

# Things You Can't Buy

MasterCard, one of the UEFA Champions League sponsors, has a marketing slogan that says: "There are some things money can't buy. For everything else there's MasterCard." The first part of the slogan is a universal truth; even John Lennon and Paul McCartney offered their endorsement when they wrote the pop classic "Can't Buy Me Love" in 1964. And most people would agree that health, family, intelligence, happiness, and class also come into the not-for-sale category. But what about professional football, which seems to be awash with money at the top level? Are there things which cannot be bought by technicians and players?

A bulging wallet does not help a coach to develop his leadership skills; to gain coaching know-how, experience, recognition, or time. Cash will not get him a coaching job, give him the energy he needs to survive in a demanding role, or make him a winner. Former England coach Sven-Göran Eriksson highlighted the latter when he said: "A winning mentality – you have to earn it; you cannot buy it in a supermarket." And, of course, Lady Luck is not impressed by your wealth.

There is no debate that expensive players, purchased or nurtured, increase the possibility of a team's success, because results are inextricably linked to talent. Xavi, the midfield maestro of Spain and FC Barcelona, confirms the point when he says: "You can win a game without it, but usually it is talent that makes the difference." No argument there. But highly valued, gifted players are not enough. Teamwork, harmony in the camp, the health and fitness of the squad and consistency of performance are vital ingredients, and all are outside the influence of the purse strings. Furthermore, when we talk about millionaire star players and their careers, Gérard Houllier, the former coach of Liverpool FC and Olympique Lyonnais, hit the nail on the head when he declared that: "Today, players have all the money they will ever need. What they can't buy is success."

Satisfaction is also something without a price tag. Like me, those who have worked in coach education and player development for a long time (I have just completed 18 years as technical director at UEFA, following a similar period and role with the Scottish FA) know the pleasure and the contentment which come from helping the next generation of players and coaches, and by doing so, contributing to the future of the game. But, we are in a business, whether as a front-line technician or as a development coach, which is not always fully appreciated or understood – just think of the way some top coaches have been treated when expectations have not been fully met. So the coaching profession, in all its forms, cannot buy respect – it can only earn it by continuing to promote competence, credibility and quality.

MasterCard is right: there are some things money can't buy, even in football.

**Andy Roxburgh**  
UEFA Technical Director

*Xavi is a key element  
in the Spanish and  
FC Barcelona teams*



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# The Technician Interview

Vicente Del Bosque is one of only two coaches who have won both the UEFA Champions League and the FIFA World Cup (Marcello Lippi of Italy is, of course, the other). Indeed, the man from Salamanca in Spain was UEFA club champion twice as boss of Real Madrid, in 2000 and 2002, and added the UEFA Super Cup and the European/South American trophy to his CV just for good measure. Meanwhile, as a coach on the domestic front, the former Real Madrid and Spain midfielder (he won 5 league championships and 4 cup medals, and earned 18 caps for La Roja) collected two Liga titles and one Copa del Rey. After a short spell of coaching in Turkey, he took over the Spanish national team as head coach, following their EURO triumph in 2008. Building on that success, Vicente led Spain to their first gold medal at the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010. The president of the Spanish Football Federation, Ángel María Villar Llona, describes his head coach and former international team-mate as a “normal” person. This is, of course, a compliment because it recognises his impressive human qualities. With a wry smile, Ángel Villar adds: “Don’t forget, genius can reside in the normal.” Talent, humility and passion for the game make Vicente a perfect match for his team. He is undoubtedly the right man, in the right place, at the right time. He is a winner, he is:

## Vicente Del Bosque

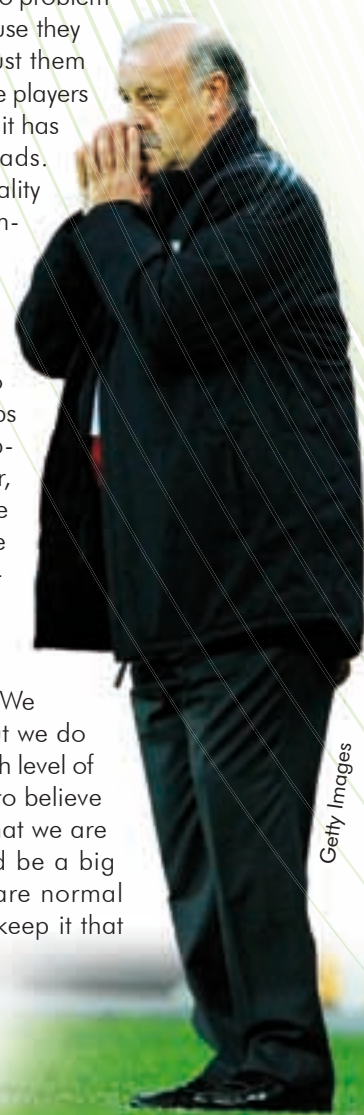
**As European and world champions, expectations on your team will be exceptionally – maybe unreasonably – high at EURO 2012. How do you intend to deal with that?**

