

# UEFA



THE TECHNICIAN

2016-2017



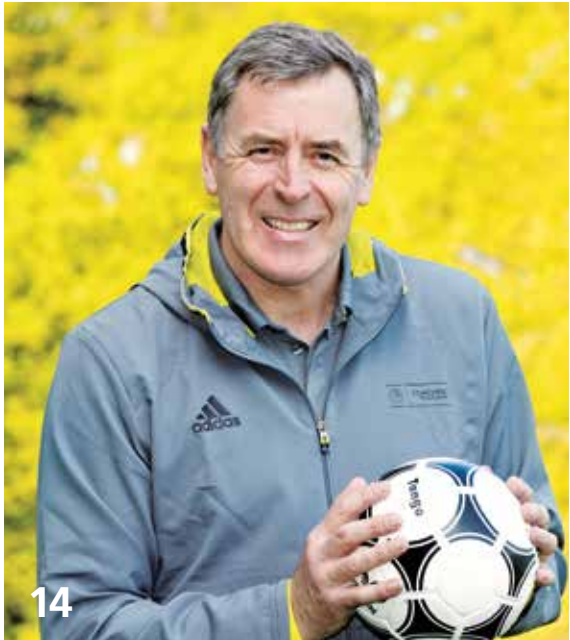




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EDITORIAL



UEFA started publishing a newsletter for Europe’s coaching fraternity back in 1997 and in early 2016, it was decided to make The Technician a more regular feature in the pages of UEFA Direct, as part of a broader revamp of the organisation’s official monthly magazine.

The Technician’s 19th season maintained the tradition of exclusive interviews with the biggest names in coaching and investigative reports into the key football development issues of the day. In this compilation from 2016, insights from Roy Hodgson, Lars Lagerbäck and David Moyes and features on goalkeeping, futsal, sports science and the relative age effect are bookended by chats with Vicente del Bosque about the then reigning champions’ preparations for UEFA EURO 2016 and Fernando Santos about Portugal’s road to European Championship glory.

We hope that you enjoy this standalone annual review and that you find the content thought-provoking and enriching. We aim to provide you with many more interesting articles and interviews in The Technician’s 20th year and beyond!

**Ioan Lupescu**  
Chief Technical Officer



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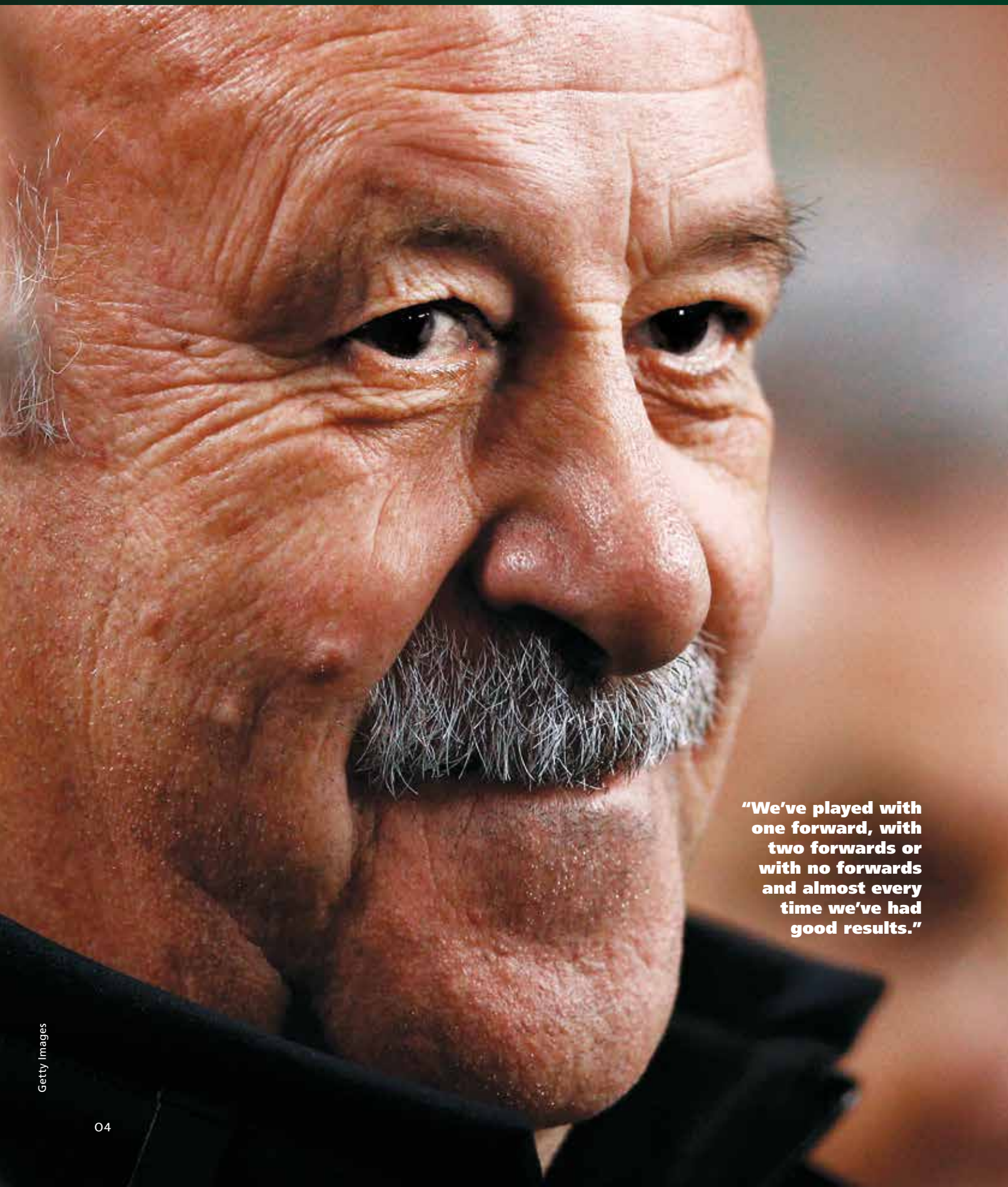
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**"We've played with one forward, with two forwards or with no forwards and almost every time we've had good results."**

VICENTE DEL BOSQUE

# 'STILL STRIVING TO BE THE BEST'

Evolution, not revolution, is the watchword for Spain's head coach as his team targets a record third straight EURO title.

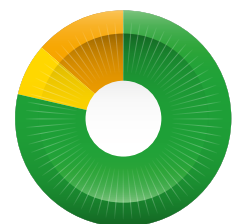
**Y**ou are the coach. As you take your team into EURO 2016, you could field seven of the players who started the World Cup final in Johannesburg back in 2010. But would you? You could even pick half a dozen of the starters who ended Spain's 44-year wait to regain the European Championship by beating Germany in Vienna under the guidance of Luis Aragonés in 2008. You could select no fewer than nine of the starting line-up from when Spain successfully defended their European crown by beating Italy in Kiev in 2012. But the youngest would be 27 and five would have passed their 30th birthdays. So would you? Bearing in mind Spain's startling failure to progress beyond the group stage at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, is this a time for evolution or revolution?

There are still a few months to wait before you can compare your answer with that of Spain's head coach, Vicente del Bosque. He does, however, hint strongly at a preference for evolution after a EURO qualifying campaign that yielded nine wins from ten games. Looking

back at progress since the World Cup, he comments: "We have taken some careful steps forward. We didn't really start a revolution or make any dramatic steps. Instead, we just developed further, step by step, introducing players who we think are right to put together a good national team. There is a block of players who have stayed, such as Jordi Alba, Gerard Piqué, Sergio Busquets, Andrés Iniesta, Cesc Fàbregas and David Silva, and we've added some younger lads who, I think, have freshened the team up. I think it's normal to proceed like that."

Continuity is written with a capital C in Spain's footballing lexicon. And that starts at the top. Angel María Villar Llona's benchmark-setting tenure as president of the Royal Spanish Football Federation has provided a platform on which sustained success in UEFA's age-limit competitions – and ultimately at senior level – has been built. In the wake of the disappointment in Brazil, the media were quick to pronounce that Spain's winning cycle had come to an end, but Villar would have none of it. Del Bosque remains and, in his case, →

## THAT WINNING FEELING



● 82 wins  
● 8 draws  
● 14 losses

**In 104 games in charge of Spain, Vicente del Bosque has achieved a terrific record, winning 79% of his matches.**



continuity is not just about years or matches on the bench. His equanimous, avuncular personality provides a steady hand at the tiller. Since taking over in 2008, he has become the first coach to be champion of Europe and the world at both club and national team levels, yet shies away from any hint of personality cult. "I think the victory at EURO 2008 made us feel proud and meant we could forget the complexes we might have had in the past. A lot of different factors came together back then. We have a better youth system now and we don't have to look around at the work being done by other national associations. We have better facilities, and coaches who are better qualified to do a great job."

Del Bosque denies that, in 2016, his team needs to be reinvented. "Some of the players from Brazil are still with us and have been showing excellent performances at their clubs all year long," he maintains. The last three words are not without significance, given that players from Barcelona, who have tended to

supply core elements not only in terms of manpower but also with regard to playing style, may have to cope with an extended EURO on the back of a season which could entail as many as 65 competitive matches. But he shrugs off suggestions that freshness and preparation time could become key issues.

### 'A bit of time pressure'

"We will do more or less the same as every time," he insists. "But we will certainly have a bit of time pressure after the end of the domestic season and other competitions like the Champions League. We have always been able to manage those pressures in previous tournaments, so I hope we will be successful in what we do this time."

A further coaching challenge will be the selection of a playing structure, and Del Bosque has displayed enough flexibility to have used different team shapes to win two Champions Leagues with Real Madrid plus a EURO and a World Cup with Spain. In the national team, the

Fernando Torres scores Spain's third goal in their 4-0 victory over Italy in the final of EURO 2012.



**"If I had to name favourites, I think France and Germany would be my picks – along with Spain."**

main issue is in attack. With neither Barcelona nor the two big Madrid teams fielding Spaniards in their habitual line-ups, he is obliged to cast his net elsewhere – or, as he has done in the past, manage without strikers. In previous front lines, players such as David Villa could hardly be described as classic target strikers and, among the goalscorers who have caught the eye in Spain's age-limit sides, Villarreal's Adrián López and Paco Alcácer at Valencia are rapiers rather than blunt-instrument strikers.

"The team has always been very interesting in terms of attack," Del Bosque comments. "We've played with one forward, with two forwards or with no forwards and a lot of midfielders. And almost every time we've had good results. I don't think I have a favourite playing system because it always depends on the players available to you and the characteristics they have. You draw a picture starting from that. The initial picture is not so important. It is more about the way you play the game."

