

THE TECHNICIAN

**Editorial:
Overnight Success**

**Football
Philosophers**

**Organising
the Back Room**

Learning to Read

**National
Team Football:
An Identity
Parade?**



**NEWSLETTER
FOR COACHES**

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**With the World Cup
finals kicking off
in South Africa on 11 June,
Marcello Lippi and his
Italian side are gearing
up to defend the title
they won in Germany
in 2006.**

(Photo: Getty Images)

**Under
Pep Guardiola,
FC Barcelona
swept the board
last season.**

OVERNIGHT SUCCESS

EDITORIAL

BY ANDY ROXBURGH,
UEFA TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

In 1988, Gladys Knight, the 'Empress of Soul', sang the words "overnight success, stars are on the rise". She wasn't referring to José Mourinho or Pep Guardiola. At the time, the former was a young student on a coaching course in Scotland, while the latter was a 17-year-old member of the FC Barcelona youth academy – a product of La Masía. But maybe the singer's words were, unknowingly, a prediction of glories to come.

From an early age, José Mourinho studied football. Indeed, he once said "my training as a coach was fully comprehensive". He was referring to a number of important elements in his development. For example, he came from a football family – his father being a professional player and coach. He was trained in physical education and football coaching; he had fantastic work experience at Sporting Clube, FC Porto and FC Barcelona (where Bobby Robson and Louis van Gaal were his mentors) before dipping his toes deeper into the turbulent waters of coaching at SL Benfica and UD Leiria. At 39 years old, backed by a mine of footballing know-how and expertise in coaching methodology, he took over at FC Porto. In his first two seasons in charge of 'The Dragons', he won the Portuguese Liga twice, the domestic cup, the UEFA Cup and the UEFA Champions League. He was an overnight success, but it was like a roof appearing on a house that had taken years to build.

Pep Guardiola, who joined FC Barcelona as a 13-year-old and first experienced nights of European football as a ball-boy at the Camp Nou, was spotted by Johan Cruyff in the youth team and quickly became the midfield fulcrum

in the much lauded 'Barça dream team'. In an illustrious playing career, the thoughtful midfielder won La Liga six times, the European Cup Winners' Cup, the UEFA Champions League and an Olympic gold medal with Spain in Barcelona in 1992. During the period between then and 2001, when he also gained 47 international caps, he learned from three of Europe's top club coaches: Johan Cruyff, Bobby Robson and Louis van Gaal. After a season of successfully coaching Barça's B team, the young man who, apart from a few years abroad, had been immersed in the Catalan club's culture for more than two decades, took over as manager of the FC Barcelona first team. He proceeded to win absolutely everything during 2009 – his first calendar year in charge: the Spanish league, cup and super cup, together with UEFA's Champions League and Super Cup titles. The FIFA Club World Cup then provided the icing on the cake and confirmation that Pep Guardiola was the ultimate overnight success, albeit that his education in leading Barcelona, as captain and as coach, had started back in 1984, when he had joined the club as a skinny young boy.

From the perspective of coach education, what do these two success stories tell us? Firstly, that there are different routes to the top of the coaching moun-

tain. The paths of José and Pep did cross for a period at FC Barcelona during the latter part of the 1990s. But their football backgrounds and training were certainly not the same. Message 1: Coach education is about dealing with individuals and getting the best out of them. It is not about mass production and rote learning. Coaches develop through a combination of work experience, the help of mentors, managing lower-level teams, personal study and a life immersed in the game, as well as structured coaching programmes. Message 2: The latter may be only part of the equation. But well-designed, reality-based courses with individual tuition can help aspiring technicians to improve their coaching competence and to find their style of leadership.

Pep Guardiola and José Mourinho travelled a long way to become overnight successes. José summed it up when he said "there's a history made up by each of us that leads us to that final victory. It's that history, in its entirety, that turns us into champions." In her soulful voice, Gladys Knight echoed the same sentiments when she sang "overnight success, I know it doesn't happen overnight". The road to coaching stardom takes years of dedication, experience and learning. Some talented coaches, such as José and Pep, simply sparkle earlier than others.



José Mourinho during a training session with Inter Milan



**ARSÈNE WENGER
WITH ANDY ROXBURGH
AND GÉRARD HOULLIER
AT A UEFA COACHING
FORUM**

FOR OVER A DECADE UEFA HAS HAD THE SUPPORT OF MANY ILLUSTRIOUS COACHES. THEY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE TECHNICIAN (SINCE 1997), THE TECHNICAL REPORTS AND THE ELITE CLUB COACHES FORUM (SINCE 1999) WITH COMMENTS, INTERVIEWS AND IDEAS. THIS SPECIAL FEATURE HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE 'WORDS OF WISDOM' OFFERED TO US BY TOP-LEVEL COACHING COLLEAGUES, ALONG WITH THE TECHNICIAN'S RESPONSE TO THEM. THE ALMOST RANDOM SELECTION FEATURES SOME OF THE MEN OF CREATIVE THOUGHTS AND SUCCESSFUL ACTIONS WHO ARE AMONG OUR

FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHERS



Sir Alex Ferguson sends his team on the attack.