Becoming European champions and then world champions has given us much more responsibility. But we have very good players, top sportsmen who play with important clubs, and therefore they are accustomed to dealing with the expectations and the pressures of high-profile competitions. As sports people, we have to get used to handling the emotions and be aware that careers will come to an end. But I am very happy with our squad of players and their attitude. They are top-level people and when you have won the greatest championships, you have experienced the pressures. We make sure that everyone remains cool

and remembers that football is a short career, so it is important to relax and enjoy it while you can. We try to keep everything in perspective.

**You have said in the past that success can sometimes lead to complacency. Is that something which especially concerns you as you lead the squad into the final tournament?**

I am very conscious of the fact that most of my players come from FC Barcelona and Real Madrid and they will have had a very long and demanding season before the EURO. These players will have taken part in the UEFA Champions League, la Liga, the Copa del Rey, etc. and this will be hard. But I have no problem with complacency because they are good guys and I trust them to remain focused. These players are used to success and it has never gone to their heads. They have a good mentality and a high level of competitiveness. The spirit in the group is exceptional and they want to join the national team. We have five players who have more than 100 caps and others who are approaching that number, and I am lucky that some are leaders within the group and exert a positive influence. Leaders are not necessarily the best players, although, of course, they can be. We are not complacent, but we do worry because of the high level of competition. If we start to believe that we are big stars, that we are marvellous, that would be a big mistake. Our players are normal people and we like to keep it that



Getty Images



Vicente Del Bosque meeting the UEFA President at a UEFA conference for national team coaches

way by avoiding excessive adulation. I also tell them that football is a passion and to always defend the game, to work hard. When we talk about leadership, particularly as a coach, the priorities are human qualities and team building. When I was coach at Real Madrid, it was not the big players like Zidane, Figo or Ronaldo that needed most of my attention but the team players who could gel the group together on the pitch. The latter were not necessarily recognised by the public but for the team they were vital – great personalities who could unite the group and improve the team's performance.

### Is there anything you learned during the World Cup in South Africa that could be useful in your preparations for the EURO or during the final tournament itself?

The Confederations Cup helped us to prepare for the World Cup in South Africa, but the biggest lesson we gained in the final tournament came in the first match, a game we lost to Switzerland. Of course, you are sad when you lose, but you don't need to be depressed. In this type of competition you have the possibility to recover. We didn't blame anyone after that game. We simply encouraged them to fight back and tried to maintain our confidence. We knew it was a bad failure, but we didn't want to dwell on it and create depression. There was no need to change the system, the style or the players – we kept the faith, and recovered on the training ground and in the next match.

### Everybody will be trying to beat Spain at EURO 2012. But which other teams have impressed you and could be challengers for the trophy?

We cannot avoid being the favourites, but we are aware of others in the favourites' category, such as Germany and the Netherlands. In addition, we can consider some teams as being in "sleeping mode", like England, France, Italy and Portugal. You also have to consider the potential of other countries that may not be viewed as contenders

at this stage, but which might blossom in a short final tournament, the way Greece and Denmark did in 2004 and 1992 respectively.

### So, what will it take for Spain to successfully defend their title?

Firstly, it is important that the team members relate well to each other, and that there is a good feeling in the squad for the challenge ahead. Secondly, we must believe in our style of playing, the style that has made us successful so far. Thirdly, we need to avoid too many injuries, and when the club competitions are finished, we need the physical, mental and emotional condition of the players to be good enough to prolong the season for the duration of the EURO. We need to maintain concentration. During the World Cup, we had 50 days together and we had to maintain the right balance between training, playing and resting. The EURO will be shorter but the challenge is the same.

