 of the FIFA rankings. For that you need a continuing stream of world-class players. Those players would also find themselves sought after by the world's best clubs.

It has to be said that, based on those criteria, Australia does not have a truly world-class Youth Development system.

That is not to say that Australia has not had some excellent youth coaches and high quality youth football programs. It is undeniable that, given the circumstances, Australia has tended to punch above its weight and achieve better results than many traditional football nations.

However, in order to realize our long-term goal we must honestly appraise our current Youth Development system, accept that it is not likely to bring world-class results and begin to make the necessary improvements.

Many of those improvements have already been put in motion.

This book and FFA's associated Coach Education programs aim to address the ongoing problem that many of the coaches working with youth players are untrained, or not appropriately trained

Let's now look at another specific problem that needs to be addressed in this country:

Youth Development is not properly planned

The Team Model is the point of reference for all coaches

In order to properly plan Youth Development, we need a starting point. We all know what 'Youth' is, and we looked closely at some characteristics in the last chapter. However, 'Development' needs a context: 'Development for what?'

A Youth coach can only effectively operate if they know the ultimate objectives. They are not just preparing the players to play football: they are developing players to play a SPECIFIC TYPE OF FOOTBALL.

The foundation is FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE. The starting point for everything a coach does is a FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY; this leads to a clear FOOTBALL VISION; the key elements in the VISION are the PLAYING STYLE and the TEAM MODEL that brings it to life.

TEAM MODEL
PLAYING STYLE
FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY
FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE
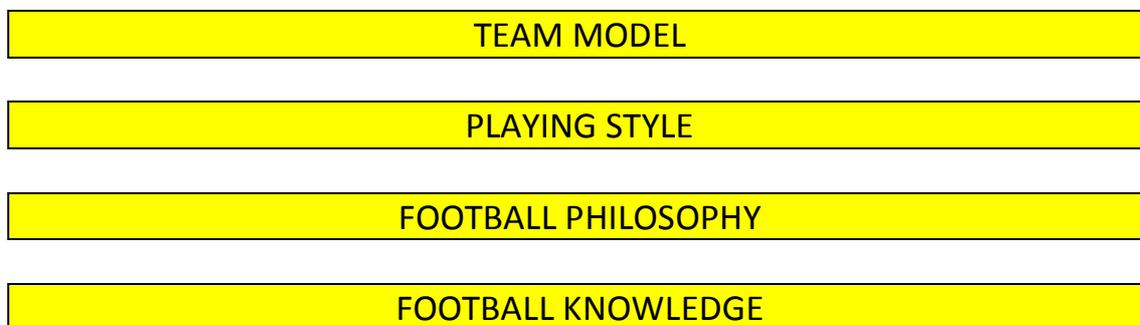
FFA has articulated explanations of all of these, and they can be found in detail in Part One of this manual, and in the Coaching Expertise Model in the Appendix.

Here, we remind you of FFA's Playing Style and Team Model:

FFA Playing Style Statement:

A pro-active brand of football, based on effective possession, with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals.

Defensively the key components are quick transition and intelligent collective pressing.

The Playing Style is underpinned by a strong 'team mentality', capitalizing on Australia's traditional strengths.

Team Model:

OUTCOME	WIN MATCHES			
OBJECTIVES	SCORE GOALS		PREVENT GOALS	
METHODS	GET THE BALL AND YOUR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS		PREVENT THE OPPONENT GETTING THE BALL AND THEIR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS	
MAIN MOMENTS	**BPO>BP**	**BP**	**BP>BPO**	**BPO**
KEY PRINCIPLES	Immediate transition into BP positions	Effective Possession 1. Structured Build-Up	Immediate transition into BPO positions	Win the ball back as soon as possible
	Quick forward passing	Effective Possession 2. Controlled Possession In The Middle Third	Press the ball carrier immediately	Deny opponents time and space to build up
	Quick forward movement	Combination Play 1. Organised Opponent	Limit opponent's passing options	Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances
	Make the field as big as possible	Combination Play 2. Disorganised Opponent	Make the field as small as possible	
		Individual Skill 1. To create scoring chances		
		Individual Skill 2. To convert scoring chances		
TEAM TASKS	(Fundamental Tasks to make the Key Principles happen)			
PLAYER TASKS	(General and Position-specific)			
PLAYER ACTIONS	Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating		Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating	

Armed with this information, the Youth coaches have a much clearer idea of what is required of them. They now know what the end product looks like.

Age-appropriate Coaching

But there is still something missing. The Youth coaches need answers to questions like:

'I'm coaching the U12s: what should I be doing?'

'What is the sequence of development steps that take us from the U9s to the First team?'

Finding the answers starts with the Building Blocks.

The Building Blocks outline the nature of each stage of development and the main role of the coaches within each stage. The two phases concerned with Youth Development are described below:

Age 9-13   Skill Acquisition Phase

Role of the Coach:
'To prepare talented players for team football by developing the functional game skills'

Age 13-17   Game Training Phase

Role of the Coach:
'To prepare skilful players for performance phase football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting'

(Remember, the Discovery Phase for 5-9 year-olds is about exposing the youngsters to the nature of football in a fun environment, without 'coaching')

154

An 8-year process must be planned in order to prepare players for the Performance Phase

So, we have a context for Youth Development:

TEAM MODEL   =   THE DESTINATION

BUILDING BLOCKS   =   THE MAP TO GET YOU THERE

There is an 8-year process to be planned, spanning two phases of the Building Blocks.

We will look at the Game Training and Skill Acquisition phases separately in later chapters, considering the factors involved in designing the Four Year Plans for each phase.

Chapter 3 - Why Youth Development?

It is worth reminding ourselves of the reasons why this book has been produced:

- Australia has set a long-term mission to be a world leader in the world game
- Youth Development and Coach Education are the two strategic spearheads to help achieve the mission
- Youth Development in Australia needs to be improved before it can be called world-class
- Youth Coaching in Australia is largely not at the appropriate standard

'Problem Prevention' is the key

FFA has a National Football Curriculum which sets the direction for football in this country. A major part of that direction is FFA's National Philosophy on Football, including the key elements of the Vision required to bring it to life:

- A clear Playing Style
- A carefully-constructed Team Model

Youth Development, therefore, has a key role in preparing players to be able to play according to the stated Playing Style and in the context of the Team Model.

There are also interesting contrasts between the functions of the Senior Coach and the Youth Coaches. These apply both in the National context in which Australia aims to develop players for the Socceroos, and in the 'local' context within a properly-organised and structured club, where the aim is to develop players for the First Team.

The Senior Coach:
- fixes problems with the team, based on recent performance(s)
- prepares the team to deal with problems expected in an upcoming match
- focuses on the short-term, as their role is generally results-based

The Youth Coaches:
- aim to 'prevent problems in the future' (Remember, 'prevention is better than cure')
- prepare players to be 'problem-solvers' and able to deal with all or most opponents
- focus on the long-term, as their role is based on individual development for the future

If the Youth Coaches do a good job, the Senior Coach's job should be easier:

- There should be fewer problems to fix
- The problems observed should be easier to fix
- As the Playing Style has been developed logically and progressively over an 8-year period, the Senior Coach needs only to make adjustments to Team Tasks and Player Tasks, which suits the short-term nature of their role. Developing a Playing Style from scratch would be much harder for the Senior Coach and would require a lot of time; it would also be more likely to break down under pressure compared to a Playing Style that has been ingrained over many years

The over-riding benefit to a properly planned Youth Development system is that every coach in the system, right up to the First Team, is on the same page and working in unison towards a common goal.

The next three chapters are concerned with the Game Training Phase. This phase is closely related to the content of Part One of this manual and therefore revision of the relevant Chapters is highly recommended.

Chapter 4 - 4-year plan for the Game Training phase

Definitions

The Game Training Phase – 13-17 years of age

Role of the Coach:

> 'To prepare skilful players for performance phase football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting'

Team Model is the point of reference

As we saw in the previous chapter, the FFA Team Model gives context to every coach in Australia, regardless of age-group.

The Performance Phase obviously incorporates the whole model. As the Game Training phase must prepare players for that, there must be a progressive development of the Key Principles and Team Tasks for all four Main Moments, as well as the underlying Player Tasks and Actions.

Work backwards logically

Therefore, one can outline in a structured way the logical steps required to produce players at 17 years of age (the end of the Game Training Phase) who can play according to the Playing Style.

In other words, you have four years to teach skilful 13 year-old players (the 'fruit' of the Skill Acquisition phase) how to use functional game skills in the context of the Team Model, preparing them for Performance Phase football.

Planning Guidelines

We believe that the vast majority of Youth Training in Australia is not properly planned and often not planned at all. To address this issue, below are our guidelines to assist in establishing a structured process.

1) Divide the Game Training Phase into four separate years

2) Divide each year into 6-week cycles

3) Label each cycle and week (eg, 'Cycle 3, Week 4')

4) Insert the competition games and expected pre-season games

5) Mark the days on which training sessions for that age-group will take place

The first two cycles for an U-14 team might now look like this (T = Training, G = Game)

U-17	CYCLE 1						CYCLE 2					
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
MON	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
TUE	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
WED												
THU	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
FRI												
SAT	T	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
SUN												
Note:		Internal Game	Pre-season friendlies				Season starts					

Now the coach (or ideally, the Technical Director) can plan the technical content for each cycle.

It is at this point that one really sees the value of a well-constructed Team Model. Rather than devising random training session topics, the overarching content and themes for sessions are contained in the Model.

Firstly, the Playing Style is outlined in the Model according to the natural structure of football, that is the Four Main Moments.

So now one can label each training session in the cycle with a Main Moment focus.

Rotating the Four Main Moments to develop the Playing Style

The decision that needs to be made now is: 'Do I devote equal amounts of training time to each Main Moment, or allocate differing amounts?'

Do we just plan like this, with an equal number of sessions allocated to BP and BPO and to both Transition moments?:

Day	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6
MON	BP	BPO>BP	BPO	BP>BPO	BP	BPO>BP
TUE	BP>BPO	BP	BPO>BP	BPO	BP>BPO	BP
THU	BPO	BP>BPO	BP	BPO>BP	BPO	BP>BPO

What might be the issues with the above?

Or do we plan the training session themes another way?

The key to solving this question is in the section heading above:

'Rotating the Four Main Moments to develop the Playing Style'

Once again, we see the importance of a clear Philosophy and Vision on Football. Because we have articulated a Playing Style, we are able to make logical decisions about what we do. The FFA Playing Style is:

FFA Playing Style Statement
A pro-active brand of football, based on effective possession, with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals. Defensively the key components are quick transition and intelligent collective pressing. The Playing Style is underpinned by a strong 'team mentality', capitalizing on Australia's traditional strengths.

Therefore, when deciding how to allocate training session themes, we naturally opt for more time to be spent on BP. Also, we believe that defending (BPO) is easier to teach than pro-active, creative attacking (BP)

In regards to the two Transition moments (BP>BPO and BPO>BP), it is our belief that:

- Both Transition moments can be addressed in the same training session, since when Team A is in BP>BPO, Team B is in BPO>BP
- The smart coach incorporates the Transition moments within every BP and BPO session so the players are conditioned to see the links between them (eg, while teaching BP in the front third, the practice is allowed to flow into BP>BPO so the players learn/practice the early pressing required in the Playing Style)

Our rough guide on Main Moment allocation is:

BP   50%
BPO   33%
TRANSITION   16%

This means that, for example, every six sessions would be made up of:

BP   3 sessions
BPO   2 sessions
TRANSITION   1 session

There is no 'magic' order, but it might look like this for our U14 team above:

Day	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6
MON	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP
TUE	BP	BPO	BP	BPO	BP	BPO
THU	BPO	TRANS	BPO	TRANS	BPO	TRANS

160

A whole range of possible considerations might lead to a different order to this, but the key points are:

- Training is planned in 6-week cycles
- The Main Moments are rotated using a designated allocation which is based on the Playing Style

(Hypothetical: If a certain country (or club) outlines a Playing Style statement that contrasts with FFA's, they would also be expected to choose a contrasting allocation of Main Moment themes. For example, if their style is based on deep, compact defending as a starting point, with quick counterattacks as their main weapon in BP, they may decide to spend the majority of their time working on BPO and BPO>BP)

Teaching the Key Principles within the Four Main Moments to develop the Playing Style

Again, we are about to see the value of a well-constructed Team Model.

We have allocated Main Moment themes to every training session, and the breakdown was based on the Playing Style statement.

Now we can add more detail to each session content, by choosing which Key Principle will be developed.

So, using BP as an example, we refer back to the Team Model and find six Key Principles:

MAIN MOMENT	KEY PRINCIPLES
Ball Possession (BP)	Structured Build-Up
	Controlled Possession In The Middle Third
	Combination Play v Organised Opponent
	Combination Play v Disorganised Opponent
	Individual Skill to create scoring chances
	Individual Skill to convert scoring chances

These are the 'main headings' of BP training sessions. Following them ensures that we are working towards developing the Team Model according to the Playing Style. There is consistency and there is a planned process; we are avoiding random, unplanned activities that may 'look like football' but do not contribute to a structured Youth Development system with stated objectives.

A Youth Coach in the Game Training phase should always know which Main Moment and which Key Principle they are working on in every single training session they conducts.

If we look again at our U14 cycle above, we must now add Key Principles to the BP sessions. Just as we did with the main Moment allocation, we must now decide how to 'rotate' the Key Principles (equal time, or weighted?)

New Cycle, New Focus

The next important consideration is in relation to the 6-week cycles. It is a good idea to determine a main focus for each cycle and to allocate the Key Principles according to that.

Below is a hypothetical example of planning one cycle for our U14 team:

U14s – CYCLE 1	
BALL POSSESSION	**TOTAL SESSIONS = 9**
MAIN FOCUS: Develop ability to play out from the back	
KEY PRINCIPLES	ALLOCATION
Structured Build-Up	5
Controlled Possession In The Middle Third	2
Combination Play v Organised Opponent	1
Combination Play v Disorganised Opponent	0
Individual Skill to create scoring chances	1
Individual Skill to convert scoring chances	0
BALL POSSESSION OPPONENT	**TOTAL SESSIONS = 6**
MAIN FOCUS: Win the ball back as soon as possible	
KEY PRINCIPLES	ALLOCATION
Win the ball back as soon as possible	4
Deny opponents time and space to build up	0
Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances	2
TRANSITION	**TOTAL SESSIONS = 3**
MAIN FOCUS: BP>BPO – Immediate transition into BPO positions	
KEY PRINCIPLES	ALLOCATION
Immediate transition into BPO positions	3

U14 s - CYCLE 1						
Day	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6
MON	BP Structured build-up	BP Structured build-up	BP Structured build-up	BP Structured build-up	BP Structured build-up	BP Controlled Possession In The Middle Third
TUE	BP Controlled Possession In The Middle Third	BPO Win the ball back as soon as possible	BP Combination Play v Organised Opponent	BPO Win the ball back as soon as possible	BP Individual Skill to create scoring chances	BPO Win the ball back as soon as possible
THU	BPO Win the ball back as soon as possible	TRANS Immediate transition into BPO positions	BPO Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances	TRANS Immediate transition into BPO positions	BPO Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances	TRANS Immediate transition into BPO positions

A key point to remember here is that devoting more time to a specific aspect of the Team Model for 6 weeks will lead to better learning of that aspect.

Cycle 2 can be planned to focus on other Key Principles, or to further reinforce and extend the learning of Cycle 1 by repeating the program (or a combination of both, depending on team progress)

The decisions to be made next are:

- How to progressively develop the Main Moments and Key Principles **over the cycles of one season**
- How to progressively develop the Main Moments and Key Principles **over the four years of the phase**

These are the challenges for coaches and Technical Directors and there is no magic formula to follow. However, some guidelines are:

- If you do not plan, you are inviting chaos
- Use a step-by-step and year-by-year approach to develop players for the Performance Phase
- The plan is your guide, but do not be too religious in following it: you may need to adjust it based on how the players are developing
- Your Annual Plans will improve from year to year with experience and learning from mistakes
- Remember the 5 Ps: Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance
- We might add another 5 Ps specifically for Youth Development: 'Patience; Planned Process; Progressive Perfection'

The Plan is only a Guide

As mentioned above, planning is essential to avoid training becoming ineffective or, worse, descending into chaos.

There is a structured approach and a series of logical, progressive steps.

However, the coach (and Technical Director) need to regularly assess the players' progress and then decide whether the training plan must be adjusted. For example, the players have developed a very good understanding of their tasks in BPO but are still deficient in BP; the breakdown of Main Moments might need to be changed, changing two BPO sessions into BP sessions, with a specific Key Principle and defined Team Tasks as the focus.

Assessing Performance in matches

The key points are:

- Focus your observation on how successfully the players are implementing what has recently been taught at training. The Main Focus of the Cycle should be a major factor in observation, especially towards the end of the Cycle

- Winning is the purpose of football and it is an important part of player development; however, the Youth Coach must remember that their role is not to get their team to win the Championship, but to develop individual players who will be successful within the Playing Style when they reach the Performance Phase (winning titles is an incidental bonus!) So, on Match Day the youth coach avoids emotional behavior with constant reaction to every incident in the game; rather than shout instructions, they observe what the players do and listens to their communication. This will help them gain an accurate indication of the players' progress and the success of their training program.

Setting Annual Performance Targets

To assist in the process of progress assessment, annual performance targets should be written and used as a yardstick.

These should not be complicated, but should centre on the development of the Team Model in a structured manner.

From 'Individuals' to 'Positions'

The Game Training phase is the development stage in which players gradually evolve from 'general skilful players' at the end of the Skill Acquisition phase, into 'specialist position players'

The Team Model has clearly defined positions for the 1-4-3-3 formation with shirt numbers, and players begin to show aptitude for one or two of them. By the end of the Game Training phase, the players should know their basic tasks in these positions.

SEE APPENDIX FOR 1-4-3-3 PLAYER POSITION PROFILES

Fitness Training

You will have noted there is no mention in the planning process outlined above of 'fitness training', 'conditioning' or 'gym sessions'.

This is intentional. FFA's holistic philosophy applies to all aspects of football, and we do not believe in isolated fitness training just as we do not believe in isolated technique training.

The best way to get fit to play football is to practice playing football.

Football Training **is** conditioning for football.

We have adopted the Football Conditioning Model of world-renowned expert Raymond Verheijen, in which football-specific exercises are used to develop football fitness. Since our approach is to introduce Football Conditioning in the Performance Phase (after the growth spurt), it is not necessary to explain this model here.

Number of Training Sessions per week

FFA recommends that 3-4 training session per week is the maximum safe workload for players in the Game Training Phase.

4 sessions per week would only be acceptable in a first class environment, such as a National Training Centre program, where there is a full-time, professional coach and qualified support staff to monitor workloads. Player welfare is paramount.

In the wrong setting, 4 sessions per week could be harmful.

So, now we should have a four-year plan which outlines a structured development process for players from U14s up to U17s.

The Coach / Technical Director can develop their own templates or expand those given above as examples.

The main point is that Youth Development should have a structure and a planned process. This will hopefully mean that talented young players in Australia will no longer have to endure training that is unplanned, inappropriate, counter-productive and a waste of time.

Given our long-term mission, that is surely something we should all strive for.

Chapter 5 - Planning the Individual Game Training Sessions

As we learnt previously in 'The Football Coaching Process', Training is comprised of four elements:

PLAN
PREPARE
CONDUCT
EVALUATE

The first step, PLAN, is made up of:

1. DEFINE
2. DESIGN

DEFINE in the Performance Phase consists of:

- Football Problem?
- Session Objective?

