

# THE TECHNICIAN

WOMEN'S

**UEFA  
Women's  
National Team  
Coaches  
Conference  
in Nyon**

**Fast-forward  
from  
Finland**



**NEWSLETTER  
FOR COACHES  
SUPPLEMENT No. 6  
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Elodie Thomis of France up against Norway's Maren Mjelde in one of the group matches

## IMPRESSUM

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Silvia Neid, the winning coach, shows off the European Championship trophy that Germany had just won for the fifth time in a row.

(PHOTO: BARON/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES)

**THE UEFA PRESIDENT HANDS  
THE TROPHY OVER TO GERMANY AFTER THE FINAL  
BETWEEN GERMANY AND ENGLAND.**



Action Images/John Sibley

# FAST-FORWARD FROM FINLAND

**THE WOMEN'S EURO 2009 SET NEW BENCHMARKS. THE FINAL TOURNAMENT – THE FIRST TO FEATURE 12 TEAMS – ATTRACTED UNPRECEDENTED TV AUDIENCES WHICH HIGHLIGHTED A SPECTACULAR GROWTH IN THE POPULARITY OF THE WOMEN'S GAME. IN THE NETHERLANDS, ALMOST 40% OF THE VIEWING PUBLIC WATCHED THE RUN BY VERA PAUW'S DEBUTANTES TO THE SEMI-FINALS. AUDIENCES IN THE UK WERE CLOSE TO 1.5 MILLION DURING HOPE POWELL'S SIDE'S ROLLER-COASTER RUN TO THE FINAL. AND, IN GERMANY, WELL OVER 7 MILLION VIEWERS WATCHED THEIR NATIONAL TEAM WIN ITS FIFTH SUCCESSIVE EUROPEAN CROWN.**

Maintaining this momentum and extending it to nations which occupy various steps on the stairway to the big stage was the central theme of the UEFA Women's National Team Coaches Conference which took place at the very end of November.

The event at UEFA's headquarters in Nyon was the first of its kind. Although four general women's football conferences had been organised in the past, the 2009 gathering represented an innovation in the sense that it was specifically aimed at technicians, with national team coaches and technical directors from 51 member associations making their way to Switzerland. The prime objectives were to review the 2009 finals from a technical perspective and to allow the participants a rare opportunity to share experiences, knowledge and opinions with a view to tracing a forward path for the women's game. The conference featured sessions on 'A Winning Mindset' by Dr Frank Dick, coach to medal-winning Olympic athletes, and UEFA's technical director, Andy Roxburgh, was on stage to outline the sort of leadership qualities now required by the coach of a national team. But the core element was to rewind images of the finals in Finland

and to highlight the features which will allow the women's game to hit the fast-forward button into the future.

## **The Format**

The expansion to a dozen teams was unanimously hailed as a welcome advance – but one which fell short of perfection. The pros and cons were

objectively reviewed by UEFA's competitions director, Giorgio Marchetti, on the second morning of the three-day event, and some of the coaches who had led teams through the group phase in Finland were quick to point out that the format had shaped their tactical approach to certain games. The only two draws during the group phase were



**Finland's Tiine Sofia Salmen (No. 6) tries to outmanoeuvre Kirsten van de Ven of the Netherlands in one of the Women's EURO 2009 matches in Group A.**

Getty Images



**HOPE POWELL, ENGLAND'S COACH,  
DURING A TRAINING SESSION AT THE  
FINAL ROUND IN FINLAND**

'results of convenience' in the sense that they allowed the four teams to qualify for the quarter-finals – two of them as the best third-placed teams, at the expense of Denmark who, in Group A, had completed their campaign 24 or 48 hours before the other two groups.

"In our last game against Sweden, we knew that a draw would be OK," the England manager, Hope Powell, explained, "whereas a win could have given us a quarter-final against Germany. I have to admit that finishing third worked in our favour. But there's no doubt that having 12 teams in the finals helps to develop the game." The Dutch coach, Vera Pauw, explained why, when trailing Finland 2-1 in the second game, she advised her players to give priority to not conceding more goals. "My girls were having difficulties in coping with a big stadium, a passionate crowd and a tough game against the hosts. When we conceded the second goal, I felt that to open up and go for an equaliser would expose us to conceding more – and oblige us to beat Denmark in our last game instead of being able to go through with a draw. It was a realistic approach – but I hope it never happens again!"

As Giorgio Marchetti pointed out, finals with 8 or 16 teams might be fairer in sporting terms but the former would be seen as a retrograde step and the sec-

ond option, although it would provide greater incentives, might create a tournament which would be difficult to host and to finance.