### As a former creative midfielder yourself, how impressed are you by the middle-to-front players in your squad, such as Xavi, Iniesta or Fàbregas?

There is a principle in football that "the way the midfield plays will dictate the way the team plays." We have several very creative middle-to-front players who have an attacking mentality. They also have a conscience and they are willing and able to defend, so there is an all-round talent. Yes, I like your suggestion that our midfield is a Rolls Royce engine because it is true that our football is based on the style and quality of our midfield play. From a management perspective, I have the problem of having a lot of top midfielders and they can't all play at once. But, we are lucky, they are good people and this helps us to keep a positive atmosphere in the group, no matter which players are selected. It is very important for me to have good characters, as well as big talents.

### Spanish football – at club and national team levels – has achieved extraordinary success and has become a benchmark for others. What has happened during the last ten years to make this possible?

We must acknowledge the role of the top clubs, Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, during the last decade as they have been very successful in European competitions, and at youth and Under-21 levels we have had big results. It was only the senior national team which was missing from the winners' rostrum. That, as we know, changed in 2008, and was then repeated in 2010. Maybe we also have to consider the changes which have taken place in the country in general. We have become



Vicente Del Bosque in action for Spain against Cyprus in 1979



more modern, we have lost some of our old negative complexes in relation to the rest of Europe, and socially, we have advanced. Also, some top Spanish players went abroad to play, and this didn't happen before. In the past, we went to see what the coaches were doing in Yugoslavia, Russia, France and Italy. But now, due to better coach education in Spain, people come to us. Guardiola, Benítez and others have brought attention to the Spanish school. The facilities throughout the country for training and playing

### At the top level, what are the factors which can make the difference between success and failure?

You need a good organisation, team order, attention to small details, and an approach that lets the players express their talent. It is vital that everyone in the group avoids becoming arrogant and remains normal. There is no place for those who become egocentric and think they will win just by being there. The key is to have talented players and to bring out the best in them in a team context.

### You have worked in youth development, at a top professional club, and with the national team. How does the role differ between the different jobs?

The best time for me in my coaching career was when I was working with young people, 16 and 17 years old, in the youth programme at Real Madrid. Because I was not only training and coaching them but I was educating them, helping them in any way I could. It was the happiest time of my life as a coach – I had no thoughts about becoming the manager of a top team.

Regarding the differences between the jobs at youth, club and national level, I think they are quite similar. Basically, you have to organise a team and develop a system of play. It is your relationship with the players that can be different. For example, as a pro club coach, the players have more time to get to know you, and you have more time to know them. It is the lack of time that makes some things more difficult with the national team. Having said that, as a national coach you have fewer problems with players, simply because you are not together as much. At the club, you know the players better because you are with them every day, but this means you often deal with more issues. The advantage of this familiarity is that, in a club context, you can just look at a player and that may be enough! It can be a look of love or something more unpleasant.

### Looking ahead to EURO, what do you hope to achieve during the preparation phase?

I want to maintain the same routine that we had at the Confederations Cup and the World Cup in South Africa. We will have three preparation games. Plus, the players will get a few days off after the domestic season. But, we have a lot of players from FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, and some of them could play the UEFA Champions League final. Also, Barça could be in the Spanish Cup final the following week. To cover ourselves, we will take some players from the Olympic team to help during the training camp prior to departure for Poland. The main thing will be to find some tranquillity before we compete again. Regarding the preparation games, we will avoid too much experimentation and simply fine-tune the team. The aim will be to create the best atmosphere and to get everyone mentally ready to compete.



*Looking forward to Spain's EURO 2012 qualifier against Scotland in Glasgow*

improved and made a big difference. However, there is no doubt that investment in the training of our young players – our youth football is very well structured – and the education of our coaches were important to our success. But for me the main thing is that we broke the complex that we were a minor country.

### Personally, how do you deal with the pressures of being a national team coach?

We have been here at the Spanish FA for four years and now I think there is a better view of us as a technical team. Even in universities and other areas of Spanish life, football has a better image. Each coach has his own style and we have our approach. I always say that football is for playing, so that means you must try to be happy. I don't understand the coach who is always angry, also jumping around and screaming. If you have to manage a team and make them happy, then you can't be yelling at them all the time. So when you ask me about pressure, I think it depends on the individual. In life everything is relative. Of course, I am a responsible person, but if I am shouting a lot and displaying anxiety, this will send a negative message. Experience helps, and when you have been in a club like Real Madrid, where you must win every game, you get accustomed to the demands on you. To a degree, you become philosophical.