A First Team Head Coach generally defines football problems based on issues identified in the execution of the team Playing Style in recent games, or based on expected issues with an upcoming opponent (this includes exploiting anticipated weaknesses of the opponent)

A Youth Coach, who is engaged in a long-term process of development, does not concern himself with these short-term, results-based issues. The question of identifying the Football Problem is answered in advance, and we saw earlier that Youth Development can be viewed as a process of 'Problem Prevention'

The answer is in the Annual Plan, which forms part of the Four-Year Game Training Phase Plan.

So, if we have a Four-Year Plan, we simply have to look for:

- The Age Group (eg, U15)
- The Cycle
- The Week
- The Day (ie, which training session of that week?)

We should then be able to see:

- The Main Moment to focus on
- The Key Principle from the Team Model to zoom in on

So, DEFINE in the Game Training Phase consists of:

- Main Moment / Key Principle?
- Session Objective?

So, the coach knows which Main Moment / Key Principle to focus on, since it is in the Annual Plan, but before writing the Session Objective they must ask themself:

Based on observation of recent performances, where are we in terms of progress with this Main Moment / Key Principle?

Their analysis and notes should lead them to choosing an appropriate Team Task.

The first part of the Session Plan might then look like this:

Main Moment: _____

Key Principle:

_____

Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve:

Team Task:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

By focusing on: Player Tasks (General / Position-specific):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

The Team Task, as well as the Player Tasks and Actions, should be found in the model, but might also be adjusted versions based on recent observations of match performance.

A hypothetical example is below:

Main Moment: Ball Possession

Key Principle: Structured Build-up

Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve:

Team Task: Get one of our players into the middle third in controlled possession

By focusing on: Player Tasks (General / Position-specific):

- Goalkeeper, act as an extra field player by supporting the ball
- 2 and 5, push high and wide
- 6 and 8, start high to create more space for back four
- 3 and 4, look for opportunities to bring the ball forward into space or receive the ball in space in the middle third

The second part of PLAN is:

DESIGN

This consists of two elements:

- Session Components
- The Script

These follow the same steps as the Performance Phase (outlined in depth in Part One of this manual)

Chapter 6 - Conducting the Game Training Session

This also follows the same overall process as the Performance Phase, and is outlined in depth in Part One of this manual.

Re-cap of Key Points:

STAGES OF 'CONDUCTING A SESSION'	ELEMENT:	ACTIVITY:
FOUNDATION	*Pre-training*	FRAME
	PASSING PRACTICES	**Players: Warming up** **Coach: Influencing**
ANIMATION	**POSITIONING GAMES**	**Players: Learning** **Coach: Teaching**
	GAME TRAINING	**Players: Learning** **Coach: Teaching**
CONCLUSION	**TRAINING GAME**	**Players: Playing** **Coach: Assessing**
	Post-training	WRAP-UP

One point that must be stressed, however, is that after CONDUCTING the session, the coach must EVALUATE it.

He begins to evaluate during the Training Game, assessing how well the players can apply what they have learned.

This 'EVALUATION' part is crucial. The Youth Coach is engaged in a long-term process of Player Development, which means that individual progress must be evaluated and recorded. This information will constantly assist the coach in session design and lead to better achievement against expected outcomes.

(This information can also guide the Technical Director and others in regards to annual selection of players. In Australia there is far too much reliance on flawed methods of post-season trialling, rather than longitudinal assessment of players and a more effective system of player retention/recruitment.)

Coaches are also reminded of the FFA Youth Coaching Checklist:

- Is football being played?

- Is football being learned (and therefore taught)?

- Is football being experienced (and enjoyed)?

- Do the players understand the football purpose of the exercise?

- Do the players recognize the game-related intention?

- Are the players challenged to improve?

These questions should always be answered with 'YES' in every Youth training session.

The next six Chapters are concerned with the Skill Acquisition Phase. There are many key differences from the Performance and Game Training Phases which will be covered in depth.

Chapter 7 - Why Skill?

Role of the Coach – definition

In the Building Blocks, for the Skill Acquisition Phase (9-13 year-olds) the coach's role is defined as follows:

'To prepare players for team football by developing the functional game skills'

This definition paints a very clear picture of the Skill Acquisition Phase:

- It is about 'preparing' for team football: team performance is not the focus
- The coach develops in individuals the skills required to play team football effectively, but they must be 'functional' and not 'circus tricks'

Football is a very complex game and it takes a long time to become an 'expert'

We are all aware that competitive 11v11 football is a complex game and extremely difficult to master. Some of the reasons for this are:

- the range of possible actions and tasks the player must perform is vast
- the game requires a high degree of cognitive skill (quick perception and immediate decision-making)
- the ball can be passed forwards as well as sideways and backwards
- at any given moment, in or out of possession, there are a large number of possible options to consider
- the player must be able to use their whole body (except the arms) to control and manipulate the ball
- there is a wide range of tactical and strategic variations within many playing styles

Therefore, there needs to be a long period in which the game is progressively learned. The introduction of small-sided football as the competition medium for younger players also reflects this: 11v11 is just too complex.

It is generally accepted that it takes around ten years of solid practicing and playing to progress from first experiencing football to being able to function as a player in competitive 11v11 football.

'Golden Age of Learning'

Within this lengthy period of learning football, players of around 9 years of age enter the Skill Acquisition Phase having spent three or four years in the Discovery Phase.

We can now see 'talented' players emerging.

Crucially, as outlined in Chapter 1 of this section of the manual, these pre-growth spurt children are perfectly suited to the development of motor skills. This is a

'Golden Age' for learning football skills, as the players are well-balanced and co-ordinated and the brain is also developing quickly.

So, the main points behind the Skill Acquisition Phase are:

- players must first learn the skills before learning how to use them in team football
- this phase is part of a long-term process for learning such a complex game
- we must capitalise on the physical and mental 'Golden Age of Learning'

Special players who decide matches

Analysis of the 2010 World Cup highlighted the fact that the top four teams (Spain, Holland, Germany and Uruguay) all had special 'matchwinning' players.

- Xavi, Villa, Iniesta (Spain)
- Sneijder, Robben, Van Persie (Holland)
- Oezil, Mueller, Schweinsteiger (Germany)
- Forlan, Suarez, Cavani (Uruguay)

Other countries had theirs too:

- Messi, Higuain, Aguero, Tevez (Argentina)
- Robinho, Luis Fabiano, Kaka (Brazil)

Throughout the history of football, when one thinks of the great teams one immediately thinks of the special players within them (Di Stefano, Pele, Cruyff, Maradona, Platini, Zidane, Ronaldo, etc)

These players are the ones who can single-handedly decide the outcome of matches. As more and more teams have developed the ability to defend effectively, with compact lines, zonal marking and little space allowed, it is the skilful players with creative, individual flair that tend to make the difference at the highest levels.

Australia clearly does not produce enough of these special players. It could be argued that we have reached top 20-30 status in world football by utilizing the traditional Australian strengths, such as our 'never-say-die' mentality, physical commitment and bravery. It could also be argued that we are unlikely to reach the consistently higher ranking that we desire without producing more of the special matchwinning players that all the top nations seem to have.

The Skill Acquisition Phase is where we will develop this type of player.

The coach's mindset in this Phase must be one of pure individual development. They are not obsessed with the weekend result their team achieves, but the long-term potential for development and improvement in their players.
The focus is on teaching a full range of skills to all the players, rather than 'team tactics' or 'fitness training' in order to win next weekend's match.

By focusing on SKILL in this phase, we should naturally end up with a larger number of skillful players. The key is to set up the right conditions.

With the right coaches, the right programs and the right identification processes we can start to have a huge influence on the future of football in Australia.

Chapter 8 - What Skills are necessary in Football?

We considered the importance of skill acquisition in the previous chapter.

It is now time to look specifically at the skills in question.

'The Team Model is the point of reference'

As is often the case, we find our answers in the Team Model.

OUTCOME	WIN MATCHES			
OBJECTIVES	SCORE GOALS		PREVENT GOALS	
METHODS	GET THE BALL AND YOUR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS		PREVENT THE OPPONENT GETTING THE BALL AND THEIR PLAYERS INTO GOALSCORING POSITIONS	
MAIN MOMENTS	**BPO>BP**	**BP**	**BP>BPO**	**BPO**
KEY PRINCIPLES	Immediate transition into BP positions	Effective Possession 1. Structured Build-Up	Immediate transition into BPO positions	Win the ball back as soon as possible
	Quick forward passing	Effective Possession 2. Controlled Possession In The Middle Third	Press the ball carrier immediately	Deny opponents time and space to build up
	Quick forward movement	Combination Play 1. Organised Opponent	Limit opponent's passing options	Limit opponents' ability to create scoring chances
	Make the field as big as possible	Combination Play 2. Disorganised Opponent	Make the field as small as possible	
		Individual Skill 1. To create scoring chances		
		Individual Skill 2. To convert scoring chances		
TEAM TASKS	(Fundamental Tasks to make the Key Principles happen)			
PLAYER TASKS	(General and Position-specific)			
PLAYER ACTIONS	Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating		Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating	

A logical explanation for all this might be:

Player Actions	The Tools a Player uses to accomplish...
Player Tasks	..his individual role in helping the team to...
Team Tasks	..perform its key functions...
Key Principles	..according to the Playing Style..
Main Moments	..in the four main moments of the game
Methods and Objectives	..in order to score and prevent goals
Outcome	..and win games

But which parts of the model should we cover in this phase, given that we are in an early part of the long-term process and we have already stated that our focus is on individual development?

Skill Acquisition Phase				
OBJECTIVES	SCORE GOALS		PREVENT GOALS	
METHODS	Get the ball and your players into goalscoring positions		Prevent opponent getting the ball and their players into goalscoring positions	
MAIN MOMENTS	BPO>BP	BP	BP>BPO	BPO
KEY PRINCIPLES		Effective Possession, Combination Play, Individual Skill		Win the ball back ASAP, deny time and space, limit scoring chances
TEAM TASKS		Basic Team Tasks		
PLAYER TASKS		General Only		
PLAYER ACTIONS	**Positioning, First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1, Striking the Ball, Communicating**		Positioning, Pressing, Marking, Intercepting, Tackling, Communicating	

This diagram shows:

- o   Main areas to cover in bold
- o   'Hidden learning' in faint type
- o   (Areas of less importance have been removed)

So, Player Actions are the most fundamental parts of the game of football.

- • Players are the protagonists in the game
- • Players 'do' things
- • If players don't 'do things', nothing happens
- • If your players 'do things' better than the other team's players, you will probably win

We have chosen to focus in the Skill Acquisition Phase on the fundamental

Player Actions in Ball Possession

(in bold in above diagram)

So, what exactly does a player 'do' in BP?

176

When you analyse football and observe what a field player does, you might summarise it as follows:

- He does a number of things with the ball
- He does a number of things without the ball

If you then broke down these two points into components, you might end up with a list like this:

With the Ball
Controlling the Ball
Travelling while in possession of the ball
Passing the Ball
Shooting
Crossing
Heading
Changing speed and/or direction with the ball
Using a fake to deceive an opponent
Taking a throw-in

Without the Ball
Moving in order to receive the ball now
Moving in order to receive the ball soon
Moving in order to distract / displace defenders
Moving in anticipation of loss of possession
Giving information to team-mates (verbal and non-verbal)

These, then, should be what we teach players to 'do', and do well, during the Skill Acquisition Phase.

However, given our philosophical preference for an approach that is 'holistic' and logical, the tables above can be revised and simplified; we want to avoid long lists of separate components.

With the Ball	Logical Arrangement
Controlling the Ball	First Touch
Travelling while in possession of the ball	Running with the Ball
Passing the Ball	Striking the Ball
Shooting	
Crossing	
Heading	
Changing speed and/or direction with the ball	1v1
Using a fake to deceive an opponent	

(You will notice that 'taking a throw-in' has been removed; this is not a skill that deserves specific attention in the Skill Acquisition phase)

Without the Ball	Logical Arrangement
Moving in order to receive the ball now	Positioning
Moving in order to receive the ball soon	
Moving in order to distract / displace defenders	
Moving in anticipation of loss of possession	
Giving information to team-mates (verbal and non-verbal)	Communication

Four 'Core Skills' and 'Two Constants'

So, in BP we now have:

- four elements with the ball, which we call 'the four core skills'

The Four Core Skills
First Touch
Running with the Ball
Striking the Ball
1v1

- two elements without the ball, which we call 'the two constants'

The Two Constants
Positioning
Communication

The Four Core Skills

In the Skill Acquisition Phase, the coach should focus on developing the four core skills. These are the main headings for the training session themes.

The Two Constants

The two 'constants' (positioning and communication) are built in to every training session. These are the two things a player does without the ball, and since for most of the game they are without the ball, it is wise to develop them.

Positioning is especially a major factor in the core skills of 'First Touch' and 'Striking the Ball (Passing)'

Description of the Four Core Skills

An understanding of the core skills is inherently visual and dependent on experience and observation of football. However, below are some verbal explanations to provide some guidance.

First Touch

Receiving the ball in order to execute what you decided to do prior to the ball arriving
(NB: this includes trapping the ball with the sole)

Running with the Ball

Travelling with the ball in order to: • attack free space • commit a defender • allow team-mates to make runs/get in position • make defenders move • create a numerical advantage for the team
Links well with 'combination play'

1v1

Faking or changing direction in order to lose a defender and create space to: • shoot • pass • cross • run with the ball • create a numerical advantage for the team
Defender may be in front of you, to the side, behind you or coming at an angle
Links well with 'combination play'

Striking the Ball

Passing, Shooting, Crossing and Heading in order to: • score goals • deliver killer pass • eliminate defenders • create a 1v1 situation • change the point of attack • keep possession

A worthwhile exercise is to closely observe a top-level football match and analyse what the players actually 'do' (Player Actions).

179

You should be able to categorise what you see into one of the Four Core Skills (and the Two Constants, positioning and communication)

When planning and conducting training sessions in the Skill Acquisition Phase, it is vital to have in your mind visual 'movies' of professional players performing the core skills. You should be able to help the players see how the skill training you are giving them will help make them better players.

Goalkeepers

There are also, of course, Core Skills for Goalkeepers; these are covered in our specific Goalkeeper courses

Chapter 9 - Four-Year plan for the Skill Acquisition phase

As we have seen in previous chapters, the FFA Team Model gives context to every coach in Australia, regardless of age-group, and the Building Blocks provides the framework for structured and logical Youth Development.

So, in terms of planning the Skill Acquisition Phase, this is the situation:

We have four years to teach talented players (from 9 to 13 years of age) the functional game skills in the context of the Team Model, preparing them for the Game Training Phase.

Planning Guidelines

We can start with the same guidelines established with the Game Training Phase:

1) Divide the Skill Acquisition Phase into four separate years
2) Divide each year into 6-week cycles
3) Label each cycle and week (eg, 'Cycle 3, Week 4')
4) Insert the competition games and expected pre-season games
5) Mark the days on which training sessions for that age-group will take place

The first two cycles for an U-10 team might now look like this
(T = Training, G = Game)

U-10	CYCLE 1						CYCLE 2					
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
MON												
TUE	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
WED												
THU	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
FRI												
SAT	T	T	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
SUN												
Note:			Pre-season friendlies				Season starts					

Now the coach (or ideally, the Technical Director) can plan the technical content for each cycle.

It is at this point, again, that one really sees the value of a well-constructed Team Model. Rather than devising random training session topics, the overarching content and themes for sessions are contained in the Model.

As explained in the previous chapter, the Skill Acquisition Phase is focused on the fundamental Player Actions at the base of the Team Model. We logically divided these actions (the things players 'do') into The Four Core Skills.

Rotating the Four Core Skills to develop the Playing Style

So now one can label each training session in the cycle with a Core Skill focus. Cycle 1 for our hypothetical U10 team might look like this:

U10 - Cycle 1						
	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6
TUE	First Touch	Running with the Ball	First Touch	Running with the Ball	First Touch	Running with the Ball
THU	Striking the Ball	1v1	Striking the Ball	1v1	Striking the Ball	1v1

The Four Core Skills are rotated within the 6-week cycle, and each is given the same amount of time

It is vitally important to remember that the development of the Core Skills is not in isolation: the Team Model is always the point of reference. The coach in the Skill Acquisition Phase is not just developing 'general skill'; they are developing SPECIFIC SKILL.

Therefore, for every cycle, rather than 'general' development of a Core Skill, the coach/Technical Director chooses a SPECIFIC ASPECT of the skill to focus on for 6 weeks. This all takes place within the context of the Team Model and with the ultimate aim of successful execution of the stated Playing Style.

FFA Playing Style Statement
A pro-active brand of football, based on effective possession, with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals. Defensively the key components are quick transition and intelligent collective pressing. The Playing Style is underpinned by a strong 'team mentality', capitalizing on Australia's traditional strengths.

The Team Model and Playing Style are always in the coach's mind, guiding him on session design and influencing the way sessions are conducted. So, since BP is the focus of this phase, we refer back to the Team Model and find four Key Principles:

MAIN MOMENT	KEY PRINCIPLES
Ball Possession (BP)	Structured Build-Up
	Controlled Possession In The Middle Third
	Combination Play v Organised Opponent
	Combination Play v Disorganised Opponent
	Individual Skill to create scoring chances
	Individual Skill to convert scoring chances

The first Key Principle above, 'Structured Build-up', is primarily concerned with 'Playing Out from the Back' teaching defenders and midfielders to use the full width of the field to bring the ball forward. Given that the Skill Acquisition Phase is not concerned with 11v11 tactics or positions, this principle is not relevant to this phase. Also, we can simplify the remaining Key Principles for implementation in this phase.

So we now have:

MAIN MOMENT	KEY PRINCIPLES FOR SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE
Ball Possession (BP)	Effective Possession
	Combination Play
	Individual Skill

These three Key Principles should guide the coach as their overarching themes.

Below is a hypothetical example of planning one cycle for our U10 team, incorporating:

- Equal rotation of the four core skills
- Specific aspect identified for each skill for duration of cycle
- Reference to one of the three relevant Ball Possession Key Principles from the Team Model
- The main Player Tasks for the coach to concentrate on

U10s – CYCLE 1	
CORE SKILL: FIRST TOUCH	**TOTAL SESSIONS = 3/12**
SPECIFIC ASPECT: Moving the ball into space to facilitate a pass to a team-mate	
KEY PRINCIPLE: Effective Possession	
PLAYER TASKS: Position yourself where you can see the ball and the target Observe the situation and decide what you will do before the ball arrives Move the ball with your first touch to allow you to pass to a team-mate with your second Try to face forward and pass forward	
CORE SKILL: STRIKING THE BALL	**TOTAL SESSIONS = 3/12**
SPECIFIC ASPECT: Passing the ball to take defenders out of the game	
KEY PRINCIPLE: Effective Possession	
PLAYER TASKS: Pass with good ball speed (ball travels quicker than opponents can run) Pass in front of your team-mate Look for passes behind the last defender Try faking the pass, or a 'no-look' pass	
CORE SKILL: RUNNING WITH THE BALL	**TOTAL SESSIONS = 3/12**
SPECIFIC ASPECT: Run into space to commit defenders	
KEY PRINCIPLE: Combination Play	
PLAYER TASKS: Try to run at space between defenders Position yourself ahead of the ball where you can receive the ball past a defender If a defender doesn't close you down, continue to run forwards If a defender closes you down, get close to him before passing to a team-mate and continuing your run	
CORE SKILL: 1v1	**TOTAL SESSIONS = 3/12**
SPECIFIC ASPECT: Losing a defender to the side of you	
KEY PRINCIPLE: Individual Skill	
PLAYER TASKS: When you're close to the sideline and a defender is running next to you, find a way to create space to run inside, cross the ball or pass to a team-mate Fake to accelerate with the ball, but instead stop and cut inside behind the defender Start to slow down and/or fake to stop, but then accelerate and cut inside (or cross) ahead of the defender	

Each core skill has three sessions in this cycle in which the stated Specific Aspect is worked on. For example, every time 'First Touch' appears on the program in this cycle the theme is always 'Moving the ball into space to facilitate a pass to a team-mate', and the training exercises will be similar or even identical. The idea is to make gradual increases in challenge ('step up') to develop the players. It may also be the case that a 'step down' is required because the players are struggling to succeed.

