

A Knowledge Based Structure for Coaching Young Football Players: The "IKEA" Principle

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In the previous article on a knowledge-based structure for coaching young football players a conceptual model was presented. This model reviewed the key aspects of knowledge required by an effective football coach who would dispense his or her duties in a professional manner.

This article looks in more detail at the "smaller picture" and aims to focus on finer details of the areas of information, knowledge, expertise and application of method required of an advanced football coach. The major aspect to be developed in the article is the **IKEA** principle. In this acronym:

- I** = information
- K** = knowledge
- E** = expertise and
- A** = application

Information

The world of information technology is now with us and information about football is easier to come by than 10 years ago. The internet, detailed analysis of football on television, statistical analysis of games and players, and developing coaching programmes and resource support are all working together to provide information that is up to date and relevant to football coaches. However, it is relatively easy to collect information and to be informed. Being informed on the other hand does not guarantee knowledge. The development and maintenance of up to date and relevant knowledge base are essential if coaching is to be effective.

Knowledge

Developing knowledge and learning involves a gradual build up of a detailed picture of football skills, tactics and strategies. Furthermore, understanding the basic principles of growth and development and all other aspects related to physical and psychological issues in young footballers is essential. Knowledge is important and knowledge rich contexts provide a more effective learning environment where football players and coaches are in a continuous process of developing knowledge and practise. Players practise on the basis of the structures and knowledge imparted by the coach. It is at the point of delivery of an activity that the coach may impart knowledge of very different varieties. For example, coach A may have a group of 10-year old players in a

5 v 5 game looking at "keep ball" with the condition that the ball is only played below waist height. Coach A may have chosen this activity because s/he wants players to use both feet and for all 5 players to develop movement. Coach B may use the same activity but focus on asking the players to work out the best strategies at keeping the ball. Coach A may progress the activity and using his/her knowledge give specific examples of, for instance, feinting, short dribble, wall pass. Coach B may change the condition, for example, no dribbling, play the ball below shoulder height, without giving one answer or solution at a time. These are examples of where a coach's skill is knowing how best to use his or her knowledge to promote game understanding. Coach A used his/her knowledge directly by implementing a didactic approach compared to coach B who used a problem solving approach. These two teaching approaches involve the players in different learning processes. The players are less involved in decision making under coach A than coach B but may get the key points more quickly because the coach has controlled the input of information. Coach B on the other hand has given the group more latitude and allowed them more control in solving the problem that is to keep the ball. This group may not end up with the solutions that coach B wanted. On the other hand the solutions to the problem may have been more closely related to player experience during a real game situation, where with the possible exception of set pieces, the exact same occurrence or passage of play rarely happens twice. Coach A and coach B have used their knowledge in different ways. The important thing about both of these coaches is that they assimilate their coaching practise and use it to evaluate its effectiveness with one group of players at one moment in time. The same thing may not work as well with a similar group the following day and the two coaches may need to alternate their coaching styles. The greater practise and reflection on practise, the more expert the coach becomes. Expertise is absolutely essential when dealing with young footballers

because not only are the principles of football crucial in developing players, but also there is a key understanding that these are taking place in the context of growth and development.

Expertise

The expert coach is one who has had detailed experience of coaching a variety of young players. These coaches know where players have come from and where they are going in terms of their developmental stage. The process of knowledge development comes through practical coaching, observing coaching activities and other expert coaches, and reading relevant literature. This promotes coaching expertise to the point where some coaches become recognised as an "expert" or master coach. Mastery of coaching is never really attained as there are always new approaches, theories, and skills to develop. However, it is generally the master coaches that facilitate progress in the game. Developing a detailed expertise in a range of these aspects is essential to becoming a master coach. Take the example of chess. Why is it that a 10 year-old expert child can play chess as well as a novice adult. Knowledge is the key factor more than factors such as maturation or age. Although adults possess effective means of problem solving, these are often limited by a lack of knowledge. Expert thinking is significantly enhanced by expert knowledge. From this basis it is clear that expertise in coaching, especially coaching young football players, is dependent upon expert problem solving which in turn is dependent upon expert knowledge. George Bernard Shaw once stated that "he who can, does, he who cannot teaches (coaches)". This aphorism could not be further from the truth. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that excellent players do not always make excellent coaches. Master coaches are those who are able to "apply" their knowledge of football. Glaser (1984) persuasively argues that to apply knowledge and expertise to coaching, four major steps need to be considered. These steps are described in the final section.