

EDITORIAL

VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

One of the major coaching events to take place since the UEFA.technician was last published was the UEFA coach education workshop staged in Budapest in early October. Much of the content is discussed later in this issue, but it would be remiss to overlook the significance of two elements which topped and tailed the event in Hungary. The opening session featured tributes to Vlatko Marković, György Mezey and Zdeněk Sivek. The closing session was an interview with Sir Alex Ferguson.

Vlatko Marković had passed away a few days earlier, at the age of 76. For the coach education family, who paid their respects by rising to their feet for a poignant moment of silence in Budapest, it signified a special loss. Most of the tributes highlighted his distinguished career as a player and coach – as a player for the Yugoslav national team and clubs in Austria and his homeland, and a coaching career which took him to Belgium, France and Austria. But, for those who stood in silence at the coach education workshop, he was especially remembered for his contributions to coaching development while wearing a UEFA uniform. He had been a member of UEFA's Technical Development Committee between 1996 and 2007 (chairing it for the last three years), had played a prominent role in UEFA's Football Committee from 2007 to 2009, and had been deeply involved in the Development and Technical Assistance Committee since 2009. This meant that he had been a first-hand witness to the extraordinary advances in the coaching and coach education spheres – not least the implementation of the UEFA Coaching Convention. He was present at the birth in 1998

and helped to nurture the sibling through its infancy and into its current maturity. The progression he witnessed can be gauged by the current grand total of 204,590 UEFA-endorsed coaching licences from B to Pro levels.

The homages to György Mezey and Zdeněk Sivek – both of them very much alive, it has to be stressed – represented similar acknowledgements, not only of the work done in Hungary and the Czech Republic respectively, but also of the experience and wisdom contributed to UEFA's coach education strategy over a similarly large number of years.

The value of such contributions was underlined by Sir Alex Ferguson, when he flew in to join his coaching colleagues in Budapest. *"For a young coach,"* he said, *"the opportunity to mix with older ones is great. It is important to listen to older people. I realised that when I was an apprentice tool-maker. Learning from the older toolmakers, even in a different job perspective altogether, was fabulous. I loved it. So I believe it's an imperative that an older coach should impart whatever knowledge he can."*

Sir Alex is leading by example. Retirement has opened greater space in his diary and he has immediately demonstrated his readiness to invest time in sharing his wisdom with his colleagues in the coaching profession, firstly by agreeing to chair UEFA's annual forum for elite club coaches, and secondly by joining representatives from UEFA's 54 member associations in Budapest. On the field and off it, Sir Alex has achieved role-model status. Hats off to him! ●

Ioan Lupescu
UEFA Chief Technical Officer



Another award for Sir Alex Ferguson, applauded by UEFA's chief technical officer, Ioan Lupescu

IN THIS ISSUE

INTERVIEW – SIR ALEX FERGUSON	2-5
A PLATFORM FOR FASCINATING DISCUSSION	6-7
COACHING AND EDUCATING	8-11
A GERMAN ACCENT	12

THE INTERVIEW

No introduction is required. The collection of titles speaks for itself – in fact, there are so many of them that there is a high risk of a miscount. Forty seasons at East Stirlingshire, Saint Mirren, Aberdeen, the Scottish national team and Manchester United FC seem to have yielded 49 pieces of silverware – 38 of them during almost 27 seasons at Old Trafford. Unsurprisingly, this is not the first interview to appear in the UEFA•technician. Back in 1999, a couple of weeks before the unforgettable UEFA Champions League final in Barcelona, the introduction to his first interview highlighted his “winning mentality, total commitment and craving for dynamic, spectacular play” and the headline was Champion of the Cause. At the end of another interview in 2006, he said that: “Coaches often think they are alone, but they are in same situation as many fellow coaches. It’s important, therefore, to relate to your coaching colleagues because we are all in the same boat.” At the coach education workshop in Budapest, he remained true to his words – and these extracts from the interviews he conducted demonstrate that it is always good to listen to...

SIR ALEX FERGUSON



First of all, how important is it to have a good coach education?

“I was an engineer and a part-time footballer and decided to go full-time at 22. I started my coaching certificates at 23, got my full badge when I was 24, and from then to when I finished at 32, I was preparing to stay in the game because there was no way I was going back to engineering. I think that the preparation – it was really important to take lessons from the coaching schools in Glasgow at that time – was a fantastic period. My room-mate was Jim McLean, who was a great coach at Dundee United. The coach educators were very well established as coaches and they gave you an inspiration and also an understanding of the job you were going into. They made it clear that it was difficult. The practical exams at that time were very severe and made sure that if you got your coaching badge, you had to earn it.

