

Celebrating the 50th

In March 1997, AFC Ajax, Manchester United FC, Juventus and Borussia Dortmund were successfully negotiating the quarter-finals of the UEFA Champions League. The last two would, as we know, later contest the final, with the Germans winning the title in Munich. That same month, the UEFA Technician newsletter for coaches was launched, with the aim of informing practising coaches about UEFA events, highlighting issues relating to the coaching profession, recognising winning performances and recording the thoughts of our top technicians. After 14 years of words and images, we have reached the 50th issue. So, as people often do when a milestone is reached, we reflect for a moment on what has been a highly successful period for European football.

During this time, we have paid tribute to Ottmar Hitzfeld, Sir Alex Ferguson, Vicente Del Bosque, Carlo Ancelotti, José Mourinho and Pep Guardiola, who have each won the UEFA Champions League not just once, but twice – a remarkable achievement. Meanwhile, we have saluted Aimé Jacquet, Marcello Lippi and Vicente Del Bosque for lifting the FIFA World Cup: three European successes in the last four editions is something to be proud of. EURO accolades have gone to the wonderfully enthusiastic Roger Lemerre (France), the irrepressible Otto Rehhagel (Greece) and the revered Luis Aragonés (Spain).

Sadly, there have also been tributes to departed colleagues, such as Dutch coaching guru Rinus Michels, Italy's world champion Enzo Bearzot, England's gentleman of football Sir Bobby Robson, the elegant Giacinto Facchetti of Inter, the thoughtful René Hussy of Switzerland, and the highly respected boss of Italy's coaching school, Guido Vantaggiato.

All aspects of UEFA's technical programme have been recorded, from top-level events such as the Elite Club Coaches Forum and the UEFA National Coaches Conference to the UEFA Grassroots Workshop and the UEFA Study Group Scheme. Of particular interest was the implementation of UEFA's Coaching Convention, which started with six members in 1998 and had incorporated all 53 associations by 2008 – with 43 authorised to deliver UEFA Pro diplomas. In this context, the role of the coach education director was highlighted. This is the person responsible for developing the next generation of coaches, supporting frontline technicians and leading a team of staff coaches. The technical director, on the other hand, is the one responsible for leading all technical activities at the association or club (coaching, age-limit teams, women's football, grassroots, etc.). The UEFA Technician has enthusiastically supported the specialist activities of both. Their work is rarely publicised, but their impact on the future of the game is immense.

The use of interviews, editorials and event reports has provided a vehicle for sharing the wisdom of elite coaches and bringing important issues into the public domain. Among the many profound statements made by coaching colleagues, some resonate. For example, Arsène Wenger's: "You must love the game and want to share with the players a certain way of life, a way of seeing the game." Or Sir Alex Ferguson's: "The drive, the hunger, the passion must be inside you, because the players need to recognise that you care." And when we refer to hot topics, we need look no further than issue No. 1, when the proposal to have weekend fixtures and double-headers for national team matches was first communicated, following our post-EURO '96 conference.

The Technician newsletter has covered 14 years of glorious European football as seen through the eyes of the technician and has reported on all aspects of UEFA's technical development programme. Decision-makers, administrators, referees, doctors, commentators and fans, as well as coaches, have all contributed to the game's progress during this time, but ultimately it is the players who have provided the spectacle and we take this opportunity to thank them, from Zidane and Co. of the late 90s to current stars such as Rooney, Ronaldo, Messi and Xavi, for all the moments of football magic they have brought us. Even after 50 editions, the truth remains: when players shine, coaches glow.

Andy Roxburgh,
UEFA Technical Director



Pep Guardiola,
winner of two
UEFA Champions
League titles

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The Technician Interview

By Andy Roxburgh, UEFA Technical Director

André Villas-Boas started to study coaching in his teens and after a short spell in the British Virgin Islands as national coach he became the assistant coach of José Mourinho at FC Porto. He followed his Portuguese colleague to Chelsea FC and then to FC Internazionale. At the beginning of the 2009/10 season, the young coach left José Mourinho's backroom team to take over at Académica de Coimbra in the Portuguese top division and quickly lifted them from the bottom of the league into a safe position, finishing 11th. Good results and an attractive style of play resulted in him being offered the post of FC Porto's head coach. In one season (2010/11),

they won four titles: the Portuguese Cup and Super Cup, the league title and the UEFA Europa League – the latter making him the youngest manager, at 33 years old, to win a European competition.

Before the celebrations had died down, he was on his way to Chelsea FC in the English Premier League and one of the biggest, most challenging coaching jobs in European club football – further evidence of his meteoric rise to prominence. He is a highly intelligent, articulate and gifted technician – he is ...

André Villas-Boas (Chelsea FC)

How did you develop as a coach?