First to the microphone is:

Arsène Wenger

(finalist in the UEFA Champions League, European Cup Winners' Cup and UEFA Cup, and winner of leagues, cups and super cups in France, Japan and England)

"You must love the game and want to share with the players a certain way of life, a way of seeing football."

Technician: This wonderful sentence provokes all sorts of reflections on the degree of dedication which needs to go with the love of the game, the sacrifices that the technician is required to make, the importance of having a clear vision of the sort of football you want your team to play, and the management and leadership qualities which will allow the technician to implement that vision. What's more, the 'sharing' aspect neatly highlights the need to transmit your vision, your footballing lifestyle, to the players and the 'team behind the team'. Arsène is one of the game's most stimulating philosophers – constantly offering comments which provoke profound reflection. Talking of reflections, his observation **"the coach's face is a mirror to the health of the team"** not only expresses an opinion which

is often graphically verified by TV pictures but also underlines the technician's need to watch his body language and to transmit positive messages to players, directors and the public via the media.

Sir Alex Ferguson

(league, cup and Cup Winners' Cup champion with Aberdeen FC and winner of just about everything since taking over at Manchester United in November 1986, including two UEFA Champions League titles)

"Playing wing backs, while using three central defenders, represents a far less aggressive attacking philosophy than operation with wingers."

Technician: The sentence illustrates how Sir Alex has built teams which reflect a club credo of playing attractive attack-minded football based not only on wingers but also on overlapping runs by adventurous full-backs. But this is more than a structural approach. It represents a philosophy which responds to the wishes of the supporters and to the passion for football which has traditionally underpinned the club. The need to transmit the right messages in the dressing room and on the

**RAFAEL BENITEZ
WITH STEVEN GERRARD,
ONE OF HIS
STALWARTS AT
LIVERPOOL**



training pitch is nicely expressed by another of Sir Alex's firmly held convictions: **"the drive, the hunger, the passion must be inside you, because players need to recognise that you care."**

Louis van Gaal

(UEFA Cup, UEFA Super Cup and UEFA Champions League winner with AFC Ajax; league, cup and super cup winner in the Netherlands and Spain)

"I do not think it is fair to judge coaches purely on results. You have to see how they work, judge their philosophy and assess their relationship with the players."

Technician: Louis, in his usual direct fashion, hits a nail on the head – and one which, if you'll excuse a mixed metaphor, is a thorn in the technician's side. At one club, Louis was on his way to the door when the players publicly asked him to stay. Their wish was granted – and rewarded with a league title. But there is not always justice in terms of rewards for good work or attempts to implant a new philosophy. Sadly, the majority of coaches are judged purely on results and, in many cases, purely on immediate results rather than on their level of performance or their contributions to entertaining games of football.

Rafael Benítez

(UEFA Cup champion with Valencia, UEFA Champions League winner with Liverpool, and winner of domestic trophies with both)

"I am always questioning, always looking for new solutions, new ways to proceed."

Technician: This is another short sentence which highlights one of the crucial areas in coaching. Rafa expresses the need for the technician to have a restless mind, to be curious, to question facets of the job which are taken for granted, and to search for new solutions to perennial challenges. In other words, his comment succinctly describes coaching as a lifelong learning process and a profession in which

the feeling that you know it all is one of the great danger signs.

Giovanni Trapattoni

(winner of all international competitions with Juventus; league champion in Italy (seven times), Austria, Portugal and Germany; national team coach of Italy and, currently, the Republic of Ireland)

"With a club I was a sculptor – with the national team I'm a blender."

Technician: This is a typically wonderful and colourful sentence by 'Trap' which highlights the differences between club and national team coaching. The sculptor bases his day-to-day work on shaping a chunk of rock or metal into a work of art – in other words, designing and building a team and developing the players which form it. The blender can select his ingredients but, when he has them together, only has time to hit the switch and mix them into instant food. He has to be good at building quickly and shrewdly with a view to producing effective performances at the highest possible level. Then, success for the national team coach in qualifying campaigns entails an abrupt change of scenario in terms of getting the group together for an extended period of cohabitation at the end of a gruelling club season. The blender then has to deal with a very different mix.

Rinus Michels

(champion of Europe with Ajax and the Netherlands; winner of leagues and cups in Netherlands, Spain and Germany)

"Those who focused on the best result rather than the best football were less vulnerable than others."

Technician: This was Rinus, one of football coaching's genuine gurus, taking a typically analytical look at the ingredients of winning sides. This sentence had a factual basis: teams designed to be pragmatic and functional are less vulnerable. But Rinus's conviction was that the teams equipped to win titles were those who were

prepared to take the initiative and to permit themselves an element of risk. Defensive strategies can win games, he always maintained, but they rarely win titles. He also insisted on the importance of positive dynamics within the group and the value of leadership qualities – among players as well as the coach: **"If you have the leader, others adapt."**

Carlos Alberto Parreira

(FIFA World Cup finalist with four different countries and champion with Brazil; set to make it five as national team coach of South Africa)

"When we talk about stars, I don't like those who just make smoke, I like those who make fire – the ones who perform."