Ángel María Villar Llona, President of the Spanish FA, Andy Roxburgh, UEFA's Technical Director, and Vicente Del Bosque during the interview in Madrid

**After South Africa, you underlined the importance of your "team behind the team". What will your backroom team be like for EURO 2012?**

Of course, the team behind the team is important. This includes the doctors, the physios, the cook, the media officer as well as the coaching staff. They all have to be invisible and efficient. The players must not have to worry about anything – they need to know that everything is in order. When I talk about having good relationships with the players, this applies equally to the backroom staff. As head coach, part of my job is to make sure everyone works together. At the World Cup we had a great atmosphere, and if there were any problems, they were very, very small. Looking forward to the EURO I "touch wood" for luck and hope it will be the same.

**From a general perspective, what do you expect in Poland and Ukraine?**

From a football perspective, I think it will be, as I said earlier, a similar situation to South Africa, but with France,

England and Italy back in contention. It will be a highly intense competition, because there are many good teams in Europe. Also, I think that the desire to play well will, once again, be the norm. Yes, everyone wants to win but the quality of the performance has also become a target for most coaches. Most national coaches today recognise and display fair play. All World Cups and European Championship final tournaments have been a success and I don't anticipate anything else in Poland and Ukraine. Before South Africa, all the propaganda was negative, but it was a big success in every way. The EURO will have everything: good stadiums and passionate crowds. Just think how many Irish supporters will be there. A lot I am sure. I have good memories of previous experiences in Poland. Recently, I met seven monks in a Spanish monastery – two were from Poland and they were delighted that the EURO was partly in their country. It was a cloistered monastery without any TV, radio or newspapers, so the only information they received was from their food suppliers. But even the monks know about the EURO!

**Finally, if you were to reflect on your amazing coaching career, what have been the principles and values which you have displayed and promoted?**

Most players in Spain come from poor families or from modest backgrounds and, above all, the values of normal, humble people have to be maintained. Players must not forget where they come from. I also advocate the typical values of sport: to improve, to fight, to react well after a failure, to be a good team-mate, to respect the referee and the opponent. These are not old-fashioned values (as our children sometimes suggest), they are values for the whole of life. After all, football is a reflection of life itself. ●

*Vicente Del Bosque was in conversation with UEFA's Technical Director, Andy Roxburgh.*

*The four coaches of the teams in EURO 2012 Group C (left to right): Slaven Bilić (Croatia), Giovanni Trapattoni (Republic of Ireland), Cesare Prandelli (Italy) and Vicente Del Bosque (Spain)*



# Thirteen Titles

If you fancy a challenge, open Pep Guardiola's photo album and, maybe using clues such as the presence of the odd player who has left the club or a glimpse of a tell-tale advertising board, try to put a date, a competition and a venue to each of the pictures of him being thrown into the air by his Barça boys. Although Pep has not yet completed his fourth season on the FC Barcelona bench, there are 13 of them – 13 titles out of a possible 16.

Not surprisingly, this earned him the FIFA World Coach of the Year award. As it happened, his neighbour on the seating plan for the ceremony in Zurich was Sir Alex Ferguson, runner-up to Pep in the coaching poll and winner of FIFA's Presidential award for his services to the game of football during a 25-year era of success on the Manchester United bench.

When the two get together, generation gaps seem to evaporate. The empathies generated by encounters at

UEFA's annual Elite Club Coaches Forum in Nyon have developed into complicity and admiration based on passion for the game and strong beliefs in the way it should be played. The two men have set benchmarks in the coaching profession: Pep for his exceptional success rate in such a short period of time; Sir Alex, not only for his collection of silverware but also for his vigorous longevity in an English league where the coach's average tenure is now down to something like 14 months. For the record, Pep's league debut was a 1-0 defeat at CD Numancia on 31 August 2008; Sir Alex's was a 2-0 loss at Oxford United on 8 November 1986. Since those dates, they have not been renowned for their defeats.