I was influenced a lot by many different people throughout my career. Also, I think I have to acknowledge the luck factor which led to some valuable opportunities, such as getting to a club like FC Porto at an early age – a club that has a background of nurturing players and coaches. I was then able to put into practice my ideas and all the small things I had learned on coaching courses in Scotland, England and Portugal. The Scottish courses were particularly important because I was able to express myself and to exchange ideas in an open, respectful way. It was good for me to live in this culture and to accumulate all these experiences. I also respect the fact that being an assistant to José was significant – his success helped me to progress as a coach. I was able, for instance, to get into a Portuguese first division club like Académica right away. There, I had great facilities and the freedom to work. I am a firm believer in the beauty of our game and I like to implement that conviction with the teams that I manage. I am very positive and attack-minded and I think we, as coaches, have an important role to play in that sense. I know this philosophy goes a bit against current thinking in society – everyone is taking less risk due to the financial situation and it is a mentality which is seen in the game too: fear, holding a position and trying to avoid criticism. I prefer to be positive, to take the initiative and to create as many chances as we can. I experienced a good mixture as I was developing as a coach and I am a bit of everything I learnt along the way.



Getty Images

André Villas-Boas gives instructions during the Manchester United v Chelsea Premier League match at Old Trafford in September



A media conference ahead of the UEFA Europa League final between Porto and Braga

What were the main reasons for your quick rise to prominence?

Circumstance played a part. At Académica the players who had previously been successful were not on form and were bottom of the league. My arrival was seen as an emotional stimulation and the players responded. I definitely benefited from living through this process – it was a leadership task linked to their state of mind. The players wanted to transcend themselves, to recapture the emotions of the year before, when they had been successful. So it was very much about human and emotional aspects of the job – trying to get the players to express their qualities, because it is the players that take you to success more than the other way around. They had an emotional block and the minute we got the first result we went on a run that took us off the bottom of the league. Once the players got over this period, they started enjoying it more and started absorbing my ideas.

Then I went to FC Porto and faced a similar situation. The club had won the championship three seasons in a row and then had lost out to Benfica. There was a desire to win the title back. We used a lot of what Jesualdo [Ferreira] had left us, but added some of our own ideas and a new club leadership was born. It was a big change for the players – not to be in any way critical of the previous set-up – and soon we reignited their motivation to regain the championship.

My age was never an issue because I started coaching when I was very young. It is something that has always generated debate, but I have no problem with it because the players always accepted the position of the manager

and they seemed to enjoy the relationship with someone of their generation. The players, of course, are always testing the manager to find out what his weaknesses are. In the first two or three weeks when you implement your ideas, they test your leadership and your competence. It also depends on the way you come across, and if you are able to sustain yourself through this period it can build the basis that can take you forward. The disruption will come and that is a normal part of the game because of the frustrations that players live with. We have to remember that players are often under tremendous pressure. The testing, if you cope, will strengthen your leadership position.

The game is so unpredictable, but the variables are influenced by the team that wants it more. You need, of course, to have confidence and belief in what you do. The players must be by your side, but ultimately it is the players' talent that normally solves the match situations. We won the Europa League, but in the first three games our goalkeeper saved us by dealing with some 1 v 1 situations early in each match. In my opinion, the more access you have to top players, the more likely you are to be successful as a coach.

What do you emphasise in your training?

This is difficult. The way you train does not necessarily reflect the way you play. It is not your methodology that takes you to success. It is your players' talent, your ability to motivate and human skills that make the difference. You can be a coach who is very detailed in his preparation, but might miss something in the game itself. On the other hand, you might delegate a lot of the training, yet be able to get results by stimulating the players to perform at their peak. In my mind, you can be successful in football with different types of methodology. What makes sense for me is that you must convince your players that your methods



will lead them to success. I believe in using difficult situations in my training, utilising equal numbers or even overloading, and this helps the players to solve demanding problems in the game. Of course, if you give your team the numerical advantage, it helps to produce fluency in the play and confidence. So there are different ways of seeing things and more than one route to the top. Normally, I develop my training from small to big spaces, from drills into open play. Of course, when we have midweek games, the emphasis is on recovery, but with some tactical input. However, I repeat there are different approaches. The Italians, for example, have good physical preparation, and then you get coaches such as José who incorporate everything: the psychological, tactical and physical aspects. No matter the style, you need to sell your method to your players.

In a managerial/leadership sense, how would you describe yourself?

Because of my age and my lack of a professional playing background, I could never be dictatorial. I therefore let the players have a certain amount of input into the decisions regarding the way we play and the way the team is run. Also, when we talk about the well-being of a group, I encourage the players to participate in the decisions affecting their professional life. For example, at Porto I would discuss with the players the starting time of the training or the need for rest days. I try to be an open-minded leader and to respect people. You must build a two-way relationship, even on decision-making about arrangements or actions in the game. Naturally, as the coach I make the final decisions though and if I have to upset a couple of people, then so be it.

Do you see today's top-level football in a positive light?

This is not an easy one to answer. In some leagues the gap between the top team and those that don't challenge for the title is getting wider and wider, and that is a worry. Money is beginning to play a decisive part – the richer the league, the more competitive, the more equality there is. The Premier League in England comes into this category, but that does not seem to be the case in Spain where, in recent years, the top two have been detached.