When I got involved, the competition from other coaches gave me a competitive edge and, at the same time, it was also important to listen and to observe how the well-established coaches went about their job. Getting the knowledge of how to run a training session was important and one of the best pieces of advice was to use your imagination when looking at how to add to a player’s profile: giving imagination to the sessions so as to inspire players.

When I started, coaching courses were over short periods. Now, it’s maybe two years – and that’s correct, because it should not be easy. I’m totally against fast-tracking because you’re not doing a coach any favours at all. It’s a results industry: if you aren’t winning games, you’re out, so the preparation that your coaching badges can give you is very important. When you see a coach being sacked time and time again, you suspect that they went into the job ill-prepared. If top players think they should receive special treatment or if they have a vanity about them, maybe they shouldn’t go into coaching. They

may think that learning at grassroots level doesn’t do anything for them, but that learning is important. There was a period in England where players were retiring and managing top clubs straight away. None of them lasted, by the way. It didn’t do them any good. An experience at a harder level of football does them a lot of good.

Several of your assistants at Manchester United have benefited from the grounding you gave them. How important is the selection of your team behind the team?

There are several issues here. I mean, when I came into the profession, you depended almost entirely on your own ability. I had a physiotherapist at East Stirling – and that’s all I had. When I



Alex Ferguson and his assistant Archie Knox hold up the European Cup Winners’ Cup won by Aberdeen in 1983 against Real Madrid

moved to Saint Mirren, I got an assistant manager, a physiotherapist and a reserve-team trainer. Step by step, it has progressed from that, but it's not a bad thing to start with the premise that, ultimately, you depend on yourself.

It didn't do me any harm to start in a small way. Learning the parts of a small club is key when you get the opportunity to progress. When you have been a player and one day, you go to Manchester United and they give you 25 million to spend and you spend it, I don't think that does you much good. At East Stirling, I had to make sure my judgements were good because I was spending small but important sums of money. I was scouring free transfers and really testing my judgement.

In the case of the assistants I have employed over the years, I take two examples. Steve McClaren: we did a bit of research on him with people who had worked with him and we interviewed him twice. Then Carlos Queiroz, who did a fantastic job, absolutely first-class. He came to the interview immaculately dressed, like he was going to a wedding, and I was sitting there in my tracksuit. I thought that he obviously had pride in himself and that instinct was important. Instinct is part of it but in both instances, I was proved right. They both did an excellent job.

The team behind the team has evolved a lot and you have to adapt to change, especially sports science. But three things are very important: work ethic, loyalty and philosophy. It's important for everyone to be singing the same tune, no matter how bad the tune is. At United it was about agreeing with the way that we wanted to play. My attitude to a game of football has always been never to give in. If you're behind, never give in. And if you're still behind in the last ten minutes, go for it because you're losing anyway. I remember a game against Wimbledon where we sent Peter Schmeichel up front at the end and finished with no goalkeeper. We lost! He was useless! He had three chances and missed them all! But it's about building the character and the determination of everyone at the club – everyone!



PA Archives/PA Images

During a Manchester United training session in 1986



Getty Images

You've mentioned sports science – how big an influence and how valuable a tool has it become?

There are different sides to it. Fitness coaches have come into the game, and I was impressed by the work they did at United. But I still maintain that, at Aberdeen, we ran the socks off everybody! The methods are, these days, almost taboo – the five-mile runs and the like. On the other hand, we once went through a period of losing goals in the last 15 minutes – which was not normal at United. I asked if it could be a fitness problem and I suggested that we could show we weren't so happy with them by giving them some extra running. It worked!

At United, when we started bringing in foreign players, a doctor told me he'd been looking at the stats and thought we should bring in a sports scientist. I made it hard for the doctor to explain the difference it could make in terms of training, but I was impressed. Does it improve you 1%, does it improve you 2%? If it improves you, then it's okay. It was definitely, without doubt, a major step in terms of accepting and adapting to change. Even so, I'd leave the stats

Sir Alex in discussion with his assistant Carlos Queiroz before the 2008 UEFA Champions League final against Chelsea in Moscow

to the sports scientist. I prefer to use my eyes because all the evidence is on the football field. They can come up with statistics that prove you right – but use your eyes first.

You once said that the most revealing piece of sports science you can ever watch is a football match. You obviously remain loyal to that idea.

Definitely. Observation is the one thing we tend to forget about in the long line of qualities needed as a manager, you know, with decision-making, picking teams, organising training sessions, transfer market, dealing with agents, dealing with the press... but observation is what you have to depend on at the end of the day. When I was

looking for knowledge during my coach education and a structure which I could use in terms of training programmes and how to go about them, I learned it was important not to forget the observation part. Sometimes, we can get ourselves trapped in the middle of a training session and we don't see anything. To watch it and observe it is important.

In general, how important have the man-management aspects of the job become?