Role models they may be. But, in a coaching profession where a vast majority aspire, in terms of titles, to reach single rather than double figures, the ineluctable fact is that neither of them can be cloned. Even Pep's context at

FC Barcelona is difficult to emulate. When he lifted his 13th trophy by beating Santos FC of Brazil in the final of the FIFA Club World Cup, nine of his starters had emerged from the club's academy at La Masia – as had seven when Barça defeated Sir Alex's Manchester United FC at Wembley to take the UEFA Champions League for the second time in three seasons. Pep, when he stepped up to receive his award in January, had given first-team debuts to 22 players from the academy.

Imitation may be out of the question. But Pep, Sir Alex and their benchmarks raise some interesting debating points related not



*Pep Guardiola congratulates Javier Mascherano and Cesc Fàbregas after FC Barcelona's win against Real Madrid in the return leg of the Spanish Super Cup*



so much to methods of coaching a team but rather how to coach a winning team – especially a group of footballers who have become serial winners at both club and national team levels. Success is one thing; sustained success is something else. Thirteen titles inspire in-depth analysis of FC Barcelona's playing style by technicians from all latitudes of planet Earth.

As Pep commented in Zurich: *"The more successful you are, the more other teams want to beat you. The more they study you and the more they learn about you, the harder you have to work. You have to keep setting objectives as high as possible in order to keep winning. It's extremely difficult to build something good and strong. Letting it slide is much easier."* One of Pep's axioms is that *"the more successful you are, the humbler you need to be."* The winning coach needs to have a sixth sense in detecting symptoms of arrogance or complacency.

Central defender Gerard Piqué, whose two coaches in adult football have been Sir Alex and Pep, adds: *"Teams have won titles but then started losing their hunger, whereas we're getting hungrier all the time. We want to have that special feeling of pleasure that comes from showing that you're the best, time and again. Pep doesn't let us take our foot off the pedal. He's always on our backs, trying to get the very best out of each one of us so that the team as a whole remains successful."*

During Pep's run to 13 titles, individual motivation has been interwoven with a tactical evolution triggered by a need to avoid predictability and to continue to be able to break down opponents who, more often than not, focus on neutralising Barça's title-winning virtues rather than going brazenly for victory. Initial variations were based on a 4-3-3 structure featuring Lionel Messi on the right wing; a more orthodox central striker (Zlatan Ibrahimovic for example); and two box-to-box full-backs. Nuances have steadily been added to the extent that, when Pep's Barça took its title tally to 13 with the FIFA Club World Cup victory in Japan, the Santos FC coach, Muricy Ramalho, admitted after his side's 4-0 defeat: *"The sheer quality of their players makes a difference but, tactically, Barcelona demonstrated that you don't need forwards to play good football and score goals. We simply couldn't cope with their 3-7-0 formation."*

There is nothing new under the sun – and playing with three at the back comes into the déjà vu category. But, in this case, not quite. Traditions are based on three central defenders plus a couple of hardworking wing-backs. Pep tends to perm a back three out of Carles Puyol, Gerard Piqué, Eric Abidal and Javier Mascherano who, if we delve into their footballing origins, are right-back, central defender, left-back and screening midfielder respectively. In Yokohama, Dani Alves operated as an out-and-out right winger with, on the other flank, Thiago Alcántara who, barely 17

months after representing Spain in the European Under-19 Championship final, had already played six different positional roles in the FC Barcelona first team. The positional and tactical permutations have a secondary interest in that they offer continual challenges and re-education opportunities to the players involved.

As Gerard Piqué explained at the FIFA event in Zurich: *"Pep sees football in a way that other people don't. Then he explains it better than anyone. Lots of coaches just tell you to move right or move left, but he gives you the reasons why. That means you clearly understand why you're doing*



25 years at the helm of Manchester United for Sir Alex Ferguson and 13 titles for Pep Guardiola

*something. And so, without even realising it, you learn more and more every day and start to make your own decisions out on the pitch. He persuades you to feel and act like a real professional. It seems as though he's giving us freedom, but in fact what he does is to give us decision-making power. It's as if he were saying, 'Do you really want to make a living doing this? Do you want to be the greatest and win lots of trophies? It all depends on you. I'll let you spend the night before a game at home, doing whatever you like, but you should know that if you don't play well, you won't start the next match.' This makes you much more mature as well as making you feel you owe him something, so you feel like you have to perform out on the pitch."*

Having said all that, both Pep and Sir Alex agree that a pinch of luck is an essential ingredient in the recipe for success – and 13 is a number enigmatically linked with luck. For some, it's unlucky; for others it is the luckiest number known to mankind. In football, 13 titles can't be written off as luck. But, as FC Barcelona's director of football, former international keeper Andoni Zubizarreta, comments: *"If you think that 13 is an unlucky number, you just go for 14 as quickly as possible."* That just about sums up the attitude of Pep, Sir Alex and their serial winners. ●

# Tracksuits in the Office

What is the ideal distance between dressing rooms and offices? Traditionally, the question might have been little more than rhetorical for members of the coaching profession. But the current economic climate, coupled with the drive towards principles of financial play, has given added relevance to relationships between those responsible for playing the game and those responsible for administering it.