Also, there is so much pressure to succeed, and I am with Louis van Gaal when he says that it is much more difficult to defend an attacking philosophy. It is definitely easier to produce a cautious, defensive organisation with a compact block than to promote creativity, talent and attacking fluency. Those who are positive will clash with the "contain and counter" teams and it will not be easy to triumph. You need good players and good decision-making to overcome defensive structures, and it is difficult to nurture the talents that you need in order to cope with the demands at the top level. Because of Barcelona's success, there seem

to be more coaches willing to take the positive path. But when they are faced with pressure, they can find themselves in a difficult situation.

What qualities do you look for in a player?

If it was easy to find the perfect player, we wouldn't make as many mistakes. Maybe Messi, Xavi and Iniesta, at the moment, fit this term. They represent the defence of a culture – they were bred by the club and they now serve that club to the maximum extent. To find that situation at another club or to move them to another environment... they wouldn't be the same players. When I look for a player, I look for technical skills because we seek fluency in our game. The player also needs to be able to express himself on the ball. In addition, he needs the right attitude, tactical awareness and to be quick in every way. To find this perfect player is very difficult, so you look for players who can serve you well in your team, and then positional requirements become a factor. Taking a general view, I look for players who are technically gifted and psychologically strong. I am a firm believer in the human aspect of the game and therefore the personal qualities are extremely important.

What is the toughest part of being a top coach?

I suffer most as a coach when everyone is available and I have to select the lineup at the end of a week when everyone has given their total commitment. It is a basic part of the manager's job, but when you have to leave players out for the sake of the team, it is tough. Nothing you can say to them can convince them that they haven't done something wrong. This selection process, being

ruthless, takes the human element out of you, and it is something that makes you sensitive to players' feelings. You just need to talk to them and move on, because next week they can be selected and be decisive for you.

The other issue relates to outside judgements and expectations. You are expected to be successful instantly, and the process and the circumstances are not taken into account. Tolerance and patience are less obvious today and maybe social frustrations play a part in this.

How important is technology for today's front-line coach?

The most important thing is to be comfortable with what you have. If you are happier with extreme, aggressive analysis, then that is OK. As assistant to José, I wanted to give him as much detail as I could. But when I went into management, I decided that this was only a part of the equation, and not the decisive part. When you have a role to play, you think that your contribution will be crucial. I am happy today with my scouts providing me with the things which I think are important, and basically, I want to know the main tactical strengths and weaknesses of the opponent. In the end, it is the strategic part of the game which plays a decisive part and you have to predict what you think the opponent will do. Some coaches are obsessed by their computers and the data they receive. I am not that way because, as I said, I favour the emotional, human aspect of the game and the cultivation of

André Villas-Boas congratulates goalscorer David Luiz as he comes off the pitch during their UEFA Champions League match against Bayer Leverkusen



the players' talent. Sometimes players can't express their quality because they are restricted by rigid systems.

Do you have a certain way of approaching team meetings?

Normally, my team meetings last around 20 minutes, including videos. We address our team in relation to the opponents, in and out of possession, the opponents' qualities and finally have a short video on our set plays.

In midweek, I will occasionally get them together to discuss what we are doing well and what we are not doing so well. I try as much as possible to put this feedback into training sessions, in order to avoid putting them into a meeting room too often.

What, for you, are the main tactical trends at the top level of the game?

No doubt, speed of the game, speed of decision-making and speed of the counter-attack are common features in the Champions League, yet somehow I don't think this is related to FC Barcelona. They are an exception.

What they have done is to slow the game down in certain situations, and therefore slow down the decision-making. Because of their skill level, they are able to live with the pressure without rushing and they make the decisions when they are ready. Of course, they can play quickly like other top teams when necessary, but they have a gift for time and space. They have redefined the way of playing, creating more time for team-mates and raising decision-making to a higher level. At the moment, the game is going through an obsessive period regarding speed – the game is reflecting society with everything being done in a hurry. Everything is frenetic in life, so everybody expects the game to be the same. In England, football is fuelled by the emotions of the people. The fans want you to be quick, to accelerate the action, and possession and patience are not appreciated as much. It is a cultural thing. When you become

a manager, you have to produce results immediately, to get the players to perform right away. What Pep [Guardiola] has done tremendously well is to redefine the notions of time and space, while maintaining ball speed and other quick elements of the play.

As someone who was interested in journalism, how do you see the role of the coach in relation to the media?

I try to be open and explain what we are trying to do. Coaches such as Sir Alex and Arsène have brought a lot of respect to the profession through their achievements and longevity, and this helps. At Porto, I tried to treat everyone the same and I did this by holding open press conferences. In England, I have had to adapt a bit to the accepted requirements and arrangements. We each have our job to do and our relationship is gradually evolving.

What aspect of today's football disturbs you most?

We are still living off the financial bonanza that has taken place around football during the last ten years, and maybe this situation will stabilise. Appearance money could become more important in stimulating the desire to play, and love of the game could return to pole position, and that in turn would help us to nurture the passion. The things I don't like are negative, outside influences having an impact on the game.