Del Bosque's daily routine at the national association's training centre at Las Rozas includes a breakfast with his coaching staff – not just those pegged to the senior team but also those responsible for all the age-limit sides. Spain's recent successes have been recompense for a clear playing philosophy implemented from the bottom to the top of the pyramid.

"I don't think there are many coaches who think in a defensive way," the 65-year-old maintains. "We like to play and be proactive, to have possession of the ball, to dominate matches, to play attacking football and have a lot of attacking players on the pitch. Of course you need balance with defence, but if you dominate the match and impose your game, then everything is in your hands."

Spain's possession-based domination game now has to be played without the dancing feet and shrewd footballing brain of Xavi Hernández. "As I've said many times, he is irreplaceable," Del Bosque admits. "But you can't think about the past; you need to think ahead. If not, you can't go out and play. We have to adapt our game to players like Thiago, Koke and Isco, all young lads who are also great midfielders."

The question is whether the evolving Spain team is great enough to defend the title and, adding Paris to Vienna and Kiev, record a unique hat-trick of victories. "In sport, you win and you lose," says the imperturbable Del Bosque without so much as a twitch of the moustache. "In the last four years we've had the experience of winning matches and losing matches. We didn't play a good World Cup, that is evident, but we're still striving to be the best. I wouldn't say we are the main favourites because we all know how to play football and it has balanced out to such an extent that there is no great superiority of one national team over the others. If I had to name favourites, I think France and Germany would be my picks – along with Spain. We will be one of the teams trying to win the title. But it won't be easy, as the competition is enormous."

Asked to name three key aspects of a tournament like a EURO, Del Bosque does not hesitate. "Firstly, the human and personal relationships are important – living well together. Secondly, you need to have a clear idea of how you want to play – a clear concept. And you all have to share the same objective. In the end, though, you always need a bit of luck as well. Winning another EURO would be a fantastic achievement. If you have good players, you should be able to achieve good results. The difficult but nice job for the coach is to get all those players together in a winning team." 🇪🇺







PAUL BALSOM

# PEAK PERFORMANCE

Paul Balsom's team of sports scientists at Leicester City are at the forefront of a revolution in how footballers are prepared for the demands of the modern game. He takes The Technician behind the scenes at the club setting the Premier League alight.

**A**nalyst Tom Joel plays back a video of the session he led that morning at Leicester City's Aylestone training complex. He is reviewing a sprint drill, looking to see which players carried it out successfully, who may need more guidance and how well he delivered the session. He will then study the GPS data recorded during the drill to determine the intensity of the players' workout as they prepare for

Swansea City's visit the next day. Most of the players have long since gone home, but for the sports science and performance analysis team, the day's work is entering its second phase. Training over, analysis is under way. The mood is upbeat, as you might expect at a club that has become the talk of Europe after their incredible rise from the bottom of the Premier League in January 2015 to top spot just a year later. Off the pitch too, Leicester are among the vanguard of Premier →

**"Specificity is one of the basic principles of training. You should be training in a very similar way to what you are going to perform."**



TwelfthMan/Shutterstock



League clubs. The GPS technology they are using to maximise each player's potential is the equal of any of their title rivals'.

Four cameras installed on high poles around the main training pitch allow coaching staff and players to review each session from multiple angles and perspectives. The cameras are controlled remotely from the coaches' room, which looks out onto the pitch. No kick is missed. Paul Balsom is the head of sports science and performance analysis at Leicester. He also works as assistant to Erik Hamrén with the Sweden national team, and is helping UEFA promote the importance of specificity in football training to achieve peak performance and prevent injuries.

### Training as one performs

"Specificity is one of the basic principles of training," Balsom explains. "You should be training in a very similar way to what you are going to perform. If we look at the movement pattern of a football player – standing still, walking, jogging, running at different speeds, sprinting, moving sideways and backwards – the category of movement will change about ten times a minute. Every

time you change the way you are moving you make a decision and that process is obviously coupled with the game. Playing as much football as possible to get our players as fit as possible is football specificity. Not only are we working physiologically with the same type of stress on the body as we do during the game, which will then obviously promote adaptations, we are also hopefully making our decision-making processes better, which will make us better football players."

Not all fitness training can be done with a ball at the feet, but the key is to train the body to cope with the demands of a game. "We always have in mind our end product: what do we want to see our players do during the game? We are not training big centre-backs, for instance, to be endurance athletes. We need to develop good maximal strength, good power, because a lot of their work is over five or ten metres. That's where gym work will help, monitored by the medical department to make sure that we are really minimising the risk of injury."

The data gathered by the sports science team has other benefits too. By seeing quantifiable results from training, players are motivated by tangible goals and targets,



Above: Leicester's players are put through their paces.  
Below: Paul Balsom reviews the morning's training session.



TwelfthMan/Shutterstock

**"GPS is very new, so we are trying to open up and discuss the opportunities it presents."**

which also enable them to better understand the philosophy behind their fitness work. "All players are taking more responsibility," Balsom says.

Balsom's approach is the same whether helping Leicester manager Claudio Ranieri prepare for the next Premier League game or getting Hamrén's charges into peak condition for EURO 2016. "The circumstances are different, but in essence both are relatively similar," he says. "I can't use high volumes of fitness work with Sweden to get the players fit for a game in the short time I am with them, but we can make sure that we optimise the loading, the duration and the content of the training sessions and that we are in communication with their clubs. The problem is that there are different ways of monitoring training load. For example, there is no standard definition of high-intensity work. One club might be saying one thing and another club another. Unless all clubs are wearing exactly the same GPS unit with exactly the same definitions and thresholds it is very difficult for me."

### Personality and social skills

After assessing the players' well-being when they arrive at Sweden's pre-EURO training camps, Balsom will establish individual programmes to ensure each achieves maximum performance levels when Sweden kick off against the Republic of Ireland on 13 June. "Some will literally come from playing a game to the start of one of our camps the next day," Balsom says. "The Scandinavian leagues finish on the Sunday and our second week of pre-camp starts on Monday. Some will finish four weeks before that. It's my role to make sure that the players can start on as level a playing field as possible. Those who are rested maybe we just need to work on them that week; those who haven't had any rest focus on the tactical work and keep the loading down."

One of the biggest challenges facing sports scientists is how best to share their data with players and coaches. Intriguingly for a man so well versed in cutting-edge technology, Balsom declares that getting the most out of it is as much of an art as it is a science. "Personality and social skills are as important if not more important than the knowledge," Balsom says.

As advances are made in sports science, more avenues are opening up. Balsom advocates greater links between sports universities and the national associations, and more research, for example, into long-term player development and fitness training

## FITNESS FOR FOOTBALL

Coach education and fitness experts from across Europe gathered in Athens between 7 and 10 March for the latest 'fitness for football' seminar in the UEFA Study Group Scheme. Trends in football fitness and injury prevention were discussed, with topics ranging from developing and monitoring speed, high-intensity interval endurance training and measuring training load. "The exchange of information and knowledge-sharing between associations is very beneficial and the UEFA Study Group Scheme is a great platform for this," said Romeo Jozak, a member of the UEFA Development and Technical Assistance Committee and technical director at the Croatian Football Federation. "This week in Greece we have learned about best practices in specific preparation, and we will leave Athens with many new ideas for our programmes in Croatia."

Aristotelis Batakis, technical director at the Hellenic Football Federation, added: "We have launched a national fitness diploma as we believe it is important to educate experts that can transfer fitness knowledge to real football situations, implement it on the training pitch, improve players' fitness and try to prevent injuries." Practical sessions were a key part of the programme, with Paul Balsom using one to demonstrate how GPS can help monitor training. "GPS is very new, so we are trying to open up and discuss the opportunities it presents," he said. "We ask the coaches to design a training session to hit certain performance goals and get the heart rate over a certain threshold. Their training session is then implemented with the players. We measure everything with the GPS and review the data that evening, then the next day we discuss how close they were to achieving the goals."

for youth players. "There is so much to do," he smiles. With Sweden and Leicester helping set the example, the way forward is clear. 🌱



# PREPARATION IS KEY

From a coaching perspective, the recent Futsal EURO played in Serbia raised a number of issues – some of them related exclusively to the indoor game, but others equally applicable to the outdoor game and the fast-approaching EURO in France.

One of the challenges faced by the technicians who led their teams to Belgrade, for example, was that of bringing their squads up to speed, literally and figuratively, for a high-intensity final tournament. Significantly, perhaps, the final was disputed by Spain and Russia, whose domestic championships are widely regarded as the most competitive in Europe.

For the coaches of many of the other ten finalists, the major pre-tournament task was to prepare players from lesser leagues to compete with the best. José Venancio López, coach of the Spain team that won the final 7-3, was able to focus on technical and tactical matters. “Our victory could be interpreted as something of a tribute to the quality of the Spanish league,” he said. “Our fitness levels were uniformly high and our training programme could therefore be focused exclusively on work with the ball.” Ditto Russia coach Sergei Skorovich: “Our players travelled to Serbia from a championship where the players are used to playing two periods of 25 minutes at very high intensity. Fitness was therefore not an issue for us either.”

By contrast, the coaches whose work was coloured by the other end of the spectrum had to cope with squads where parameters of fitness varied widely. One roster contained two players who were alternating indoor and outdoor football for clubs in Austria. Others featured a cocktail of players culled from domestic competitions of diverse quality and intensity, with the result that coaches needed to design individual fitness programmes in a bid to reach a degree of uniformity – a need which evidently affected the structure of training sessions.

“Only two of our squad were from highly competitive leagues,” said Aca Kovacević, coach of the Serbia team who fired up local support and claimed fourth place, “so we had to work hard to bring the others up to competitive standard”. The coaches currently designing their schedules for EURO 2016 in France face similar challenges in preparing squads recruited from domestic championships of vastly different tempos and intensities. Coaches frequently flirt with conflicting principles. On the one hand, they acknowledge that players competing in top leagues around the world are

Kazakhstan’s Aleksandr Dovgan fires at goal against Serbia.



Getty Images

the ones most likely to raise standards when they return home to report for national team duty. On the other hand, this gives them the potential headache of building a competitive machine from components forged in leagues of widely differing characteristics.

## Striking a balance

Going back to futsal, the squads at the final tournament in Serbia comprised 14 players, with all but Spain selecting a dozen outfielders and two goalkeepers (Venancio was alone in opting for three keepers). However, some coaches felt that not all of their outfielders were equipped to cope with the rigours of a EURO and therefore focused on a hard core.

Captain Igor Osredkar, for instance, was on court for almost the entirety of Slovenia’s games, while other squad members remained unused. Andrej Dobovičnik was by no means alone in relying on a quorum. And debate about the validity of the strategy was fuelled by final-tournament debutants Kazakhstan, who went into the record books by claiming third place at their first attempt, with coach Cacau relying heavily on a talented, well-balanced, experienced nucleus.