Technician: Carlos grew up in an environment which has, traditionally, offered immense riches in terms of solo ball skills. But he is not impressed by 'tricksters' who make smoke but no fire. He is a firm believer that each player should contribute his individual box



Giovanni Trapattoni applauds his players at the end of a match.



OTTMAR HITZFELD AND OTTO REHHAGEL

of tricks to the collective team effort. He respects players with talent – but he wants talent to be translated into team performance. **“Top players do things that others don’t expect,”** he comments – and he places great value on creativity, with the proviso that playmaking roles offers no excuses for laziness or for abstaining from the collective effort.

Otto Rehhagel

(league, cup and European Cup Winners’ Cup winner with Werder Bremen, league champion with Kaiserslautern, and champion of Europe with Greece) **“I am the only man in Athens who is allowed to drive in the bus lane.”**

Technician: This comment, made at a UEFA coaching event staged in the wake of Greece’s victory at EURO 2004, is a lovely sample of Otto’s great sense of fun. He was 65 when he allowed the Greeks to don the European crown for the first time, yet he never fails to transmit a contagious youthful enthusiasm which creates a mood of confidence in and around the dressing room. His humorous comment illustrates two concepts: firstly, that the fun element should never be allowed to disappear from football and secondly, that, in coaching, job satisfaction should not be equated exclusively to financial recompense. The longer-lasting rewards for a job well done are intangibles based on admiration and public affection.

Luíz Felipe Scolari

(FIFA World Cup winner with Brazil and silver medallist with Portugal at EURO 2004)

“Everything must be kept simple – do not complicate what is a simple business, a simple, beautiful game.”

Technician: ‘Big Phil’ expresses one of the concepts which has kept Brazilian football at the top of the tree. But anybody who knows him will testify that his method of ‘keeping things simple’ is based on large doses of dedication and hard work. His comment supports the

theory that it takes a degree of genius to create simplicity and that, if the greatest teams are often described as ‘making it look easy’, it is because a great deal of work has gone into the creation of structures and environments in which talents can be expressed at their maximum levels.

Ottmar Hitzfeld

(winner of 18 titles and the only coach to have won the UEFA Champions League with two different clubs; current coach of the Swiss national team)

“Major changes have taken place during the last ten years. There was more space and the passing was longer – now it’s quick, short passing and every coach is well organised.”

Technician: This is a significant comment by Ottmar because, despite the experience accumulated during decades of coaching, he has taken the time to step back and to analyse the way the game has been constantly evolving. He believes that coaches also need to evolve in terms of being aware of trends, deciding whether

to react to them or not, and being open to changes in playing styles and lifestyles. The quick, short-passing game he mentions is epitomised by the current FC Barcelona team – but to what extent can this style be implanted elsewhere?

Roy Hodgson

(successful with club sides and national teams in eight countries and, this season, making history with Fulham’s Europa League run)

“The modern coach needs a philosophy, an expert eye and intuition.”

Technician: Eleven words which provoke a lot of thought. The philosophy has to be created, developed and implemented. The expert eye and the intuition are linked with footballing know-how, innate talent and experience accumulated over the years. But, amid today’s trend towards sports science and performance analysis, are the expert eye and intuition being undervalued? Scientific input is based on what has already happened; intuition is an anticipation of what happens next and what needs to be done in order to shape a team’s destiny.



Roy Hodgson, with Zoltan Gera and keeper Mark Schwarzer, celebrates as Fulham qualify for the Europa League semis.

**JOSÉ MOURINHO GIVES INSTRUCTIONS
TO JAVIER ZANETTI AND ESTEBAN CAMBIASSO
IN THE RETURN LEG OF THEIR
ROUND OF 16 TIE AGAINST CHELSEA
IN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE.**



Marcello Lippi

(steeped in Italian club and national team culture; currently back with the national team; the only coach to have won the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA Champions League)

“You have to make each player feel equally useful, but not indispensable.”

Technician: Marcello’s comment is a neat way of summarising the sometimes complex task of blending personalities into an effective unit and motivating players without taking their feet off the ground. At national team level, the ability to take a country’s top individuals and build them into a workforce with a strong team ethic is one of the major challenges for the technician. Marcello also comments: **“Many coaches have had difficult relationships with great attackers – at the end of the career the player thanks the coach for helping him to understand the whole game.”** In the meantime, the coach has to find the optimal method of getting the best from each individual.

José Mourinho

(currently at FC Internazionale; UEFA Cup and UEFA Champions League winner with FC Porto; winner of leagues and cups in Portugal, England and Italy)

“I use a global method. Yes, I use direct methods when preparing our organisation, but I also use guided discovery where I create the practice, dictate the aim, and the players come up with different solutions.”

Technician: José has demonstrated that, in getting the best out of players, modern approaches on the training ground and carefully thought-out coaching methodology have an important role to play. One of his talents is to set targets and achieve them. **“You need to have a clear philosophy to know what you want and how to get it.”**

Gérard Houllier

(winner of four domestic cups, the UEFA Cup and the UEFA Super Cup with Liverpool; league and super cup

champion with Olympique Lyonnais; currently France’s technical director)

“Win as a team – lose alone.”