Remember, football, ultimately belongs to the players and the public.

What aspect of today's football excites you most?

What excites me most is how winning and losing affects my daily life and my relationships with my players. As I said, I am a firm believer in encouraging players to exploit their talent and I want to promote a better game for people to enjoy – it is a wonderful challenge. ●



PA Archive/PA Images

Sharing a few words with Sir Alex Ferguson at the end of the Manchester United v Chelsea game

Twelve years on

What do Sir Alex Ferguson and Gérard Houllier have in common? Before you set search engines in motion, it's only fair to say that no amount of trawling through football trivia is likely to help you on this one. The answer is that Sir Alex and Gérard were in Nyon on 1 September 1999, as UEFA Champions League finalist and UEFA technical observer respectively, for the first ever UEFA Elite Club Coaches Forum. Twelve years later, they were back at the same venue in the same capacities for the 13th edition of this annual get-together, which has become an important event in the UEFA calendar. As it happens, they were the only 'survivors' of the 1999 gathering, even though the likes of Fabio Capello, Ottmar Hitzfeld, Louis van Gaal, Otto Rehhagel and John Toshack could easily have been on the 2011 squad list, had most of them not switched to national team rather than club football.

The inaugural meeting was recorded in the tenth issue of *The Technician*. "The coaches talked about subjects ranging from overall philosophy to the nuts and bolts of UEFA Champions League football," we were informed on the back page. It's interesting to note that, a dozen years ago, the elite coaches were already discussing ways of maintaining the entertainment value of the competition and how to "safeguard the future of the game by promoting player development". The *Technician* underscored the significance of the concern caused by clubs who "had the financial resources to buy rather than manufacture". Sir Alex was quoted as warning "it is important not to let the Bosman ruling affect the challenge of developing young talent. Team spirit is created by people who have been at the club for a long time, and the young players are the soul of the team." The relevance of his comment has not been buried by the sands of time.

On a similar theme, it might also be worth recalling that, in 1999, the top coaches were already expressing concerns that talented youngsters were being persuaded to gravitate towards the financially powerful clubs, only to find themselves in situations which put the brakes on their development. Twelve years ago, the coaches called for an age limit to be imposed before which players should be legally deterred from leaving their native country.

In that inaugural meeting, the call for a review of the yellow-card-and-suspension system in UEFA's club competitions was, if you like, the first goal the elite coaches scored. Since then, many of their proposals have been taken on board and implemented

by UEFA. A year later, for instance, the coaches proposed that a uniform match ball should be used at all UEFA Champions League games. Done. At the same time, they asked UEFA to bring down the final curtain on joint press conferences attended by the head coaches of both teams. Done. A year later, they proposed that doping controls should be intensified with a view to demonstrating that football is a clean game. Done. At the same meeting, the coaches proposed that pitches used for UEFA Champions League games should all be of the same dimensions. Done. Later, and of major significance, they proposed the Friday/Tuesday schedule for international double-headers in order to allow players to return to their clubs a day earlier. Done.

And so the story has continued over the last decade. Evolution and trends, however, are more difficult to change than competition regulations. It's interesting to note that, in September 2000, when the elite coaches reviewed their own role in the game, they commented that "the job now entails more man-management problems" and remarked "the job is more difficult because the powerbase has moved from collective team-game concepts towards individualism, resulting in many players becoming less willing to work for the team and less receptive to orders and advice". Over a decade ago, they expressed concerns that "the coach is all too often regarded as a shorter-term employee – more so than his players, prompting the players to question the coach before questioning themselves".

Sir Alex and Gérard apart, there were massive changes on the star-studded team sheet when the elite coaches met



UEFA Champions League finalists at Wembley in May, Sir Alex Ferguson and Pep Guardiola both attended the forum in Nyon



in Nyon for their 13th forum – but many of their professional concerns remained the same. On the ‘less receptive to orders’ front, the technicians commented that coaching methods had needed to change in response to the evolution of the game and its environment. “Twenty years ago,” explained UEFA’s technical director, Andy Roxburgh, who has led the annual forum since its inception, “it was easier for coaches to say ‘do it this way’ – and that was it. Today, in response to players’ profiles, their fame, their money and their greater freedom, the coach needs to be far better in terms of communication. You have to be able to convince players, the media and the board that what you are doing is the right thing.” As Arsène Wenger added, “in the modern game the manager must convince rather than dictate”. Views on the evolution of the coaching environment were encapsulated by the head coach of SV Werder Bremen, Thomas Schaaf: “The coach’s responsibility now involves a lot more areas than it did some years ago. It means that we have to deal with issues that are not directly related to football or the field of play. It sometimes means that we are short of time to perform all the tasks that we are now expected to do.” These opinions were expressed during a session on the second morning in which the tasks



Back row, from left to right: Rémi Garde (Olympique Lyonnais), Roland Nilsson (FC København), Ralf Rangnick (FC Schalke 04), Thorsten Fink (FC Basel 1893), Thomas Schaaf (SV Werder Bremen), Andy Roxburgh