184

The main benefit of outlining the Specific Aspect is once again to ensure relevance to the Team Model: we are preparing players for a specific type of football, so delivering 'general' and random football training sessions will not be as effective.

Additional benefits:

- Running with the Ball could potentially be presented in a boring way ('all we're doing is running up and down with the ball') but as seen above, the process outlined above makes the coach think of the purpose: 'running with the ball to achieve what?'
- Striking the Ball (especially Passing) and First Touch are developed in every training session whether or not they are specifically being worked on. Players are always receiving and passing the ball. Therefore, when these two Core Skills are being worked on, there is an opportunity to choose a very specific focus.

New cycle, new focus

The next cycle is planned with a different (or adjusted) Specific Aspect for each core skill.

Actual planning will depend on a whole range of variables including:

- Age of players
- Ability of players
- Recent progress of players

After a completed cycle: one week off is recommended (if possible) and you should strive for a minimum of six full cycles per year.

The Model guides every coach in their work

Working from the model gives a clear sense of direction and, in the Skill Acquisition Phase, ensures that important aspects of the fundamental philosophy and vision are not neglected for long periods.

We can look back at the fundamental statements and Key Principles of our model, recognizing that the same words and phrases are apparent from top to bottom, and that is why we can now structure our work in the Skill Acquisition Phase logically and with a sharp focus.

The 'Obsession with Possession'

FFA stresses the need for 'effective possession' and the Team Model includes as Key Principles 'structured build-up' and 'controlled possession' However, possession in football is often misinterpreted and it may lead many coaches to work exclusively on 'passing the ball' and 'keeping the ball'. Players may end up being well-equipped to keep possession of the ball, but will probably not be as effective in creating goalscoring opportunities. More worryingly, if we are only taught to pass the ball we will never develop the ability to take on and beat opponents using individual creativity. Remind yourself of the lack of 'special, match-winning players' in Australia, and how much we need them in order to challenge the world's best.

It would be feasible, therefore, in some cycles for 'individual skill' to be the overarching Key Principle for two out of every four sessions.

The Plan is a guide

As mentioned earlier, planning is essential to avoid training becoming ineffective or, worse, descending into chaos.
There is a structured approach and a series of logical, progressive steps.

However, the coach and Technical Director need to regularly assess the players' progress and then decide whether the training plan must be adjusted.

Assessing Performance in matches

The key points are:

- Focus your observation on how successfully the players are implementing what has recently been taught at training. The Specific Aspects of the Four Core Skills that have been worked on in the Cycle should be a major factor in observation, especially towards the end of the Cycle
- Winning is the purpose of football and it is an important part of player development; however, the Youth Coach must remember that their role is not to get their team to win the Championship, but to develop individual players who will be successful within the Playing Style when they reach the Performance Phase (winning titles is an incidental bonus!) So, on Match Day the youth coach avoids emotional behavior with constant reaction to every incident in the game; rather than shout instructions, they observes what the players do and listens to their communication. This will help them gain an accurate indication of the players' progress and the success of their training program.

Setting Annual Performance Targets

To assist in the process of progress assessment, annual performance targets should be written and used as a yardstick.

These should not be complicated, but should centre on the development of the Four Core Skills. The players should be assessed in terms of their progress towards functioning as a player in 11v11 Team Football, according to the Model and Playing Style.

Fitness Training

You will have noted there is no mention in the planning process outlined above of 'fitness training', 'conditioning' or 'gym sessions'.

This is intentional. FFA's holistic philosophy applies to all aspects of football, and we do not believe in isolated fitness training just as we do not believe in isolated technique training.

The best way to get fit to play football is to practice playing football.

Football Training **is** conditioning for football.

We have adopted the Football Conditioning Model of world-renowned expert Raymond Verheijen, in which football-specific exercises are used to develop football fitness. Since our approach is to introduce Football Conditioning in the Performance Phase (after the growth spurt), it is not necessary to explain this model here.

Players in the Skill Acquisition Phase should train exclusively with the ball.

RECOMMENDED TRAINING ACTIVITIES	TRAINING ACTIVITIES TO AVOID!
Game-related training with the ball	Running laps Endurance runs / Interval runs Speed/Sprint Training Hill runs Weight training Plyometrics Any activity without the ball

(Note: it is a mistake to believe that the activities to avoid in the right-hand column above automatically become acceptable by giving the players a ball. Coaches are advised to avoid them completely.)

Training Sessions per week

3 sessions of 60-75 minutes plus one game is a <u>maximum</u> safe workload for players in the Skill Acquisition Phase

Additional <u>technical</u> 'home-work' assignments are acceptable, but a balanced work-rest ratio is of eminent importance in these age brackets.

4 sessions per week may only be considered in a first class environment, such as an official FFA or State Federation program, where there is a full-time, professional coach and qualified support staff to monitor workloads. Player welfare is paramount.

In the wrong setting, 4 sessions per week could be harmful.

<u>Weekly Programming</u>

2 sessions a week

- Tuesday and Thursday training
- Saturday game

3 sessions a week

- Monday, Tuesday and Thursday training
- Saturday game

If game-day is Sunday adjust schedule accordingly, striving for a schedule without training sessions the day before and after a game.

Chapter 10 - Planning the Individual Skill Acquisition Sessions (1)

Define

As we learnt previously, Training is comprised of four elements:

PLAN
PREPARE
CONDUCT
EVALUATE

The first step, PLAN, is made up of:

3. DEFINE
4. DESIGN

DEFINE in the Game Training Phase consists of:

PLAN	Game Training Phase
DEFINE	• Main Moment / Key Principle? • Session Objective?

The initial answers came from the Annual Plan, which is part of the Four-Year Game Training Phase Plan.

We now also have a Four-Year Plan for the Skill Acquisition Phase.

So, we simply have to look for:

- The Age Group (eg, U10)
- The Cycle
- The Week
- The Day (ie, which training session of that week?)

We should then be able to see:

- The Core Skill to focus on
- The Specific Aspect to zoom in on (and Key Principle from the Team Model)

So, DEFINE in the Skill Acquisition Phase consists of:

PLAN	Skill Acquisition Phase
DEFINE	• Core Skill / Specific Aspect? • Session Objective?

The coach knows the session's Core Skill and Specific Aspect, since it is in the Annual Plan, but before writing the Session Objective he must ask himself:

Based on observation of recent performances and training sessions, where are we in terms of progress with this Core Skill / Specific Aspect?

Every session when the same core skill comes back, the coach can ideally implement the **'repeat / step up'** principle (if possible)

This means that during the cycle the Core Skill / Specific Aspect is progressively improved. What can happen is that the exercise from the previous session is **repeated** in the same or similar format, then it is made more challenging (eg, by reducing the area), creating the **step up.**

Therefore, by the end of the cycle we have taken steps to improve the players' ability in the Core Skill / Specific Aspect, and should see signs of that improvement in games.

The first part of the Session Plan might then look like this:

Core Skill: _____

Specific Aspect:
_____

_____

Key Principle: _____

Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve the players' ability in the following Player Tasks/Actions:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

The answers are mostly in the Team Model and in the detail of the Annual Plan. That is, the Player Tasks that the coach decides to list as the main ones for this session will probably be contained in the content of the cycle in question.

However, a qualified coach is required here to define the individual sessions, because there is a process of **OBSERVATION** and **ANALYSIS** required. It is not possible (nor advisable) to write a full season's content completely in advance; the players must be assessed and evaluated in training and in games in order to determine the specific objectives and exercises of training sessions.

Choosing the content for the first session of a cycle

Sometimes the level of training content and challenge cannot be gauged from recent performance (as would be the case in Cycle 1 of an U10 team, since it would be their first year in the program) or at the start of a season.

If necessary, the coach can use the first session of each core skill to define the 'starting level'. They choose an exercise in which the Core Skill / Specific Aspect is brought to the fore in a game situation; the players' performance will assist the coach to design the content for the following sessions in the cycle.

Now we have DEFINED our Session Objective…..

The next step is DESIGN, where we come up with the actual training exercises to maximise the chances of achieving that objective.

As the Skill Acquisition Phase has a very different purpose to the Game Training and Performance Phases and is a crucial part of a player's development, we will need to have a very detailed look at this aspect in the next chapter.

Chapter 11a - How do we define 'Football Skill'?

Designing Skill Acquisition training sessions

Re-cap

Training is comprised of four elements:

PLAN
PREPARE
CONDUCT
EVALUATE

The first element, PLAN, is made up of:

1. DEFINE
2. DESIGN

DEFINE in the Game Training and Skill Acquisition Phases consists of:

	Game Training Phase	Skill Acquisition Phase
DEFINE	• Main Moment / Key Principle? • Session Objective?	• Core Skill / Specific Aspect? • Session Objective?

We looked earlier at DESIGN in the Game Training Phase

	Game Training Phase

DESIGN	• Game Training Components
	   o Passing Practices
	   o Positioning Games
	   o Game Training
	   o Training Game
	• The Script
	   o Team Task
	   o Player Tasks / Actions
	   o Coach's Cues

The question now is:

How should we DESIGN training sessions in the Skill Acquisition Phase, given all the considerations?

- The specific age-group
- The role of the coach according to the Building Blocks ('To prepare players for team football by developing the functional game skills'
- The importance of developing skilful players
- The lack of special, matchwinning players in Australia

In the Skill Acquisition Phase, we are developing **skills** in individuals, not fixing team problems (if we are successful in this phase, however, we will **prevent future problems**)

The Game Training components above have a close link to team football and actual game situations, replicating the scenarios and player positions of the 11v11 game; they tend to take place in the part of the full-size field where the problem occurs.

Clearly, using the same Game Training components in the Skill Acquisition Phase will not make sense; we need to come up with specific Training Session Components for the Skill Acquisition Phase.

To lead us towards solving this problem, we need to have an in-depth look at Football Skill and the Development of Football Skill

What is Football Skill?

When one analyses the game of football, especially the top-level football we are preparing young players for, one soon comes to the conclusion that it is an extremely difficult game. The players have to constantly make decisions, with and without the ball; the range of possibilities is vast; the array of technical skills required is perhaps wider than in any other sport.

'Off the Ball Skill'

The fact that a player has to make countless decisions when they DO NOT have the ball is often ignored: the skill of 'correct movement', or 'positioning yourself for the maximum benefit of the team' is usually neglected.

Good players are also good communicators when they do not have the ball: they read the game, perceive what is happening, anticipate what is likely to happen and give information to assist team-mates who are on the ball or closer to it.

'POSITIONING' and 'COMMUNICATION' are integral tools a player must use, and they are embedded in FFA's approach to coaching.

'On the Ball Skill'

The focus in the Skill Acquisition Phase is on the Four Core Skills, and these are of course largely centred on the player's relationship **with the ball**.

Definitions of 'Skill'

There are many textbook definitions for 'skill'. Most tend to include one or more of the below:

- The learned ability to bring about pre-determined results
- The minimum outlay of time or effort or both
- The result you want, with maximum certainty
- Performed under control

All games and sports are different in terms of their inherent qualities. Football is often classified in these categories:

Qualities of Football	Explanation
OPEN	Changing situations requiring a range of decisions and possible options (CLOSED = eg Discus)
EXTERNALLY-PACED	When and how fast you do things is decided by the situation and other players (INTERNALLY-PACED = eg Vault in gymnastics; you decide when and how you execute the action)
INTERACTIVE	Decisions involve other people and their actions (INDIVIDUAL = eg High Jump; it's just you and the bar)
COMPLEX	Many other sports are more SIMPLE because they are CLOSED and not INTERACTIVE
HIGH ORGANISATION	The complex nature of football requires of the brain a high level of organization, compared to, for example, swimming in which one technique is repeated over and over
GROSS **AND** FINE MOTOR MOVEMENTS	Archery = mainly 'fine'; weightlifting = mainly 'gross'

Let us now try, as is our usual preference, to find our own specific definition of 'football skill', which must of course be based on analysis of football.

Daniel Coyle, in his much-acclaimed book 'The Talent Code', explains the difference in the brain processes involved in, on the one hand, activities like golf and violin-playing, compared to activities like football.

'Skills like football are flexible-circuit skills, meaning they require us to grow vast ivy-vine circuits that we can flick through to navigate an ever-changing set of obstacles. Playing violin, golf, gymnastics and figure-skating, on the other hand, are consistent-circuit skills, depending utterly on a solid foundation of technique that enables us to reliably re-create the fundamentals of an ideal performance.'

This is a key distinction to bear in mind, and it should guide us to find answers that apply specifically to football, and not generic or non-specific information.

Perception – Decision - Execution

Let's look at it logically:

We are talking about the things a player DOES with the ball.

What governs everything a human being does?   THE BRAIN

In football, THE BRAIN tells the appropriate muscles to contract at a certain time and in a certain way to move the body and the ball in order to achieve the desired football outcome.

How does THE BRAIN choose the desired football outcome?

Football players are constantly assessing what is going on in the game so that they can do what is required according to the playing style.

They must mainly take into consideration:

- The ball
- Team-mates
- Opponents
- The Goals
- Space

Therefore, the player has to SEE these things, and also HEAR any communication which might assist.

'EYES, EARS, KNOWS!'

However, SEEING and HEARING alone is not enough: the BRAIN has to make sense of what it sees and hears.

In other words, the BRAIN must find order in the chaos of a complex football situation, by finding what is important and ignoring that which is not.

This is **PERCEPTION**.

The top player perceives the situation quickly and accurately, utilizing 'selective attention' to focus on the crucial factors.

In addition, the top player goes one step further than simply perceiving things as they are – they **ANTICIPATES** what is going to happen. The best players in the world seem to have 'x-ray vision', giving them the ability to 'see' the solutions more quickly than everyone else (especially opposing defenders)

It is useful to avoid visualizing the 'present' as a static situation. Seeing it as an 'evolving situation' is a better approach.

PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
What just happened?	What is happening now?	What **is likely** to happen?
Evolving Situation		**ANTICIPATION**

ANTICIPATION is a vital skill to develop in players, so what exactly is it?

As a football situation is evolving, the brain searches through its **memory** for relevant information from past experiences and things you have learned.

Therefore, this skill is more likely to develop if there are actually some past experiences of a similar football situation, and learning experiences stored in the memory.

So, effective Youth Training must regularly place players in football situations where they are required to perceive and assess the likely outcomes.

We have now established the first step:

PERCEPTION

The player sees and hears what just happened and what is happening, then based on memory and experience tries to anticipate what will happen.

He also takes into account:

- Playing Style
- Game Plan / Strategy
- Main Moment
- Key Principle
- Team Task
- Player Tasks / Actions

There are also other factors for the player to consider:

- The score
- Time remaining
- Conditions)

This now leads them to select an appropriate course of action – they DECIDE what they will do.

This is the second step:

DECISION

So, the player has PERCEIVED and DECIDED. Now they have to DO what they have decided to do.

This is the third step:

EXECUTION

The player has to execute the chosen action with the appropriate qualities (timing, direction, speed, etc)

We can now clearly visualize the process as a 'chain'
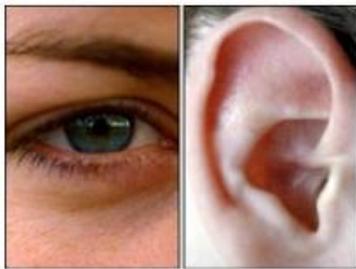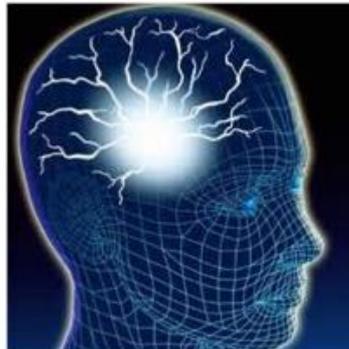
Perception   Decision   Execution

Skilful players have deeply-ingrained motor programs, because the movements are encoded in their <u>implicit</u> brain system.

This means they are almost automatic and are usually 'unconscious'. The opposite is the explicit brain system, in which the brain 'consciously' thinks about what it is doing.

Crucial point:

HOW LONG DOES A PLAYER HAVE TO PERCEIVE, DECIDE AND EXECUTE THE CORRECT ACTION?

When you watch a top-level game and consider this question, especially when you have Ball Possession in the opponents' half and are trying to create a goalscoring opportunity, it is apparent that time is very limited.

Therefore, training exercises which do not touch on or challenge the Perception and Decision aspects will be of little real value in preparing the player for the demands of the game. Also, exercises which provide no 'time pressure' on the player will be of little benefit.

So, the elements in the football skill 'process' appear to be:

A football SITUATION requires a FOOTBALL ACTION

↓

A player must SELECT an ACTION, based on perception and decision-making, and they have to do this QUICKLY

↓

They must EXECUTE the ACTION PERFECTLY

↓

They have to do all of this CONSISTENTLY
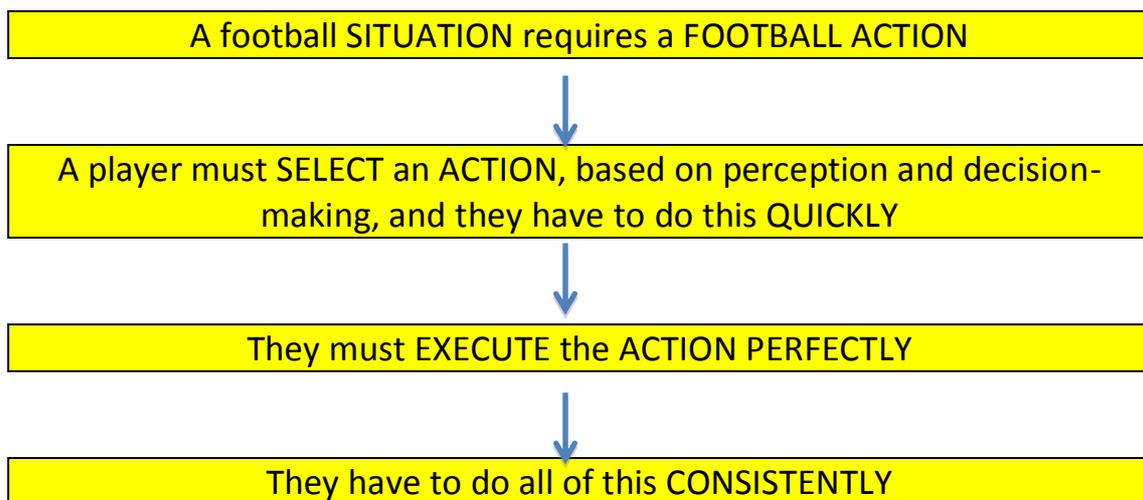
Therefore, we can now define football skill:

Definition of football skill:
The consistent ability to quickly select and perfectly execute the correct football action for the situation

(By football action, we are essentially referring to the Four Core Skills, as well as the Two Constants)

Now we know what Football Skill is, the next question is:

What type of training exercises will help us develop Football Skill?