Technician: In few words, Gérard highlights one of the stark realities of the coaching profession. Despite the camaraderie, it is essentially a solitary, lonely job. The ultimate responsibilities that go with the role include accepting not only defeats but also the consequences of those defeats. The coach has to provide explanations to the players, to the other echelons within the club and to the public, via the media. One of the coach’s major challenges is to set the team back on track after a run of poor results.

Vanderlei Luxemburgo

(Brazil’s most successful coach with 20 state and national titles and one Copa América with the national team; UEFA Champions League participant with Real Madrid)

“To be afraid of losing removes the willingness to win.”

Technician: Vanderlei, whose teams play creative, attacking football, believes that the fear factor is the greatest enemy to a winning mentality – in both players and coaches. Arsène Wenger also believes that, in major competitions such as the UEFA Champions League, mental strength is a key asset. Fear of failure rapidly translates into diluted ambitions. As Vanderlei also insists: **“Victory goes to those who are faster – to develop, to improve, to play.”**

Fabio Capello

(32 caps for Italy, 328 games in Serie A, nine league titles as coach in Italy and Spain, UEFA Champions League winner in 1994, and current England national team manager)

“When you are a player, all you have to do is think about your own game, your fitness, your diet, etc. – you train, you go home, and that’s it. But when you become a manager, you have to think about the physical and mental preparation of the whole squad, building

up team spirit, being aware of medical issues. Above all, you have to develop your leadership skills.”

Technician: The transition from playing to coaching is a path that has been trodden by the majority of modern technicians. Fabio’s description highlights the importance of working towards a vision while developing management and, above all, leadership qualities.



Fabio Capello with England international Wayne Rooney

In summary, without a clear philosophy of the game, a coach is like a ship without a rudder. Of course, players and circumstances can have an impact on performances, but in the long run, the technician is there to convey his beliefs and affect the footballing behaviour of his players. One of Andy Roxburgh’s favourite proverbs comes from Spain: **“It is not the same to talk of bulls as to be in the bullring.”** Our leading coaches have not only succeeded in the football ‘bullring’ but also have enough wisdom to articulate their views about that experience.



Sportsfile

GÉRARD HOULLIER HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF A WELL-ORGANISED 'TEAM BEHIND THE TEAM'.

ORGANISING THE BACK ROOM

IT IS A SIGNIFICANT SIGN OF THE TIMES THAT THERE IS A HEALTHY LEVEL OF CROSS-FERTILISATION BETWEEN AREAS OF THE GAME THAT, IN THE PAST, WERE RUN AS 'INDEPENDENT STATES' OR, IT HAS TO BE SAID, DIDN'T EVEN EXIST. IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE OF THE TECHNICIAN, ONE OF THE TOPICS WAS THE IMPACT OF SPORTS SCIENCE ON THE COACHING PROFESSION – AND THIS WAS CROSS-FERTILISED BY SOME OF THE ISSUES RAISED AT THE RECENT UEFA MEDICAL SYMPOSIUM IN SWEDEN AND RECORDED IN OUR MEDICAL PUBLICATION, MEDICINE MATTERS. ONE OF THEM WAS "THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEAM DOCTOR AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COACH".

It served to highlight the need for the modern technician to organise and captain an efficient 'team behind the team' which, as Gérard Houllier insists, "not only performs specific tasks but also has a role to play in creating the atmosphere around the team". As Andy Roxburgh pointed out in Stockholm, today's top coach is the leading edge of a group which frequently consists of assistant coaches, goalkeeping

coaches, fitness trainers, physios, kit men, masseurs, doctors, sports scientists and other specialists in areas such as sports psychology. As with a football team, one member who doesn't perform effectively can undermine the results and morale of the entire group.

"Things have changed in the last 25 years," Sir Alex Ferguson comments, "particularly in the area of sports sci-

ence. Medical information, nutrition and the preparation of players has reached another level. Today we have a full-time doctor, five physios, a fitness coach, a weights coach, an optometrist..." Sir Alex is the first to admit that a head coach is no longer a one-man band and that a boot room would be hard-pressed to accommodate meetings of the backroom staff. The challenge is therefore to select staff as well as players and to build teams – in the plural – rather than just a team.

Having built a 'team behind the team', the head coach is required to lubricate the machinery to ensure that it runs smoothly in all conditions. As György Mezey, the former Hungarian national team manager who now shares his working life between FC Videoton and the Puskas Academy, maintains, "integration is a key word for the team behind the team."

This was the theme taken up during the medical event in Stockholm by the former Swedish national team coach Lars Lagerbäck (now head coach of the Nigerian national team) and a member of his backroom staff, Dr Paul Balsom, the Swedish national association's performance manager. They jointly highlighted the importance of fully integrating the backroom staff – including the



Getty Images

FC Barcelona are well aware of the importance of good cooperation between the medical team and technical staff in order to make the most of the talents of players such as Messi and Xavi Hernández.