Middle row: Gianni Infantino, Massimiliano Allegri (AC Milan), Jorge Jesus (SL Benfica), Roy Hodgson (West Bromwich Albion/UEFA technical observer), Felix Magath (VfL Wolfsburg), Rudi Garcia (LOSC Lille Métropole), Frank de Boer (AFC Ajax), Unai Emery (Valencia CF), Vítor Pereira (FC Porto), Giorgio Marchetti

Front row: Didier Deschamps (Olympique de Marseille), Arsène Wenger (Arsenal FC), Sir Alex Ferguson (Manchester United FC), Michel Platini, Josep Guardiola (FC Barcelona), André Villas-Boas (Chelsea FC), Gérard Houllier (UEFA technical observer)

and demands facing today's coaches were discussed, along with the profile of the top coach now required to deal with them.

But the 2011 Elite Club Coaches Forum had all the traditional diversity which makes it a fascinating two-day event. UEFA's readiness to listen to the coaches' opinions was reflected by the presence throughout of the UEFA president, Michel Platini, and the general secretary, Gianni Infantino, along with competitions director Giorgio Marchetti. They heard some lively debate, with last season's UEFA Champions League finalists Sir Alex Ferguson and 'Pep' Guardiola playing prominent roles in discussions with their coaching colleagues, covering topics ranging from tactics and management to competition regulations.

However, one of the novelties in relation to previous editions of the forum was a session related to players' health and the risks and implications of injuries. To provoke discussion, Prof. Jan Ekstrand, vice-chairman of the UEFA Medical Committee, offered the coaches data derived from UEFA's ongoing injury research project, which has been built on the solid foundations of a

decade of information-gathering among the continent's leading clubs. The coaches were reminded that each club receives two detailed reports per season, in which UEFA presents data that permits comparisons with other teams in terms of 'medical performance'. The discussion point here was the degree of cooperation and the synergies between representatives of the coaching and medical professions within the dressing room. By way of provocation, information was provided on club coaches who had won a hatful of trophies with injury rates well below the competition average, in contrast to other coaches who had not won any trophies during periods when injury rates were dramatically higher.

Although the participants had profiles that were high enough to fill the lobby at UEFA's HQ with cameras and reporters, the opinions expressed in the meeting room were treated with traditional discretion. Nevertheless, an interesting exercise is to examine your own responses to some of the issues the elite coaches addressed.

For example, would you be in favour of granting automatic UEFA Champions League access to the winner of the UEFA Europa League? The question is currently an academic one, as FC Porto secured a place in the Champions League on sporting merit last season. But it's an interesting debating point all the same.

When two or more teams finish level on points in the group phase of a UEFA club competition, are the criteria used to separate them (initially applied on a head-to-head basis to the teams concerned) the most appropriate? Or is it time for a review?

Could – or should – more be done to achieve greater uniformity in the standard of playing surfaces in UEFA competitions?

The elite coaches always relish the chance to 'talk football' at the annual forum – and the 2011 edition was no exception. Trends were discussed at length – including the stark contrasts between the last two UEFA Champions League winners, FC Barcelona and FC Internazionale Milano, with the Catalan club averaging 68% of the ball with their possession-based playing style, compared with Inter's 45% in the 2009/10 campaign – and only 32% in the final against FC Bayern München. In terms of passes attempted during a game, Barça's 2010/11 average was 791, whereas Inter's in 2009/10 was 409. The question for debate is which of the two playing styles constitutes a better route towards success. Answers on a postcard...

But, for the coaches, the real beauty of the annual forum is the chance to get together, share experiences and exchange ideas. As Gérard Houllier remarked, "being a top coach can be a lonely existence, so meeting like this in Nyon is like going on a refresher course. It gives you new ideas and makes you reflect on a lot of issues." The added bonus is that UEFA also benefits greatly from listening to their views and receiving their feedback on a wide range of footballing and organisational topics. ●



Promoting the profession in Prague

In his welcome message to more than a hundred coach education and technical directors from UEFA's 53 member associations, FIFA and three other confederations who met in Prague in September, UEFA's general secretary, Gianni Infantino, commented on the new Coaching Convention Directives which, as he put it, "*mark another milestone in UEFA's continuous efforts to further improve the game through coach education*". He went on to emphasise that the new guidelines constitute an important basis "*but the high-quality implementation of national coach education programmes is crucial*". The avowed aim of the 9th UEFA Workshop for Coach Education in the Czech capital was therefore to identify best practices and consider future developments in the coaching profession.

The brief was far-reaching – as illustrated by the sheer diversity of the three-day workshop in Prague. In his keynote presentation, UEFA's technical director, Andy Roxburgh, outlined UEFA's three-pronged programme which supports the educators, the frontline coaches and the students who are working towards UEFA-endorsed coaching licences while, at the same time, attempting to promote and protect the coaching profession and help to raise standards on a pan-European basis. This entails a process of constant self-appraisal within UEFA on the basis of feedback from coach education specialists at the national associations. The event in Prague offered the ideal scenario.