On the basis of my own experience, a lot more important. The human beings I've dealt with are far more fragile than the human beings of 30 years ago. And I say that in a good sense because they're coming from better conditions and better-off families. Parents drive them to their training session, drive them back... I don't think any kids walk now. Man-management must deal with that. Nowadays, I couldn't lose my temper with people the way I did back then!

Dressing rooms have become increasingly multicultural. Has it made this aspect more difficult?

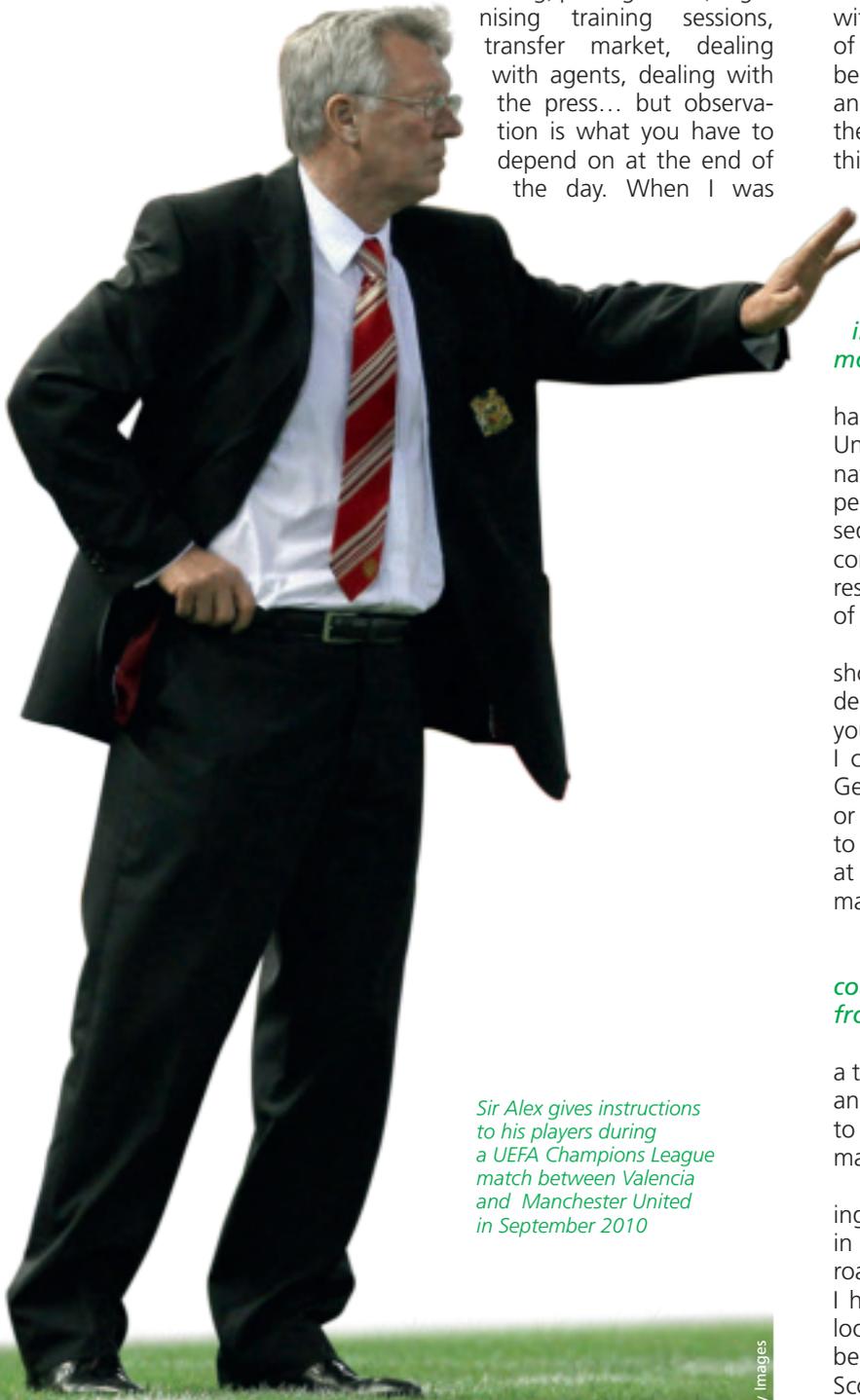
The culture of players from different countries has become dominant in the English game. At United, I think there are people of 20 different nationalities – and that's a challenge because people from different cultures have to be addressed and you have to make sure that they are comfortable in their environment because it's a results industry and you need to get the best out of them.

I enjoyed it – it's understandable that there should have been some apprehension about dealing with players from different countries and you had to get language teachers in because I can understand a bit in French and a bit in German but no way could I converse in Spanish or Portuguese. But, my advice to the coach is not to be afraid of it. I had some wonderful people at United who dealt with all these things and made sure that all the right things were there.