**DR PAUL BALSOM MAKES
A PRESENTATION AT THE UEFA MEDICAL
SYMPOSIUM IN STOCKHOLM.**



medical team – into the daily life of the squad. As they both agreed, one of the premises for total integration is a clear demarcation of responsibilities, allied with fluent and regular flows of communication. Spheres of influence need to be precisely traced, with those responsible for medical care and performance assessment offering input to leisure activities as well as the intensity of training sessions. In Stockholm, one of the discussion points was the tendency for coaches to take members of their ‘team behind the team’ with them when they move to a different team. In the past, this was generally restricted to assistant coaches. These days, it is not unusual for the coach to arrive at his job with a member of his medical staff at his side.

At the medical symposium, the team doctor’s responsibilities were perceived to focus on safeguarding the players’ health, injury prevention, the care and rehabilitation of injured players, leading the medical team, providing medical advice and establishing links within the medical profession. The physio could be regarded as responsible for implementing injury prevention, care and rehabilitation, and lifestyle counselling, including the use of leisure time, hygiene in living habits, nutrition and safety.

But areas of responsibility can differ from team to team. One of the operational questions to emerge from Stockholm, for example, was whether the fitness coach is to be considered a member of the coaching staff or part of the medical team. In other words, is there a need to mark a line in the sand between the concepts of ‘fitness’ and ‘coach’? It is then up to the head coach to determine how, when and to what extent the fitness coach contributes to work on the training ground.

Paul Balsom, following up his presence in Stockholm by contributing an article to *Medicine Matters*, commented, “to be effective, sports-science and medical practitioners must be able to influence key decisions with respect to injury-reducing or performance-enhancing aspects such as training loads (duration and intensity), training content (e.g. gym-based v on-field activities), recov-

ery strategies, training/team selection based on needs (considering requirement to rest players, etc). This is where the core values, beliefs and leadership qualities of the modern-day coach become critical.” He went on to add, “the performance decisions made by the support team need professional acceptance. Key decisions, such as when a player can return, should NOT be tainted by the opinion of the coach.”



Discussions at the symposium in Stockholm

This categorical statement illustrates the need to find the right balance between the medical and footballing standpoints. The transcendental importance of certain matches can justify an element of risk-taking. With the full consensus of all concerned – including, obviously, the player himself – Andrés Iniesta played all but the closing seconds of added time in the 2009 UEFA Champions League final in Rome, aware of the risk of aggravating a thigh muscle injury. The grandeur of the fixture justified an exception to a rule.

FC Barcelona feature among the top teams who take part in UEFA’s ongoing injury study. Recently, the clubs with the most favourable injury statistics were asked to offer opinions about why they achieved such good results. Many of them highlighted the importance of good collaboration between the med-

ical/sports-science team and the technical staff. Other explanations included the contribution by assistant coaches in implanting a serious training ethic, the importance of adhering to protocols of injury prevention and treatment, the ‘luxury’ of having a sufficiently strong squad for players nursing minor injuries to be rested, the implementation of individualised nutrition, preparation and injury-prevention programmes, and

work done on the psychological front to ensure that the players attain an optimal mental balance.

The modern coach therefore has to be prepared to take on board performance-indicating information when it comes to making his team selection. The days of ‘my eye is the best judge’ are numbered – if not definitively over. “It would be impossible to work in the same way as I did in 1986,” says Sir Alex Ferguson. “It’s too big a beast now to be hands-on with everything. Delegating is essential. I’ve learned at this level you need good people around you. I trust them and rely on them. There must be about 40 people who report to me now, quite apart from the players.” Managing the ‘team behind the team’ has now become a significant part of the top technician’s responsibilities.



Getty Images

**ANDRÉS INIESTA (6) AND XAVI HERNÁNDEZ (8),
BARCELONA'S MIDFIELD DUO, TEAM UP FOR SPAIN
AGAINST GERMANY IN THE EURO 2008 FINAL.**

LEARNING TO READ

UEFA'S PRESIDENT, MICHEL PLATINI, ALWAYS MAINTAINS THAT HIS GREATEST GIFT AS A PLAYER WAS HIS ABILITY TO 'READ THE GAME'. THE EXPRESSION IS EXTENSIVELY USED IN THE WORLD OF FOOTBALL, YET NO DICTIONARY DEFINITION CAN BE FOUND. MICHEL HIMSELF FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO FIND A RATIONAL EXPLANATION FOR HOW THIS SPECIAL TALENT WAS DEVELOPED. HENCE FOOTBALL'S FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION: CAN 'READING THE GAME' BE TAUGHT OR COACHED?

It is a quality which can certainly be associated with clarity of vision – especially the sort of peripheral vision which can broaden the picture. A team-mate of Cesc Fàbregas at Arsenal FC recently said “he seems to see absolutely everything around him as if he also had eyes in the back of his head.”

When assessing players, reading the game tends to be associated with the ability to locate opponents and team-mates and to detect spaces and exploit them with passes or runs. But the expression is more seldom used when discussing defensive aspects of team play. In the French side of the 1980s,

Michel Platini was accompanied in midfield by Alain Giresse and Jean Tigana, two creative players who, in terms of physical and footballing stature, might easily be compared to today's FC Barcelona and Spain duo of Xavi Hernández and Andrés Iniesta. Critical appraisal of all four focuses on their contributions to attacking play and often obviates their talent for re-gaining possession. The ball is not won by physical presence or crunching tackles – it is much more about reading the game well enough to anticipate the next movement or the next pass. For the defender, ability to read the game might become apparent in positional

responses to situations and capacity to anticipate and cut out the through pass.