Discussion among the participants focused on proposing formulas for building on the impact made by the UEFA Coaching Convention over the last decade in terms of enhancing quality and, in the view of many national association representatives, helping to eliminate protectionist tendencies. In response to questions about what more could be done by UEFA in the area of technical development, the coach educators came up with a wide range of proposals such as:

- specialised youth coaching events, such as workshops, maybe attached to the final tournaments of UEFA's age-limit competitions;
- exchange schemes for Pro-licence students;
- wider distribution of DVD material from Under-17 and Under-19 competitions (qualifying rounds as well as final tournaments) to allow youth coaches throughout Europe to draw comparisons and better prepare teams to compete at international level;
- even greater support by UEFA for national coaching courses, including assistance in the education of student coaches in the use of technology.

Some national associations also emphasised the need to advance on a common front in the specific sphere of the training of fitness coaches. In Prague, there was a unanimous call for UEFA to support development in this area by adding a specific fitness coach branch to the existing core of UEFA-endorsed licences. Andreas Morisbak of Norway presented the results of a survey conducted by



a working group. "It is a complex issue with a number of sub-topics," he reported. "There is enormous diversity of cultures and expertise within the general field of fitness coaching, but UEFA's commitment is obviously to cater for the specifics of football rather than for sport in general." The survey revealed that the 'fitness' component in existing coaching courses comprises, on average, 60% theory and 40% practical work. Six national associations, he reported, operate fitness-coach courses based on 75 to 120 hours of tuition, while in Spain, to quote another example, fitness qualifications are currently based on five-year courses.

The participants in Prague were also brought up to speed on the advances being made in the goalkeeping sector. Former Republic of Ireland goalkeeper Packie Bonner reflected on the rapid evolution of the goalkeeper's role over the last 15 years or so as a preamble to presenting plans for the imminent introduction of a UEFA-endorsed diploma for goalkeeping coaches. "I think that one of the interesting areas," he commented, "is that the vast increase in terms of media exposure and the

analysis of errors have made goalkeeping a high-stress occupation. Mental strength has become an essential commodity and goalkeeping coaches have to be equipped to provide psychological support as well as technical assistance."

Packie has been heading a UEFA working group which, after researching the current situation across Europe, has designed a pilot course and four goalkeeper-coach seminars incorporated into UEFA Study Group Scheme events to be staged during the current season – the first in Belgium, followed by events in the Republic of Ireland, Sweden and the Netherlands. The initial concept is for the UEFA-endorsed goalkeeper-coach qualification to be injected at UEFA A-licence level with, existing goalkeeping studies aside, access also granted to students with at least five years of playing experience – or three years at elite level. The full course is designed to have a duration of at last a full season, with education based on 30% theory, 30% practice and 40% work experience derived from visits to clubs, where the on-site work will be combined with guidance from a coach-education mentor.

The trend towards coach-education processes aimed at developing specific competences was underlined in Prague

The coach education directors in Prague



by the Dutch association's coach education manager, Nico Romeijn, who presented a session dedicated to UEFA's Elite Youth A licence, a category which has been developed over the last decade. He outlined a specialised course based on 14 residential meetings totalling 135 hours, 32 hours of club visits, 6 hours of match visits, 100 hours of on-site work experience, 120 hours spent on specific assignments and tasks related to problems that the coaches are most likely to encounter, and 10 hours of final assessment, bringing the overall total to 403. The focus is on three main areas: coaching games, leading training and the management of teams and individual players.

"At this level, it's important to be totally aware of the profile that professional players are expected to have," Nico said. "You also have to stress the importance of communication and leadership qualities and trace the age groupings in which tuition and guidance in specific competences are required. The coach educator needs to help students to assess the importance of analysing their own performances. But balance is important. You want to encourage students to reflect on their learning process – yet not to become excessively self-analytical."

The venue for the workshop provided a cue for the hosts to present an overview of their responses to situations common to many of the national associations which

needed to go through 'reinvention' processes after the political fragmentations of the 1990s. The Czech FA's technical director, Dušan Fitzel, ran through the difficulties encountered during the transition from university-driven coaching qualifications to football-specific licences in line with UEFA's Coaching Convention, followed by the new impetus provided by the government when a decision was taken to promote football facilities. Regional coaching centres have provided a launching pad for development projects based on a five-tier coach education structure ranging from grassroots qualifications to the UEFA Pro licence.

The advances in coach education also laid foundations for a new national footballing philosophy which focuses on player development rather than results, a shift towards constructive football (as opposed to a defend-and-counter philosophy) and emphasis on the positive values of creativity, enjoyment and passion for the game. Implementation of this philosophy is being based on promoting get-togethers of coaches and coach educators at matches, raising awareness among the coaching profession of the differences between domestic and international football, and establishing a network of 'ambassadors' in the form of ex-national team players who work on the training pitch and live with the country's age-limit teams.