Others were obliged to contend with a vicious circle of fitness parameters and tactical repercussions. Azerbaijan’s Spanish coach Tino Pérez pointed out that “the tendency to defend deep and counter was not that visible in this tournament. There was more high pressing and teams played with greater ambition.” Javier Lozano, two-time world champion and three-time champion of Europe

as coach of Spain, was in Belgrade as one of UEFA’s observers responsible for compiling the (soon to be published) technical report. “In my opinion,” he said, “the overall improvement in physical condition allowed teams to press higher up the pitch and exploit greater mobility off the ball. In the past, nearly all teams tended to concentrate defensive work in their own half. But in Belgrade we saw a lot more sustained, aggressive pressing three-quarters of the way up the pitch.”

For the observers, the conclusion was that the most successful teams were the ones whose physical condition permitted sustained high pressing – with the Spain v Russia final providing a prime example. During the early stages of a fascinating tactical contest, the Russians set out to disrupt Spain’s combination play by pressing high up the pitch. Spain’s successes in both the indoor and outdoor games, however, has been built on composure under pressure and the ability to play out of tight situations – and this ultimately prevailed in Belgrade.

Questions that can be transposed from Serbia to France therefore include how coaches contend with varying fitness levels, how they build competitive teams from players who are plying their trade in leagues of different intensities, what they consider to be the ideal balance between a settled team and squad rotation/sharing the load (and therefore how many squad members will remain unused), and to what extent tactical questions such as the use of high pressing will be influenced by end-of-season fatigue. ☺

**“The overall improvement in physical condition allowed teams to press higher up the pitch and exploit greater mobility off the ball.”**

**Javier Lozano**  
UEFA technical observer

Spain’s Miguellín shows spectacular aerial agility in the final.



Getty Images



PAT 'PACKIE' BONNER

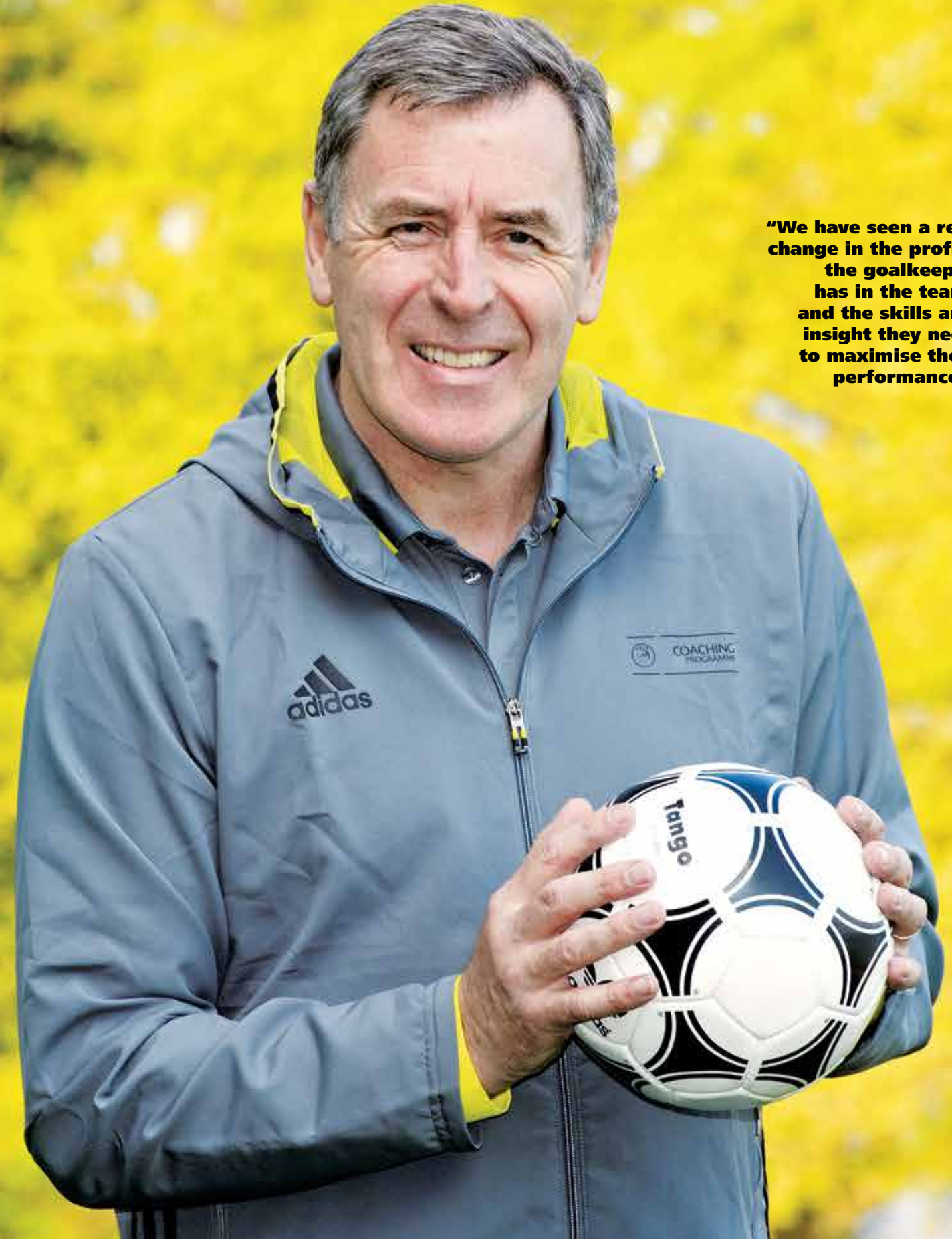
# SAFE HANDS

Now a technical instructor for UEFA, the former Republic of Ireland goalkeeper talks to us about the changing responsibilities of the man between the posts.

**T**he rapid evolution of the role of the goalkeeper is one of the more consistent of football's modern trends. In an effort to meet the challenges of this ever-changing role, various new demands have been placed on today's goalkeepers, and this in turn has resulted in greater emphasis on coach education

for goalkeeping specialists and their place within coaching teams. The leader of UEFA's goalkeeping advisory group is a man who donned goalkeeping gloves for two decades at Celtic FC and reached a FIFA World Cup quarter-final in 1990 with the Republic of Ireland thanks to his penalty save against Romania's Daniel Timofte. He is, of course, Pat 'Packie' Bonner →

**"We have seen a real change in the profile the goalkeeper has in the team, and the skills and insight they need to maximise their performance."**





**Packie, in what ways has the role of the goalkeeper developed in football?**

The Laws of the Game have certainly changed since my playing days but, more than that, we have seen a real change in the profile the goalkeeper has in the team, and the skills and insight they need to maximise their performance. In many ways they're much more like outfield players – the great sweepers of the past, like Franz Beckenbauer or Ronald Koeman. They have to have the skills to play, to start attacks.

Between 60% and 80% of a goalkeeper's actions now are with their feet, which shows the way in which the game has changed as a whole. At the EURO this summer, for example, we anticipate that we will see a number of goalkeepers playing far higher up the pitch than in previous European Championships and the media, the supporters, teammates and coaches are more accepting of that. When I was playing, you would just hear 'Get back on your line – you'll get chipped!' but attitudes have changed.

**A few key objectives have remained the same, though ...**

Of course, the main aim is to keep the ball from the back of your net and that has never changed. However, the way of achieving it

has. When you see some of the range of saves that are made by goalkeepers like Joe Hart and Thibault Courtois, you see an athleticism and skills that have certainly progressed over the years. Not only has this led to a need to focus on their holistic development but also the ways in which they are coached.

**So how has the framework been established for specialist goalkeeper coaches to grow, develop and prosper across Europe?**

The UEFA Goalkeeper A licence has been devised as one of the specialist programmes within the UEFA Coaching Convention. We have created an advisory group that reports directly to the Jira Panel; its remit is to monitor and support the national associations during the preparation and rollout phase. We work very closely with UEFA's football education services team to structure an approach to learning that is reality-based, rather than enshrined in traditional coaching methods. We're also very fortunate to have the support of many technical directors, who are helping us to spread the message of what can be achieved by treating the goalkeepers as being a part of the team rather than apart from the team. Various elements of these

**"When I was playing, you would just hear 'Get back on your line – you'll get chipped!' but attitudes have changed."**

Packie Bonner's save against Romania that took the Republic of Ireland into the 1990 World Cup quarter-finals.

Getty Images



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teaching philosophies are already being applied in around 55% of associations who are involved in the rollout of the UEFA goalkeeper course.

**What challenges do you face in the implementation of goalkeeper licences?**

To some extent, it has been changing the mentality, although the number of people who have really embraced reality-based learning right from the start has impressed us. The first course in a country is always the most difficult and we tend to spend more time on a first visit in order to see how the process is implemented into their education courses. The main issues are in having enough specialists in some of the federations from a goalkeeper education perspective. Also, the acceptance of the head coaches in clubs to allow for the integration of goalkeeper coaches in team training sessions. Just like a head coach and an assistant coach, the goalkeeper coach is also a coach with a specialism. Changing that mentality is something that will take time, especially once the younger coaches understand and see the merits of the process that we are endorsing.

**Can you give some specific examples of positive results you have already seen?**

Belgium is a country where they have really taken to the process, and it's the same in Poland, where they were a little tentative at the start but 18 months down the line we have seen big changes. The courses that they have embarked on have certainly increased credibility and added competence to their goalkeeper coaches as fully integrated and respected members of the coaching staff.

**What can UEFA's experts do to effect the change in mentality you mentioned when it comes to integrating goalkeeper training into the team as a whole?**

There are a couple of things to do, really. The first is to make the goalkeeper coaches themselves realise that the game has changed and that with it, their role has altered too. In many cases we need to see a willingness for goalkeeper coaches to step up and to do it themselves, take on the challenges. As well as that, our job is to encourage technical directors and heads of education to fit goalkeeper education into their overall structures. We can give expertise, knowledge →

Jan Oblak intercepts a Thomas Müller penalty, taking Club Atlético de Madrid into the 2016 UEFA Champions League final at the expense of FC Bayern München.



and ideas, but how they adapt that to their own systems is up to them.

**What characteristics do you look to develop in the modern goalkeeper?**

I think the characteristics can be split into four key categories: technical, tactical, physical and psychological. The last factor includes the concentration and focus of the goalkeeper during a match, their composure and decision-making. However, it can also include lifestyle choices, personal planning, rest and recovery, and can even go down to diet. This is another reason that the goalkeepers on the field can benefit from being coached by specialists who are an integral part of the collective team, which also includes doctors, dieticians, video analysts and fitness coaches who can all feed into that process.

