



# "THE FOUR CORNERS"

## LONG TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL

CRAIG SIMMONS MSc, Player Development Advisor, The FA

### "The Social Corner"

The expectations we all may have of young players development has to consider a number of features of the growing child. Craig Simmons looks at 'The Four Corners' of long term development and has focused on 'The Social Corner' for a deeper review of this understated element of development. Although the examples shown in the introduction are early teenage boys, the principles may apply across genders and age.

#### Introduction

Consider the following scenarios:

On one side of town a family awakes looking forward to a new day, fourteen year old Johnny can hear his successful, ex-professional, footballing father Peter showering in the en-suite shower, whilst his mother Janet is reassuringly preparing breakfast, meanwhile his sister Leanne is still slumbering in her own room. As he ponders about the forthcoming events of the day, Johnny slips into the family bathroom and showers before packing his top of the range football kit, which he had proudly prepared the night before, into his designer backpack. By now both parents are downstairs discussing the days arrangements, Peter will run Johnny to school on his way to work, whilst Janet runs Leanne to her new secondary school before returning home to get ready for the part-time job she enjoys at the town hall. Johnny, who also enjoys tennis and cricket, has football practice at a fashionable club after school and Leanne, who is mature for her twelve years of age, has music lessons after school before both children are collected for a seven o'clock family dinner together.

This has been a fairly typical day for the family in the four-bedroom detached and affluent household placed in the leafy suburbs of this town.

Meanwhile, across town, another family awakes to a familiar day. David stirs to find the house is silent as it is most mornings, he lays in almost darkness as he considers his day. A number of decisions have to be made before his next move. Firstly, does he try to slip out of bed without disturbing his younger brother. He knows that if he wakes the seven year old he will certainly have to produce his breakfast, as his mother will have no desire to rise early after the late night she had just experienced. David's eighteen year old brother was arrested for a drugs offence again just before midnight. With his handicapped father virtually housebound, it was left to his mother to deal with the incident and be collected by the police in order to visit the station and support her son. The environment facing David's start to the day consists of a cold room with the broken window pane boarded over and loose faded curtains barely meeting in the middle. Three generations of unemployment are represented in this inner city accommodation, which is home to grandfather (who is a great supporter of all his grandchildren), two parents and four children. David's next decision as he arrives in the kitchen involves the limited options for breakfast. As he ponders his next move his seventeen year old sister appears to his delight. She will produce a reasonable meal and has some sympathy for her fourteen year old brother who appears to have a particular talent and ambition to play football. Exactly how David is to reach his football practice with his scruffy kit after school may well be influenced by a number of issues. Suffering a drowning from torrential rain in the morning walk to school will be one feature which may result in him not attending. Getting across town for the tea-time football practice, where he will join Johnny, offers him some of the most enjoyable experiences in his life.

What does the next ten years have in store for these two age-related, football loving teenagers?

### The Social Corner

Given that the 'psychological' corner of development is interactive with the 'technical' and 'physical' corners, a fourth and very important corner is considered; that of the sometimes neglected 'social' environment and the many factors which may relate to player development.

This feature highlights the significant "shifting" social position of the young player and considers;

- the family
- the school
- the community
- the club

The interaction between these environments will range from productive to disruptive, particularly as influential opinions begin to dominate decisions with regard to the strategies being proposed. The social environment surrounding the player at different ages and phases will invariably affect their learning process.

There are many varied and sometimes discreet influences that affect the developing player, the social element has to consider a number of these factors and address the need for greater understanding of these issues by all parties involved with player development.

The following examples may be considered:

#### Family

- Opportunity – based on age, family status, distance from club, support and interest
- The social impact of perceived success or failure to developmental progress
- Socially coping with personal experiences – eg parental disruptions, illness and injury
- The more spiritual aspects which include emotion, self-respect, good manners and humility
- Parenting for problem anti-social behaviours – eg hostile aggression, drugs, racism and bullying

#### School

- Selection for teams may be influenced by age or physical size, this may impact social relationships
- Football status will create a social standing and peer group effect with others
- Resentment may arise within the school and compromise the social relationships of students and teachers
- An inclusion policy supports academic late learners, however, exclusion often applies in team games
- Will the school football team support the late maturing child who simply needs more time