Going back to the original question, physical distances have often been substantial. Many clubs have historically set up city-centre administrative headquarters which have been a long drive from the pitches where footballs are rolling. Much the same has applied to national associations, where suits and tracksuits rarely coincided in the same premises. The modern trend, however, is for administration to gravitate towards the stadium or towards club or national training centres. The greater physical proximity sometimes means that relationships between dressing-room and administrative personnel need to be more carefully designed with a view to making sure that an administrative nose around the dressing room door does not run the risk of being interpreted as intrusion. Expressed in more philosophical terms, at what point does cooperation become interference?

Coaches readily acknowledge the importance of forming and leading an efficient *"team behind the team"* but the importance of establishing comfortable and effective relationships between boardroom and dressing room is a question that could easily be thrown into a discussion group at a coach education course.

All this might seem totally alien to UEFA. Public perception is that the organisation is a purely administrative body – all boardroom and no dressing room. But visitors to the House of European Football complex in Nyon soon become aware that this is not quite the case. Despite all the political and administrative connotations which

are endemic to the presidency of UEFA, Michel Platini is still very much a football man and has been keen to give the organisation a footballing heartbeat.

The opportunity to lay foundations stemmed from an agreement with the authorities in Nyon which allowed UEFA to take over the management of the Colovray stadium and sports centre on a long-lease basis. The undertaking was for UEFA to protect the interests of the sports clubs which were already using the facilities but also to stage a series of events which would really bring the complex to life. The fact that it is right next door to the UEFA offices has made this project, logistically at least, the proverbial piece of cake.

The first move was to establish a Centre of Refereeing Excellence, which was up and running in summer 2010 with the aim of training and accelerating the development of the most promising European referees. But, within the last year, coach education projects have helped to create an intensive and sustained buzz of activity in a complex where UEFA has already added two artificial pitches to the existing facilities.



A student coach in action  
at the Colovray stadium in Nyon



As a one-off example of how the complex has been brought to life, one of the outstanding features of 2011 was a visit, in October, by some 40 elite Chinese youth coaches as a UEFA contribution to the EU-China Year of Youth project. This was a ten-day educational event for coaches working with boys and girls in the Under-12 to Under-19 age bracket. However, the greatest momentum has been added to the footballing activities at UEFA by the UEFA coach education student exchange programme.

As regular readers may recall, the project was initiated with a pilot course in Nyon last May, followed by a second event staged in Denmark during last summer's European Under-21 Championship finals. The successful experiments prompted UEFA's President and Executive Committee to give full support to the project, accompanied by a decision to stage all future courses at the House of European Football in Nyon.

Since then, two events involving 101 students have taken place. The "students" were coaches who travelled to Nyon as part of the courses which, they hoped, would earn them full UEFA Pro licence status. The idea is to add international elements to courses usually undertaken on a national basis and to provide some direct UEFA input in terms of course content and the promotion of international contacts. The next two events in the 2011/12 campaign are scheduled to take place in April and May.

The most recent event involved students from Austria, England and Germany, with familiar names such as Toni Polster, Markus Schopp, Ivica Vastić, Christian Wörns and Stefan Effenberg on squad lists heavily populated by former professional players keen to embark on a coaching career. Each of the three teams of students staged a practical session on the training pitch, with the Austrians focusing on counterattacking ploys, the English on combination play

through central midfield, and the Germans on methods of creating goalscoring opportunities. Between the studs-on sessions on the pitch, the students made their way through the tunnel and into the main building at UEFA for sessions on specialised topics such as leadership, crisis management, dealing with the media, and an in-depth look at learning strategies.



*The Pro licence student exchange project brings an international dimension to coach education*

The event was timed to coincide with a UEFA Champions League week, which allowed the students to watch the SSC Napoli v FC Bayern München and Olympique de Marseille v Arsenal FC fixtures on giant screens in the main auditorium at UEFA's HQ building, with each group of students then preparing analysis of the defensive and attacking mechanisms of the four teams.