**What methods do you apply to make sure the learning and development process continues?**

We have five key steps in the learning circle at the heart of our methodology: analysing the game, planning a training session with specific objectives based on the analysis, then transferring it to the pitch in a realistic manner and, most importantly, evaluating

the session as a team of coaches. Then, recommendations or adaptations can be made ahead of the next match, when again, you analyse the match and start the circle again. This is all part of treating the goalkeeper as part of the game, which will get the best out of them on matchday.

**Does all of this suggest that the days of individual training of goalkeepers are over?**

Not at all. There is still a need for individual work that will be dictated by the personal development needs of the first, second and third-choice goalkeepers. Identifying key issues through match analysis and what needs to be done to fix them for the next game will then help the goalkeeper coach to prioritise how much work is individual and how much is collective as part of the weekly preparations. In the past, individual training may have formed 75% of the goalkeeper's programme, but that has now definitely been reduced to bring the goalkeepers into the team functions. This places greater emphasis on collective work with field players and the coaching staff as a whole but does not eliminate individual work. We say that the role of the goalkeeper has seen an evolution rather than a revolution, and the goalkeeper coaching is exactly the same. 🌱

**"Just like a head coach and an assistant coach, the goalkeeper coach is also a coach with a specialism."**

Packie Bonner and Shay Given at the play-offs for the 2010 World Cup. The psychological support provided by goalkeeper coaches is a crucial part of modern training.



**EDUCATING THE EDUCATOR**

The third and final module of a goalkeeper coach educator development course took place in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, from 2 to 5 May. Participants from Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia joined the hosts to complete the course, which was designed to help the associations implement goalkeeper coach education at national level and eventually introduce UEFA Goalkeeper A licence courses.

The programme featured match analysis-based practical sessions in which the participants, all of them goalkeeper coach educators in their respective countries, guided club coaching staff through demonstrations. The primary focus was on the goalkeeper coach's ability to carry out his role, as both goalkeeper coach and member of the wider coaching team. Brane Elsner, head of coach education at the Football Association of Slovenia, was enthusiastic about the course and the future of goalkeeper coach education. "We are teaching the new generation of coach educators how to organise themselves, prepare themselves, how to be good speakers, how to motivate and how to ask the right questions at the right time," he said. Munir Talović, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Federation's education director, echoed the views of his Slovenian counterpart: "This is a great chance for us to share opinions, pick up best practice examples and have the best UEFA experts teach us and show us the way."

This three-part course, with previous modules delivered in Croatia and Serbia, marked a new level of cooperation between the participating associations. This is also something that Talović believes can be developed further: "I think that the way we're doing it here can be transferred to other areas to help us develop the sport and coach education in the future."





**HOLGER OSIECK**

# 'THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR GAINING YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE'

Holger Osieck has had an extremely successful and multi-layered coaching career at national association and club level. As assistant to Franz Beckenbauer he won the World Cup in 1990 with West Germany. He then worked at Marseille with Beckenbauer (winning the French Championship) before becoming head coach at VfL Bochum, Fenerbahçe, Urawa Red Diamonds and Kocaelispor, winning the Turkish Cup and Asian Champions League along the way. He took over as Canada's head coach and upset the odds by winning the Gold Cup, and he also had a spell at FIFA as technical director before managing Australia and guiding them to the 2014 World Cup.



**How did your coaching career start?**

It all started while I was still a player. During this period, I was at the same time studying physical education and English at the university in Bochum. In the context of a cooperation between the sports institute of the university and the regional football association in Westphalia, I obtained my B licence. But I still considered this as a complementary part of my education and not as something leading into a future perspective of becoming a professional coach. Courses were on offer and that was the first step towards becoming a coach. At that time, my primary target was to become a teacher but as I went through the coaching licence process, more and more I developed the idea of getting into professional coaching. While I was in the North American Soccer League playing for the Vancouver Whitecaps, I also got into coaching because I signed a contract as assistant coach with the Canadian Soccer Federation. This got me involved in the qualifiers for the 1978 World Cup in Argentina. After I returned to Germany, I received an offer from the German FA to join them as a staff coach. I worked for the German FA for the following 11 years, working in different areas: I was involved in coach education (responsible for the A licence) and player development (coaching all youth teams (Under-15s to Under-21s)). In 1987, I became assistant coach of the senior team alongside Franz Beckenbauer. We coached together until the 1990 World Cup, which we won. After this great achievement, we both left the German FA.

**Which other coach has had the biggest influence on you personally?**

You take something from every coach. In particular as a young coach, it is important that you are ready to listen to the advice of

experienced coaches. In my case, my mentor was Herbert Widmayer, a very experienced Bundesliga and German FA staff coach. He took me under his wing and introduced me to the professional coaching business. Despite all the advice and support you receive, it is important to find your own way. There is no substitute for gaining your own experience.

**How much influence did former head coach at the German FA Jupp Derwall have on you back then?**

Jupp Derwall was a really successful German coach. He was assistant at the 1974 World Cup and took over the team after the World Cup in Argentina in 1978. In 1980 he won the European Championship and reached the World Cup final in 1982. He was like a father figure; he was always available and tried to help whenever he could. After the 1982 World Cup, he took me with him as assistant coach for one season with the national A team, when Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Paul Breitner were still part of the German team. All the experience I gained during that period helped me a lot in my personal development as a coach.

**What qualities does a coach need when entering professional football today?**

Alongside the technical aspects like training and player development, a very important factor is man management. Psychological and leadership qualities are required; in particular the coach as a leader plays a very important role in the complex construction of a team. You need to have a vision, you need to have a plan and you need to give directions. It is crucial to communicate all these elements to the team to make your ideas work.

In 1982, Osieck became assistant to Jupp Derwall, coach of the West German team that won the 1980 European Championship and reached the 1982 World Cup final. He then served as assistant to Franz Beckenbauer, with whom he won the 1990 World Cup.



**What concessions do you have to make to survive?**

The most important thing is to be able to reach any of your players because they are all individuals with different personal attributes. You have to deal with sensitive characters, more robust characters and even indifferent characters. Now it is up to you as a coach to connect with all these different characters to challenge and to motivate them.

**You have worked at different levels. How would you describe the treatment you have received from people in leading positions?**

First, you have to adapt to various situations. There are officials at a club or association who try to impose their point of view on the coach, and others who are more supportive and have a lot of say in the work of the coach. In either case, you have to find a good basis for →



communication and understanding. It is always important that neither side loses face. The bottom line is that you stick to your principles and do not let these people interfere in your actual work.

**What is the key when dealing with the media?**

The importance of the media in today's game has grown tremendously. Whatever you do, whatever your decisions, they will be under the scrutiny of journalists. You have to learn that these people often have their own point of view that does not actually reflect your actions. There are different and often controversial positions on the media side. You have to accept that these controversial aspects exist. The media can never be your friends. They have to do their job and you as a coach have to do yours. And you cannot always ask for their full understanding of what you are doing. If you can come to a certain level of acceptance, it helps your position a lot. The worst mistake is that you start a war with the media. The outcome will be that they use their strong position and you will end up as the loser.

**What were the toughest decisions you had to make?**

Difficult situations occur when you have to tell a player that he won't be part of the team. When I was in the Turkish Cup final for instance, there was a player who had been a regular starter for the team but he was not 100% fit. So I had to tell him that he was not part of the squad for the final. Of course, he tried to persuade me to the contrary, which was understandable. But, for the good of the team, I had to leave him out. That was a tough decision and it was really difficult for me to get this message across. I had to think of the team and not the individual. Decisions like that were always problematic.

**A recent study showed how much stress coaches are under. How did you keep fit during your career and how did you manage your stress?**

Everybody develops their own method for dealing with stress. In particular, when the stress started to mount after a series of negative results. I used to protect myself by not reading any papers or other sports news, or I tried to work off the stress with some interval running. But I found that when the stress was really on, exerting myself physically made me even more frustrated. What I needed was a trustful environment with someone (my partner, for example) with whom I could discuss problems openly and discreetly. But in the end, the best way to get out of a miserable

situation is for you and your team to start winning again.

**How do you see the relationship between coach and assistant, and how has the role of assistant coach evolved over the years?**

The first requirement is loyalty. The assistant coach is the link between the head coach and the players. That means that, on the one hand, the assistant coach needs to fully support the head coach and, on the other hand, he needs to have a good working relationship with the players, in particular when the assistant has to convey messages from the head coach to the players. Given that the demands on the head coach in professional football have expanded, due to increased media attention, the work on the pitch is very often done by the assistant coach. The players are trained and instructed on how the head coach wants them to train. Therefore, acceptance of the assistant coach by the team is crucial.

**Is there any decision you made as a head coach that you would like to change?**

It is crucial that you surround yourself with people you trust, in particular when you work in foreign countries with different mentalities and a different approach to the game. I would bring at least one person of my choice with me, someone I could fully rely on. In some situations in my professional life, I went on my own without such a person and I experienced some disappointment.

**You have more than 35 years of experience. How have you seen coaching change in the dressing room and on the touchline?**

As society has changed over the years, so have the players. Whereas in the old days, a coach was more of an autocrat – what he said went for everybody – these days the players have become more critical and challenging towards the coach, which is a reflection on the development of the game itself. Years ago the players had clear tasks, whereas in today's game the tactical requirements of the players, the understanding of the game, and flexibility have become more and more important. That is why players have developed more into personalities who ask questions. There are game situations where they have to make their own decisions. Therefore, one of the main tasks of the coach is to enable and to encourage them to do so. The players should not just blindly follow any orders. Everyone has to be considered as an individual case. Everyone has to handle his own situation. ☺

**“The worst mistake is that you start a war with the media. The outcome will be that they use their strong position and you will end up as the loser.”**

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**OSIECK'S TOP COACHING TIPS**

● **LEADERSHIP**

Have a vision, have a plan and give directions.

● **LEARN**

Listen to the advice of experienced coaches.

● **SUPPORT**

Surround yourself with people you trust.

● **TRUST**

Encourage players to make their own decisions.





# PREPARING FOR A TOUGH PROFESSION

An online search for 'coach education' is not overly rewarding. It throws up a couple of commercial offers and the odd link to national association websites. Searching for 'UEFA coach education' yields more heartening results, but even so, the on-screen evidence could easily be used to support theories that coach education is one of football's best-kept secrets. So much so that UEFA has produced a promotional video to underline the importance of good coach education and map the parameters of the new edition of the UEFA Coaching Convention, which was published last year and is now being implemented by the national associations across Europe.