One of the major debating points at the event in Prague was how best to improve protection and support for practising coaches. Current footballing and labour legislation varies widely from country to country, with the result that degrees of protection also differ substantially. Many of the participants found inspiration in a session directed by Howard Wilkinson, chairman of England's League Managers Association, which has grown in leaps and bounds since it was founded on a shoestring budget in 1992 with the aim of allowing a representative and collective voice to be heard, protecting coaches' rights and privileges and offering a wide range of support services not only on professional but also on personal levels, such as in health and welfare. The organisation currently offers support services to the coaching profession on 11 fronts and during last season alone provided 158 members with the sort of legal back-up which would be welcomed by coaches in countries where, as the dialogue at the workshop in Prague revealed, the coaching profession is still short of protection and respect. ●



Dušan Fitzel, technical director of the Czech Football Association

Latest developments

A hat-trick of national team victories, hard on the heels of FC Barcelona's triumph in the UEFA Champions League final, enhanced the status of the current world and European champions as trendsetters in international football. UEFA's technical reports on the UEFA Champions League and the final tournaments played at Under-17, Under-19 and Under-21 levels in the men's and women's game not only provide a permanent record of the competitions but also offer a series of reflections and talking points which can be useful to practising coaches at all levels of the game.

Spain's successes in 2011 have thrown Ginés Meléndez into the limelight. He was a member of UEFA's technical team at the Under-17 final tournament in Serbia, performed the same role for FIFA at the U-17 World Cup in Mexico and led Spain's Under-19 team to victory at the European finals in Romania – where a final blaze of glory put an end to a coaching career that has translated 15 UEFA and FIFA finals into an impressive collection of gold and silver medals. After Romania, Ginés took over as the sports director responsible for coordinating all of Spain's age-limit teams.

"There's a tradition that benchmarks are set by the teams that win the European Championship or the World Cup," he says. "So, inevitably, a team that wins both in a short space of time becomes a point of reference for the rest. I think the tournaments played in 2011 have confirmed that there's a marked trend towards the style which Spain adopted some years ago. Of the teams I was able to see, I'd say that 90% now play in a 4-2-3-1 formation and the most successful teams from outside Europe also opt for this structure. I acknowledge that the numbers can have shades of meaning but, basically, the teams I saw in Mexico mainly played 4-2-3-1. Germany played a fantastic campaign and could easily have been world champions. France also gave a very good account of themselves but the European teams also had to cope with climatic conditions which didn't exactly work in their favour. There is now



In the technical area during the 2010 European Under-17 Championship final between Spain and England

complete uniformity in playing with a zonal back four – in Europe and elsewhere. At the U-17 World Cup, even the African teams played with a flat back four."

"In midfield," he adds, "teams are generally coached to operate with one or two central screening midfielders and I think that the choice between the two variations is usually influenced by the quality of the player who is selected for what we might call the No10 role in the central area behind the main striker. I would say that Spanish teams have maybe encouraged coaches to think about the best ways to use the wide areas, because I can see that more and more teams are focusing on a facet of the game that we have worked on for many years – the relationships between full-backs and wingers."

The evolution of wing play is among the most frequently raised issues in this year's round of UEFA technical reports. Spanish teams have been among the frontrunners in terms of implementing the 'Messi syndrome' launched when FC Barcelona opted to field – in the days before he switched to his current central role – the left-footed Argentinian genius on the right wing. This particular trend was underscored at the Under-21 final in Aarhus when Spain and

Switzerland fielded left-footers (Juan Mata and Xherdan Shaqiri respectively) on their right flanks while right-footers (Iker Muniain and Innocent Emeghara) operated as left-wingers.

The tendency contributed to a significant change in attacking patterns. The technical reports on the final tournaments of the men's Under-17 and Under-19 competitions highlight that none of the open-play goals in the 30 matches played at the two events were headers. At the Under-17 finals, two free-kicks deflected off defenders' heads gave Germany a 2-0 semi-final win against the Danes, while the only other headed goals were the result of corners. At the Under-19 finals, 1,380 minutes of football failed to provide a headed goal.

Among possible explanations, a lack of quality crosses is the most plausible. But the shortage of crosses could be traced back to the type of players deployed in wide positions in the middle-to-front line of three in the 4-2-3-1 structure. It was also noticeable in both tournaments that, when crosses were supplied from advanced wide areas, they tended to be whipped in low rather than lofted. The proliferation of the 'Messi syndrome', with wingers equipped to cut inside rather than head for the corner flag, has accentuated the trend towards attacks based on Spanish-style combination play with the result that the Under-19 report features a provocative question aimed at fuelling

discussions: is aerial ability heading for extinction? How much of a priority on the training ground, asks the Under-17 report, is the development of heading ability among young attackers?

The Spanish influence has also become visible in the women's game, where the Under-17 team coached by Jorge Vilda took the European title for a second successive year thanks to the spectacular added-time goal which earned them a 1-0 victory over France in the final played in Nyon. In this case, Spanish success is all the more remarkable since the country has fewer than 25,000 registered female players.