In both attacking and defending modes, reading the game could be defined as an ability to convert images into messages and immediately translate them into actions.

Those who have made the transition from playing to coaching can testify that the game needs to be read in a different way by the coach. There is less emphasis on immediacy and instant responses. The move from pitch to bench could be likened to a journalist who switches from live TV commentary to writing more considered reports for a newspaper. In reading the game, the coach often has to curb his or her instinctive attention to detail and be more discerning in filtering the flow of information. It is easy to become confused – or confusing – by the sheer volume of details. Reading the game requires an ability to highlight the most relevant sentences in many pages of text.

The coach will measure his capacity to read the game by the number of decisions that help to produce a favourable outcome. The UEFA Champions League – the competition where the coaches feel they are being tested to the limit – produces some striking examples. Claude Puel, for instance, laid the foundations for Olympique Lyonnais' victory over Real Madrid CF in the first knockout round with two changes during the half-time interval of the second leg at the Estadio Santiago Bernabéu. Having started with a 4-1-4-1



Getty Images

Cesc Fàbregas, with an FC Porto player on each side, is an expert at reading the game.

FITNESS TEST FOR THE REFEREES IN MALTA



structure, he moved his midfield pivot (Jérémy Toulalan) into the back four and injected Kim Källström and Maxime Gonalons in the midfield holding roles of a 4-2-3-1 formation. By changing the shape of his team, he changed the shape of the game.

During the 2008 final between Manchester United and Chelsea, Sir Alex Ferguson did likewise, but in a different situation. By the middle of the second half, Chelsea were enjoying territorial advantage and threatening the United goal. Sir Alex reorganised his 4-2-1-3 into a 4-3-3 formation to mirror Chelsea's three-man midfield, with Wayne Rooney in a wide right berth and Carlos Tévez at the apex of the attack. "We had to make sure at that moment that they didn't get control of the game, because I knew we would get stronger the longer it lasted," Sir Alex said afterwards. In other words, this was a coaching answer to the nimble ball-winning midfielders, with shrewd reading of the game translating into anticipation. Sir Alex was reading the writing on the wall.

When questions about educating players and coaches in reading the game are extended to referees, even more fundamental differences become apparent. Unlike players and coaches, match officials do not have the same opportunities to 'live the game' in sustained sequences of training and match play. Preparation can certainly help – and Pierluigi Collina was among the frontrunners in terms of doing his homework on the modus operandi of the teams and their defensive mechanisms. On the one hand, anticipation is less critical for the referee; on the other hand, referees and players share the need to read situations and take decisions in fractions of a second.

These factors prompted a session directed by UEFA's technical director, Andy Roxburgh, when over 100 international referees (evenly split between international newcomers and experienced campaigners already in the elite and premier categories) got together in Malta for UEFA's annual referee courses.

Among them were the ten European referees who, hours later, appeared on the list of match officials selected for the FIFA World Cup. So, the best of wishes to Olegário Benquerença (Portugal), Massimo Busacca (Switzerland), Frank De Bleeckere (Belgium), Martin Hansson (Sweden), Viktor Kassai (Hungary), Stéphane Lannoy (France), Roberto Rosetti (Italy), Wolfgang Stark (Germany), Alberto Undiano Mallenco (Spain) and Howard Webb (England).

In Malta, the programme featured a practical session aimed at coaching the referees' judgement and positioning in player simulation situations, and assessing their reactions in terms of how offences should be most appropriately punished. Extensive DVD analysis was aimed at unifying criteria and reactions, protecting players from reckless or overzealous challenges, appropriate punishment for holding, pulling and pushing offences in the penalty area, and a best-practice approach to detecting and dealing with simulation.

All this dovetailed with Andy Roxburgh's session, which addressed the importance of being able to read the game

and methods of improving this ability. Discussion was sparked off by DVD clips from EURO 2008 and the UEFA Champions League which illustrated the importance of positioning – and, in refereeing, 'positioning' is all about making the right runs at the right time. But, whereas a player's running is all about making the best angles to receive passes, the referee's running is about making the best angles for a clear vision of play.

The referees were also confronted with a number of situations where they needed to be on 'red alert', with Andy Roxburgh explaining some of the moves rehearsed on training grounds and examining examples of legitimate and not so legitimate blocking manoeuvres frequently employed to gain space for an attacking team-mate at corners or free-kicks.

"The more you know, the easier it becomes to see things during the game," he commented, "and the better you are at reading the game, the easier it is to make the right calls and the greater the chance of the game being exciting, fair and spectacular."



Cristiano Ronaldo soars above the rest in the 2008 Champions League final between Manchester United and Chelsea.



**THE NATIONAL TEAM BRINGS
TOGETHER THE FOOTBALL FANS
OF AN ENTIRE COUNTRY.**

NATIONAL TEAM FOOTBALL: AN IDENTITY PARADE?