The video features a long line of leading coaches, who share their personal experience and professional insights. Thomas Schaaf, for instance, speaks for a great many of his colleagues when he says: "As a player you naturally think that you know it all, but you quickly realise that you are missing key knowledge – and this is what you obtain during your coach education." Schaaf embarked on a long career coaching youth teams while still playing for SV Werder Bremen, and this path is now being trodden by members of a new generation, such as Swiss international Alexander Frei, who is currently coaching the

U15 side at FC Basel while studying for his UEFA A licence. "As a former top player, you think you know it all. But it is so different to become a good coach. I would say that without a proper coach education this is really not possible. So I'm enjoying the educational process that I'm going through with the Swiss FA," he says.

Frei, who is taking his first steps on the coaching ladder, was quick to appreciate the value of 'learning his trade', but it is equally significant that those who have reached the top still stress the importance of climbing the educational ladder. "This is a profession," says Didier Deschamps. "It's something you have to learn, so the training process is vitally important." Roy Hodgson concurs: "The coaching profession is very tough these days and anyone considering taking it up needs to understand that thorough preparation is essential." European and world champion Vicente del Bosque maintains that Spain's successes in club and national team competitions, senior and youth, can legitimately be linked to the quality of coaching at all levels. "Our youth football has become well-structured," he says, "and the education of our coaches has been fundamental to our success." Recent UEFA research supports this gradual progression, having found that 47 of the 80

head coaches who entered the 2015/16 UEFA Champions League or UEFA Europa League group stages had themselves started out in youth coaching or as assistant managers. It is also never too early to start, with the same UEFA research finding that 90% of those coaches were given their first coaching roles before they had reached the end of their thirties.

## The value of the convention

Top technicians acknowledge that the coaching profession is constantly evolving and the new edition of the UEFA Coaching Convention has been designed with this in mind, reflecting – and encouraging – the trend towards reality-based learning. It is not always easy to agree on what this means in practice, and specifically in coaching courses, but Kris Van Der Haegen, Belgium's director of coach education, came up with a neat definition at the most recent meeting of the UEFA Jira Panel, representing the group of coach education experts responsible for the convention: "It's about using knowledge, skills and attitude to deal with realistic situations and problems in football, and the ability to transfer theory into practice."

World champion Joachim Löw is also quick to recognise the value of the convention: "Coach education has to be well-structured, multi-layered and constantly adapted to the evolutions of the game. UEFA realised this many years ago with the introduction of the Coaching Convention." Howard Wilkinson, chairman of England's League Managers Association, agrees: "There is no substitute for a thorough and ongoing coach education programme. We recognise that this would not be possible without the hard work and the foresight that

went into the creation and implementation of the UEFA Coaching Convention across Europe." Sir Alex Ferguson adds: "It is essential that anyone looking to become a coach gets enrolled onto a coach education programme. UEFA has worked really hard to ensure that this opportunity is available right across Europe."

## More women in coaching careers

One of UEFA's current priorities is to ensure this opportunity is enhanced for female coaches. And it is starting to pay off. "I am happy to see that a larger number of women are taking the same opportunity as I did and are becoming coaches," says Sweden's Pia Sundhage, while European champion Silvia Neid adds: "Initiatives by UEFA and the German Football Association are helping to give women access to coaching careers through solid training. It's a positive development that more and more women are getting the UEFA Pro licence."

David Moyes, who has joined the tutors at a number of UEFA's Pro licence student exchanges in Nyon, stresses the need to prepare conscientiously for a challenging profession: "I would strongly advise anyone who is thinking of making football their profession to get themselves a very thorough coach education. UEFA's Coaching Convention has developed really well over the last decade or so and is there for everyone."

Iceland coach Lars Lagerbäck, also a Jira Panel member, is a firm believer that there are no shortcuts: "To become a good coach, you need education, experience, further education, a will to always learn more, a lot of hard work ... and a little bit of luck." ⚽

Coach education courses, both theory and practice, are essential for getting to grips with all aspects of the coaching profession.

**"The coaching profession is very tough these days and anyone considering taking it up needs to understand that thorough preparation is essential."**

**Roy Hodgson**  
Manager of the  
England national team





PRE-SEASON

FC PORTO  
ON TOUR

## PRE-SEASON – WHEN FOUNDATIONS ARE LAID

So you've coached, guided and nurtured your team through the season, with its vast catalogue of highs and lows. Perhaps you've won a title, captured domestic or international trophies, or clinched a hard-earned promotion to a higher division. Maybe you've masterminded recovery and survival from a seemingly hopeless position, and avoided relegation against all the odds. You've coped with myriad internal and external pressures, and come through the other side. Well-earned rest and recreation beckons – but the next campaign is already looming on the horizon ... and preparations for the new season lie in wait around the corner.

As demonstrated by FC Porto in the Netherlands last year, pre-season tours are used by many big clubs to regroup and reconnect.



**T**he 'pre-season' period of several weeks is crucial for coaches and their squads in the search for success. The coaches strive to create a team spirit and cohesion that will prove its worth through the months to come. They plan, organise, improve and define objectives, and ensure that the players are in tune with the coach's overall vision for the campaign. Coaches can, among other things, try out tactical variations, or blood youngsters to help them gather vital experience for the future. It might also be a 'getting to know you' period for a coach as he – or she – sets out on a job with a new club. As for the players, they are coming back after their own much-needed break. Working together with the coach and his staff, players sweat and graft to reach maximum fitness and attain ideal match sharpness levels – to be ready and present for the battles ahead.

#### Taking a break

Before then, at the previous season's conclusion, coaches need a 'timeout', a welcome holiday, to replenish energy levels. Each of them has their preferred ways of refuelling the engine – be it relaxation on a beach, cherished family time or walks in countryside calm. However, with fresh challenges just a short distance away, how easy is it for the coach to recuperate between seasons? Thomas Schaaf, a veteran of countless Bundesliga campaigns with Werder Bremen and Eintracht Frankfurt, highlights a particular dilemma: "As a coach, I'm thinking that the season is at an end, but I'm asking myself how my squad is set up – the squad isn't complete yet, and there's work to do during the break."

**"As a coach, I'm thinking that the season is at an end, but I'm asking myself how my squad is set up – the squad isn't complete yet, and there's work to do during the break."**

**Thomas Schaaf**  
German football coach



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I have to look at which results I can achieve in the preparation, and when."

Constant success for a coach also has an impact that needs addressing in terms of taking a rest. "The ends of the season were always exhausting, because we were always involved in something," says Sir Alex Ferguson, who, as a winner of honours galore with Manchester United FC and Aberdeen FC, is in a perfect position to make an assessment. "It always went to the last game or so, or you were in a final. I only used to take two weeks' holiday when I was a young manager. It was not until about 18 years ago that I started taking three or four weeks' holiday. That is a matter of needing it."

"You do think about the next season, even well before the break," reflects Mixu Paatelainen, who has coached extensively in Scotland, as well as managing the national team in his native Finland. "It is important to be able to switch off, and to do activities such as fishing or golf, where you can engage your mind totally, instead of dwelling on your work. But it is very difficult, because there are so many things to think about."

#### Team-bonding

Player transfers are a dominant part of every summer, with each club welcoming newcomers, sometimes in considerable numbers. Alongside the key involvement in deciding which players come in, the coach's task is to help the recruits bed in to their new surroundings. "You want to make the new players as comfortable as possible," says Paatelainen, "introduce everybody and do everything within your powers to help them settle into a new environment, a new country, a new culture."



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Juventus in Melbourne as part of their pre-season training.

**"In the last 15 years, we went abroad all the time, for commercial reasons, going to the Far East or the United States."**

**Sir Alex Ferguson**  
Former Manchester United manager



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Obviously, you have private discussions with the player regarding tactics and weekly routines – you make sure the player feels at home."

The pre-season period is an essential moment for careful team-building on and off the field, with new players looking to fit in seamlessly and quickly with their new team-mates, and make a good overall impression on coaches and colleagues. Team training camps are seen as an excellent way of bonding a squad together and getting away from daily routines. "When you're training at your own training ground," says Paatelainen, "the players go home – but at a training camp, you meet together, you have activities in the evening, social things with the players. That's where the players get to know each other really well – there's possibly one or two jokes going about, and maybe new nicknames that might stick! It's very important – that really gels the team together, because you are 24 hours together."

"Team-bonding has an important role," adds Sir Alex. "In the last 15 years, we went abroad all the time, for commercial reasons, going to the Far East or the United States. The new players would have a dinner, and they would have to sing a song, make a statement or make a bit of poetry. It was just a way of light initiation. The players are pretty good at that ... they enjoy that part."

Most clubs carefully plan their pre-season match programme, with games against lower-level opposition followed by more testing outings that might include a tournament featuring top-notch international outfits. "Today, there may be six, seven or eight close-season transfers, or perhaps even more," says Schaaf. "This means that a team has to become attuned to each other as quickly as possible. Of course, everyone wants to prove themselves against strong teams. But you need to be →



able to analyse, adapt and apply certain things, so you need the gradual increase in intensity to then be able to produce optimum performance against strong opponents." Schaaf stresses that the diligent pre-season fine-tuning and experimenting process should ideally mean that actual results at this stage ought not to be viewed by the public or media as being of fundamental importance.

#### Observing the changes

David Moyes, a coach at the highest levels with Everton, Manchester United, Real Sociedad de Fútbol and now Sunderland, says he has seen various changes in pre-season preparations from when he was a player up to the start of the new millennium. "When you came back for pre-season preparation," he explains, "you were never in great shape. The breaks were bigger for the players, and you did have to work very hard in pre-season to keep yourself in shape. Training was much harder, less with the ball at that time, much more running-

orientated, and I think that, over the years, that has changed. I would say that even in my own work as a coach, most of the work would be done now with the ball."

"What I have just seen a little bit of recently is going back to where it was before," Moyes adds, however. "I think, without doubt, that people want their players to be fit. Coaches want to do most things with the ball, but you want your players to feel fit as well. So there is a balance in getting that right."

It's July/August for a club playing an autumn-winter-spring season. The grass is green, the sun is shining, the coach is proudly watching over his charges. A time for natural optimism, because, as Sir Alex rightly points out: "You can't lose a game then." Every coach is united by the firm hope that the hard yards of planning, training and dedication put in by everyone under those summer skies will lead to the feeling of losing becoming an absolute rarity, once the serious business of getting results kicks off in earnest ... ⚽

## GETTING INTO GEAR

Even if they may find the work gruelling, players recognise the importance and benefit of pre-season training, for themselves and the team as a whole. It's the time to gradually run through the gears and attain fitness and sharpness to embark on the serious rigours of the months ahead.