**Team Shapes**

As Andy Roxburgh commented at the conference, "top teams again proved that shape mattered. A disciplined defensive structure and a framework for attacking fluidity and creativity was important." As recently as the 2001 finals, the most frequent team shape was a classic 4-4-2. In Finland, however, the trend was towards a 4-2-3-1 with two screening midfielders operating in front of a zonal back four.

On the other hand, there was greater tactical flexibility than at previous tournaments and most teams were equipped to adjust their formation in response to the nature of the opposition or to the scoreline. "A lot of teams impressed me," commented the champion coach, Silvia Neid. "They were excellent tactically and defensively well organised. The game was played at a higher pace and I would say that the difference in terms of coaching, positional play and tactics in comparison with the 1997 finals, for example, was simply incredible."

**Playing Styles**

The finalists in Finland adopted diverse playing styles according to the quality

of the players. None of the teams was outclassed. Ignacio Quereda, one of UEFA's technical team at the finals, praised the standards of football played by the teams eliminated in the group phase. "Russia," he said, "had very clear concepts and an attractive playing philosophy."

"What most struck me," commented Norway's coach, Bjarne Berntsen, at the conference, "was that teams were so well organised and played at a higher tempo than in the past. I think we are seeing the results of girls starting to play their football at earlier ages and, in the case of the Nordic countries, the benefits of being able to train and play on artificial surfaces. It means that the level of skill is progressively increasing as the young girls come through."

Styles were also influenced by pre-tournament expectations. Some teams focused on minimal-risk defensive play and quick counter-attacks. Some were prepared to carry the game to the opposition with high-tempo possession play. There were interesting contrasts between teams, such as France, who preferred to build attacks with short-passing combination moves and those whose attacking play was based preferentially on direct passing. Most teams acknowledged the importance of fast wing play, although the complexion of line-ups often depended on whether the players deployed in the wide areas were genuine wingers (more of a rarity in Finland) or attack-minded midfielders.

In terms of the audiences generated by EURO 2009, Hope Powell emphasised the need to offer the public entertaining football. "This is paramount for the future of the game," she commented in Nyon, "as it is the way to get more girls interested in playing football, to persuade national associations to place greater value on women's football and to contribute more to the game's development. The viewing figures in Finland will undoubtedly help us to attract greater finance in the future."



The UEFA Women's National Team Coaches Conference

**BJARNE BERNTSEN, COACH OF THE NORWEGIAN WOMEN'S TEAM, TAKES THE FLOOR DURING THE UEFA CONFERENCE IN NYON.**



UEFA-Woods

**The Goals**

The eight-goal final in Helsinki was seen as a spectacular advertisement for women's football. Even though the overall average of goals per game was slightly down on the 2005 finals, it was higher than in the previous two final tournaments.

Year	Matches	Goals	Av.
1997	15	35	2.33
2001	15	40	2.66
2005	15	50	3.33
2009	25	75	3.00

The relevance of wing play was emphasised by the fact that 40% of the goals scored in open play were derived from crosses, diagonal balls or cutbacks from advanced wide areas. By contrast, only two of the 75 goals were solo efforts – a figure which makes interesting comparisons with the 20% registered by the men during the 2008/09 UEFA Champions League campaign. As Andy Roxburgh suggested at the conference, "this could be simply down to the fact that the best soloists in the world tend to be found in the UEFA Champions League."

The importance of breaking the deadlock was highlighted by the fact that 18 of the 25 games (72%) were won by the team scoring first. There was one goalless draw, two teams fought back to 1-1 and only four sides managed to bounce back from a deficit to record a victory.

**Counter-attacking**

In Finland, 22% of the goals scored in open play could be directly traced to counter-attacks. Even Germany, largely expected to dominate possession and carry the game to their opponents, placed special importance on the ability to launch lightning-fast counter-attacks. "The defensive organisation of so many teams has improved so that we are finding fast breaks an even more important weapon," said Silvia Neid. "We worked hard on winning the ball in midfield to set up fast, vertical moves. Managing to do that effectively was one of the reasons behind our success." "If you can't cope with their counters," said Hope

Powell, "you have a big problem." Andy Roxburgh, reviewing the goals scored on the break, commented, "the key elements were the transition speed, the immediacy of forward action (much of it explosive running), a minimum number of passes delivered at high speed and, of course, fast, accurate finishing."

**Set Plays**

More than one-quarter of the goals scored at EURO 2009 stemmed from set plays. The figure of 27% represented a significant increase compared with the 20% registered at the men's finals in 2008. As in 2005, some teams adopted the ploy of packing players into the goal area at corners, making it difficult for defenders and the goalkeeper to manoeuvre. Good delivery of the corner was therefore crucial and in some cases, such as the Germany v Norway semi-final, committing so many players – defenders among them – to such advanced positions created vulnerability to counter-attacks.