This leads us to the next Chapter.

Chapter 11b - What exercises are best for developing football skill?

Re-cap: We are looking for specific guidance on how to DESIGN suitable training sessions for the Skill Acquisition Phase

In the previous section we looked at the nature of football skill and proposed a definition:

Definition of football skill:
The consistent ability to quickly select and perfectly execute the correct football action for the situation

This section looks at:

What type of practices are best suited to the development of Football Skill?

Unfortunately, many coaches will interpret the above definition in an 'isolated' way; in other words, they might look at it like this: 'If I teach a player to perfect all the separate techniques one by one in a controlled, repetition-based setting, when they have to select a technique in a game they will be able to execute it perfectly'

However, this opinion is not supported by the academic research in this area. World-renowned football scientist Professor A. Mark Williams has published a large body of work where the evidence is to the contrary, and he states:

'The development of football skill is inseparable from the development of perceptual expertise'

This means that if you are aiming to produce skillful players, training exercises must be football-specific, and include PERCEPTION, DECISION-MAKING and ANTICIPATION.

At this point, it is useful to consider the types of practice that may be delivered with this quote in mind:

'The manner in which practice is structured affects whether and how much skill learning takes place'
Williams/Ford

Researchers have proposed several elements of practice, with distinguishable 'opposites' at each end of the spectrum, below:

PRACTICE TYPES	
RANDOM	**BLOCKED**
Practice involves a number of different techniques in a changing, game-related context	The same technique is practiced continuously, in the same context
DISTRIBUTED	**MASSED**
Also known as 'spaced repetition', it is a learning strategy where skills are learnt in a number of short bursts, with rest or other activities between each, over a longer period of time	Consists of fewer, longer training activities to learn a skill
VARIABLE	**CONSTANT**
Practice involving more than one technique in more than one situation (variations in service, distance, pressure, etc)	Practicing the same technique in the same situation (eg, 20 volleys with the same foot, with the ball coming at the same height and speed, aiming at the same target)

Research has led academics overwhelmingly to recommend the training types in the left-hand column.

PREFERRED PRACTICE TYPES FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT
RANDOM
DISTRIBUTED
VARIABLE

The reason is that these types of practice lead to not only the development of skill, but more importantly the LONG-TERM RETENTION of learned skills.

'Game Intelligence'

This is another well-used term, and most of us would agree that it is a pre-requisite for players to play at a high level. Once again, as seen earlier, the term has an obvious reference to THE BRAIN; where else do we find 'intelligence'?

The components of Game Intelligence are often described as:

- Visual search processes
- Recognition of information from player and ball movements
- Recognition of patterns and familiarity in sequences of play
- Prediction of likely event occurrences
- Action selection and execution

In other words, we are back at PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION

So, in terms of practice requirements:

- To acquire the perceptual, decision-making and motor skills needed in the game, practice must be organized and structured around the decision-making processes of the player
- Practice must have the same underlying structure as the game itself

The current situation

Research shows that the vast majority of coaches, even in the Youth Departments of the English Premier League, devote most of their training time to isolated and less game-related practices. Our own observations in Australia reveal a similar situation.

Why are isolated and less game-related practices so prevalent? Their widespread use is not supported by empirical research, but seems to be based on the mistaken beliefs below:

MISTAKEN BELIEFS
By lessening the demands on the learner, learning takes place more easily
Blocked, constant, massed practice means less mistakes, and therefore performance appears to be good during training
Solid repetition is the best way to develop technique

However, the truth is that isolated technique practice, in blocked, massed and constant settings presents fewer opportunities (and often NO OPPORTUNITIES) for players to develop the PERCEPTION and DECISION-MAKING skills that are essential during match play at the highest levels.

Game-related practices have been proved to develop PERCEPTION and DECISION-MAKING skills, and ANTICIPATION yet **THEY ARE STILL VERY MUCH THE EXCEPTION RATHER THAN THE NORM**

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Have players developed BECAUSE OF THE TRAINING PROVIDED by our coaches or **IN SPITE OF THE TRAINING PROVIDED?**

'Challenge' or 'success'?

As stated above, one reason for the prevalence of practices which are less effective is the mistaken belief that lessening the demands on the learner helps learning to take place more easily.

Therefore, many coaches mistakenly think up practices which are as SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE, breaking down the game so much that the practice hardly looks like football at all.

In these practices, by virtue of their simplicity, success is almost guaranteed.

However, research tells us that we should lean towards CHALLENGE rather than SIMPLICITY in order to achieve long-lasting skill development that transfers to improved game performance.

The problem for coaches when designing training exercises seems to be:

HOW DO I LOWER THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TASK TO ASSIST PLAYERS TO LEARN IT WHILE MAINTAINING ITS NATURAL GAME-RELATED PERFORMANCE?

THE SPECTRUM		
Over-simplified	Optimal CHALLENGE POINT	Over-complicated
TOO EASY		TOO HARD
TOO MUCH SUCCESS		TOO MUCH FAILURE

The coach avoids either end of the spectrum, and aims for an exercise that challenges the players to an appropriate level.

'World-class performance comes from striving for a target just out of reach'
Anders Ericsson

From the game to training

FFA's approach to football is that everything begins and ends with the game, that is 'the 11v11 match' in which we try to beat an opponent.

TRAINING only exists because there is a MATCH and it has no purpose other than improving match performance.

The senior coach is trying to improve the team's chances of winning a competitive match at the weekend; the youth coach is trying to prepare players to function in competitive matches in the future.

So, as we have seen previously, coaches are trying to solve problems or prevent problems that occur in the match.

Below is a graph representing the possible steps in breaking down the game situation to choose a training form for, as an example, passing technique practice.

The blue line shows the level of relevance to the actual game.
The red line shows the likely number of touches on the ball the players will get.

As we move from left to right, the level of game relevance (decision-making) decreases, but the likely number of touches on the ball (repetitions) the players will get increases.

11v11	7v7	4v4	5v3	5v2	4v1	1v0
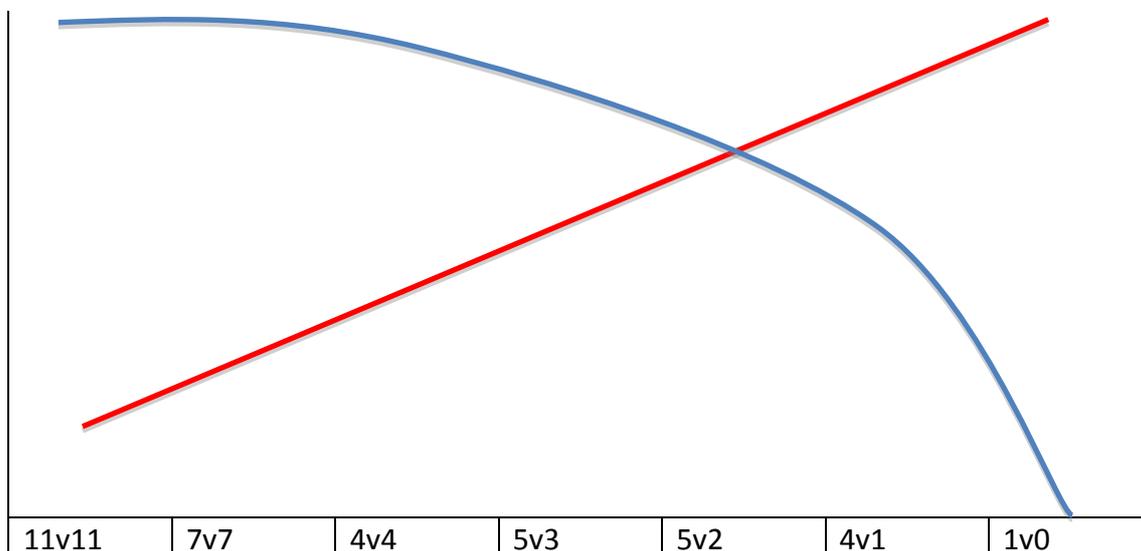
TRAINING FORM
11v11
7v7
4v4
5v3
5v2
4v1
1v0

In line with our philosophy, the starting point is the game. The coach should begin at the top of the above table and only go down as far as necessary. The bottom step, 1v0 (isolated technique training with no resistance or decision-making), is the last resort, to be used only for players who have not improved despite the game being broken down all the way to 4v1. Clearly, in the Skill Acquisition Phase, we need exercises somewhere in the middle of the graph, providing a combination of realism and repetitions. Too many coaches start at the bottom when designing exercises, choosing isolated technique practice and therefore subjecting all players to the lowest challenge imaginable.

(NB: The steps would be different if the coach was designing a session to improve 1v1 skills – the coach needs situations where the player has a defender nearby: if there is too much space and time, there will be no repetitions)

A better future

Re-cap

In the last chapter we proposed a definition of football skill

- **The consistent ability to quickly select and perfectly execute the correct football action for the situation**

The definition was based on these elements:

A football SITUATION requires a FOOTBALL ACTION

A player must SELECT an ACTION, based on perception and decision-making, and they have to do this QUICKLY

They must EXECUTE the ACTION PERFECTLY

They have to do all of this CONSISTENTLY

In this chapter we have looked at the factors to be considered in order to design suitable exercises to develop football skill.

In other words, how to bring the definition to life:

To ensure Australian Youth coaches become as good as any in the world, we need to take into account all the points covered and implement them.

Necessary elements of training to maximise skill learning

On the following page, is a list of elements that the coach should strive to incorporate in the design of exercises where skill learning is the objective:

NECESSARY ELEMENTS OF TRAINING TO MAXIMISE SKILL LEARNING	
PERCEPTION	Is there a 'football situation' for the player to make sense of?
DECISION-MAKING	More than one option / possibility?
GAME SITUATION RETAINED, CHALLENGE MAINTAINED	Match scenario simplified just enough to enable learning, while keeping true football context and providing 'optimal challenge'
IMPLICIT BRAIN SYSTEM DEVELOPED ('Flexible Circuit')	Players placed in learning situation often enough to influence subconscious behavior

ANTICIPATION	Players required to:
	    search for visual cues
	    gather information from player and ball movements
	    recognize patterns of play

RANDOM AND VARIABLE	Rather than 'constant' and 'blocked'
EXTERNALLY PACED	The speed and timing of football actions must be determined by movement of opponents, team-mates and the ball (rather than 'high jump style', where the player starts when they likes and goes at their own speed)

Re-cap

In the previous sections we looked at the nature of football skill and proposed a definition:

Football Skill is the consistent ability to quickly select and perfectly execute the correct football action for the situation

We then looked at what type of practices are best-suited to the development of Football Skill, and devised a table of factors that could serve as a checklist:

NECESSARY ELEMENTS OF TRAINING TO MAXIMISE SKILL LEARNING
PERCEPTION
DECISION-MAKING
GAME SITUATION RETAINED, CHALLENGE MAINTAINED
IMPLICIT BRAIN SYSTEM DEVELOPED ('Flexible Circuit')
ANTICIPATION
RANDOM AND VARIABLE
EXTERNALLY PACED

Based on all the above, and FFA's philosophical starting points from the National Football Curriculum, we will now set out and explain:

FFA's Three Session Components for the Skill Acquisition Phase

You will recall the components for the Game Training (and Performance) Phase

Game Training Phase

• Training Session Components
     o Passing Practices
     o Positioning Games
     o Game Training
     o Training Game

These needed to be revised, since the focus of the Skill Acquisition Phase is different to that of the Game Training Phase. The coach's role is different, so the nature of training will be different.

Role of the Coach	
Game Training Phase	Skill Acquisition Phase
'To prepare skilful players for performance phase football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting'	'To prepare players for team football by developing the functional game skills'

The purpose of the Game Training session components can be summarised in this way:

Game Training Phase - Training Session Components	
Passing Practices	Warm-up ('hidden learning', repetition)
Positioning Games Game Training	Teaching (coach teaches; players learn)
Training Game	Game (players play; coach assesses)

In the Skill Acquisition Phase we are developing skills in individual players. Since Skill Acquisition Phase sessions do not evolve into team-based units or position-based play in the team context, the structure of the sessions can be simplified. There is no need for two components of 'teaching' in the middle, so there are three components rather than four.

Skill Acquisition Phase – Training Session Components	
Skill Introduction	Warm-up ('hidden learning', repetition)
Skill Training	Teaching (coach teaches; players learn)
Skill Game	Game (players play; coach assesses)

(The word SKILL is repeated in every component, to ensure the real focus is never lost)

1. Skill Introduction

As in the Game Training Phase, this 'warm-up' time is used to *prepare the players for the upcoming activity,* technically and mentally, as well as physically.

We continue to respect the principles of safe warming-up covered previously and in 'The Football Coaching Process'

Again, just as in the Game Training Phase, this time is used to introduce the theme of the session, providing *repetition* and *hidden learning.*

We do not call this component Passing Practices, because in this phase Passing (Striking the Ball) is just one of the four core skills. The warm-up may be preparing the players for a Running with the Ball, First Touch or 1v1 session, which is why we call it the **Skill Introduction.**

This is the only part of the session where drill-type exercises could be used (as the warm-up should essentially be unopposed) but the creative coach will include elements of decision-making by perhaps incorporating a rotating passive defender.

2. Skill Training

In the Game Training Phase, the *main* teaching and learning takes place in the Positioning Game and Game Training components. Given the individual skill focus, without an 11v11 context, and potentially shorter training sessions in the younger age-groups, the main teaching and learning is delivered in one component.

The focus is on one designated core skill. By calling it Skill Training, we constantly remind you to recall the recent chapters you have read: to deliver Skill Training, you must think **'What is Football Skill?'** and **'What types of training develop Football Skill?'**

It is this session component that we must ensure we reflect the findings we saw from academic research and implement FFA's national philosophy and vision.

Key points of Skill Training component:

- Perception opportunities
- Decision-making present
- Game situation retained, challenge maintained
- Implicit brain system developed ('flexible circuit')
- Incorporate development of anticipation
- Random and variable in nature
- Externally-paced

Skill Training exercises should be designed to satisfy as many of these criteria as possible.

3. Skill Game

The final component of a training session is always a game. The players focus on playing, the coach assesses the success of the session.

The Skill Game should include as many as possible of the elements of the real game and be organised in such a way that the designated core skill has to be used regularly. Skill Games are preferably **small-sided games** to maximise the number of repetitions/touches.

There is a slight difference in comparison to the Training Game at the end of a Game Training session: given the age of the players, and the fact that these Skill Games are not full-blown 11v11 replications, the coach may intervene at certain times to make key points and provide feedback.

We can now start to fill in some of the gaps identified previously:

DEFINE and DESIGN in the Game Training and Skill Acquisition Phases:

	Game Training Phase	Skill Acquisition Phase
DEFINE	• Main Moment / Key Principle? • Session Objective?	• Core Skill / Specific Aspect? • Session Objective?

DESIGN	• Game Training Components
	    1. Passing Practices
	    2. Positioning Games
	    3. Game Training
	    4. Training Game
	
	 o The Script
	
	 • Team Task
	 • Player Tasks / Actions
	 • Coach's Cues
		• Skill Training Components
		    1. Skill Introduction
		    2. Skill Training
		    3. Skill Game
		
		 o The Script
		
		 • *To be covered later*

Chapter 11d - Skill Acquisition Session Planning Process

Design

The Skill Acquisition Phase Session Planning Process

Steps so far:

4-year plan for the SA Phase

↓

Annual Plan for each age-group

↓

Which Cycle, which week, which day?

↓

Core Skill / Specific Aspect

↓
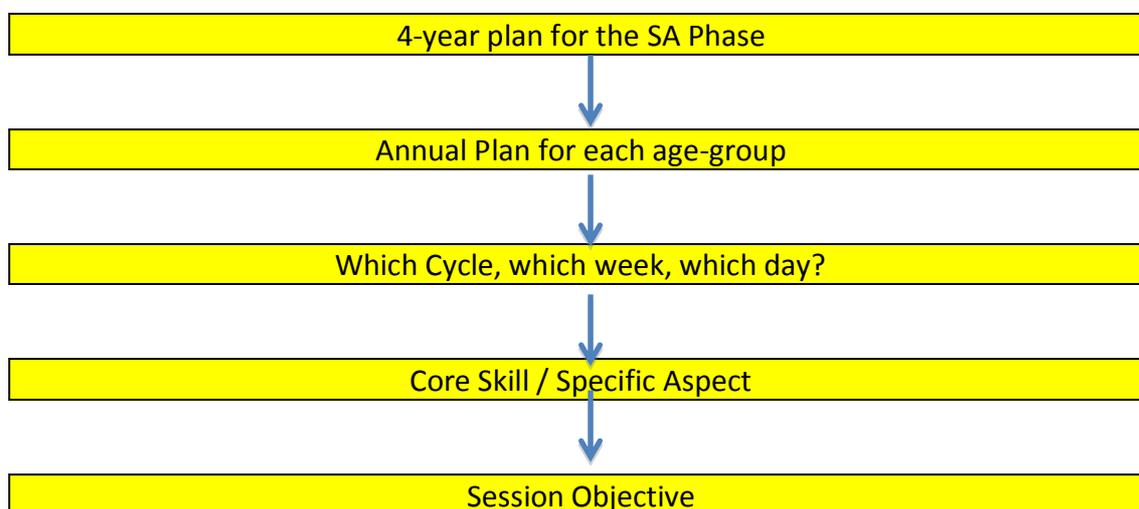
Session Objective

Now we have DEFINED, giving us:

- Core Skill / Specific Aspect
- Session Objective

The first step of DESIGN is clear to us:

- Skill Training Components:
  1. Skill Introduction
  2. Skill Training
  3. Skill Game

The recommended planning process from here follows the same philosophy as outlined in Part One of this manual for the Game Training Phase:

Plan the main teaching part first!

In the Game Training (and Performance) Phase, this means the Game Training component (third of the four components).

In the Skill Acquisition Phase, this means the Skill Training component (second of the three components)

2. SKILL TRAINING	Exercises designed to facilitate the players' development of one of the core skills, allowing natural learning to take place in conjunction with effective teaching by the coach

The approach with the Game Training component was:

'Put the ball and the players in the situation that needs fixing', in the context of 11v11 football problems.

The approach with the Skill Training component is:

'Put the ball and the players in football situations where the core skill can be effectively developed', in the context of the Team Model

With this in mind, and armed with the knowledge from the previous chapters, Youth Coaches can begin to design (and then test) Skill Training exercises which they believe are suitable for their players.

We plan the Skill Training part of the session first because it determines the nature of the other two components (the first and third of the three components):

3. SKILL GAME	A game in which the designated core skill and specific aspect must be used regularly, so the coach can assess the success of the earlier parts of the session

How can you plan this component if you haven't planned the activities in which the core skill / specific aspect are developed? It must be a 'specific' Skill Game, demonstrating a clear relationship with the Skill Training component.

1. SKILL INTRODUCTION	Warm-up exercises that prepare the players technically and mentally, as well as physically, for the upcoming activity. The theme of the session is introduced

How can you plan this component if you haven't planned the 'upcoming activity' or articulated a definite theme?

So now the logical series of steps in planning a session are:

4-year plan for the SA Phase

↓

Annual Plan for each age-group

↓

Which Cycle, which week, which day?