It's not something you enjoyed but, as a coach, do you learn more from losing than from winning?

I think you do. It's a test of yourself to prepare a team so that you don't lose twice. The attitude and the mentality was not to do that. We tried to be well prepared and more determined to make sure losing didn't become a habit.

I'm prepared to put everything out in a dressing room straight after a game – I don't believe in going back again. I want to get it out of the road and say what I feel at that moment because I have another game and I have no interest in looking back at Saturday on a Monday. I remember Jock Stein, when I was his assistant with the Scotland national team, and we spoke about this. I said I can't help myself, I have to do it. He said he preferred to leave it until Monday



Sir Alex gives instructions to his players during a UEFA Champions League match between Valencia and Manchester United in September 2010

Getty Images

because you'll have calmed down and have a better view of things. Whatever you choose, if you're successful at it, don't change.

You mentioned putting things back in the game in terms of passing on the benefits of experience. Is this important in the coaching profession?

Absolutely. I think it's a joy to help young people, and see how they do. I acknowledge that I've had a privileged position. At United we had a lot of young youth coaches starting their careers, and you hope to see them doing well four or five years down the line. And you hope that, in some small way, you've have helped that process. It's an imperative that an older coach should impart whatever knowledge he can. You know, the thing about imparting knowledge is it doesn't necessarily register with the people you give it to. But if they listen and want to learn, it can only be an advantage. I noticed at the forum in Budapest that there were plenty of older coaches who had never forgotten the learning process. For a younger coach, it's great to mix with people like that. Listening to older people is always a benefit.

What did your coach education not prepare you for?

The things that coach education sessions don't prepare you for is results on the football field. But from the minute you start, you realise it's about getting results. Doing it the beautiful way is great. But sometimes, you're sitting there coming into the last 15 minutes and you don't care how it happens – the ball can go in off someone's backside – so long as it happens because winning is the name of the game. Relationships with club management are sometimes understated as well. I remember one game in the early

years when the chairman came into the dugout and asked what I was going to do. I said the first thing was that he was getting out of the way! When I was younger, I wanted to control everything, but you have to understand that they can fire you. You have to deal with that and find a way of coaxing them into your way of thinking without them feeling like you're bullying them – you have to find a nice way because they can sack you. At Aberdeen, I had a fantastic chairman who understood the game and understood me – and that taught me you need to respect chairmen and get on with them.

What advice would you give to the people responsible for coach education?

To stress that it's about developing young people and footballers to be better. It's not always about educating them like a history teacher. Sometimes it's about inspiring them to be the best that they can be. It's about developing players as human beings. And, on the football field, it's very often a 'character' who wins you the match. The other thing is to encourage students to have an imagination about them as a coach. There may be some coaches who depend on the manual – and there are some fantastic books. As a young coach, I read books and learned from them. But you also need to use your imagination. ●



Getty Images

Directing Wayne Rooney in the first leg of the 2010/11 UEFA Champions League quarter-final between Chelsea and Manchester United



Getty Images

Winning the Premier League in May 2013

A PLATFORM FOR FASCINATING DISCUSSION

Had there been a blackout at the House of European Football in Nyon at the start of September, there would have been one obvious explanation – the surge in energy brought on by the brainstorming session of Europe’s leading football minds that took place under the auspices of the 15th UEFA Elite Club Coaches Forum.



The elite club coaches with UEFA representatives in Nyon

It is hard to think of another time and place in the year when so many of the coaching fraternity’s leading lights come together to reflect and to share ideas. Men like Arsenal FC’s Arsène Wenger and Rafael Benítez of SSC Napoli, touch-line adversaries in the UEFA Champions League a few weeks later, were seated around the same debating table at UEFA headquarters. It makes for a unique occasion and provides a platform for some fascinating discussion.

The forum, as in previous years, was open to all the coaches from the previous season’s UEFA Champions League round of 16 and the eight coaches of the UEFA Europa League’s quarter-final clubs. As a result, the 2013 line-up was as impressive as ever: beside Wenger and Benítez, there was Laurent Blanc (Paris Saint-Germain FC), Neil Lennon (Celtic FC), Antonio Conte (Juventus), Manuel Pellegrini (Manchester City FC), Paulo Fonseca (FC Porto), Carlo Ancelotti (Real Madrid CF), Jens Keller (FC Schalke 04), Mircea Lucescu (FC Shakhtar Donetsk), Miroslav Djukić (Valencia CF), Murat Yakin (FC Basel 1893), Jorge Jesus (SL Benfica), Vladimir Petković (S.S. Lazio), Kurban Berdyev (FC Rubin Kazan), and André Villas-Boas (Tottenham Hotspur FC).