FIVE YEARS AGO, BEFORE HE LED ITALY TO VICTORY IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP, MARCELLO LIPPI COMMENTED: "THE NATIONAL TEAM REPRESENTS THE FOOTBALL OF THE COUNTRY. ITALIAN NATIONAL FOOTBALL IS NOT REPRESENTED BY ITS CLUBS. NOT BY JUVENTUS OR MILAN OR ROMA, IN THE SAME WAY THAT GERMAN FOOTBALL ISN'T REALLY REPRESENTED BY FC BAYERN OR DORTMUND OR BREMEN. NATIONAL PRIDE AND CHARACTERISTICS COME TO THE FORE IN THE NATIONAL TEAM. AT A CLUB, YOU CAN'T CLAIM THAT A SQUAD WHICH CONTAINS 17 OR 18 IMPORTED PLAYERS REPRESENTS NATIONAL IDENTITY. IT'S ONLY THE NATIONAL TEAM THAT CAN CLAIM THAT. SO FAR, I HAVE TO SAY THAT IT HAS BEEN A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR ME TO WORK WITH AN ALL-ITALIAN GROUP AND TO FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL IDENTITY."

Since Marcello pronounced those words, the globalisation of club football has marched onwards, making the question of developing and maintaining a football identity within a national association an even more relevant topic – one which has been extensively discussed by UEFA's Football Committee, chaired by Franz Beckenbauer, and one which has, more than once, also appeared on the agenda of the Development and Technical Assistance Committee.

In the meantime, the immense public interest in major tournaments for national teams has highlighted the importance of national identities. And it doesn't take too much delving into the archives to find compelling testimony from leading technicians, such as "the national team is part of the national culture and, during great events, teams and their supporters form something of national value" (György Mezey), "the national team remains the focal point of a nation's football, capable of rousing great fervour and emotions and of unifying the whole country behind their team" (Roy Hodgson), "the national team provides the full

emotional scale of an entire nation, from joy and happiness to frustration and despair" (Holger Osieck), "players represent their nation for love, glory and pride in a team that unites the supporters of the whole country" (Gérard Houllier), and "the national team is the lifeblood of a country's football" (Berti Vogts).

The challenge is to translate these unanimous sentiments into a plan of action for establishing and protecting national identity. Marcello Lippi's willingness to accept responsibility for the Italian identity is underpinned by the fact that a vast majority of his squad play their football in Serie A and are therefore steeped in Italian football



Universal pride and joy in Italy

LARS LAGERBÄCK, SURROUNDED BY SWEDISH PLAYERS AT EURO 2008, IS LEADING NIGERIA TO THE 2010 WORLD CUP.



Gesty Images



Empics Sport

Fernando Torres's goal in the EURO 2008 final

culture week in, week out. Other national team coaches are confronted with very different scenarios. At EURO 2008, only 52.4% of squad members – and less than half of the regular starters – were playing in their home countries. But was it purely coincidence that the percentage of home-based players was 81.5% among the four semi-finalists? Or that 17 of the 22 starters in the final were playing at home in Spain's La Liga or Germany's Bundesliga?

The reality of national team football in many other associations is that the top players are widely spread around the continent. A look at the squads who are heading to South Africa in a few weeks will reveal that in other confederations the tendency is magnified, with a majority of players based at long-haul distances from their native country. Gravitation towards Europe has given birth to a trend towards playing international fixtures on neutral European soil, leading to even less frequent contact between players at European clubs and their home countries and cultures.

And what about the increasing cross-border movements of technicians?

Looking at the topic from a different perspective, how difficult is it to develop a national identity if the coach is from a different country? Since taking the England job, Fabio Capello has been at pains to promote English virtues, to fast-track players through the age-limit teams, and to embrace the English football culture. This, it has to be said, is not always easy. For example, a European technician appointed as coach of a national team on another continent may find that over 90% of his potential squad members are at European clubs. This has logistical advantages in that watching them becomes relatively easy. But it becomes more difficult to assess the national identity of the country where the hopes and dreams of millions are pinned to performances by him and his players.

Incidentally, there are now five European technicians who'll be leading non-European national teams into the FIFA World Cup finals. Following the most recent appointments, Lars Lagerbäck will be at the Nigerian helm against Argentina, South Korea and Greece, while his compatriot Sven-Göran Eriksson, taking over from Vahid Halilhodzic, will be in

charge of the Ivory Coast's Group G campaign against North Korea, Portugal and Brazil.

Barring further changes, there will be 18 European technicians on the benches in South Africa. Many of them are on short-term contracts and, as also pointed out in our last issue, 8 of the 13 coaches who'll be heading for South Africa at the head of European national teams were appointed as recently as 2008. There are therefore legitimate questions about whether it is reasonable to ask Marcello and his coaching colleagues to be solely "responsible for the national identity". This is evidently an issue to be faced on wider fronts at national association level.