↓

Core Skill / Specific Aspect

↓

Session Objective

↓

Design the Skill Training Component

↓

Design the Skill Game Component

↓

Design the Skill Introduction Component

We now have our exercises planned and have almost completed the PLAN part of the training session.

PLAN	Skill Acquisition Phase	
DEFINE	• Core Skill / Specific Aspect? • Session Objective?	✓ ✓

DESIGN	• Skill Training Components
	    o Skill Introduction
	    o Skill Training
	    o Skill Game
	
	• The Script
		
		✓
		✓
		✓
		
		?

So, in the next chapter we will look at The Script.

Chapter 11e - The Script

(Designing Skill Acquisition sessions)

In 'The Football Coaching Process' we looked closely at all elements of TRAINING:

PLAN, PREPARE, CONDUCT, EVALUATE

We saw the essential links between all four of them, and how every part depends on what comes before it. That means if the PLAN is not good enough, everything else will be compromised.

It became clear that the professional coach, as well as *drawing* exercise diagrams and describing how they operate in their Session Plan, should also *write down* some other key things to help him conduct the session effectively.

These are the things they intend to say to support player learning.

Far too often, the words that the coach uses have a detrimental effect on the session. This is usually because they did not give any thought to what they were going to say.

The quality of a coach's communication is vital; it is their main coaching tool. Given that fact, it is clearly not professional to rely on your ability to 'wing it' and 'make it up as I go along'. Perhaps some experienced coaches can get away with that, but it is not the ideal course of action for most coaches.

Preparing smart and effective interventions is an acquired skill, and a valuable one. But it has to be undertaken before training, during the PLAN stage.

We call it **The Script**, because, just like for actors, it is a pre-determined series of phrases and questions to say.

(The parallels with the theatre do not end there, because the coach also has to be able to speak with effective volume, clarity, expression, timing, etc, to gain maximum impact)

The most important of the things to say are associated with the main teaching and learning part of the session:

In the Game Training Phase, this means the Positioning Game and Game Training. For each of these session components, the coach writes down:

- **TEAM TASK**
- **PLAYER TASKS/ACTIONS**
- **CUES**

In looking at the Skill Acquisition Phase, this is what we did first in planning the session:

CORE SKILL	One of the four core skills, designated in the Annual Plan
SPECIFIC ASPECT	A specific core skill focus (eg 'running with the ball in order to ......') outlined in the Annual Plan
SESSION OBJECTIVE	Based on recent player progress in training and matches, the coach selects the player tasks and actions from the Team Model, or variations of them

Then the coach planned three session components that would be best suited to the development and improvement of the players' ability to achieve the session objective (listed in order that they are planned):

2. SKILL TRAINING	The main teaching and learning part
3. SKILL GAME	Game in which the designated specific aspect of the core skill is used regularly
1. SKILL INTRODUCTION	Warm-up that introduces the theme ('hidden learning', repetition)

As we now consider what the Skill coach should write in The Script, in comparison to the Game Training coach, we should remember the difference in their roles:

Role of the Coach	
Game Training Phase	Skill Acquisition Phase
'To prepare skilful players for performance phase football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting'	'To prepare players for team football by developing the functional game skills'

In other words, by definition, the complexity of the football situations for the Game Training coach will tend to be much higher than for the Skill coach.

Positions are irrelevant; individual progress is the distinguishing factor

In training sessions, the Game Training coach places players in positions and gives them specific position-based tasks, but the Skill Specialist coaches all the players as individuals. Rather than differentiating them by position, they must differentiate on ability.

This means being able to challenge every player to improve *from their present level.* The coach may need to set different tasks for different players within the same activity. This can be imagined in terms of a limbo exercise, where the coach lowers or raises the bar depending on who is next.

Team tactics are irrelevant

The Game Training coach is preparing the players for 11v11 football in the context of the Playing Style and Team Model, and there are naturally elements of team tactics and strategy. This does not apply to the Skill Coach (although the Playing Style and Team Model are their points of reference that guide their work). The Skill Coach is very much focused on individual and small group situations in modified games.

However, the football situations may be less complex, BUT THIS DOES NOT MAKE THE ROLE ANY EASIER.

The Skill Coach has, perhaps, a narrower range of disciplines to focus on but the onus is on him to be AN EXPERT in these areas. They must know the Four Core Skills and their specific aspects INSIDE-OUT.

The Script – Skill Acquisition Phase

Here are the elements of The Script, highlighting the contrasts between the two phases:

Game Training	Skill Acquisition
1. Team Task	1. Exercise Task
An overarching task which makes it clear for all the players on the team, not just those you are focusing on, what they are trying to achieve. Eg, 'The team task is to let the back four bring the ball forward, guide them away from the central area and win the ball wide in the middle third'	As there is not a 'team' focus, and the exercise will be centred on individuals and small groups, the coach makes clear to everyone what the object of the exercise is. Eg, 'Every time the ball is served in, the two attackers try to get the ball across that blue line and then shoot in one of the two goals'
2. Player Tasks/Actions	2. Player Tasks/Actions
The coach, based on the Main Moment / Key Principles approach, and recent observations, writes down the specific tasks certain identified players will need to perform in order to improve team performance.	These would already be outlined in the Session Objective part (see above) at the top of the session plan. These are chosen as the key things the players must learn to do to develop proficiency in the specific aspect of the designated core skill.
3. Coach's Cues	3. Coach's Cues
Phrases usually beginning with 'if', 'when' or 'as' which the coach uses to assist the players who are not fulfilling the tasks set for them. Eg, 'If you're tightly marked…', 'when the ball is…', 'as the defender closes you down….', etc	Essentially the same as in Game Training. However, the Skill Coach must develop the art of devising a range of smart and catchy cues for the young players to hook onto. This is also useful for dealing with situations where the player does not respond to one or more of the cues you have tried. Have plenty of variations up your sleeve

	4. 'Step up, step down'
	The Skill Coach plans in anticipation of a situation where most of the players either find the Skill Training exercise too hard (step down) or too easy (step up) He is prepared to modify aspects of the exercise, but does not set up a completely different exercise.

Step up, step down

This is usually a matter of modifying the organization or rules of the exercise.

STEP UP, STEP DOWN POSSIBILITIES	
AREA	Bigger, smaller, wider, longer, etc
NUMBER OF PLAYERS	More/less attackers, more/less defenders
STARTING POSITIONS	Eg, the defender comes from closer/further away (increase/decrease pressure)
NUMBER OF TOUCHES	Increase/decrease for: all players, certain players, attackers/defenders only
OTHER CONDITIONS	- Ball has to go somewhere before you can do something - Number of passes required before you can do something - Time factor – more or less time to achieve something - Goal will only count if you… - etc
GOALS / TARGETS	Bigger/smaller; more/less of them; change the position of them; increase/decrease the rewards for them
START METHOD	Change the way the exercise starts in order to make it easier/harder to succeed

The list above aims to be a guide and is not exhaustive or exclusive.

Remember the importance of 'striving for a target just out of reach' and the value of ensuring the 'optimal challenge' is provided.

One hopes that, as the coach knows their players well, the further the season progresses the more likely they are is to plan Skill Training exercises that are 'just right' and are more likely to need a 'step up.'

*'There is no greater power on the playing field
than the players' intelligence'*
Cesar Luis Menotti (World Cup winning coach, Argentina)

TRAINING	PLAN
	PREPARE
	CONDUCT
	EVALUATE

The stages of the CONDUCT element of TRAINING were covered in depth in Part One of this manual.

Re-cap:

GAME TRAINING PHASE - CONDUCT			
FOUNDATION	**FRAME**	*Pre-session briefing*	**Players: Listening/watching Coach: Explaining**
	WARM-UP	**PASSING PRACTICES**	**Players: Warming up Coach: Influencing**
ANIMATION	**CHECKLIST TEACHING PROCESS**	**POSITIONING GAME**	**Players: Learning Coach: Teaching**
	CHECKLIST TEACHING PROCESS	**GAME TRAINING**	
CONCLUSION	**APPLICATION**	**TRAINING GAME**	**Players: Playing Coach: Assessing**
	WRAP-UP	*Post-session de-briefing*	**Players: Listening/discussing Coach: Summarising**

The red arrow indicates the chronological progression through the session.

218

For the Skill Acquisition Phase, CONDUCT looks like this:

SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE - CONDUCT				
FOUNDATION	**FRAME**	*Pre-session briefing*	Players: Listening/watching Coach: Explaining	
	WARM-UP	SKILL INTRODUCTION	Players: Warming up Coach: Influencing	
ANIMATION	**CHECKLIST**	SKILL TRAINING	Players: Learning Coach: Teaching	
	TEACHING PROCESS			
CONCLUSION	**APPLICATION**	SKILL GAME	Players: Playing Coach: Assessing	
	WRAP-UP	*Post-session de-briefing*	Players: Listening/discussing Coach: Summarising	

As in the Game Training Phase, we recommend that the coach FRAMES the session before it starts. This is not only to brief the players and stimulate the aural and visual learners (see Part One) but in this age-group the ability to enthuse and inspire the players is crucial.

Similarly, after training the coach should wrap up the session with a de-brief and summary, engaging in some question and answer to gauge understanding.

Structural differences:

o different session component names
o only one component in the main teaching part

So, are there major differences in the way the Skill Acquisition coach **actually conducts** the session?

In the FOUNDATION and CONCLUSION stages, there is very little difference.

But let us now review the ANIMATION stage;

ANIMATION

o Checklist
o Teaching Process

Now, with the detail for each part:

ANIMATION	CHECKLIST	Start Organisation Attitude Ability Understanding Shape Self
	TEACHING PROCESS	**Task Observation Intervention**

Checklist

It is still recommended for the Skill coach to go through a checklist, as a means of ensuring the coach addresses all the 'preventable' reasons why the session might not reach an optimum outcome.

Remember, the Checklist phase is also the time when the players unconsciously go through their 'playing checklist'. They need to get used to the size of the area, their role and the roles of team-mates and opponents, exercise constraints, etc. Bear in mind that they have just completed an unopposed Skill Introduction as a warm-up, and the players will need to adjust and 'build up to the required tempo.'

This is not a smart time to start coaching the players.

While they go through the player's checklist, you can go through the coach's checklist. This way, everyone has the best chance of doing well.

'CHECKLIST' ELEMENTS – SKILL ACQUISITION	
Start	Start the Skill Training component quickly and efficiently
Organisation	Check that the balls, bibs, cones, goals, etc, are all where they should be, according to the session plan. Also check that the areas you planned are in fact appropriate for the players.
Attitude	Check the players are in the right frame of mind to apply and improve themselves
Ability	Check that the exercise is not going to break down because some or all of the players are unable to perform the tasks required
Understanding	Check that the players understand the 'rules and roles' of the exercise; are they clear how it works?
Shape	In Game Training, the coach checks that both teams have the correct 'shape' in relation to the 11v11 context. In Skill Acquisition, this is obviously less of an issue. However, the Skill coach must always have in mind the Playing Style and Team Model, as this is the setting in which the functional game skills they teach will be expressed. Therefore, they will try to structure practices and encourage relationships between players in such a way that training that will assist the players' transition into team football. This must be done without actually giving players positions or talking about team tactics
Self	Check yourself: are you are ready to move onto the actual teaching part of the session ('Am I in the right frame of mind to give them a great session?', 'What is my session objective? What are the main tasks I've planned to set? What cues do I have ready to support the players?')

Teaching Process

'TEACHING PROCESS' ELEMENTS – SKILL ACQUISITION	
TASK	Set the planned Exercise Task. This task, in the context of the chosen set-up, was designed to challenge the players in the specific aspect of the designated core skill
OBSERVATION	Observe how well the players can perform the task. Given the built-in challenge mentioned above, you would naturally expect to observe things that need improving.
INTERVENTION	Intervene to provide feedback and guide players towards improved skill performance. This includes: - clarifying the player actions required to achieve the task - give players cues to support learning - give feedback on performance - ask questions to stimulate and engage players - 'step up, step down' if required

'Setting a Task' is something any coach can do

'Observing' is something that most coaches should be able to do

But…

'Intervention' is the key to effective coaching

Intervention is the hardest skill for the coach to master

Knowing when and how to intervene is the most important skill a coach must have, and one of the hardest to develop.

The only way to really develop it is by regularly doing it, with some guidance to assist you.

A player has a coach to guide him, but has to put in a lot of practice.

You as a coach gain guidance from coach educators (by attending coaching courses) and from books like this, but then you, too, have to go away and put in a lot of practice.

Note: It takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in most things. How many hours will you put on the clock?

Intervention in the Skill Acquisition Phase

Research in this field has repeatedly found that the common practices in which most coaches engage are not effective.

WHAT MOST COACHES *ACTUALLY* DO
• set up a practice that resembles football • keep stopping the practice • when they stop it, spend two or three minutes telling the players what they know about football and to point out all the things the players are doing wrong

The reasons for this may be:

- they copy what other coaches do **(emulation)**
- they use the training methods employed when they were playing **(tradition)**
- they come up with what they feel is right **(intuition)**

WHAT COACHES *SHOULD* DO
Apply **research-based** principles that are shown to be effective

So, what research-based principles are we looking for?

Let us apply our usual logical, football-specific approach:

We have a definition for football skill:

- **The consistent ability to quickly select and perfectly execute the correct football action for the situation**

We are working in the Skill Acquisition Phase, then, with players who are talented but cannot yet be defined as having football skill.

Our job is to help them learn football skill, and to nurture and develop their TALENT.

Therefore, the research-based principles we need must help us with these questions:

- How do players learn to make the right decision quickly?
- How do they learn to execute the right action?
- How do they learn to do these consistently?
- What do we know about talent that will help us do our job better?

<div style="border: 2px solid red; background-color: yellow; text-align: center;">

A starting point is often
MOTIVATION

Do they WANT to get better?
If that is missing, the whole
exercise is probably doomed to fail.

</div>

Below are the major research-based principles which will guide the coach towards becoming more effective:

Feedback

'Feedback is the rocket fuel that propels learning'

Situation:

They can't do something yet
They need to get better at doing it

So, if they need to get better at doing something, theu needs to know:

- what it is they are doing wrong
- what they need to do differently.

And in essence, that is the key function of the coach.

Feedback is the main tool that assists this process.

TWO TYPES OF FEEDBACK	
INTRINSIC	EXTRINSIC
Takes place internally	Provided by someone else, usually the coach
The brain evaluates what it just did (what it made the muscles/body do and what the outcome was)	The brain has to process what it is told or shown about what it just did and what the outcome was

TWO TYPES OF EXTRINSIC FEEDBACK – PROVIDED BY THE COACH	
DESCRIPTIVE	PRESCRIPTIVE
DESCRIBES what you saw the player do	PRESCRIBES what you believe the player should have done

> *Great coaches are able to design practice so that feedback is embedded in the exercise, leading to automatic adjustment*

The FEEDBACK CHALLENGE for the coach:

- How can you help them maximise their INTRINSIC feedback processes?

- How can you avoid misusing your EXTRINSIC feedback?

INTRINSIC FEEDBACK

The main tool for the coach here is 'THE TASK' that you use. If there are clear tasks made clear to all the players, it is easier for the intrinsic feedback process to operate. The brain can evaluate what it just did and the resulting outcome in the context of what was the desired outcome.

EXTRINSIC FEEDBACK

Coaches often provide feedback that is not very useful to the player.

- DESCRIPTIVE. By describing what the player just did, the coach often provides feedback that is identical to their INTRINSIC feedback, eg 'you missed the target.' This is simply stating the obvious.

- PRESCRIPTIVE. By prescribing what the player should do, the coach often neglects to explain 'WHY' they need to do it. It is also not effective to remove the player from the process by constantly DIRECTING them.

Again, the secret of maximizing EXTRINSIC feedback is to use THE TASKS that you set. In conjunction with this, the coach should remember the process of PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION that governs performance. You must try to assist the player in all three stages.

Example:

COACH: 'John, what are we trying to achieve in this situation?' (clarify the TASK)

PLAYER: 'We're trying to get one of us across that line with the ball' (Player engagement; developing knowledge base)

COACH: 'Spot on, so can you see (PERCEPTION) how that pass actually made it easier for the defender to stop you?' (Collaborating to provide DESCRIPTIVE feedback)

PLAYER: 'Yes, yes I can now'

COACH: 'So what might have been a better pass in this scenario?' (Questioning to assist DECISION-MAKING; guiding, not directing)

PLAYER: 'I could pass to Dave because the defender wouldn't be able to get there in time' (Collaborating to provide PRESCRIPTIVE feedback)

COACH: 'Excellent, OK let's replay that situation and you can play that pass this time (EXECUTION), Mike please play the same ball to John and we'll go live.'

Notice in the above dialogue how the coach keeps things SHORT and SIMPLE.

Notice above, also, that it is a DIALOGUE (two people speaking) and not a MONOLOGUE (just the coach speaking, hoping that others are listening and assuming that they understand)

Do you think they get better by spending more time practicing or spending more time listening to you?

SUMMARY FEEDBACK

A type of DESCRIPTIVE feedback that can be useful is SUMMARY or AVERAGE feedback. The coach allows a number of repetitions of the game situation to flow without interruption, then either:

- SUMMARISES: 'We are still having trouble achieving what we set out to achieve; three times now, 'x' has happened because of 'y'; also, we haven't managed to get 'a' because on both occasions that it was possible, we did 'b' instead.'

225

- Or the coach indicates AVERAGE performance: 'The problem we've been having is failing to see the opportunity for the killer pass; Dave, your first touch is tending to go backwards; Mike, you need to face forward more regularly before you receive the ball.'

How often should the coach give feedback?

Research suggests:

- more frequent feedback is not necessarily better for helping players develop skill
- many studies have in fact demonstrated that when players practice without extrinsic feedback it is actually more beneficial than practicing with it

This could be because when players don't receive extrinsic feedback they have to do more of their own problem solving and have to make the most of the intrinsic feedback.

The more you force them to tune in to their intrinsic feedback, the better they will be able to perform in competition without your assistance. Using task-based coaching will help, as well as providing the right type, amount, and frequency of extrinsic feedback.

> **NOTE:**
> **If the task you set is easy to achieve,**
> **there will be no problem-solving**

Quality of feedback before quantity

Think about what you will say and when you will say it; choose the right moment to maximise effectiveness.

Feedback for short-term or long-term success?

Research suggests that many coaches choose exercises that lead to improved performance ONLY IN THE PRACTICE, but NOT IN THE GAME.

This is particularly true of isolated drills and other simple exercises with little game relevance. Players appear to achieve success and 'performance seems to be improving' so the coach is happy. But the relationship to match performance is minimal. Performance seems to be good, but there is no real learning.

Many coaches also deliver feedback in a way that has short-term benefit. The table below explains this point:

LESS EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK	MORE EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK
- Frequent - Immediate - Detailed - Focused on movement - Negative	- Infrequent - Delayed - Less detailed - Focused on action/effect/ task - Positive
OUTCOME	OUTCOME
- Performance **in practice** improves - EXPLICIT LEARNING	- Learning that develops **game-related skill** - IMPLICIT LEARNING

'Skills learnt using instructional techniques that promote IMPLICIT learning are more resistant to forgetting, less likely to break down under pressure and are more flexible and adaptable than those acquired via traditional explicit methods'
Mark Williams

Our aim must be to provide 'deep learning', leading towards unconscious action rather than conscious. We all know top-level football does not allow players much time to think before deciding and acting, so those with the unconscious ability to do so are more likely to survive. This IMPLICIT learning is the key.