#### Community

- Cultural differences within the relationship group may produce social opposition
- The young player needs support for socially coping with success, adversity and pressure
- Forces are at work which may produce – idealisation, jealousy or unrealistic expectation

- Are the alternatives in place for career options if football doesn't produce the expected outcome?
- Respect for people in general and an appreciation of others contributions are often overlooked

### Club

- Social interaction within a peer group of mixed football abilities which avoids humiliation
- Unrealistic expectations based on false promise may produce mixed messages for the young player
- Enhancing friendship patterns and team cohesion tends to reassure children
- Inter-team conflict and competitiveness will invariably produce a position within the group
- The practice of promoting players early may have a beneficial or adverse affect socially

### Interaction – Family/School/Community/Club

- Relationships with – parents, friends, teachers, coaches and other players
- The football triangle of personal and impersonal relationships, eg coach/player/parent relationship
- Effects of family, social support and role models on competence, enjoyment and motivation
- Trust, responsibility and commitment built on reliable experiences

Socialisation is a process by which we can acquire: values, beliefs and behaviours, the football environment may offer the means by which important features of our everyday life are established.

Childhood is a critical period for this process.

### Questions for the coach

The earlier introduction scenarios reflect some the social issues, therefore:

- I What are the influences and who are the role models for fourteen year old Johnny and David?
- II Are both boys likely to have been 'included' with suitable opportunity to participate?
- III Can the golden age of learning (5 to 10) be effective by chance as well as by planning?
- IV How can the family influences each boy experiences have a beneficial or detrimental effect?
- V Who are the most likely people now shaping both boys development?
- VI Why may three generations of unemployment in one household impact player development?
- VII What may motivate both players desire to succeed and why?
- VIII How is the learning process likely to be significantly different for each boy?
- IX Does everyone agree on the expectations and achievements for each boy?
- X What type of benefits or difficulties for the player may accrue from an affluent family background?

Why, when, where and how do these potential social problem areas arise and who resolves them?

The next ten years will define the values of the social corner for Johnny and David.

### Alternatively

The factors that affect the development outcomes of Johnny and David will apply to two of their school friends. Darren is from an affluent social background whilst Brian's family is financially restricted.

The differences lie within their club as it fights for survival both in terms of money and status.

The need for players to be productive may arise much earlier than in the larger and wealthier clubs.

Therefore:

- How patient can this club be, given the financial restraints and pressures of survival?
- Does the priority for development change accordingly and produce a different type of player?
- Will the character of the boys be affected if subjected to earlier expectations and demands?
- Can the level of support from the club meet the individual needs of the players?

### Questions

How does this alternative developmental environment differ from the one experienced by Johnny and David?

Are the expectations, achievements and progress for the four boys likely to be different because of their environment?

### Summary

The answers to the many social scenarios faced by parents, friends, teachers, football coaches and others may be complex and unique to the individual. The review of the social environment suggests that:

- Parenting is a skill often acquired by experiencing the problem. Therefore, how do we deal with these aspects when seeing them for the first time?
- Friendship is a vital ingredient for communication and support
- Teachers will be a major influence in group situations
- Coaches are often role models and can have a major influence on young players
- There are additional people who often affect the thinking of young impressionable players

**Question for all** – What are the motives of the people in close contact with the player?

Although there may be a number of tools available for solving these problems, the resolution will often have to be dealt with on a local basis. There are no simple prescriptions!

### Reminder:

**If the only item in your toolbox is a hammer, then all of the problems will tend to look like a nail.**

### Discussion:

What are your experiences and are they worthy of discussion?

Which features of the social corner (for long term player development in football) are missing from this article?

In an effort to build our understanding of the social corner (regarding long-term player development in a football environment), you are invited to contribute to the discussion by Email.

The aim of the discussion group will be to highlight the areas of concern, and the solutions you found for dealing with the problem. These case study type comments need to be brief, constructive, informative and related to the people in direct contact with the developing player.

### Please note:

The communication should not name individuals or clubs and not compromise any confidentiality.

Comments have to be appropriate and justifiable.

Although child protection issues are social concerns they will not form any part of this discussion group. This delicate area of social concern is addressed by the appropriate authorities and is a specialist subject within the social framework of society.

Correspondence please to [craig.simmons@TheFA.com](mailto:craig.simmons@TheFA.com)

### Acknowledgement:

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