In a change from previous years, the coaches attending were given a more active say in the format, with UEFA establishing a four-man bureau to provide suggestions for topics to be covered. This high-class brains trust comprised Ancelotti, Wenger, Sir Alex Ferguson and José Mourinho. It was the recently retired Sir Alex who chaired the event via satellite link-up, and he was honoured beforehand with the award of a framed picture and plaque recognising his longevity as a coach in the UEFA Champions League. Ancelotti and Wenger received similar recognition, collecting their awards from the UEFA President, Michel Platini, in an act mirroring UEFA’s honouring of players who reach 100 caps in international football. Mr Platini remained present throughout, along with the UEFA General Secretary, Gianni Infantino, and chief technical officer Ioan Lupescu, with UEFA listening as intently as ever to a debate that touched on a variety of technical and tactical questions, including the following...

Home and away

The statistic that just one of the last eight UEFA Champions League winners had finished

second in their group led Sir Alex and Wenger to stress the importance of finishing first – to ensure home advantage in the second leg in the round of 16. That said, there were also reflections on how the approach of the away team had changed in Europe in view of the increased number of away wins in the group stage since 2005. Sir Alex spoke of the trend for counterattacking in numbers, “which gives teams a better chance of scoring away from home”. Wenger, meanwhile, said it was time to reconsider the away-goals rule, given that teams no longer just set out to defend away from home. “The weight of the away goal is too heavy,” he argued, with support from Benítez.

Late drama

More goals are scored in the last 15 minutes than at any other time during a match – no surprise to Sir Alex, who noted: “I had my most exciting times at Manchester United in the last 15 minutes.” According to Ancelotti, this is the “most difficult period to influence” as the mental and physical stamina of a team is tested to the limit. Wenger, meanwhile, spoke of the dilemma a coach faces between taking a cautious or courageous approach, adding: “What is important is to have players on the bench who come on in the right frame of mind and eager to do something.”

Goal-scoring

The fact that 2012/13 produced the highest-ever goal-per-game average (2.94) in the UEFA Champions League – an increase matched in all of the top six European leagues aside from Serie A – prompted plenty of discussion. Ancelotti suggested that “in training and preparation more focus is placed on attacking”, while Blanc spoke of “a change of mentality in coaches”. Lupescu concurred, saying: “In recent years we have seen coaches who prefer to be proactive rather than reactive.” For UEFA’s chief technical officer, there are other reasons too. “The quality of pitches has also improved greatly over the last 20 years and implicitly it is easier to play a positive possession game. I don’t necessarily think that the art of defending is declining. I think that the modern midfielder and attacker is doing much more for his own defence when he presses high up the pitch and conversely this can result in him damaging the other defence and creating more chances.”

Cutbacks

One specific source of goals was under the microscope, with goals from cutbacks having more than doubled in the past three seasons. Lennon, citing the difficulty given to his Celtic side by Barcelona’s Jordi Alba and Daniel Alves, said: “Full-backs provide great attacking thrusts; they are almost converted wingers.” Noting the

impact of Bayern’s David Alaba and Philipp Lahm in 2012/13, Lupescu highlighted the importance of the full-back/winger relationship: “Bayern’s full-backs clearly attack a lot and help out their wingers in the offensive game. On the other hand, the work rate shown by [Franck] Ribéry and [Arjen] Robben last season proves that the relationship between the full-back and modern winger is a two-way street. We have also seen the re-emergence of the right-footed winger playing on the left and vice versa. This is not necessarily something new but something that has come back into fashion. The winger moves inside on to his stronger foot, the full-back overlaps and therefore finds himself in more attacking areas more regularly.”



Getty Images

The crucial first goal

The forum considered the statistic that in 2012/13 the team scoring first in a UEFA Champions League game won 69% of the time, and Pellegrini said: “When you start the game you play against your opponent; when you are losing a game, you are playing against the opposition, the clock and the scoreboard.” Lupescu added: “The ability of teams to keep the ball for long periods of time makes it extremely difficult to chase the game. When you’re chasing the game it also means you have to take more risks and in doing so you make yourself open to counter-attacks, and today we have fantastic players who can use this opportunity to punish you.” ●

The UEFA President presents Arsène Wenger with a tribute to his 100+ UEFA Champions League matches

COACHING AND EDUCATING

How good are you at coaching? How good are you at educating? How much of coaching is about “educating” players? The questions are rhetorical in the sense that they were not directly posed to the participants at the UEFA coach education workshop staged in Budapest in October.