As we saw in an earlier chapter, research has shown that in football the development of motor skills is inseparable from the development of perceptual expertise. In other words, repetition without decision-making (isolated, drill-type exercises) only develops 'muscle memory' and this does not appear to be the most educationally effective way.

Research into talent development

GROWTH MINDSET

Carol Dweck has outlined two distinctly contrasting mindsets in learners. One is called 'fixed mindset' and the other 'growth mindset.'

The main differences between the two are in the table below:

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
- Talent = innate - Failure = de-motivation - No perseverance ('I do not have the talent so I will never be able to learn this')	- Talent = trainable - Failure = extra motivation - Strong perseverance ('I can learn this through effort')
OUTCOME	OUTCOME
Achievement of mediocrity	Achievement of excellence

If a player feels that their ability is 'fixed' or 'constant', then the likelihood of the player developing is minimal. But if the player believes that 'growth' or 'positive improvement' is always possible with effort and perseverance, then there is a much greater chance that it will happen.

In the specific context of Skill Acquisition, what is the possibility of the player 'acquiring skill' if they believe they are inherently limited and that their skill level is 'fixed'?

It seems clear that a 'growth mindset' is preferred if the young player is to reach their full potential; a growth mindset is a characteristic of most top-performers.

Therefore, the coach must strive to instill this 'growth mindset' in all their players.

Many of the tips and tools described throughout this book, and 'The Football Coaching Process' will help the coach to achieve this.

For example:

- Select the right type of training exercise
- Provide 'optimal challenge point', and help players see the way to overcome the barriers
- Make the right interventions
- Ensure feedback is always positive
- Focus on tasks and outcomes to strive towards

In addition, coaches should note these two pieces of important advice:

1. Praise effort, not talent

PRAISING EFFORT – PREFERRED TYPE OF PRAISE
'You're picking this up really well, keep it up'
'That was an excellent decision that time'
'Those killer passes are starting to do some damage now, that's a real improvement'
'Can everyone see how Ante is doing his best to face forward every time? Good effort'
'Yellow team, you've really focused on this task and the football has been very good so far'
'You're working very hard to lose your defender, well done'

2. Failure is a learning opportunity

We should always remember, too, that failure (making a mistake, losing the ball, making the wrong decision, etc) is a learning opportunity. These are the occasions when the coach must resist the temptation to give negative feedback.

With task-based coaching, it should be more natural to simply ask 'Boys, what are we trying to do here? …… 'So, if we are trying to get the ball to the target player, what would be a better decision next time you're in that kind of situation?'

The 'fear of failure' is a common reason for inhibited performance and coaches whose response to mistakes is 'No, no, no! That's wrong! How many times do I have to tell you?' will instill this fear in their players.

'You talk too much!'

Studies into coach behavior often reveal that coaches spend far too much time talking to or shouting at players during practice.

The data on the coaches' 'verbalisations' from one such study across a wide subject group is in the table below:

Behaviour	Nature	TIME %
INSTRUCTION	Telling players what to do / coaching interventions	30%
SUPPORT/ENCOURAGEMENT	Praising or general comments like 'well done', 'come on, move the ball quicker'	25%
MANAGEMENT OF EXERCISE	Explaining the practice, etc	22%
SILENCE	Saying nothing for 5 seconds or more	20%

Except for SILENCE, the rate for the other three was more than one per minute

The high frequency of verbalisations contradicts motor learning research on instructional strategies and suggests learning may actually be degraded.

We can deduce from the above that, since the coaches were talking for around 80% of practice time, they only spent 20% of the time on concentrated observation which is a critical skill for a coach.

How can you focus on 'observing' and assessing real progress when you're constantly talking?

Coaches who continually talk while the exercise is ongoing are often engaged in giving players instructions on what to do. This must be avoided. Coaches should

229

WATCH what players do and THINK more than they TALK. The players must be allowed to put their own thinking and decisions into practice, so the fundamental processes of PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION can be developed.

Special qualities

The effective Skill Acquisition coach clearly needs to possess and/or develop a range of competencies and attributes.

One of these is the ability to relate with young players and ensure that training is always 'fun' rather than 'work'.

However, it is a mistake to extend this into an assumption that working with talented 9-13 year-olds is a role where having fun is the main goal and that there is 'no pressure' attached to it.

There may not be the same week-to-week, result-focused pressure that the First Team coach faces.

But there should be a more 'slow-cooking' pressure. The Skill Coach should put himself under pressure to work cleverly and professionally so that EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEIR PLAYERS IMPROVES THEIR SKILL LEVEL.

This is a huge responsibility. It is not a comforting thought to have to say to yourself, 'that player had great potential, but they didn't progress to a high level because I didn't do my job properly.'
Training talented 9-13 year-olds is a very serious role; but it is best conducted in an environment of stimulating enjoyment.

That is not intended to dissuade coaches from coaching players in the Skill Acquisition Phase; 9-13 year-olds are a fantastic age-group to coach and the work is thoroughly rewarding. However, it is a crucial stage of development, the 'golden age of learning', and skill coaches have a key role not only in helping the players reach their full potential, but helping Australia reach its long-term goals.

The following chapters apply to the whole of Youth Football, i.e. Skill Acquisition and Game Training Phases.

Chapter 13 - Talent Identification

Recently, there was a movie posted on YouTube showing Tomy, the 10 year-old son of Colombian football star Juan Pablo Angel. The skills they display, one would imagine, should be instantly recognisable as exceptional for such a young player.

Many comments below the clip are extremely positive, predicting great success for the boy:

'The next Messi'
'Chelsea, sign them please'
'An awkward moment when you realize a kid is a better player than you are'

However, a large number of people expressed very contradictory opinions, such as these:

'He never passes the ball'
'More like a selfish only child'
'They aren't good, they doesn't play with the team'
'Superb talent, they'll never progress into a pro though because evidently their coach doesn't know enough about the game to teach them to look up and pass the ball every now and again'
'They never passes the ball, they think they are the best and they are playing against other kids who can't kick the ball properly...'
'If they passed the ball more they would be a much better player'

Some other critics were so unimpressed that they even added offensive comments that cannot be printed.

The conclusion one has to draw is that not everyone has the same view when it comes to 'talent.'

One also has to acknowledge that the comments above cannot simply be divided into 'right' and 'wrong.'

Those who wrote positive things like 'The next Messi' may be wrong: they may be performing at the time the movie was filmed just like Messi did at the same age, but

that does not mean they will turn out to be the best player in the world; it does not even mean they will become a professional footballer.

Those who wrote negative things like 'they'll never progress into a pro' may actually be right.

The fact is: nobody KNOWS how the boy will turn out.

The questions are, though, would the staff at your club have the same negative opinions as those on YouTube about Tomy Angel? If a 10 year-old like that arrives for a trial at your club, would they be selected?

What is 'Talent' and how do we identify it?

There are a range of dictionary definitions of 'talent' which tend to fall into two categories:

- *Having* a special natural ability or aptitude

- Having a *capacity* for achievement or success;

In the context of Youth Football, it is the second category that we should adopt, since we are trying to identify *potential.* You are trying to make an informed decision on the **possibility** that a youngster *might be* a top player in around ten years.

Remember, the player is still EVOLVING.

This is where many selectors get it wrong – they only look for those who stand out at the time of selection.

Talented young players will demonstrate that they already have a certain amount of ability in football; there will be *visible signs* that they have already developed or started to develop some of the requirements of a football player. In essence, the *visible* signs are all you can base decisions on. We must also remember, though, that when a player does not demonstrate that they *already* have one of the desired qualities, this does not mean they cannot develop it in the future.

The *invisible* signs involve guesswork. Here, we are talking about qualities such as 'coachability', character and resilience.

It is generally agreed, based on research, that nobody has the magic formula for Talent Identification. There will always be late developers, those who 'fell through the cracks', and that is something that cannot be changed.

However, in today's world, everyone is concerned, and rightly so, that they do not fail to identify someone who should have been.
So, how do you make an informed decision?

We have just answered the question 'What is Talent'? Let us now ask ourselves some further fundamental questions about identifying it.

Why Talent Identification?

This can easily be put into perspective:

The player has a mission, and we have a mission.

The player's long-term goal is to play football professionally, hopefully for Australia and for their favourite club. We have a responsibility to give them every chance of realizing their dream.

Australia's long-term mission is to be a world leader in the world game: a key factor in this is the need for a constant supply of international standard players available for the National team. Therefore, of course, youth development is a crucial part of the whole process.

Your club's mission, too, should hinge upon developing young players.

Basically, there is no point in going through the time-consuming and costly process of setting up a Youth Development system if you don't have the best possible players in it.

How to conduct Talent Identification?

As with most projects, you need to establish and articulate a clear and logical PROCESS. This needs to be supported by guidelines with associated policies and procedures.

Below are the key factors involved in establishing a process.

1. Selection criteria

This point is the most fundamental: what are you looking for?

The guiding factor is the definition of football skill. In Chapter 11a, we defined this as:

- **The consistent ability to quickly select and perfectly execute the correct football action for the situation**

As this is *Talent* Identification, we are looking for players who show the *potential* to develop this. Some young players will show this ability, or parts of it (i.e. 'quickly select' or 'correct football action') in *some* situations, i.e. not consistently.

234

Since 'football action' essentially means the Four Core Skills (plus Positioning and Communication) then First Touch, Running with the Ball, 1v1 and Striking the Ball should be prevalent as criteria. This takes care of the EXECUTE part of the definition.

Since 'quickly select' relates to the key element of DECISION-MAKING, this should also be present in the criteria.

Team Model and Playing Style become relevant as an additional factor with players older than 13, as you are looking for players who will fit the way you play.

Team Model and Playing Style should only be in the back of your mind as a long-term reference point with younger players. In the Skill Acquisition Phase, we are only concerned with the base of the Team Model, the Player Actions. The Four Core Skills (plus Positioning and Communication) are the tools to develop in this phase, which will allow the players to function as team players in the Game Training Phase, in the context of the Playing Style.

Talent Identification must be based on the same things that determine how you will assess and develop players after they are selected.

A definition of a Talented Player:

- ***A player who <u>demonstrates the potential to develop</u> the consistent ability to quickly select and perfectly execute the correct football action for the situation***

That is what you are looking for.

Fitness

Neither the Definition of Skill nor the Playing Style Statement make any mention of physical characteristics such as strength, endurance and speed. Therefore, they should not be criteria for selection.

You are selecting 'footballers' not 'athletes.'

Since fitness is not what we are looking for, fitness tests are not necessary. We should also note that fitness testing is pointless before or during the growth spurt.

Clubs should avoid all non-relevant tests focusing on non-football capacities, such as endurance. Football is not an endurance sport: players do not run for long periods at the same pace in the same direction. The prevalence of such tests in football may relate to the direct transfer of training methods from other disciplines in which a high volume of 'steady state' running is important.

(Note: 'At the 2012 Euro Championships, the teams that covered the highest distances were those eliminated earliest' Andy Roxburgh)

Physical attributes such as agility, balance and co-ordination *are* important and should form part of the criteria. They are also easily observed.

The size of the player is also not mentioned in the Definition of Skill or the Playing Style Statement. We are all aware of international players who could be described as 'small' or 'slightly built.' Selecting players at a young age who are bigger, faster or stronger than the rest is obviously the wrong approach. Apart from the reasons already stated, there is the issue of Relative Age Effect: some players will be bigger and stronger simply because they are older than others.

It is well-known that many coaches select the big, strong and fast players because they want to win the league this year and believe that this will secure them that success. **Clubs must ensure that such selfish, short-sighted practices do not occur**. Promote talent not physicality.

If the coach's motivation for Talent Identification is to win the league this season, that is the wrong starting point.

Relative Age Effect

We have mentioned this many times. There must be strategies in place in all clubs to make sure this does not prejudice selection of players.

When a younger child competes against an older child, they are disadvantaged. This is not comparing apples with apples. The more mature player may appear better because they are able to run faster or use other physical superiorities. They may get the ball more often and lose their marker more often because of their physical advantage, not because of their talent.

In trial processes, consider identification strategies that allow every talented player to display their potential, such as separate activities for those born from January to June and those born July to December. If either group contains a player who is obviously smaller or bigger than the others, switch them to the other group.

It is also a good idea to balance the selections you make based on birth month, choosing 50% from each half of the year. Everyone at the club must accept the fact that proper Talent Identification might mean that your team has smaller, slower or physically weaker players than some of the teams you play against.

One can see that the whole process must be about finding talented individual players, not picking a team that has a better chance of winning the championship.

Short-term losing, long-term winning

2. Identification tool

An identification tool gives you something concrete to use, rather than the traditional method in which the coach watches players for a while and then names the players they 'like.'

With a sound identification tool, you move closer to *knowing* you pick the right ones. You never actually *know* with 100% certainty, of course, but you will be towards that end of the spectrum. Coaches who simply *eyeball* players can only *hope* they do it right, and that is not the desirable end of the spectrum.

The identification tool is basically a checklist or form which lists the qualities to be looked for, with space for a comment or rating from the selector.

What should be contained in the tool?

Logically, it must be something that helps you to maximise the chance of identifying:

- **players who demonstrate the potential to develop the consistent ability to quickly select and perfectly execute the correct football action for the situation**

We discussed Selection Criteria based on the definitions above, and the key points have been inserted in the below:

QUALITIES	RATING			
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
First Touch				
Running with the Ball				
1v1				
Striking the Ball				
Positioning				
Communication				
Decision-making				
Competitiveness				
ABC				

(ABC = Agility, Balance, Co-ordination)

We have seen that football players are constantly engaged in the process of PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION, as outlined in the definition of football skill.

Perception takes place in the brain and is therefore difficult, if not impossible to assess.

Decision-making takes place in the brain too, but can be assessed visibly because we can see what the player does (EXECUTION follows DECISION.)

The coach must be careful to distinguish between DECISION-MAKING and EXECUTION. A player may make the right decision, but execute the action poorly; conversely, they might make the wrong decision, but perform the selected action perfectly. Instead of considering both incidents as evidence of low ability, both players should be recognized for the talent they demonstrated in separate qualities, both of which are crucial. The main point is, a good youth development system will develop the player in the areas in which they are deficient.

That is why 'decision-making' is a separate quality on the sample tool above.

What about personal qualities?

These are the 'invisibles' mentioned earlier. Aspects such as resilience and coachability are difficult to evaluate without seeing the player over time and working with him.

Therefore, observing and evaluating a player over a long period is advisable in order to make an accurate assessment. We still hear stories, unfortunately, of youth clubs making decisions on which players to sign based on **ONE TRIAL**, involving a large proportion of youngsters they have never previously seen.

Some personal qualities can be evaluated reasonably well by close observation of the player.

Winning mentality

A winning mentality is often listed among the characteristics of a top player, and we can see its relevance in a game where winning is the objective. The 'never say die' approach is one of the strengths of Australian players and was given prime importance in a recent document, 'The Way of the Socceroos', which was compiled by National Team players.

Winning mentality is an important quality and is touched upon in the sample form above, by looking at the player's Competitiveness. The desire to affect the game in a positive way and a refusal to stop trying even when you are losing can often be seen in young players.

Other qualities are also regularly mentioned as pre-requisites for a top player and can be summarized as 'The 4 Cs':

Commitment
Confidence
Control
Concentration

The presence or absence of these may be detectable in certain behaviours displayed. For example, they may show confidence by giving you a handshake or making good eye contact when talking or listening; body language is another indicator.

Control refers to 'emotional control.' Positive signs include a lack of over-reaction when things go wrong (eg, they misses a good chance, gets tackled harshly or loses the ball) Negative signs include berating team-mates, complaining about decisions and over-reacting to a missed shot.

These 4Cs can provide additional information when making decisions on which players to select.

Parents

It is widely accepted that a supportive home environment is a pre-requisite for developing talent. This is hard to assess. Serious clubs will try to meet with the player and their parents trying to observe the relationship between them. They would also clarify the demands and requirements on the player and the parents' role in supporting them.

Advice when finalizing selections:

Be careful not to just select players who are 'rather good at most things.' This is the potential danger when you use an overall 'points score' as the solitary consideration. It is wise to keep an eye out for players who have a 'weapon', a superlative quality.
If they are outstanding in just one or two qualities, but poor in some others, you should consider selecting them. For example: there are not enough special 'matchwinning' players at the top level in Australia, so a youngster who displays exceptional ability in 1v1 situations should not be discarded just because they do not display ability in, say, passing the ball. It is much easier to teach passing the ball than it is to teach creative 1v1 play.

Look for the best of TOMORROW, don't just promote the best of today.

Look for differing qualities (different types of player)

The sample tool above is just a starting point, and it should be adjusted to make it user-friendly, and allowing space perhaps for additional observations (eg, The 4 C's) and a written comment from the selector.

Who carries out Talent Identification?

We now have an Identification Tool and are ready to assess the players. Another critical consideration is the issue of WHO will use the tool and make the tough decisions involved.

Firstly, whoever it is must be trained to use the selection tool and be completely familiar with it well before selections start. The club needs selectors who are as consistent as possible in its interpretation and implementation.

At least one 'dummy run' is a good idea, so that selectors can become familiar with using the tool in a live practical setting.

Identification is ideally carried out by experienced coaches. They must be conversant in the Playing Style and Team Model and, in the Skill Acquisition Phase, aware of the specific considerations it requires.

The experience of the selector is a key factor: a combination of playing and coaching football is desirable. It is advisable to have multiple selectors present; more than one opinion should be taken into account so discussion and comparison of evaluations can take place.

The whole process must be supervised by the Technical Director or Youth Department co-ordinator and they must have the final say when there is disagreement. They have the long-term mission in mind and is one of the custodians of the club's Philosophy and Vision.

How should trialling be conducted?

Generally in Australia, not only is the trial process much less efficient than it should be, it also tends to be very short. Players must be given the best possible opportunity to display the talent they possess.

You should bear in mind that on any given day of trial, one or more players may be:

- sick
- carrying an injury
- tired because of a match for their school that day
- underperforming because of problems at home
- not as familiar as other players with the type of activities conducted
- below their best for any number of reasons

Therefore, an extended process is preferable: the longer the trial period, the better.

Youth Departments at the big professional clubs in traditional football countries have a more longitudinal process, combining scouting with trialing. They will tend to know all the top players in their own league, and assign others to keep an eye out for talented players in other competitions.

Australian clubs, generally speaking, do not have this approach. Most rely on a brief number of trials, which are generally not conducted to the highest standards, while *hoping* that some good players turn up for trials.

There also appears to be a tendency towards a 'start from scratch every year' approach, where often a new coach is appointed and they pick a team for that season. The long-term development view is usually absent. It would be better for Australian football and all the clubs if there was a Technical Director monitoring the players' progress over a number of seasons, deciding which players deserve to

remain in the team the following year. Consistent development over a long period of time would be beneficial and clubs would find themselves more likely to produce their 'own' players. This would, of course, be more successful if clubs selected properly in the first place, as outlined in this chapter; providing excellent training and a professional environment would also influence the players to stay with the club.

> **'Build a culture of excellence, and you will attract excellence to your culture'**

Identification activities

If we are looking at what a player does with the ball and what they do off the ball, it is logical that we must provide a large number of opportunities for them to demonstrate these.

It is disconcerting to see and hear of trials being conducted with young players in which 11v11 games form the major part of the selection process. Players trialling for U13 and under 14 are usually not experienced enough in this format making it a flawed selection medium. Worse still, the number of times a player touches the ball or can clearly demonstrate positioning and communication ability in 11v11 are very low. 11v11 games are not an efficient means of identifying talent; small-sided games are the ideal format in which to assess the player.