Gareth Southgate, manager of the England Under-21 team, played over 500 club games at England's highest levels, and made 57 appearances for England's national team, including EURO and World Cup final rounds. He looks at his pre-season experiences:

"I think there were two phases for me – one when I was a young player, where you were looking at gaining strength for the season, and making sure that you were in good condition when you went back to training to impress the manager. So you wanted to be in a good place before the start of pre-season.

"Then, once I was a little bit older, I was always coming back from having played international matches, so you had a smaller period, maybe normally three weeks – so then it was just a question of

getting match sharpness. Your basic fitness was there, so it was very different to having a six-week pre-season, where you are starting from almost nothing, to coming in later with some sort of match play within a couple of days.

"I think, generally, it's very hard to go into the first competitive game completely fit and where you want to be. But you're also conscious that this just takes time. The matches in pre-season are never quite the same as the matches at the beginning of the season. I think everybody suffers a little bit in the first few weeks.

"I was always happy and ready to go. As long as there was long enough to switch off from the last season to think about your objectives and your goals for the next season, three weeks was always enough for me."

**"The matches in pre-season are never quite the same as the matches at the beginning of the season. I think everybody suffers a little bit in the first few weeks."**

**Gareth Southgate**  
England Under-21 manager

**"Coaches want to do most things with the ball, but you want your players to feel fit as well. So there is a balance in getting that right."**

**David Moyes**  
Sunderland manager



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**"One aspect seldom taken into consideration in my opinion is the workload that the player has already been subject to over the season. The player might not realise this at a tournament – he keeps going and takes the next step, because he has a goal ahead of him."**

**Thomas Schaaf**  
German football coach



This year, Paris Saint-Germain spent part of the summer training in Los Angeles.

## BACK FROM THE EURO

This summer, countless European players have been returning to their clubs after performing on the high-profile, high-stakes stage at EURO 2016 in France. Their moods will most likely differ quite distinctly, depending on factors such as the performance of their team in the tournament, or their own personal performances.

The pre-season period takes on a different meaning for such players who, before they resume training, are in need of rest and recovery after a tournament that follows a long and demanding previous season. They might be feeling the acute disappointment of defeat as far along the line as a semi-final or final, or may have suffered an injury during the competition.

Every club coach has a specific way of handling players who rejoin the fold after a final round with their national team. They may wish to play an important psychological role, or might also feel that it is best to leave players to themselves to reflect and recover.

Here, German coach Thomas Schaaf, whose ports of call include Bundesliga outfits Werder Bremen and Eintracht Frankfurt, gives us an insight into how he deals with his charges after a major summer tournament.

"I think that, first of all, it is important to accompany the player through the tournament, and to have contact and know how he is, to already have a prior idea. How does he feel? What's on his mind? What's important for him?"

"One aspect seldom taken into consideration in my opinion is the workload that the player has already been subject to over the season. The

player might not realise this at a tournament – he keeps going and takes the next step, because he has a goal ahead of him. Then, when a disappointment happens, he thinks: 'Now I'm tired, now I've played so many matches. I had such a big programme – and now I must have a break.'

"The player might suffer a total 'drop-down', so it's important, on the one hand, that he is then given support, and is told: 'Yes, you are now entitled to recover.' The critical question then is – how long? When must you come back? What programme must you undertake? How much can you achieve in active recovery? There are many points that you have to take into account."

What about the other side of the coin – when a player comes back from a tournament as a winner or in a positive state of mind? "Then, the player is in another phase," says Schaaf. "He has had a successful experience. He is happy, and feels well. However, he may then say: 'I have achieved something, now I have the right to recover and relax.' And then, you have to be able to steer that properly as well ..."

In addition to talking with the player and working out the best mutual solution in terms of a specific pre-season training plan, the coach can look to maximise the positive effects of a player's successful tournament from a psychological point of view. "For example," Schaaf explains, "you can tell him: 'OK, now you're on the next step – so now, I am giving you a position of more responsibility within the team.' The player may then feel: 'If I have responsibility, I'm not giving it away so quickly.'"



After the physical and emotional demands of EURO 2016, on the back of an already long season, players such as Gareth Bale and Marouane Fellaini have little time to reflect and recover as they rejoin their clubs.



# REWIND REVEALS TREND TOWARDS FAST FORWARD

The recently published technical reports on EURO 2016 and last season's Champions League and Europa League point to some clear tendencies that were confirmed by the elite coaching forums held in Nyon and Paris: possession is not a prerequisite for success, effective wing play is, and direct attacks are the order of the day.

A glance at the rear-view mirror reveals that, among the top 16 clubs in each of last season's two major club competitions, almost half the coaches (14, to be precise) were no longer on the same bench when the ball started rolling at the start of the new season. In addition, nine of the EURO 2016 coaches had parted company with their national teams. As Lars Lagerbäck said after Iceland's victory over England prompted Roy Hodgson to step down, "coaching is not the easiest".

One of the hang-ups endemic to those engaged at the top end of the coaching profession is that the vertiginous roller coaster of day-to-day work affords few opportunities to take time out, rewind the recent past and use a wide-angle lens to search for any patterns that may or may not have emerged from the previous season. UEFA offers encouragement to hit the pause button by staging the annual Elite Club Coaches Forum in

Nyon and, after EURO 2016, inviting the continent's national team coaches and technical directors to a conference in Paris for a review of the first 24-team final tournament in the history of the European Football Championship. And, with a view to sharing information and reflections among as broad an audience as possible, technical reports on each competition have been published. In theory, the two major club competitions should not be overly dissimilar. Yet Unai Emery, after steering Sevilla FC in the group stage of the UEFA Champions League and then leading the Spanish club to a third successive UEFA Europa League victory, stressed during the forum in Nyon that teams diverted from the Champions League to the Europa League frequently struggle to adjust to the biorhythms of two surprisingly different competitions. Zinedine Zidane, who led Real Madrid CF to victory in the Champions League in his first season as coach, admitted "the Champions League is a complex entity to

deal with", while technicians such as SL Benfica's Rui Vitória and FC Dynamo Kyiv's Serhiy Rebrov underscored the coaching challenges pegged to the need to combine high-profile, high-intensity European fixtures with much lower-key domestic games. Flipping the same coin to a EURO perspective, Northern Ireland's Michael O'Neill was not alone in feeling proud of the performance by players who had never experienced Champions League football and could therefore have been excused for falling short of the intensity levels required at the top end of the international game.

Despite the diverse personalities of the three competitions, it was not mission impossible to weave threads of different hues into an interesting texture. Hein Vanhaezebrouck, who led KAA Gent into the Champions League knockout phase last season, remarked in Nyon: "One of the things we saw at EURO was – it's becoming more and more visible, in fact – that you have two ways of playing: the dominant way of playing, and the defensive way →



of playing where you don't worry about giving the ball to the opponent. As a small team, the normal thing is to give the ball to the opponent. But I dared to do it the other way. In almost every game, even away to Valencia and Zenit, we had dominance."

The issue of 'dominance' via possession has been a perennial debating point during a period when Champions League titles have see-sawed between teams with possession-based philosophies and teams who have been comfortable without the ball. The technical report mentions that the group stage of the 2015/16 competition suggested that the gap between philosophies was narrowing. Teams enjoying greater possession won 40 games, while 35 were won by teams who had less of the ball. In other words, a greater share of possession was translated into victory 53% of the time, a marginal majority. Possession then became more productive in the knockout rounds (13 wins and eight defeats) to produce a final balance of 53:43 in favour of the teams with a greater share of the ball.

#### To dominate or not to dominate

At the same time, the technical report questions definitions by signalling that only four participants (FC Barcelona, FC Bayern München, Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester United FC) could comfortably be described as 'possession teams' in the sense that they had more than 50% of the ball in each and every one of their matches. By contrast, half the participants registered variations of 20 percentage points or more between their maximum and minimum possession figures – among them the two Madrid sides who disputed the final in Milan where, contrary to preconceived notions about 'possession play' and 'direct attacking', Club Atlético de Madrid had more of the ball than Real during all three periods of the match.

The Europa League painted a similarly chiaroscuro picture. Ten of the top 16 teams posted averages of 50% or more, yet none had a greater share of the ball in every match they played. As in the Champions League, the season's averages conceal considerable peaks and troughs – a glaring example being provided by semi-finalists Villarreal CF. The Spanish side had 67% of the ball at home to FC Dinamo Minsk and 35% away to SSC Napoli. The champions, Sevilla, had a greater share of possession in only one of their last five games.

However, the most compelling evidence was delivered in France, where only 15 of the 51 matches were won by the team dominating possession. The tendency gathered momentum during the knockout phase, when 15 games produced only four victories (27%) for the



Fernando inadvertently helps Gareth Bale's cross home to send Real Madrid into the Champions League final

teams who had more of the ball. Iceland's run to the quarter-finals was achieved via 21 minutes of possession per match. And Portugal's victorious campaign was based on a clear change of strategy. During the group stage, shares of the ball ranging from 58% to 66% failed to produce a win. The switch to a more counterattacking style in the knockout rounds entailed possession percentages which dropped into the low 40s.

"In the last decade," José Mourinho commented during the forum in Nyon, "possession has become a very important word in our world. But now, what is the importance of possession? At the moment, the numbers tell us very, very clearly that you can win football matches without possession."

The debate over the value of ball possession remains very much alive. But the 2015/16 season suggested that players are now less likely to display symptoms of frustration or panic when opponents dominate possession and demonstrated that top teams are comfortable with the ball and without it.

**Significantly, the eight teams in the Champions League who delivered the fewest crosses were all eliminated in the group stage.**

#### Spreading the wings

"What EURO showed us," said Sir Alex Ferguson, who chaired the forum in Nyon, "is that if you can defend right – like Portugal did in the final – you can win matches." "During this EURO," Mourinho added, "I saw a lot of strikers or front men not pressing the defensive lines, but compacting with the midfielders. In terms of roles, you could confuse them with midfield players because the objective of the team was to compact low, occupy spaces and get players back. I think teams were about a defensive idea, low levels of risk, and use of individual qualities to try to get a win."

"At EURO," Arsène Wenger commented, "I think everybody focused on strongly protecting the centre of the pitch. Everybody was physically better prepared. And almost everybody was very effective in breaking up counterattacks. That's why it's now difficult to see players running through midfield and that's why most teams focus on opening play to the flanks – and that's why we see more goals coming from crosses."

Data presented in the technical reports support the Arsenal manager's observations. In the knockout rounds of the Europa League, 28% of the goals could be traced to crosses or cut-backs from the wide areas. In the Champions League, goals from crosses increased by 24% in comparison with the previous season and, with goals from cut-backs also registering a 21% upturn, no less than 35% of the competition's open-play goals had their origins in supply from the wide areas. Significantly, the eight teams who delivered the fewest crosses were all eliminated in the group stage. Statistics also hinted at greater attention to quality. In 2014/15, five of the 32 Champions League contestants had bettered a 1 in 4 'success rate' in terms of deliveries reaching a team-mate. In 2015/16, no fewer than 14 teams surpassed this benchmark.