It added up to an intensive four-day blend of practical and theoretical work on the Colovray pitches and in the meeting rooms within the office complex. "It's an ideal setting for football events like this," commented UEFA's technical director, Andy Roxburgh, "because the facilities are simply fantastic. But not only that. I think that when you work here, you can take things for granted and not realise just how much it means to the people who come here for these events, even if they have been big names during their playing careers. They love the atmosphere; they get their pictures taken with all the UEFA trophies, they have a chance to see the President...it all adds up to a unique experience."

What's more, mixing the tracksuits and suits at UEFA's headquarters creates a real football environment which illustrates that the House of European Football is not just an administrative hub but also the home of an organisation with a real footballing heart. ●



# The Jira Journey

*“We are fortunate to have a large number of well-qualified coaches along with levels of coach education and standards of knowledge and competence which have been steadily improving.”* These words were delivered by Spain’s world champion, Vicente Del Bosque, to a group of coaching colleagues – and they could undoubtedly be echoed in dozens of European languages by other technicians. But the “steady improvement” has been matched by rapid evolution of the game and, in consequence, the need for the education of the top coaches of the future to cope with the realities of an increasingly demanding profession.

Just over two decades have passed since UEFA’s Executive Committee took the clairvoyant decision to develop a UEFA coach education structure with a brief to “upgrade standards of coach education; to protect the coaching profession and to facilitate freedom of movement within European countries in line with international law.” A working group of technical directors and experts

from various national associations was set up under the chairmanship of Vaclav Jira with the aim of drafting a Convention on the Mutual Recognition of Coaching Qualifications. After Jira’s death in 1993, it was decided that the UEFA committee (which met for the first time 1995) would bear his name, as does the panel which is currently building on his pioneering work.

When the first six member associations put signatures to the UEFA Coaching Convention in 1998, few would have predicted that it would take root so quickly and so deeply, that, within a decade, all 53 member associations would have become signatories, or that, currently, 161,086 UEFA-endorsed coaching licences would have been issued – 5,803 at full Pro level.

So much for the past – even though the core values remain essentially unchanged: to raise standards on a pan-European basis, to achieve due recognition for coaching as a profession; to promote mutual recognition and international exchange, to establish clear and workable

*The course in Brussels will give coach educators the chance to take a closer look at Belgian football*



Getty Images



guidelines, and to offer maximal guidance and support. But the role of the Jira Panel has metamorphosed. With solid foundations laid, the main tasks in hand are those of offering leadership in coach education, to continue to strongly support national associations, to monitor and to evaluate on a regular basis and, with the need for coaching qualifications deeply implanted into UEFA's licensing arrangements, to protect and maintain the total integrity of the Coaching Convention. In psychological terms, the challenges are those that face any winning team – to avoid any signs of complacency and to carry on getting results.

In practical terms, it means that members of the Jira Panel are permanently available to advise, support and evaluate with the key objective of helping coach educators all over Europe to fully meet their responsibilities for developing the next generation of coaches, to be equipped to support the front-line technicians and prepare them to lead their teams of staff coaches.

Developing the coaches of the future is a specialised art, and one which is sometimes undervalued, not least because public perception often has it that former professional players “*know everything about the game*” – which is tantamount to arguing that having been a good student automatically makes you a good teacher. What is more, the coach educator has to stay ahead of the game. The aim is not to prepare their students for the football of the 21st century but to equip them to deal with the challenges they are likely to meet next week, next season and during the critical opening phase of their coaching careers, during which first-hand experience can be applied as additional brushstrokes on the canvas which has been partially coloured by the students and their educators during coaching courses.

UEFA's role is to encourage forward-thinking and to help the coach educators prepare their students for the realities of their profession and teach them to reach into the future. Indeed, “*preparing for reality*” is the generic title of a UEFA course for coach educators which kicks-off in Brussels a few days after these pages have emerged from the printer's. The fact this is the 19th event of its kind illustrates UEFA's commitment to promoting pan-European contacts and exchanges – which have been supplemented in recent times by the successful Study Group Scheme and the Pro licence student exchange project which is mentioned elsewhere in this issue.