In the Skill Acquisition Phase, you should provide many opportunities for players to engage in 1v1 and 2v2, as well as other small-sided games, with 7v7 being the recommended maximum.

In the Game Training Phase, larger games should also be used; as stated earlier, 11v11 is not the most effective. If used, it should not take up the majority of trial time.

Varying the teams

It is wise to make sure that players are not kept in the same teams throughout the exercises: if teams are not changed regularly, you are not providing equal opportunity for all to demonstrate their talent. A less talented player may actually appear to have greater potential if they are constantly playing with a team of better players; a talented player may not get the chance to show it if their team is always being dominated by stronger teams. Mixing them up gives you a chance to observe all the players in different scenarios and with as much fairness as possible.

Skill Tests

These are not recommended for use in identification. As we have seen earlier, the execution of technique in football loses its context when it is separated from

decision-making. Skill tests which involve the individual player dribbling round cones or passing through gates are non-contextual. Unfortunately, many coaches use them because they appear organized and professional, and provide statistics or scores which they believe will help them choose the best players. Such skill tests may tell you something, but it is not really what you should be looking for.

Since we have stressed the importance of PERCEPTION- DECISION-EXECUTION, it is critical that the player must be in situations that require PERCEPTION; individual skill tests require no PERCEPTION or DECISION-MAKING. Therefore, the focus should be on game-based activities.

We have now decided on Selection Criteria, a Selection Tool, the people who will use the tool and appropriate identification activities. However, the whole process so far will be compromised if is too difficult to distinguish the players. Selectors need to be able to instantly record their observations, and there is a lot to observe. Trials where the coach tries to remember which players did well by trusting their memory are, hopefully, a thing of the past. Writing a number on the player's wrist is also inefficient as it is constantly necessary to ask a player what their number is, and that can only be done when there is an appropriate opportunity; the coach needs immediate recognition of who does what, given that there are a number of players to be assessed and the next identification moment presents itself quickly.

Numbered bibs or shirts are essential.

Assign certain selectors to certain players, the fewer the better, to ensure every attendee is fully evaluated. Thus, selectors will be more able to observe each player's off-the-ball positioning as well as other qualities, and a much more accurate assessment will be gained.

Goalkeeper selection

Although goalkeeping is a specialist position the principles above still apply.

PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION is still a key factor, so just like players they should be assessed in game situations rather than in isolated technique exercises.

It is highly recommended that you utilize someone experienced as a goalkeeper and goalkeeping coach to advise on selection.

Making sure you select the right players is only the first challenge: the second, and equally vital one, is to make sure you give every selected player the maximum chance of reaching their full potential by providing the right training in a sound environment.

And that is what this whole book is about.

LEARNING MATHEMATICS	
Preparation	Classroom activities with a teacher
Test	Sitting an exam - student demonstrates what they have learned - teacher does not come into the exam room to help the student

LEARNING FOOTBALL	
Preparation	Training activities with a coach
Test	Playing a match - player demonstrates what they have learned - coach does not come onto the field to help the player

The above comparison gives a good insight into the role of the youth coach, especially on Match day. When the team plays a competitive game, it is the players' opportunity to put into practice what they have been learning recently, as well as the cumulative learning accrued since they first started kicking a ball around.

For the coach it is the most valuable assessment opportunity, as the players are in an 'examination' setting.

The key message is:

The Match is for the players

Training is always aimed at improving Match performance. Therefore the Match tells us how the players are progressing.

The difference with Youth players is that we are developing players for the future: we are assessing whether they are progressing in such a way that they will be able to play high-level competitive Matches when their development is complete.

Remember how we defined the role of the coach in the two phases of Youth Development:

Role of the Coach – Skill Acquisition Phase

'To prepare talented players for team football by developing the functional game skills'

Role of the Coach – Game Training Phase

'To prepare skilful players for performance phase football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting'

The focus is clearly on the individual: the coach is concerned with how the individual player is developing towards being an effective team player when it really counts, in the Performance Phase.

This player-centred approach should not be thrown out of the window on Match Day. Too often, we see Youth Coaches transform into stereotypical Senior Team coaches, shouting and screaming to make sure they win, as if their job depends on every result.

Of course, winning is the *purpose* of football, whenever a Match is played. But, in Youth Football the important thing to remember is **'not at all costs.'**

Match Day Guidelines:

Youth coaches should avoid the following behaviours:

- Avoid shouting instructions to your players (let them play, while you observe)
- Avoid criticizing your players on the field
- Avoid abusing opposing players and staff
- Avoid complaining about decisions and/or berating Match Officials
- Avoid reacting to every incident on the field, whether positive or negative
- Avoid knee-jerk substitutions

Youth coaches should aim to demonstrate the following behaviours:

- Appear calm and composed
- Observe what is actually happening in the game, and record your observations
- Focus on individual performances and progress
- Give praise to good football, whether by your team or by the opposition
- Show respect and appreciation to Match Officials, and insist on the same from your players
- When a refereeing decision goes against you, 'focus on what you can control', 'leave the past behind' and teach players to do the same (eg, prepare for the resulting set play)
- Show patience and persistence; if a player is having difficulty, help him to deal with the situation, rather than substituting him immediately.

In the Coaching Expertise Model, the competencies required on Match Day are divided into these three sections and associated components:

FOCUS	Post-Training Pre-Match	From end of last training session until match kicks off
PERFORMANCE	First Half Half-Time Second Half	From match kick-off until final whistle
RE-FOCUS	Post-Match Pre-Training	From final whistle until next training session

These principles apply regardless of the stage of development: all that varies is the level of detail. A Head Coach in the A-League, with the support of their staff, goes through a very detailed and intensive process in the three windows outlined above, with a very clear intent: to win as many matches as possible.

Youth coaches are not in Performance Phase mode, so have a different approach.

Below are some suggested guidelines for the Youth Coach to follow:

Focus

From end of last training session until match kicks off

Post-Training

- Check injuries and availability
- Name team: this should be possible, as the desired approach is to try as much as possible to give all players equal time on the field. So, the players who were on the bench last week should start this week and ideally play a full game. This obviously implies: it is not about having your best eleven on the field every week in their best positions. There will be some rotation to give players development and learning opportunities. With younger players, this will assist in determining what will eventually be their best position(s)
- Clarify match kick-off, venue, meeting point, arrival time, etc.

Pre-Match

- Avoid long-winded speeches. Let the players focus
- Give key tasks based on current cycle and recent training
- Clarify Team Tasks and Player Tasks of importance
- Refresh and reinforce the Key Principles from the Team Model
- Consider less time delivering grand addresses to whole squad, and more time in dialogue with individuals and small groups
- Provide a ball-centred warm-up

Performance

From match kick-off until final whistle

(Remind yourself of the key behaviours to avoid and to demonstrate in the lists above)

First Half

- Analyse! Observe and record the key points
- Main points of reference are the Team Model and the recent focus areas
- Try to observe and assess individual performance against expected outcomes, which will evolve from a 'Player Action' and 'Core Skill' focus with the very young player, through 'Player Task' and 'Team Task' focus as they progress. Obviously, this is not a black and white issue and the lines will blur, however this is a useful philosophical overview
- Write some main points of feedback to give players at half-time

Half-time

- It is a good idea to divide the half-time window into three 5-minute blocks
- First 5 minutes: the players will need to attend to certain personal things, and it is also wise to encourage them to discuss the issues from the first half. The coach can address certain individuals and/or prepare the key points of their team talk
- Second 5 minutes: a team talk focused on learning from the first half and preparing for the second half. Don't dwell on the past, try to affect the future
- Third 5 minutes: final preparations before leaving dressing room, player interaction, coach discusses with individuals/small groups
- Avoid substituting a player who has had a difficult first half. It is much better to provide the player the information they need to take on board, and then see whether they improve in the second half. This will tell you a lot about the player and their development potential. (This would be something that the Club TD or Youth Co-ordinator should keep an eye on and insist upon; the coach may be tempted to substitute him, but the TD must have the final say)
- Older players will of course require some team-focused and result-focused guidance as they move closer to the Performance Phase. This is in addition to, not in place of, individual feedback

Second Half

- Again, the coach should focus on individual performance. This is a good opportunity to see how players respond to half-time feedback, as well as how they respond to changing game situations
- Avoid the temptation to transform into a results-driven coach as the game progresses; this is especially apparent when the team is losing and the coach starts shouting all sorts of advice to try to get a goal. Two key points to bear in mind here: 1) observe how the players respond, eg: to being a goal down: this tells you a lot about them, 2) maintain the Playing Style, don't throw it out the window and play 'short-term winning' football
- Continue with observation and note-taking

Re-Focus

Post-match

- Players cool-down, rehydrate and refuel. Injuries are assessed and evaluated
- A short de-brief is a good idea. This should ideally be focused on 'what we aimed to do and how well we did it' and 'these were the challenges the opposition provided and this is how we responded.' There should be no emotional post-mortems. Try to give appropriate praise and some things for the players to consider: maximise the learning opportunity the Match provides
- Finalise your Match Report for submission to Club Technical Director

Pre-Training

- Remember that Youth Football should not be focused on 'winning the next match', which is of course true in the Performance Phase. So avoid re-visiting the issues from last weekend's match, or planning to prepare for next week's opponents
- Session Planning is governed by the Four-Year Plan and the Annual Plan. The coach simply refers to the appropriate cycle, week and day for guidance on the over-arching topics. The previous Match(es) can be referred to in two ways: 1) by planning the specific exercises to reflect situations from the Match in which the players need practice to improve, 2) by intervening in training sessions making reference to the last Match: 'This is how we lost possession far too often last weekend: can you see now how your positioning should be ……?' In other words, the Four-Year and Annual Plans do not get tossed in the bin because the team has lost a few games, or because the coach wants to prepare in order to avoid losing to a strong opponent next week.

Chapter 15 - Management for Youth Coaches and Clubs

The Coaching Expertise Model outlines three main areas of competency required by the Coach, shown in the central band below:

Vision and Philosophy		
Training	The Match	Management
Football Knowledge		
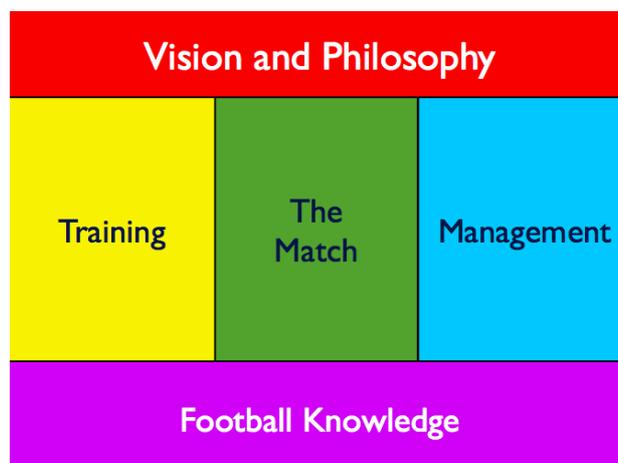
We have looked in great detail at TRAINING and provided an overview and guidelines for THE MATCH.

MANAGEMENT is broken down in the following way:

MANAGEMENT	
MANAGE SELF	MANAGE OTHERS
• Know yourself • Develop yourself	• Know others • Develop others

Let us now look at them separately:

Manage Self

Know yourself / Develop yourself

This basically means that before you can start to develop the qualities required to be an effective manager, you need to take stock of where you are now.

There are many books and theories on things like 'Management Skills', 'The secrets of successful leaders', 'Habits of top managers', 'The Levers for Effectiveness' and countless other self-help manuals.

Our approach is to try to keep things simple for football coaches. We have applied a logical and holistic viewpoint throughout, and here we do not deviate from that.

In our view, the coach needs to assess and develop their ability in three main areas:

248

- Communication
- Planning
- Leadership

Communication

When communicating with others, we must remember that they are processing audio and visual information. Therefore, the coach must be very mindful of:

What they can hear
What they can see

We refer to this simply as 'words and pictures.'

The most powerful self-assessment tool here is to get someone to film you when you are giving a talk or coaching your players.

Evaluate in terms of 'my objective was …' and assess how successfully you achieved it.

It is fair to say that developing and improving your communication skills should be an ongoing process that may never be totally finished.

(See 'Communication' in Part One of this manual)

Planning

The effective coach must Plan meticulously: the further you progress as a coach, the more things there are to plan, and the more people there are to take into account.

Even a Youth Coach must develop the skill of Planning, which encompasses more than just Training Session Plans.

Develop Plans for as much of your work as possible: eg, Match Day Plan: who does what, when do they do it, where will they be, who else needs to be there, what equipment is required, etc.

Leadership

Essentially, the coach is a leader. There are, again, many books and theories on this subject.

Since there is no formula for a good leader, and one's own personal qualities are a huge factor, it is better for us to ask coaches to consider some questions:

Do you know where the team should be going?
Can you convince others to come with you (shared mission/vision, belief in you, etc)?
Can you inspire them to do what is required to ensure success?
Can you guide them to take responsibility and make decisions?

Can you drive 'the plan' and its associated processes?

Self-awareness and self-development are crucial processes for a coach to go through.

Now we come to the second area of Management:

Manage Others

KNOW OTHERS – DEVELOP OTHERS

Applying the same principle as with 'SELF', one is better positioned to develop someone if one knows about that person.

Know Others

In Chapter 1, we provided an overview of the Physical and Mental Characteristics of young players. This gives a basis for developing them in the right manner.

Naturally, if a coach wants to conduct their own research to discover more information, then that is a good thing.

However, there are other dimensions of a player to consider as well as the specific age-based physical and mental aspects.

A key point in 'KNOWING' young players is to try to know them as PEOPLE as well as PLAYERS. The best coaches will ask and find out as much as they can about their players. Taking an interest in their family, their other activities, their school life and academic progress are good indicators of a real, holistic concern for the player as a person.

A player will feel valued and respected if they can see that the coach and the club have a real interest in them beyond just football; if a player feels like the club cares about them they are likely to perform better and is more likely to remain with that club.

Remember, we have a responsibility to society to help develop better people, not just better players.

Develop Others

With as complete a 'knowledge' as possible of your players, any development structure you design should now have a better chance of success.

What are they key elements of Youth Development Structures?

Club Model

This manual has repeatedly stressed some fundamental assumptions:

- The Club has a Vision and Philosophy
- The Club has a Playing Style Statement and a detailed Team Model based on that
- The Club has a Technical Director (TD)
- The TD is the custodian of the club's Philosophy and Playing Style, as well as its underpinning core values
- The TD oversees the Four-Year Plan and Annual Plans for the Skill Acquisition and Game Training Phases
- The Team Coach follows the Annual Plan, adjusting and tweaking based on observation and analysis of training and matches
- The TD guides, monitors and evaluates each Team Coach's performance
- The Team Coach, guided by the TD, conducts ongoing player assessment and evaluation
- The TD oversees a thorough, fair and logical process of scouting and recruitment

We strongly recommend that every club in Australia aims for this kind of model. From a national point of view, in light of our long-term goals, it is desirable that the Club Playing Style and Team Model are based on FFA's National Playing Style and Team Model.

Managing it all

As outlined at the start of this Chapter, the key skills required will be:

PLANNING

How does it all work? Who does what, when, where, with whom, and with what equipment?

Without Planning, it can all easily descend into chaos.

COMMUNICATION

Let everyone know what will be happening, where and when, and who has to be there. Let people know as early as you can, and establish an efficient system of letting people know when there are changes to the program.

Smart clubs make use of the latest technology to assist in this area.

LEADERSHIP

The Club TD, as well as the individual Team Coaches, must inspire everyone to keep working towards national, club and individual objectives.

Without good people 'on the ground', even the most elaborate and thoughtful plans are doomed to mediocrity or even failure.

Finding the right coaches

This is often the most difficult exercise in Youth Football. Amongst the main issues here is that coaching young players properly is one of the most crucial roles in football but, more often than not, the remuneration for these roles does not match its importance. Forward-thinking clubs will try to address this issue.

Fundamentally, clubs must realize that even if they have a first-class Technical Director and the best possible plan for developing the Team Model and Playing Style, the whole exercise could be a total waste of time if they do not have the right coaches for every team to bring it all to life.

A key issue is knowing what to look for in a youth coach. Appropriate accreditation is of course a key factor and in certain competitions it is a compulsory requirement.

However, clubs should take additional factors into account. Applicants should be judged on these three criteria:

1. Coaching qualifications
2. Coaching experience
3. Personal qualities (with specific reference to the age-group in question)

In relation to number 1, Coaching Qualifications, one must remember that passing a coaching course is like gaining a driving licence. As we all know, there are good drivers and not-so-good drivers, but they all gained their licence the same way, by meeting a minimum standard in terms of competency. The same can be said with coaches holding a certain licence; there are good C Licence holders and there are not-so-good C Licence holders.

Some drivers progress to become Formula One standard, and they do this by years of practice at an ever-increasing standard of competition.

The same applies to coaches who develop to a high level.

This is where number 2 comes in: Coaching Experience. Clubs should assess how long the coach has been practicing and at what level. Reliable references from previous coaching engagements will also help.

Clubs should not subscribe to the theory that 'they must be a good coach, they have a C Licence.' It is important to ask 'what have they done since gaining the C Licence?'

Remember, when FFA accredit a coach to a certain level it simply means they are 'licensed to drive' not that they are a 'Formula One' driver.

Number 3, the coach's Personal Qualities, is obviously an area the club should try to find out about, especially in relation to working with youth.

Many successful football organisations worldwide have flourished by applying one major principle: 'you may be talented, but if you are not a good person, we don't want you here.'

A coach's personal attributes should be closely investigated. Are you sure they are a 'good person'?

Evaluating a potential coach on all three of the above criteria, rather than on coaching qualifications alone, is a recommended policy for all clubs.

What other considerations are important in the Youth Department set-up?

BALANCE!

Football	Family	School	Social
BALANCE!			
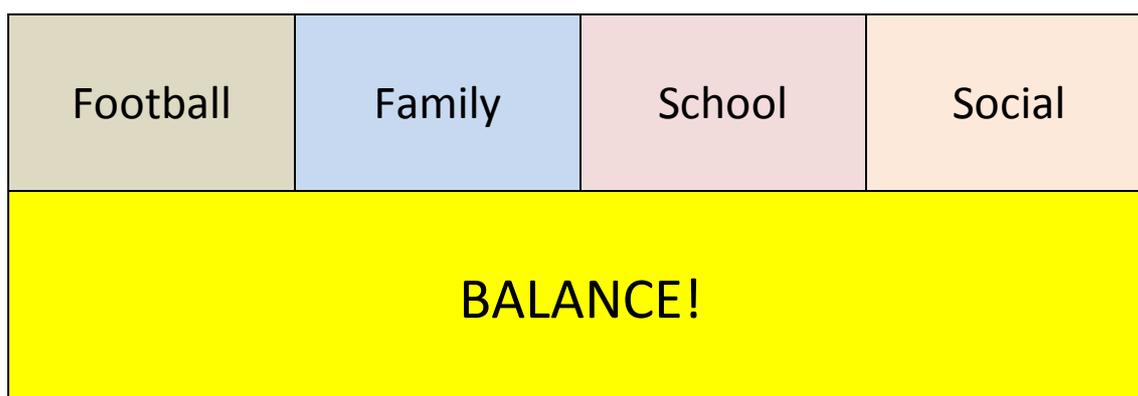
It is crucial that the club does not give the player the impression that football is all there is to life.