This trend was transported to France. Mixu Paatelainen, one of UEFA's technical observers at the final tournament, said: "We saw a lot of teams operating well-organised narrow defending and this underlined the need to find a way around the block, bearing in mind the difficulties of playing through it. I think that's why we saw a greater number of crosses". The final balance after the 51 matches was that about 40% of the open-play goals could be attributed to crosses or cut-backs and – as in the Champions League – quality, in addition to quantity, remained an issue. Iceland, although averaging only eight crosses per match, registered a success rate a few decimal points short of 1 in 3, while a third of the contestants bettered 1 in 4. Germany, despite delivering more crosses (29.8 per match) than any other team, were in the lower reaches of the table with a success rate of 1 in 5. Joshua Kimmich, pressed into action as right-back, posted a 23% success rate while Jonas Hector, on the left, registered 6%. Joachim Löw's team was among a majority in France who relied heavily on full-backs or wing-backs, rather than genuine wingers, for the supply of crosses – an eye-catching example being Italy's Antonio Candreva, who delivered 22 crosses from the right in the two games before injury ruled the wing-back out of the tournament.

However, one of the most striking statistics recorded in the technical report on EURO 2016 was the average of 40.76 crosses per match, compared with 26.16 at EURO 2012. The increase of 56% provided a clear indicator of the growing relevance of effective wing play as a response to rapid transitions into compact defensive blocks designed primarily to block central routes to goal. →





The coaches forum in Nyon brought together some of the top technicians in European club football

Counter-espionage

Information in the technical reports also endorsed Wenger’s views on the increasing difficulties in finding central routes to goal via solo runs or the traditional through ball. According to the report on the Champions League, as with the solo runs, a high percentage of the ‘forward pass’ successes can be associated with counterattacking, with Kevin De Bruyne’s opener for Manchester City in Paris, the opener by Fernando Torres for Atlético in Barcelona, and Atlético’s tie-winning away goal by Antoine Griezmann in Munich providing key examples.

A similar tale told in France

Counterattacking, the report notes, provided 46% of the open-play goals at EURO 2008 but, with awareness increasing, the percentage at the subsequent two tournaments has been halved. At EURO 2016, although Portugal’s victory could be attributed to the switch to a counterattacking approach, most of the successful counterattacks could be traced to late-game scenarios when opponents were pushing forward in search of a result. Very few broke the deadlock. Many of the coaches openly disclosed that they had designed game plans in accordance with scouting information on the opposition’s counterattacking potential. “As expected,” said Croatia coach Ante Čačić, “Portugal played on the counterattack. But we controlled it and didn’t allow them a chance until almost the end of the 120 minutes.” “We were ready for them,” stated his opponent, Fernando Santos, “and we set up to resist their strengths. We didn’t allow them to counterattack.” After the Group C game, Poland coach Adam Nawalka remarked: “There were times when Germany took the initiative but we gave it to them consciously to allow ourselves space to hit them on the counterattack.” “We didn’t allow Poland

to play to their strengths, to hurt us on the counterattack,” Löw responded. In those two games, 210 minutes of football produced one goal.

The price of goals

In France, the emphasis on spiking opponents’ guns certainly pushed up the price of goals. The average of 2.12 goals per game (and only 1.92 in the group stage) was well over 20% lower than the 2.61 in the Europa League or the 2.78 in the Champions League. What’s more, with deadball situations accounting for 30% of the goals at EURO 2016 (compared with 21% in the Europa League and 23% in the Champions League), the average number of open-play goals was 1.5 per game. In France, 68% of games were won by the team who scored first and no fewer than 19 of the goals that broke the deadlock were set plays.

The ratio of goals to attempts provided further proof that goals were more expensive in France. Sevilla won the Europa League by scoring once per 6.65 attempts and only two of the competition’s top 16 teams required an average of 10 or more attempts to hit the net. The Champions League registered one goal per 9.86 attempts. At EURO 2016, the average was 12.65. Whereas 9 of the 16 finalists in 2012 had required 10 attempts or fewer to score, only 5 of the 24 in France could boast that level of efficiency. Germany, for example, needed 15.43 to score (7.5 in 2012) and England 20.75.

However, the most palpable effect of rapid transitions into compact defensive blocks is a clear trend towards more direct attacking and away from over-elaborate construction. “In the modern game, you see more long balls than before,” Wenger said, “and one of the reasons for the increase is that the middle of the pitch has become so congested.” After Spain’s possession-based victories in 2008 and 2012, the extensive use of the long pass and more

The most palpable effect of rapid transitions into compact defensive blocks is a clear trend towards more direct attacking and away from over-elaborate construction.

direct attacking at EURO 2016 became an even more eye-catching feature.

Even before the ball started rolling in France, the Champions League had pointed in that direction. In 2014/15, long passes (30m or more) had accounted for only 9% of the repertoire of six teams. In 2015/16, by contrast, Paris Saint-Germain were the only team to fall below double figures. The average use of long passes over the 125-match campaign increased by 23% to 13.5. In France, only four teams (England, Germany, Spain and Switzerland) overtly played an elaborate possession-based passing game, and the percentage of long passes increased by almost one-quarter in relation to EURO 2012, to average out at 15.88 across the tournament. At EURO 2012, five of the 16 teams could claim that long passes accounted for less than 10% of their total. In France: none. In 2012, the Republic of Ireland had set the benchmark by going long in 19% of their passing. In 2016, four teams exceeded that figure, with Northern Ireland (28%) and Iceland (22%) at the head of the field.

Fast forward

Further evidence to support theories of a trend towards more direct attacking stems from analysis of goalscoring moves. As the technical report mentions, the time span of a scoring move at EURO 2016 dropped by 10.6% to 10.77 seconds, while the average number of passes in the build-up also fell, to 3.73. This echoed the downward trend registered in the Champions League, where the average

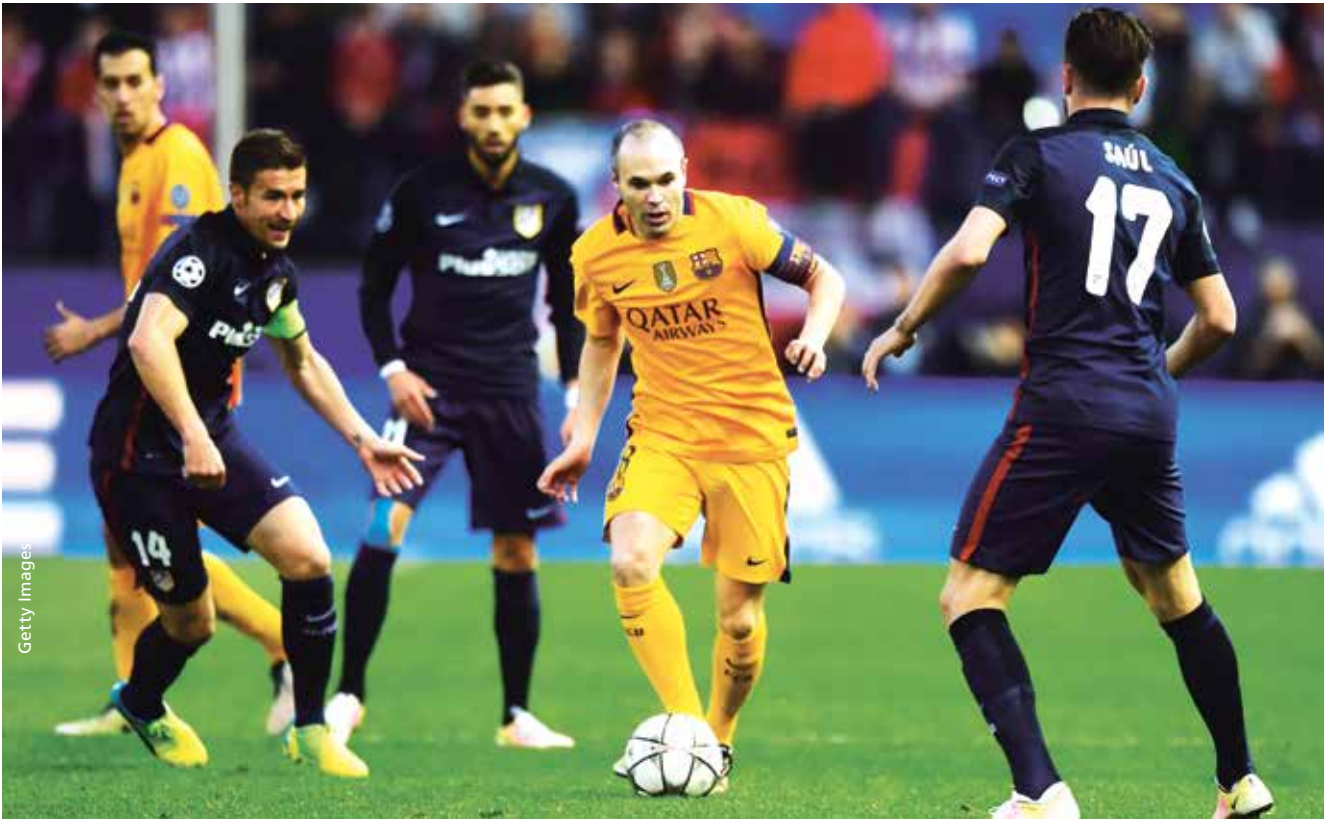


Daniel Sturridge’s spectacular curled finish put Liverpool ahead in the first half of the Europa League final

goalscoring move had a duration of 11.51 seconds and involved an almost identical figure of 3.74 passes.

Interestingly, the champions, Real Madrid, changed radically from season to season, with the duration of their successful attacks dropping from 13.83 to 7.75 seconds and the number of passes from 5.13 to 2.43, whereas silver medallists Atlético Madrid – with a greater reputation for direct attacking – required 15.06 seconds and 5.81 passes.

Among the wide variety of topics addressed by the technical reports, one of the most striking features revealed by the rewind of 2015/16 is a notable trend towards the use of the fast-forward button. ⚡







Cristiano Ronaldo rises high to head Portugal in front against Wales in the EURO 2016 semi-finals

Getty Images

# PARIS AND BEYOND

Europe's national team coaches met in the French capital on 12 September to discuss what they had learnt from UEFA EURO 2016.