Policies and action plans are inevitably influenced by the scenario within an individual association. But there are common denominators. Sweden could be taken as an example of a country where the tendency is for top players to emigrate. Seven of their 23-man squad (including two goalkeepers) at EURO 2008 were home-based. The preservation of a national identity can therefore be traced back to the social and footballing contexts in which players have been brought up, the coaches who have moulded their skills and their way of thinking, and the valuable international experience gained from pulling on the national jersey to play in the youth teams.

The relevance of age-limit competitions in terms of developing a national identity was spectacularly illustrated by the Spanish national side which took the European title in Vienna two years ago. From goalkeeper Iker Casillas to striker Fernando Torres, the team had amassed tremendous riches in terms of experience – and gold medals – at youth levels from Under-16 to Under-20. Torres, who scored the only goal in the Vienna final, had done the same



ENGLAND V UKRAINE IN THE FINAL OF THE EUROPEAN UNDER-19 CHAMPIONSHIP

for Spain's Under-16s against France in Sunderland in 2001, when Andrés Iniesta was one of his squad-mates. Captain Iker Casillas had built up an immense track record at Under-16 and Under-18 tournaments, Meridian Cups and Under-17 and Under-20 world championships – winning gold at the latter level alongside Xavi Hernández in 1999. David Silva and Cesc Fàbregas won silver medals at the 2003 U-17 World Cup.

It was generally accepted that one of the major contributing factors to Spanish success was the extension of the youth teams' playing culture into a senior team with a distinct identity based on technique, ball possession and nimble short-passing combinations among players who were, physically at least, by no means in the giant category. Marcello Lippi is convinced that "Italy could never play like Spain".

The whole process of developing a national identity therefore permeates deeply into a coach education philosophy, where there may be grounds for

focusing more tightly on candidates who are national residents. In other words, if the development and maintenance of a football identity is to feature in a national association's educational programmes, it would make sense to concentrate on pupils who can identify with and contribute to the project.

In a context of increasing globalisation, the effectiveness of player development programmes take on even greater importance. Very often, young players need opportunities to pull on and identify with the national jersey before career paths might be diverted towards distant shores. In this area, UEFA's committees have reflected deeply on the value of national centres and schools of football in helping to forge skills, styles and philosophies.

At the same time, the feeling is that there is a tendency for grassroots and youth football to be undervalued. Promotion work needs to be strong enough to persuade clubs to recognise the value of international experience in the development of elite youth players.

Some national team coaches still suffer frustrations when it comes to securing the release of players for youth tournaments by clubs who turn a blind eye to the benefits of giving their budding talents opportunities to encounter other football cultures – something which can only be positive preparation for participation in international club competitions. There have even been cases of players' agents instructing their young protégés to stay in pre-season training camps with their clubs rather than gain international experience at UEFA's U19 finals, traditionally staged in July. In this respect, the elaboration by UEFA and FIFA of an international youth calendar represents a major forward move.

Another area where significant progress is being made is in the graphic expression of national identities. When it was conceived at the beginning of the 1990s, the UEFA Champions League set benchmarks in terms of branding the competition and giving it an easily discernable identity. Once the impact had been measured, national associations began to take notice and to work on ways of 'branding' their national teams and giving them a visual identity to go with the sentimental attachments. Although the concept of branding is traditionally linked with the world of marketing, it can also represent a non-commercial way of allowing supporters to visually display their allegiances – as spectacularly illustrated by the 4.2 million fans who brought life and colour into the fan zones in Austria and Switzerland during EURO 2008.

"Recent major tournaments have not only reconfirmed the sporting value of national team football," comments UEFA's technical director, Andy Roxburgh, "but have also demonstrated the public's commitment to the international game and their desire to express a national identity through their team."



One of the EURO 2008 fan zones in Vienna



TRAINING ROUTINE

BY **GYÖRGY MEZEY**
Coach of FC Videoton (Hungary) and
Head of the Puskás Academy



Aim

- To combine technical, tactical and fitness elements into a finishing exercise.

Rules

- A player from each line plays a one-two and shoots at goal.
- The same players immediately take part in a 2 v 2 challenge, with a cross from the right.
- The same players continue forward and repeat the 2 v 2 challenge, this time with a cross from the left.
- The players then return to the back of their original line.
- The practice continues with the next two attackers.

Timing

- At a top professional club, this can last up to 45 minutes. The target is for each player to complete ten runs. (The goals tally of each player is recorded.)

Coaching

- Work on combinations and finishing.
- Develop twin-striker movement and finishing (usually in the air) from well-delivered crosses.
- Maintain quality, despite intensity.

AGENDA

2010

May 12

- UEFA Europa League Final (Hamburg)

May 18 – 30

- 9th European Under-17 Championship – Final Tournament (Liechtenstein)

May 19

- 1st UEFA Grassroots Day (Madrid)

May 20

- UEFA Women's Champions League Final (Madrid)

May 22

- UEFA Champions League Final (Madrid)

May 24 – June 05

- 9th European Women's Under-19 Championship – Final Tournament (FYR Macedonia)

June 11 – July 11

- FIFA World Cup (South Africa)

June 22 – 26

- 3rd European Women's Under-17 Championship – Final Tournament (Nyon)

July 18 – 30

- 9th European Under-19 Championship – Final Tournament (France)



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