But they were some of the questions which spontaneously arose during a thought-provoking event where the focus was on upgrading coach education and where practical coaching components were merged with academic issues related to the refinement of educational techniques. As UEFA’s chief technical officer, Ioan Lupescu, commented on opening the four-day workshop: *“The objective is to constantly look ahead, to refresh our ideas, and to remember that we have not reached the end of our journey.”* This starting point was reflected by the slogan chosen to flag up the event: *“Raising the bar in coach education”*.

pest, gave the green light for them to be submitted for final endorsement by the UEFA Executive Committee.

In Budapest, Packie Bonner (Republic of Ireland) and Marc Van Geersom (Belgium) outlined the three years of work which will allow the specialised UEFA goalkeeper licence to be rolled out in 2014. Preparations were exhaustive and incorporated feedback from pilot courses, workshops and seminars staged in Belgium, Cyprus, Hungary, Iceland, Moldova, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, Serbia and Sweden, with detailed analysis of goalkeeping at UEFA EURO 2012 and in the UEFA Champions League injected into the equation.

In UEFA’s coach education tree, the UEFA goalkeeper licence will sit alongside the general UEFA A licence. In other words, the criteria for entry into a specialised goalkeeper course stipulate that the student must already be in possession of, at least, a UEFA B licence – “at least” because during the presentation of the course in Budapest, some national associations expressed a desire to admit only coaches already in possession of an A licence. In addition, candidates will be required to possess an existing national licence or combinations based on at least five years as a professional goalkeeper and three years of experience as a coach.

The coach education and technical directors in Budapest were asked whether their national associations would be ready, willing and able to incorporate goalkeeper courses into their coach education structures – and the response suggests that the new qualification will gain rapid acceptance on a pan-European basis. The courses (the guidelines highlight a maximum of 16 students per course) entail 120 hours, of which 30 % is theory, 30 % practical work and 40 % work experience. Associations were also asked whether they had enough qualified goalkeeping tutors, with UEFA ready to provide support where required. At the same time, the issue of former goalkeepers already working as coaches without a licence is being addressed, with some national associations having already set deadlines after which the specialised UEFA goalkeeper qualification becomes mandatory.

“One of the other issues we have to address,” Packie Bonner told the participants in Budapest, *“is the positioning of the goalkeeper coach among the coaching staff. Head coaches sometimes under-exploit them because their mindset doesn’t fully recognise that the goalkeeper coach is a qualified coach who, in addition, has*



The coach education workshop in Budapest

A tree with branches

One of the main items on the Budapest agenda was related to raising the bar in terms of adding branches to the existing coach education tree. As regular readers will know, UEFA has been conducting development work on three specialised projects related to goalkeeping, futsal and fitness – the first two of which are now nearing fruition. In terms of ushering the projects through the appropriate channels, detailed guidelines on courses for goalkeeper coaches and futsal coaches had been devised in conjunction with the coach education specialists who form UEFA’s Jira Panel. Their approved versions were then submitted to the UEFA Development and Technical Assistance Committee which, meeting on the eve of the workshop in Buda-

a specialised qualification in the goalkeeping speciality.”

Many of the same parameters can be applied to the specialised futsal licence, which has also been approved by the Jira Panel and the Development and Technical Assistance Committee. In Budapest, technical director Ginés Meléndez teamed up with Javier Lozano (two-time world champion coach and three-time champion of Europe) to present the new UEFA futsal licence to the national associations. Both hail from Spain, universally recognised as the forerunner in European futsal.

The guidelines for the UEFA futsal course were fine-tuned at a pilot course staged at the Spanish federation’s “city of football” at Las Rozas and involving 16 national associations which are relative newcomers to the futsal family. The course, with a minimum duration of 123 hours (46 of them theory) is open to candidates with national futsal certificates or who have a UEFA-endorsed licence at C level. The UEFA futsal licence sits at the same level as the UEFA B licence in the outdoor game. To support the new course, UEFA is producing over 200 pages of futsal-specific educational material, along with a DVD identifying coaching points from UEFA Futsal EURO 2012 and the UEFA Futsal Cup.

In Budapest, national associations were asked whether they organised coach education courses compatible with the UEFA guidelines, whether they would welcome technical support in setting up the new courses, and whether they had enough instructors to implement the new project. As Javier Lozano pointed out: *“The futsal guidelines are as similar as possible to those being used in the outdoor game, even if the content varies. Goalkeeping parameters are different – in fact there are more similarities with handball – and the same applies to fitness coaching, as the physical requirements of the game are substantially different.”*

The issue of fitness coaching provided a topic for further discussion in Budapest, where Andreas Morisbak and Sigmund Apold-Aasen, both from Norway, commented that the fitness seminars staged in Oslo and Istanbul earlier this year (along with the next one in Baku, which will bring the number of participating associations to the full total of 54) would be used to plot UEFA’s pathway in this sector. Coaches would be ready to admit that there is no single formula for winning matches – and the same seems to apply in the fitness coaching sphere, where methods of achieving the ultimate objective vary considerably.