The emphasis in Brussels is very strongly on the need to identify competences and to pinpoint procedures which will allow them to be developed in a realistic environment. The nature of the course is, in itself, a reflection of evolution. Gone are the days when coaching courses were based on delivering instructions to groups of students who had their heads down over notebooks. Today's student

coaches may still take notes – but the emphasis is on acquiring the mix of knowledge, skills and attitudes which will equip them for the realities of the job.

UEFA's awareness of the need to focus on specific competences has been translated into specialised variations on the core elements of the Coaching Convention. Guidelines on a specialised futsal coaching diploma have now been integrated into UEFA's directives. Similar guidelines for a goalkeeper coach diploma are currently being



*Working together  
for mutual benefit*

finalised, with pilot schemes and courses in Belgium and the Republic of Ireland involving 160 goalkeeper educators helping to fine-tune the recommendations in terms of course content. At the same time, an expert working group is elaborating guidelines for a specialised, football-specific diploma for fitness coaches. Age-specific (including elite youth) competences have also been drafted on to the central core of the convention, with specialised disability projects also on the agenda.

In all cases, the aim is to prepare student coaches for the realities of their job by offering them a higher percentage of their education in a real working environment, with tutors and mentors guiding them through courses based on practical work in their own context.

At the course in Brussels, specific technical aspects – such as match analysis or the half-time team talk – will be on the agenda. But the main focus will be on a gloves-off look at the demands of coaching in top-level football and the competences required to cope with the realities of life on the front line, including media relations and the types of leadership which have become necessary in areas such as team-building, dealing with the individual and collective handling of today's top players. But that is a story for a future issue. ●

## The Kyiv conundrum

When the ball starts rolling in Warsaw on Friday 8 June, the 16 pretenders to the European crown will be led by a group of technicians with an average age of 57 years and 4 months – a good decade younger than Otto Rehhagel (67 in 2004) and Luis Aragonés (69 in 2008), who lifted the Henri Delaunay Cup in Lisbon and Vienna. One of the questions raised in the aftermath of UEFA EURO 2008 was the value of experience – and, indeed, a valid definition of the word. Is experience a question of age? Longevity in the coaching profession? Longevity in the specific post of national team coach? Specific competences acquired during previous final tournaments? Strikingly conflictive evidence could focus on Vicente Del Bosque, set to make his EURO debut as world champion. Or Joachim Löw who, at 52, is below the average age yet, particularly if his previous experience as assistant to Jürgen Klinsmann is injected into the equation, probably has more major-tournament experience than any of his rivals in Poland and Ukraine. Or Slaven Bilić, who is only 43 but among the longest servers in his current job.

More evidence in Kyiv on Sunday 1 July. In the meantime, these are coaches who will be leading their teams on to the pitches in Poland and Ukraine backed by, on average, just under four years' experience in the job – though technicians such as Oleh Blokhin, Dick Advocaat and Giovanni Trapattoni can draw on previous spells in national team management. Four of the finalists are coaching outside their native country and, curiously, only five (including the two finalists) were in action at the 2010 FIFA World Cup and only two (Slaven Bilić and Joachim Löw) coached their teams at UEFA EURO 2008.

Country	Coach	Age	Started
Croatia	Slaven Bilić	43	25/07/2006
Czech Republic	Michal Bilek	56	22/10/2009
Denmark	Morten Olsen	62	01/07/2000
England	Fabio Capello	66	07/01/2008
France	Laurent Blanc	46	01/07/2010
Germany	Joachim Löw	52	13/07/2006
Greece	Fernando Santos	57	01/07/2010
Italy	Cesare Prandelli	54	30/05/2010
Netherlands	Bert van Marwijk	60	15/07/2008
Poland	Franciszek Smuda	63	29/10/2009
Portugal	Paulo Bento	42	20/09/2010
Republic of Ireland	Giovanni Trapattoni	73	01/05/2008
Russia	Dick Advocaat	64	17/05/2010
Spain	Vicente Del Bosque	61	15/07/2008
Sweden	Erik Hamrén	54	04/11/2009
Ukraine	Oleh Blokhin	59	21/04/2011

*Joachim Löw is no stranger to taking a place on the podium at the end of major international competitions but will be hoping to make it onto the top step this summer*

Editorial Group  
Andy Roxburgh, Graham Turner

Production  
André Vieli, Dominique Maurer

Layout, Print  
CO Créations, Artgraphic Cavin SA