"The explanation," Ginés Meléndez comments, *"is that Ignacio Quereda has built the senior national team on the same foundations as the men's teams, and he has been helped by Angel Vilda, an enormously experienced coach, whose son Jorge is clever, ambitious and hardworking. They have built on the same structures as the men's teams, the same concepts and the same principles of 4-3-3 or 4-2-3-1 formations. What they have achieved is nothing short of a miracle – and it's a credit to the coaching philosophy implanted within the national association."*

When asked to summarise Spain's successful philosophy, Ginés says *"the four pillars are: the quality of coach education, the structures put in place by the national association for football at youth levels, the fantastic work done*



Spain's Paco Alcácer shoots at goal undeterred by his Czech opponent Jakub Brabec in the European Under-19 Championship final

by the clubs in their youth teams and the improvements in facilities. But this is something that requires time. We have adhered to a well-defined playing style over a period of years and we've had coaches who have remained faithful to that philosophy. Teodoro Nieto laid the foundations; then came Iñaki Sáez and, more recently, Fernando Hierro as sports director. They all maintained the same concepts in terms of organisation and, most importantly in my opinion, coach education. I am convinced that the quality of our coach education has been one of the main factors.

"These days, the young players who report for duty with the national teams," Ginés explains, "have already

received an excellent football education at their clubs. They have very clear ideas of the basic concepts that underpin Spanish football – and that's because they have top-quality coaches who educate them in the youth leagues. In the national teams, we have them for limited periods of time and we tend to focus on team-building rather than training and education. We therefore build on the work that's already been done at the club academies."

Ginés is maybe understating the difficulties inherent in converting good work at club level into successful national teams. "The key factor," he explains, "is that there is a well-defined method of working at the national association which has been in place for many years and is being improved and fine-tuned all the time. Those who join the coaching staff know that they have to adapt to a certain

way of working. This means that, even if there are changes of personnel, the work goes on almost automatically in the same way. Also, we mustn't overlook the importance of the way Spanish youth football is structured, with regional championships and inter-regional final tournaments in February and March, when we look at the players and try to select the right ones for our national teams."

Ginés insists that the quality of coach education is a vital prerequisite for advancement. "You can see that in other European teams," he comments. "National associations who have been prepared to invest resources in the development of coach educators are also making great strides in the development of players and teams. The traditional top countries like Spain don't expect to win by big scores any more. The work that UEFA has done in promoting and supporting coach education has allowed a lot of national associations to get into top gear and make spectacular advances."

He illustrates that thesis by referring to his first-hand experience at the European Under-19 finals: "With due respect to the others, I thought the two best teams reached the final: the Czech Republic and ourselves. But Serbia, who played the Czechs in the semi-final, also made a very good impression. The same applies to Belgium, who played some very good football. They had the misfortune of playing most of two games with ten – and of playing us twice in 24 hours. But their concept of collective play was excellent and Marc van Geersom had coached and organised them extremely well."

Ginés was also impressed with the decision by the Republic of Ireland to appoint Dutchman Wim Koevoets as high-performance director at the FAI. "In Romania, the Irish illustrated how much they have progressed since they recruited Wim to supervise their development projects. They were strong on collective virtues and were very well organised. Reaching the semi-finals was a great reward for them and they had the bad luck of meeting us on a very good day." Spain's 5-0 victory earned them a game against the Czechs in the final and a 3-2 extra-time win to mark Ginés's last match in a coaching capacity and round off a fascinating season in UEFA's youth development competitions. ●



Sportsfile



Sportsfile

Ginés Meléndez celebrates Spain's victory in the European Under-19 Championship earlier this year



Spain, European
Under-21 champions

In the last issue of the UEFA Technician, we saluted the coaches who had stepped onto the international podium during the month of May, culminating in the UEFA Champions League. During the three months that followed the memorable final at Wembley, five more UEFA competitions were decided. In addition, credit is due to Steffen Freund, whose German Under-17 team came from 3-1 down to beat Brazil 4-3 and take the bronze medal at the FIFA U-17 World Cup in Mexico, to Ilido Vale, who led Portugal's Under-20 side to a silver medal during the World Cup in Colombia, where they lost the final 3-2 to Brazil in extra time, and to Thomas Dennerby and Bruno Bini, who were on the benches when Sweden took on France in the third-place match at the FIFA Women's World Cup in Germany, where Thomas's Swedish team won 2-1 to take the bronze medal.

On the European front, congratulations are due to the technicians who, in chronological order, stepped on to the podium to receive the following medals this summer:

European Women's Under-19 Championship

in Italy

Germany v Norway 8-1

Gold: Maren Meinert

Silver: Jarl Torske

European Under-21 Championship

in Denmark

Spain v Switzerland 2-0

Gold: Luis Milla

Silver: Pierluigi Tami

European Women's Under-17 Championship

in Nyon, Switzerland

Spain v France 1-0

Gold: Jorge Vilda

Silver: Francisco Rubio

European Under-19 Championship

in Romania

Spain v Czech Republic 3-2 (after extra time)

Gold: Ginés Meléndez

Silver: Jaroslav Hřebík

UEFA Super Cup

in Monaco

FC Barcelona v FC Porto 2-0

Gold: Josep Guardiola

Silver: Vítor Pereira

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