One participant graphically set the scene by saying: *“As a coach, you hand your players over to someone who may or may not be qualified for the job. When you’re recruiting people, you find that most of them have non-football qualifications and, often, the only way of assessing their work is to look at the injury list. OK, on the one hand, coaches maybe need to be better prepared in order to pass judgement on the fitness coach’s work. On the other hand, it would be*

Convention scale

	UEFA B	UEFA B Female	UEFA A	UEFA A Female	UEFA Elite Youth	UEFA Elite A Youth Female	UEFA Pro	UEFA Pro Female
Number of licenced coaches	146,708	2,766	44,554	543	4,212	106	9,010	72

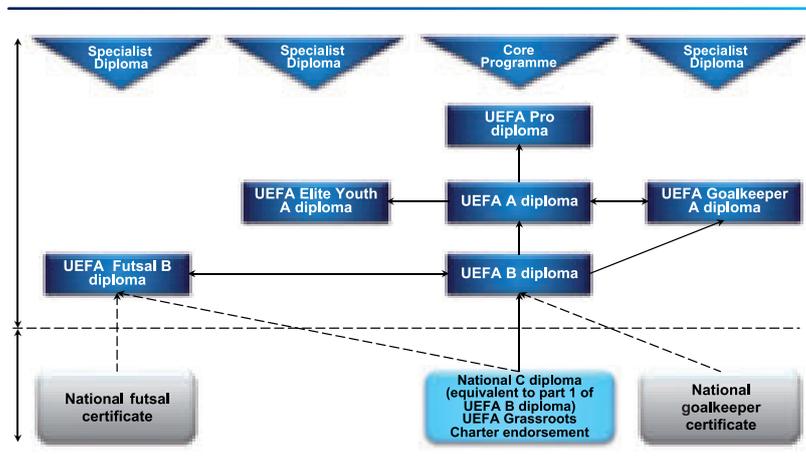
Total number of UEFA Coaching Convention endorsed licences: 204,590

positive to have a football-specific qualification for fitness coaches.”

The diversity attached to fitness coaching means that, for UEFA, this topic remains in the “work in progress” tray with a number of proposals under consideration – among them the idea of incorporating best practice exchange components into UEFA’s successful Study Group Scheme.

How to teach; how to learn

The thread which held the Budapest package together was the marriage between coaching and education. Another dimension was added when the neuroscientific aspects of delivering and receiving information were addressed by Dr Babet Lobinger from the sports university in Cologne. *“The objective of analysing the mind’s responses,”* she explained, *“is to examine how behaviour can be changed and how personality can be developed. These are key issues in youth development and in the relationships between coaches and players. It can help to improve individual and team performances – and people in football are increasingly realising the importance of mental aspects. A happy player is far more likely to perform well. Happiness is the most effective motivation. So the coach needs to be equipped to influence and regulate the mental and emotional states of his players and his team.”*



She cited the example of attaching an alarm button which alerts the player when his shoulders drop. *"If you lift your shoulders,"* she remarked, *"you feel better. There is no guarantee of victory, of course, but it's interesting to discuss the concept of 'walking off with your head held high' and to probe into aspects of the game such as the 'home factor'. What is it that induces a team to perform better on its own ground or what inhibitions can influence performance away from home?"*

Her thought-provoking session raised other issues, based on the premise that our learning processes are based mainly on imaging and watching. *"What makes a playmaker?"* she asked. *"If it's the ability to spot an imaginative passing opportunity, do we need to invest time in eye-tracking exercises? What help can we offer to defenders or goalkeepers when it comes to dealing with crosses or opponents? What is the best way of recognising feints? Do we focus on the hips? The feet? The eyes?"*

The art of communication was a theme addressed by Dr Lobinger and, later in the event, by her colleague from the university in Cologne, Werner Mickler. It was then transferred to the training pitch during sessions led by Hungary's

coach education director, László Szalai, and, a day later, by Switzerland's Dany Ryser, a member of UEFA's Jira Panel. Dr Lobinger pointed out that individuals vary considerably in terms of the amount of information that they can accept during a short period – a relevant factor when it comes to delivering team talks at half-time, for example. *"I think that, when it comes to pre-match information,"* she said, *"it's important to reassure coaches that spending 30 minutes designing a five-minute talk can be time well invested."*

For coaches obliged to communicate with multilingual, multicultural squads, her assertion that 70-80% of communication is non-verbal might be good news. It might be less good news that coaches therefore have to pay a great deal more attention to their body language and their facial expressions – especially when on camera for pre- or post-match interviews. This was a theme pursued by Werner Mickler, who suggested that media training should include sessions in which the student coach has to play the role of the reporter and pose thorny questions. Returning to the theme of non-verbal communication, he discussed the importance of clarifying gestures – which are often the only viable means of communication from the technical area dur-



ing high-profile matches. "Have you ever used ear-plugs in training?" he asked his audience.