**Injuries**

For the second time, the Women's EURO was included in UEFA's ongoing injury research project, with Dr Mogens Kreutzfeldt and Karolina Kristenson stepping on to the stage in Nyon to present a

summary of the findings derived from the finals in Finland.

They reported a lower incidence of injury compared with the 2005 finals, although the overall parameters remained essentially unchanged. The injury risk was ten times higher during match play than in training. On the other hand, 29% of the injuries recorded in Finland were sustained during training. Another contrast was that although, as in England in 2005, the injury rate was higher during the group stage than in knockout games, the three serious injuries entailing absences of four weeks or more were all sustained during the knockout rounds of EURO 2009. All three were knee injuries suffered in non-contact situations.

No fewer than 85% of the 27 injuries at EURO 2009 were traumatic, with ligament problems and contusions proving to be the most frequent. Curiously, 62% of the injuries suffered during match play occurred during the final 15 minutes of the first half.

**Germany**

A fifth consecutive continental title meant that Germany continue to set



Action Images/John Sibley

Germany's fourth goal in the final against England, headed into the net by Inka Grings.



Action Images/John Sibley

**ICELAND V NORWAY IN  
GROUP B OF THE WOMEN'S EURO 2009  
IN FINLAND.**

the benchmarks in European football, even though Silvia Neid's team was made to work hard for victories in the knockout matches against Italy, Norway and England. "I had my ups and downs like the other coaches," she confessed at the conference in Nyon. "The semi-final against Norway was especially hard because it's always difficult to convey messages to the players when you meet an opponent for a second time in the competition – and you've won the first match 4-0. In the first half, we didn't get into the match. We failed to do everything we had done well in previous games."

"Germany are ahead of us because they have top players and top coaches," said Norway's Bjarne Berntsen. "In both games against us, they were able to bring on players with special qualities and in the semi-final, they made three changes – and all three substitutes scored."

"The players on the German bench would be starters in other teams," Hope Powell agreed. "Their other strengths are a clear playing style, strength, power and direct attacking. In the final, we tried to take the game to them and we managed to force them on to the back foot for certain periods. But they are always dangerous and one of their other strengths is the belief that they can always score goals."

"Even if they're not at their peak and they're not really creating chances, they always seem to score goals,"

Vera Pauw agreed. "They have quality, they are well structured and they have a very clear concept of how they want to play football."

**Women's Football**

As part of his review of EURO 2009, Andy Roxburgh reflected on the current state of women's football, based on something akin to credit and debit columns. On the one hand, he highlighted features which appear to have increased or become noticeable and in the other column, the components which have either not grown or have decreased:

**Increased**

- Technical quality / possession play
- Crossing and finishing goals
- Collective counters
- Tempo, speed and power
- Sole striker in 4-2-3-1 structure
- Tactical flexibility
- Middle-to-front attackers
- Long-range shooting
- Goalkeeping standards

**Decreased**

- Space and time
- Solo success
- Individual marking
- Goals from direct free kicks
- Offsides
- Traditional wingers
- Risk-taking
- Defensive errors and own goals
- Rigid 4-4-2



Action Images/Alex Morton

England's Kelly Smith (No. 10) attempts to fend off Sweden's Anna Paulson.

**The Future**

Bearing in mind the different parameters among UEFA's member associations, it was no surprise that the discussion groups at the conference in Nyon came up with a rich weave of proposals for the future development of the women's game. The champion coach, Silvia Neid, summed up some of the aspirations by commenting, "we need to pay a lot of attention to the training of female coaches – not only for the elite teams but at grassroots level as well. We are at risk of letting enthusiastic young players work with coaches who haven't really got enough tactical know-how. There is still a lot of room for improvement. Technical skills are important but we also need to make sure we are preparing players with sufficient stamina and athletic ability, combined with enough tactical understanding and flexibility to play in different positions."

Others emphasised off-the-pitch ambitions in terms of developing infrastructures, starting with the implantation of football as part of the physical education curriculum at schools and universities. Further up the ladder, the concept of attaching women's and girls' teams to the major clubs in the men's game was the subject of debate, with general approval for the benefits to the women's game in terms of branding, promotion and the option of being able to exploit existing medical, training and administrative facilities. As Hope Powell commented, "women's football needs to continue to make efforts to attract investors and governments need to be persuaded to fully embrace the women's game and not just make token gestures."

One of the other ambitions for the immediate future is to capitalise on the success and the promotional boost supplied by EURO 2009 and to help Finland to fast-forward women's football into the future.

# UEFA WOMEN'S NATIONAL TEAM COACHES CONFERENCE IN NYON



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