



A vision of the future

We must ensure that we are producing English players for our national side who have the same technical ability as players in other major football nations.

The culture of English football is a topic which has been widely discussed and much debated. Although we must learn from the past, the pace at which the game is changing at the highest level means it is time to look to the future and prepare for what is to come.

It is widely agreed that the influx of foreign talent has added to the spectacle and entertainment of the game at the highest level in this country. Many home-grown players have spoken positively of the effect that overseas players have had on their game, in particular their approach to lifestyle and their dedication to continued practice and self improvement.

The varied coaching methods, philosophies and tactics adopted by foreign coaches have also contributed significantly to the development and success of the English game, both domestically and in European competition. English coaches who have been fortunate to work alongside their International counterparts have highlighted an attention to detail, tactical flexibility and vision of the game that have served as influential learning experiences.

Benchmark

The admiration and appreciation of talented foreign coaches and players will always continue in this country however the decreasing number of home-grown players and coaches at the highest level must be addressed as a key concern.

The increasing number of young foreign players being signed to Academies and Centres of Excellences at professional clubs represents a major challenge to the development of the young English player. Although it is appreciated that the recruitment of talented players exists in a global market, it is imperative for the future of the England team that we develop home-grown players who match-up to the foreign talent currently being recruited into the English game.

The standard for the development of home-grown players and coaches has been set and it is our challenge and responsibility to match and exceed this benchmark.

Young players

Improving our young players' ability to receive the ball will be crucial if we are going to compete at the highest level of the International game. Regardless of the time and pressure players' are faced with, we must aim to develop teams in which all ten outfield players are outstanding technicians, excellent at mastering the ball.

Before receiving the ball players must have the awareness and vision to formulate the 'pictures' of what they are going to do next. Watching the top players at International and European level can be similar to seeing the game being played two steps in advance. It is this level of composure, vision and spatial awareness that our young players must aspire to.

This mastery of technical ability, awareness and creation of time and space must be prioritised in our coaching work with young players. Starting with those in the very youngest age-groups, players must be encouraged to master the ball and develop their creativity and expression.



To apply the philosophy outlined in this guide, we need coaches who can develop environments in which players are encouraged to be creative and expressive without the fear of failure.

Culture and environment

Developing young players who are capable of excelling on the international stage is not an issue which will change in the short-term and it is crucial that a long-term development mindset is adopted.

To apply the philosophy outlined in this guide, we need coaches to create environments in which players are encouraged to be creative and expressive without the fear of failure. A solid foundation of technical skills and game understanding must be given to our young players, allowing them to progress from mini-soccer into the eleven-a-side game with all of the necessary requirements.

Encouraging creativity and expression should not stop with players in the youngest age-groups, and as outlined in our playing philosophy these characteristics of the game should be encouraged with players of all ages. For this to happen we need forward-thinking and imaginative coaches working throughout the age-groups, who continue to encourage players to be expressive and creative. As players progress into the older age-groups the foundation of technical and decision-making practice completed at the youngest age-groups should give them the confidence and ability to play out from the back and pass the ball through midfield.

If coaches encourage this development pathway for young players, then we may begin to nurture young players who will be expert decision makers who can provide the unexpected skills which can change games at the highest level.

The issue of practice time and the number of access hours that clubs and coaches have with their players must also be addressed. Elite football, in

comparison to other sports offers significantly less amount of practice hours for players. To succeed in our aim of producing technically excellent English players, the time spent honing individual skill and game understanding must be increased.

There has been unanimous enthusiasm from across the game for the new range of age-appropriate FA Youth Awards as well as the age-specific support provided by The FA Tesco Skills coaches and Regional Coach Development managers working in grassroots football. The question must now be posed as to how we can enhance this support network of coaches in order to maximise the impact and develop the players of the future that we envisage.

The culture of coaching in this country can be improved through developing more imaginative coaches who prioritise the importance of technique and a creative way of playing the game.

Investment

There has been growing demand for direction and leadership for coaching and elite player development from key stakeholders in the professional game and with this document we believe this guidance is provided.

The partnerships and alliances with the Professional Game are crucial to The FA's Football Development department. With the vast amount of knowledge and experience of those working in the elite game, we hope this partnership can help shape, apply and develop the philosophy encouraged in this document. For this vision to become a reality, it is essential that this technical guide receives the necessary investment to support the huge potential that exists in this country.

It is recommended that this document is supported with:

- More age-specific coaches who can support the youth development programmes in Professional clubs
- Modernisation and investment into coaching structures
- DVD's and online resources which allow coaches to view the content of this document 'live'
- Additional and more in-depth guidelines for specialist coaches working with players between the ages of 5-11, 12-16 and 17-21
- Further support and direction in the areas of sports science, psychology and social development

With this support, and the backing of all those in the English game we believe that the future of football in this country will be a successful one. It is hoped that this document provides a clear outline of our vision for the future of the game, and details the steps that must be taken to ensure we fulfil this view. We hope that all those involved in the game, at all levels will support the philosophy and vision we have advocated for the future of player and coach development. The frustration of the past must be replaced with hope for the future, and we believe this document can provide the catalyst for change.

Sir Trevor Brooking
Director of Football Development