He also emphasised the need to put a positive slant on communication with students or players. "If you're preparing instructors to deal with kids," he said, "you need to tell them that your praise-to-criticism ratio should be something like 8:1." Werner Mickler also underlined the importance of transferring information from short-term to long-term memory. "An efficient way of doing this," he said, "is to use a freeze-and-replay formula. So the idea to put in student coaches' minds is that, while the usual procedure is to stop training games to correct mistakes, it's also positive to stop and reflect on the things that they've done well."

The relevance of learning techniques to coach education was endorsed by England's Geoff Pike, who revealed that The FA's coach education staff includes a "learning expert", whose mission is to improve the arts of teaching and communication. "Our aim," he told the audience in Budapest, "is to train, develop, qualify and support more creative coaches who are excellent teachers of the game." Hungary's László Szalai underlined his national association's desire to move in a new direction and develop a coherent philosophy "after

years of listening to and trying to copy others". The immediate aims are to improve coach education course material and to promote constant re-education – the importance of the latter receiving support from France's national technical director, François Blaquart, who outlined the options currently being offered to coaches in France in order to further their "constant learning" process. The quality of the educators is therefore crucial. Kris Van Der Haegen, technical director in Belgium, attributed the rise of the Belgian national team to sixth place in the FIFA rankings from 44th in May 2012 to "the improved quality of training sessions, which has led to better development of youth players". He also outlined the system of seminars, which allows coaches "to share experiences and create a learning environment which stimulates better coaching, especially at youth levels."

"We have seen the benefits of developing coaching at all levels," said UEFA's chief technical officer, Ioan Lupescu, at the close of the coach education workshop in Budapest, "so we need to focus on continually raising the bar in terms of coaching and, in consequence, the education of coaches. If our aim is to develop better players, we must also develop better coaches and better coach educators." ●



A GERMAN ACCENT

The European Under-17 Championship finals in Slovakia heralded the start of a hectic flurry of footballing activity, with 11 national team and club titles adjudicated in a four-month period between May and August. The roll of honour has a German accent, thanks in great part to the three club titles which supplemented the senior national team's victory at the Women's EURO 2013 in Sweden. The lines between gold and silver were slimmer than ever, with three titles decided in penalty shoot-outs and six other finals where the margin of victory was a single goal. The intensive schedule barely gave time to applaud the coaches who led teams into finals so, for the record, these are the technicians who stepped onto the podium – with an additional salute to Pierre Mankowski who, in July, led France to the title at the FIFA U-20 World Cup staged in Turkey.

UEFA Women's EURO 2013 in Sweden

Germany v Norway 1-0

Gold: Silvia Neid
Silver: Even Pellerud

European Under-21 Championship in Israel

Spain v Italy 4-2

Gold: Julen Lopetegui
Silver: Devis Mangia

European Under-17 Championship in Slovakia

Russia v Italy 0-0 (5-4 in penalty shoot-out)

Gold: Dmitri Khomukha
Silver: Daniele Zoratto

European Women's Under-17 Championship in Switzerland

Poland v Sweden 1-0

Gold: Zbigniew Witkowski
Silver: Yvonne Ekroth

Germany's women's team were the dominant force once again at the Women's EURO

European Under-19 Championship in Lithuania

Serbia v France 1-0

Gold: Ljubinko Drulović
Silver: Francis Smerecki

European Women's Under-19 Championship in Wales

France v England 2-0

Gold: Gilles Eyquem
Silver: Maureen "Mo" Marley

UEFA Champions League at Wembley Stadium, London

FC Bayern München v Borussia Dortmund 2-1

Gold: Jupp Heynckes
Silver: Jürgen Klopp

UEFA Women's Champions League at Stamford Bridge, London

VfL Wolfsburg v Olympique Lyonnais 1-0

Gold: Ralf Kellermann
Silver: Patrice Lair

UEFA Europa League in Amsterdam

Chelsea FC v SL Benfica 2-1

Gold: Rafael Benítez
Silver: Jorge Jesus

UEFA Super Cup in Prague

FC Bayern München v Chelsea FC 2-2 (5-4 in penalty shoot-out)

Gold: Josep Guardiola
Silver: José Mourinho

UEFA Regions' Cup in Veneto

Veneto v Selecció Catalana 0-0 (5-4 in penalty shoot-out)

Gold: Fabrizio Tonitto
Silver: Toni Almedros. ●



Sportstyle

Editorial group: Ioan Lupescu,
Frank K. Ludolph, Graham
Turner.