A balance between all aspects of the player's life and attention to all the essential areas of their overall development must be stressed.

Your mantra must be:

THE PLAYER COMES FIRST!

Serious clubs will engage the players' parents in the whole process, establishing the importance of support and communication to ensure the player's well-being as well as optimum football development. A supportive home/family environment is crucial.

It is also important to note that the player must have a passion for football; their motivation must be intrinsic, that is, from within, and not imposed upon them by a third party, eg, a parent.

Beware that pushing children too hard at too young an age leads to physical and/or mental BURN-OUT. It is worrying to hear of stories where either a parent, a coach or club representatives have been guilty of such improper behaviour.

The number of training sessions and the distance between the player's home and the training venue are also key considerations. The Club and the Parents must evaluate the effect that the training program will have on the family as a whole (eg, other siblings constantly being transported to and from training, waiting around while the player trains), and the Club must be prepared to adopt a 'Player First; Family First' attitude in cases where there are concerns.

Codes of Conduct

The Club should draw up a Code of Conduct, outlining what is and what is not acceptable, for all groups of people involved at the Club particularly Players and Coaches.

Some guidelines for coaches have already been proposed in the last Chapter.

Conduct guidelines for Players should even extend to things like 'how to behave when you are substituted', as Youth Clubs have a crucial role in developing behavior that prepares players for professional football and establishing good habits for Australian players.

A separate code may also be necessary to clarify to parents what is acceptable and desirable behavior, especially on match day.

The Football Federation Australia website provides guidance in this area.

Fun Environment

Perhaps the most basic requirement, and one which often gets buried beneath the increasing 'seriousness' of Youth Development, is that everyone should enjoy what they are doing. We should avoid instilling in young players the feeling that this is all about 'HARD WORK'

Smart coaches are able to get players to put in the required amount of effort without ever using the word 'work'. The players are enjoying it so much, and are so self-motivated towards agreed performance targets and individual goals, that putting in effort happens automatically.

Effective Youth Coaches are also experts at allowing just the right amount of fun and humour to prevail, at just the right time. They avoid sarcasm and putting players down in front of their peers for comedy effect. Rather, they would put themselves down or show their human side to the players, convincing the players that they should not be afraid to express themselves or to have fun.

Players cannot develop or perform in a climate of 'fear'. Youth coaches must not instill this kind of atmosphere.

Child Protection

The Club has an obligation to ensure that children are safe at all times.

This includes taking every precaution to ensure the coach has been thoroughly vetted before appointment.

Legal responsibilities, the details of which vary from place to place, must be observed so that individuals with unsuitable backgrounds are not chosen to work with children.

As well as the legal responsibilities, the Club should do its best to ensure that coaches are selected so that their qualities and experience match the age-group they will be assigned to. The coach should demonstrate that they have a real passion for working with and developing young players; clubs should avoid appointing those who are only really interested in coaching senior teams and winning trophies.

Child Protection also means protecting players from coaches with unsuitable personal qualities or communication skills: overbearing personalities, a tendency to bark orders, openly criticizing players and other inappropriate traits are not to be tolerated in those working with kids.

The Club should also have firm guidelines in place for scenarios such as:

- Male coaches with female teams
- Presence of coaches while players dress/undress, shower, etc
- One coach and one player, without other adult(s) present
- Coaches befriending players on Facebook
- Safe practice for moving equipment such as goals
- Driving players home
- Etc, etc

It is an unfortunate fact that many clubs don't pay enough attention to this key area until something goes wrong: given that such an event might be a tragedy, it is best to prepare for them by trying to prevent them.

We should stress here that areas such as Child Protection should not be the responsibility of the Club's TD or Team Coaches, but must be part of the Club's overall Policies and Procedures and Risk Management Strategies. They are mentioned here to make coaches aware of some of the issues.

Technology

In the last five to ten years, the digital age has transformed the way people live and especially how they communicate. People are able to keep in touch remotely,

sharing photos and movies almost instantaneously and 'tweeting' their inner thoughts, amongst many other developments.

Slowly but surely, these technological advancements have been influencing the way the coach operates.

Given the fact that young people are already spending lots of time looking at the screens of their computers and mobile devices, it is wise to consider how to use that time to help their football development.

Tomorrow's coach will utilize technology to assist him to do their job more effectively. Some suggestions follow below, although it is not an exhaustive or exclusive list:

- post clips from the match (or training) to his, or the Club's, YouTube channel, initiating player comment and feedback
- provide player feedback via blog or similar, allowing the player to give their thoughts too
- post clips of top teams, highlighting the key points with arrows, text boxes, etc, inviting the players' comments
- notify players in advance of the theme of tonight's session, giving them some points to focus on ahead of time
- send out team tasks or individual focus points before the match to assist players to prepare and focus
- film certain exercises at training on an i-pad or similar (smartphone, Flip camera), then immediately show the key players and discuss, using freeze/replay/slow motion/zoom functions; combined with question and answer in a problem-solving aproach, the players could then return to the same exercise and try to get better outcomes
- set players technical 'homework' online, with clips of model performance as a guide

Tomorrow's Technical Director will also utilize technology to assist them to perform their job more effectively. As well as all the suggestions above, they may also consider:

- utilizing technology to store Four-Year and Annual Plans
- using technology for Team Coaches to design and store training sessions
- setting up a system for individual player feedback and goal-setting
- using technology to track player development longitudinally
- using technology to communicate and share information with Team Coaches
- driving Team Coaches to take more responsibility using technology

It is fair to say that coaches who do not embrace technology may be overtaken by those who do. Some die-hards have argued that some of the most famous coaches in history never needed to use these innovations; however, if these coaches had been offered these tools as a way of doing their job more effectively and in a more timely fashion, one could assume that the real football visionaries would have taken them.

(NB: the Club must have policies governing appropriate use of the internet and social media, and parental involvement/approval is essential)

Monitoring Workloads

This is a potentially difficult area to manage effectively. There are a wide range of tools available to solve the problems involved, but in truth most are only of real use in the professional club environment.

The suggested approach for Youth Clubs in Australia is one of common sense.

- No conditioning or fitness training before end of the growth spurt
- Without qualified Football Conditioning guidance, avoid fitness or conditioning work
- Sprint / speed training to be avoided or performed only by qualified Football Conditioning coaches

As a general rule, the coach can determine how hard players are working by how much they are out of breath, and also by how long it takes them to resume normal breathing after an exercise. They should err on the side of caution.

If in doubt, stop the activity (this can include 'freeze the play and make a coaching intervention of appropriate length') and/or lengthen the rest period between exercises.

Coaches should also be mindful of:

- The increase in workload of the defenders in positioning games, eg 5v2
- The effect of the size of the area on workloads
- The effect of conditions (eg, 'one touch play') on workload
- Acceptable length and intensity of training in extreme weather (if in doubt, cancel training)

Coaches should be made aware of some parameters to observe when their training activities are of a high intensity and uninterrupted:

	Suggested maximum duration (assuming no stops for coaching, or waiting for a ball to be played in, etc)	Max no. of games per player	Rest between games
1v1, 2v2	1 min	6	3 min
3v3, 4v4	1-2 min	6	3 min
5v5, 6v6, 7v7	2 min	2	2 min
8v8, 9v9, 10v10, 11v11	5 min	2	2 min

These parameters are designed to keep within safe boundaries in order to avoid fatigue and injuries.

As mentioned above, many coaches are often oblivious to the workload imposed on the defenders in Positioning Games. If two defenders work hard continuously trying to win the ball from five attackers, their workload will be very high and could lead to extreme fatigue and/or injury. Coaches should use the above table as a guide, and restrict their time in the middle to one minute. This only applies to non-stop activity: when there are coaching interventions and other 'rests', the time can be extended a little.

These are very simplified common-sense guidelines, and are no substitute for qualified coaches with an in-depth knowledge of the Football Conditioning Model.

Trials

The serious club realizes the importance of proper Talent Identification, and conducts it with appropriate seriousness and professionalism.

In Chapter 13, we looked in depth at the whole process of selecting players.

As we saw, if a club selects properly and fairly its teams will be made up of players of various sizes and age-groups (i.e., not only those born early in the year). In terms of Management, the Coach and Technical Director need to be aware that smaller and less-developed players will have to expend more effort than the bigger ones in the normal course of training activities and games; the pace of training/games will be at a speed and intensity naturally set by the more physically developed players, and the smaller ones will have to work harder just to keep up.

Therefore, during puberty, if care is not taken, these smaller players will be using large amounts of energy on football activities and may have less energy left for the important task of growing.

It was suggested in Chapter 1 that player height should be measured regularly as it can give an indication of potential issues. However, it is also wise to take sensible precautionary steps with smaller/less developed players for the reasons outlined above.

Summary

Effective Management of a Club, especially in the Youth Department, should allow the Club to perform well at these three fundamental tasks:

IDENTIFY TALENTED PLAYERS
DEVELOP THEIR POTENTIAL
BUILD A SUCCESSFUL SENIOR TEAM

Appendices

## 1: FFA Coaching Expertise Model in Detail

OVERVIEW OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS

Note that the model outlines five elements that are constant, regardless of the level you are working at. However, the level of detail for each element articulated in the following pages **does not apply to every coach at every level.**

Rather, what is set out below is a representation of the 'full curriculum of expertise' required for a Head Coach at a high level.

As a coach progresses through the various FFA Advanced Pathway Coaching Licences, the range and scope of knowledge and skills they must learn and demonstrate expands. As a candidate on the Professional Diploma, the highest course available worldwide, the coach's expertise must spread across the full extent of the Coaching Expertise Model's five elements.

Please note that this manual does not cover every point of detail that appears below.

Football Knowledge

Course-Driven

1. What is Football?
a.   The Laws of Football
b.   The Objective of Football
c.   The Structure of Football
d.   Match Analysis

Self-Driven

1. Football Experience
a.   Playing Football
b.   Coaching Football

2. Football Study
a.   Watching Football
b.   Informal Study
   i.   Books, Internet, DVDs
c.   Discussing Football
   i.   Peers, Mentors
d.   Club Attachment / Observation
e.   Other Study
   i.   Other sports
   ii.   Sport Science

Vision and Philosophy

Philosophy

1. Opinions on Football
a.   Football is a game …

2. Beliefs on Football
a.   Principles for scoring goals in football
b.   Principles for preventing goals in football
c.   Qualities required of players
d.   Principles for achieving my objectives

Vision

1. Team Model (Verbal)
a.   Style of Play
b.   Formation
c.   Key Principles in the 4 Main Moments
d.   Team Tasks
e.   Player Tasks (General and Position-specific)
f.   Player Actions (Four Core Skills plus Positioning and Communication)
g.   Position Profiles
h.   Principles for Set Plays

2. Team Model (Visual)

a. Basic Formation (and Basic Formation versus other formations)
b. Key Principles in the 4 Main Moments Illustrated
c. Set Plays For and Against

3. Teambuilding

a. Principles for Teambuilding
b. Season Planning
    i.   Periodisation
   ii.   Football Conditioning
c. Long-Term Planning
    i.   Mission / Goals
   ii.   Recruitment / Rosters

<u>The Match</u>

<u>Focus</u>

1. Post-Training
a.   Considerations
   i.   Training Evaluation
   ii.   Injury Assessment
   iii.   Staff Meeting
b.   Final Decisions
   i.   Game Plan Finalised
   ii.   Team Announcement

2. Pre-Match
a. Clarification
   i.   Team Meeting
   ii.   Team Talk
b.   Preparation
   i.   Warm-up
   ii.   Final Address

<u>Performance</u>

1. First Half
a. Analysis
b. Action
c. Prepare for Half-Time

2. Half-Time

a. First 5 Minutes

b. Second 5 Minutes

c. Last 5 Minutes

3. Second Half

a. Analysis

b. Action

c. Get the result!

Re-Focus

1. Post-Match

a. Players Recovery
   i.   Cool-down
   ii.   Refuel/rehydrate
   iii.   Injury Management

b. Finalise Match
   i.   Initial Review of Game Plan, Team Performance and Staff Performance
   ii.   De-brief Players and Staff
   iii.   Match Report

2. Pre-Training

a. Information
   i.   Full Match review
   ii.   Opponent Analysis
   iii.   Injury Report / Player Availability

b. Plan ahead
   i.   Formulate next Game Plan / Ideal Starting XI / Weekly Themes
   ii.   Week's Training Content (Refer to periodised 6-week Cycles)

Plan

1. Define
a. PERFORMANCE PHASE
       Football Problem? (5 Ws)
       Session Objective
b. GAME TRAINING PHASE
       Main Moment / Key Principle
       Session Objective
c. SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE
       Core Skill / Specific Aspect
       Session Objective

2. Design
a. Training Session Components
   i.   GAME TRAINING PHASE AND PERFORMANCE PHASE
       Passing Practices, Positioning Games, Game Training, Training Game
  ii.   SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE
       Skill Introduction, Skill Training, Skill Game

b. The Script
   i.   Team Task / Exercise Task
  ii.   Player Actions
 iii.   Coach's Cues
 iv.   Step Up / Step Down (SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE)

<u>Prepare</u>

1. People
a.   Players, Staff, Others
2. Equipment
a.   Balls/Bibs/Cones; Goals; First Aid; Visual Aids; Hydration
3. Environment
a.   Safety; Field; Lights; Meeting Room

<u>Conduct</u>

1. Foundation
a.   Frame
b.   Warm-up
2. Animation
a.   Checklist (Start, Organisation, Attitude, Ability, Understanding, Shape, Self)
b.   Teaching Process (Set Team Task/Exercise Task, Observe, Intervene)
3. Conclusion
a.   Application (Players apply the learning independently in the Training Game/Skill Game)
b.   Wrap-up (Cool-down, De-brief, Re-generation)

<u>Evaluate</u>

1. Objective Achieved?
a.   Observable improvement (success in Training Game/ Skill Game?)

2. Next steps?

Management

Manage Self

1. Know Yourself
a. Personality, Values and Beliefs. Behaviour ('DISC' profile)
b. Skills Assessment
   i.   Communication (Words and Pictures; Public Speaking; Negotiation/Conflict resolution; Use of Visual Aids; Media Skills)
   ii.   Planning (Short, Medium and Long-term)
   iii.   Leadership
   iv.   Self-Organisation (Time Management, Calendars/Schedules, Tasks/Deadlines, Computer Skills, Budgets)

2. Develop Yourself
a. Improve Communication Skills
b. Improve Planning Skills
c. Improve Planning Skills
d. Improve Self-Organisation Skills
d. First Aid Qualification

Manage Others

1. Know Others
a.   Psychology (Personalities, Needs, Thoughts, Feelings). 'DISC' profiles.
b.   How people learn (Action Types / Learning Styles)

2. Develop Others
a. Club Model
   i.   The 3 Ps (Purpose, People, Process)
   ii.   Model Types
   iii.   My Club Model

b. Teambuilding
   i.   Group Dynamics
   ii. Leadership Styles

What about Sport Science and Sport Psychology?

There is a huge range of information and analysis available to the coach from the world of science, and Australia is a world leader in many such sport-related areas.

However, in the Coaching Expertise Model, Sport Science and Sport Psychology do not appear as strands or pillars in their own right. Rather, the philosophy is one where the coach learns what they need from these disciplines and applies them in the performance of their main competencies; the question always is: 'can science help me achieve what I have to achieve?'

We believe it is much more logical for a coach to learn their role as a coach, developing a personal vision and philosophy, and THEN ask questions of the world of science, rather than the other way around where the world of science comes to tell the coach what they should be doing.

In the development of Football Knowledge, the base of the Coaching Expertise Model, the coach should study widely across a large number of areas. They can then apply what is 'right' for them, or what helps them to do their job. The coach must constantly filter all the information they encounter: 'Does this fit my philosophy?', or maybe even: 'This is challenging me to revisit my philosophy.'

A good example is Strength and Conditioning. While extending their Football Knowledge, the coach will read about many different methods being used around the world for developing and maintaining a player's physical capacities. FFA is, of course, aware of many methods: however, we have adopted Raymond Verheijen's Football Conditioning Model because it is the one that perfectly matches our philosophy on football coaching and our vision for teambuilding. (NB: this model is introduced on the FFA Senior C Licence course and developed on further FFA Advanced Courses)

So, in terms of Sport Science and Sport Psychology, the appropriate knowledge from these areas is incorporated in the model wherever it is relevant and can support the coach in the performance of their role.

2: Model Training Sessions
To Be Added

3: Standard Session Plan Forms

Performance Phase

Date:_____

Team: _____Cycle No.: _____ Week No.: _____

Define the Football Problem:

Main Moment: _____

Key Principle:
_____

THE 5 Ws:

What is the problem?	
Who are the key players involved?	
Where on the field?	
When does the problem occur?	
Why does the problem occur?	

Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve my team's ability to
_____
_____

By focusing on: Player Tasks (General / Position-specific):
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Key Player Actions required to achieve tasks and objective:

Positioning/Movement without the ball

Core Skills

Communication

271

Organisation Diagram	Explanation

Perception (Seeing/Hearing):

Decision (Recognition/Anticipation/Options/Choices):

Execution (Timing/Speed/Quality/Clarity):

Organisation Diagram	Explanation

Team Task:

Player Tasks/Actions:

Cues (To assist Perception, Decision, Execution):

Organisation Diagram	Explanation

Team Task:

Player Tasks/Actions:

Cues (To assist Perception, Decision, Execution):

Organisation Diagram	Explanation
	275

Session Objective Achieved?

Football Problem Solved?

Next steps?

Other notes:

Game Training Phase

Date:_____

Team: _____Cycle No.: _____ Week No.: _____

Main Moment: _____

Key Principle:

_____

Session Objective:
In this session, I aim to improve:

Team Task:

_____
_____

By focusing on: Player Tasks (General / Position-specific):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Key Player Actions required to achieve tasks and objective:

Positioning/Movement without the ball

Core Skills

Communication

Organisation Diagram	Explanation
	277

Perception (Seeing/Hearing):

Decision (Recognition/Anticipation/Options/Choices):

Execution (Timing/Speed/Quality/Clarity):

Organisation Diagram	Explanation
	278

Team Task:

Player Tasks/Actions:

Cues (To assist Perception, Decision, Execution):

Organisation Diagram	Explanation

Team Task:

Player Tasks/Actions:

Cues (To assist Perception, Decision, Execution):

Organisation Diagram	Explanation

Session Objective Achieved?

Football Problem Solved?

Next steps?

Other notes:

Skill Acquisition Phase:

Date:_____

Team: _____Cycle No.: _____ Week No.: _____

Core Skill: _____

Specific Aspect:
_____
_____

Key BP Principle:
_____

Session Objective:

In this session, I aim to improve the players' ability in the following Player Tasks/Actions:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Related aspects:

Positioning/Movement without the ball

Communication

Organisation Diagram	Explanation
	282

Technical points on the run:

Perception (Seeing/Hearing):

Decision (Recognition/Anticipation/Options/Choices):

Execution (Timing/Speed/Quality/Clarity):

Organisation Diagram	Explanation

Exercise Task:

Player Tasks/Actions:

Cues (To assist Perception, Decision, Execution):

Step up/Step Down

Organisation Diagram	Explanation

Session Objective Achieved?
How much improvement in the specific aspect of the designated Core Skill (which players did well, which players need more help?)
Things to consider when planning for this Core Skill next time it appears in the program?
Other notes:

4: 1-4-3-3 Player Position Profiles

To be added