**W**ith the rapid transition to World Cup qualifying, it is understandable that for many EURO 2016 is a thing of the past. But it would be foolish to consign it to memory without taking stock and seeing what takeaway messages it has to offer the coaching fraternity in particular. That was the mission statement when UEFA invited national team coaches, technical directors and coach education specialists to a conference in Paris – where else? – on 12 September.

The starting point was a selection of information culled from the technical report, copies of which were distributed hot off the press to the conference attendees. The full report is also available in various languages on UEFA.org. Some of the topics – such as the pros and cons of fielding a settled team or rotating the full squad – were then carried into a round-table session. “As everybody says, with a national team you can’t sign players,” Wales manager Chris Coleman said. “So it’s about

getting the best out of the players you have. In my case, I had outstanding talents like Gareth Bale and Aaron Ramsey, so I tried to set up a team that would get them into possession as much as possible and encourage them to do as much damage as possible.”

Iceland co-coach Lars Lagerbäck stressed: “We tend to look only at the final tournament. But our preparations were over a period of two years or so, since we started the qualifying rounds. Before the EURO, we had the full squad together for a very limited number of days, so our campaign was down to the good basic organisation that we had already put in place.”

Lagerbäck also outlined the ins and outs of the co-coaching formula that he had employed with Sweden and, alongside Heimur Hallgrímsson, with Iceland. “It’s a formality, really,” he said. “Heimir and I get on very well together – that’s the important thing. Whether you talk about ‘head coach’, ‘co-coach’ or ‘assistant coach’ is not so relevant. Maybe it makes it easier to share the media work but, otherwise, it makes no difference.”

## Flexibility and stability

The coaches in Paris also weighed up the value of tactical flexibility. Didier Deschamps, who varied structures and personnel during the final tournament, said: “I think a coach always wants to be able to surprise the opposition or to react in accordance with a specific match situation. You always want to play to your strengths – but a squad can give you different strengths and more options when it comes to adapting to create more problems for opponents.”

Coleman, on the other hand, expressed a preference for stability. “The best Plan B,” he said, “is to get Plan A right. But if you see that your plan doesn’t work, then you make changes to look for a result.” Lagerbäck also preferred a settled structure – in Iceland’s case a classic 4-4-2. “Football is about getting into the box as often as possible – and there are

various ways of doing that. Personally, I prefer to use two strikers as I think the cooperation between them poses greater problems for defenders.” He and Coleman both underlined the importance of training-ground work on set plays which, in France, accounted for around 30% of the goals. “You can score with fantastic creative play like Barcelona,” commented Coleman, “but that’s not the only way. A while ago, we were conceding too many goals from set plays and crosses and we’ve been successful in cutting that down. We work on organisation and delivery – which can be tedious for the players. But we make sure they know individual roles and that’s a good investment.”

During the final session in Paris, UEFA’s chief technical officer, Ioan Lupescu, invited European champion Fernando Santos to review the reasons for Portugal’s success. Man-management strategies emerged as key features, with Santos outlining his search for the right balance between youth and experience and his successful efforts in “persuading them to calm down”. He revealed that emotional responses had been difficult to control and that he had strived to stifle deep-rooted ambitions to attack with panache. “Football is very simple,” he maintained. “The aim is to score and not concede. The players wanted to throw everything forward but I helped them to become more focused and pragmatic. We didn’t change the set-up that much but we sat back a little more and didn’t allow ourselves to get caught too high up the pitch.”

Asked by Lupescu to trace his own development as a coach, he responded: “As a coach in today’s game, it is essential to be trusted by the players. Over the years, you develop your capacity to read and understand the game. You need to embrace technology and you need to be able to transmit all the knowledge that you have acquired.” Those qualities were evidently crucial in his run to Portugal’s first major trophy. 🏆

## Homage to Vicente del Bosque

“Success changes a lot of people,” Sir Alex Ferguson said on stage in Paris. “But it has not changed Vicente del Bosque. Even after all his successes, he has retained the same humility. He not only won titles but he also did it in style.” After three domestic titles and victory in two UEFA Champions Leagues, one UEFA Super Cup and one Club World Cup with Real Madrid CF, followed by eight years, a World Cup crown and a European Championship trophy at the helm of Spain, Del Bosque’s retirement was honoured by his coaching colleagues, who gave him a standing ovation as UEFA presented him with a specially commissioned photobook. With trademark humility, he said: “A coach is only worth what his players are worth. The only advice I would pass on is that behaviour is important. No matter what, a coach has to remain calm and collected in order to take optimal decisions.” Gracias, Vicente!



Sportsfile





## HOW TO REMEDY THE RELATIVE AGE EFFECT?

Whether you were born at the beginning or the end of the year can have a huge influence on your future football career. Known as the relative age effect, this problem is now being tackled by a growing number of coaches.

**B**ob Browaeys remembers a slightly built, dark-haired teenager who first came to his attention nearly a decade ago. "He was small – maybe 45 kilos and one metre 60 – and he was absolutely not one of the biggest talents," says Browaeys, head of Belgium's youth national teams. "Racing Genk didn't give him a contract."

The identity of that young hopeful? Yannick Carrasco, today a highly valued 23-year-old attacking midfielder with Belgium and Club Atlético de Madrid, and a scorer in last season's UEFA Champions League final.

Carrasco was one of the lucky ones – a lightweight hopeful who overcame big odds as a beneficiary of the Royal Belgian Football Association's programme for 'future' talents. He was in the first intake in 2008, and, out of the blue, a pathway opened up for him. "He was playing for the future team and there was a scout from Monaco who saw him playing and he went there when he was 18 years old," Browaeys explains.

Many others like Carrasco – late bloomers, born in the second half of the year – are less fortunate in combating a phenomenon which presents them with an uphill struggle during the crucial formative years of their development: the relative age effect.

Studies have repeatedly shown that young players born in the early months of the year hold a significant advantage. In short, early-maturing players are usually bigger, stronger and quicker than their peers, and thus more likely to be selected by clubs or representative sides. They therefore receive more top-level training while, in the meantime, many of their smaller, younger contemporaries lose heart from competing against more physically able opponents and drift away. Browaeys offers a sobering estimate: "I am convinced we are still losing 25% of the talent because of this problem."

The statistics highlight the bias towards early-maturing players. A mere scan of the squads at this year's European Under-17 Championship final tournament in Azerbaijan in May is a good starting point. From a pool of 288 players across the 16 teams involved, only 24 (a miserly 8.33%)

were born in the last quarter of the year. By contrast, 135 – 46.88% – were born in the first quarter.

Overall, 69.45% were born in the first half of the year. Of the two finalists, Portugal had 10 players born between January and March (out of 18), and Spain even more – 12. The Spanish produce wonderful technical footballers but, as Ginés Meléndez, technical director of the Royal Spanish Football Federation, says: "It's true that those born in the first months of the year are stronger for the championships that are played in May and June."

### Body of evidence grows

Two other striking statistics come from English football: 1) 75% of players in Premier League academies this season came from the first six months of their age groups (which means September–February birthdays, in the exceptional case of England); 2) at U9 and U10 level, boys born in the final quarter of the year were 5.6 times less likely to earn entry into the junior ranks of English lower-league sides than those born in the first quarter.<sup>1</sup> →



These stats are just the tip of the iceberg. Among the many academic studies focused on this issue are papers showing the existence of a relative age effect throughout the history of the German Bundesliga<sup>2</sup> and in Spanish league football during the period 2008–11.<sup>3</sup> Even at FC Barcelona, where small players like Xavi Hernández, Lionel Messi and Andrés Iniesta have famously flourished, statistical evidence is there: it is just a little illustration, but 22 of the 30 La Masia graduates to have represented Barcelona during this current decade have birthdays in the first half of the year.

One man who would not be surprised by any of this is Professor Werner Helsén, UEFA training expert, sport scientist and professor in performance training and coaching at the University of Leuven in Belgium. He began researching the relative

age effect in the 1990s and says: “This is a big issue which is still underestimated and it results in a huge drop-out of potentially very talented children. In one of our studies, we compared ten big European countries over a ten-year period and we could easily see that in 2010, the relative age effect was even bigger than before.”<sup>4</sup>

For Helsén, FIFA’s decision in 1997 to switch the first month of selection from August to January, which had the effect of aligning it with the school system across most of Europe, compounded the problem as it meant that “children both at school and in the club were either advantaged or disadvantaged”.<sup>5</sup>

The relative age effect, he adds, is about much more than physical growth. He cites a paper, due for publication in 2017, which proffers evidence of the relative age effect in chess. Cognitive maturation is a factor

and there are psychological aspects to consider too. “Early-born children who are older get different expectations from the teachers and coaches,” Helsén explains. “It typically means that if you as a teacher expect more from me as a student then I as a student will do whatever I can to meet your expectations, while children born at the end of the year who don’t get the same psychological support are not challenged.”

#### A French view

When France won last season’s European Under-19 Championship, their squad featured “63% players born in the first half of the year and 37% in the second”. These are the words of François Blaquart, technical director of the French Football Federation, and a man quite aware of the injustices created by the relative age effect.



The physiological differences between children born at the start and the end of the year can be significant, and they can have a lasting impact on future sporting careers.

Getty Images



Press Association Images

Felix Platte (1.90m at 18 years old) and Jay Dasilva (1.64m at 16) looked unevenly matched as they went head to head in the UEFA Youth League in September 2014, but it was Chelsea FC who went on to beat FC Schalke 4-1.

## Dealing with the relative age effect at grassroots level

By Ivan Draškić, coach of FC Požega in Serbia

“I work with boys aged between 10 and 14 and it’s certainly noticeable at this level, especially with the 10-year-olds. The older boys have an advantage in both physical and psychological terms. This can mean, however, that they don’t always look for different solutions during a game and it can stop them progressing.

A fundamental principle of football is competition and unfortunately even with this age, the competitive element is considered important by most of the people involved – players, coaches, parents, spectators. As a coach it means I am working against the expectations of others, but I still try to implement my methods.

If a boy finds himself in a situation where he feels inferior, because of his size, it does affect his confidence and this is a problem for his development. It’s important to strike a balance, therefore, between what you believe a boy can become and what he is at this moment in time.”

“It takes time for a player to blossom,” he reflects. “There are certain ages where you can’t tell. Who is the future Messi at 13 or 14? In France I’ve seen players we were calling the new Zidane at 16 and at 18 they were nowhere to be seen.”

For Blaquart it is an ‘ethical problem’ when youngsters are denied the opportunity to blossom. It is a waste too. “At that age, youngsters are often playing different sports and a good footballer is often also good at tennis or handball. There are players who, because football doesn’t choose them, leave for other sports where they can reach a high level.”

One solution on Blaquart’s part has been to extend the French Football Federation’s talent detection programme until the age of 17. “We estimate that, between 13 and 17, youngsters are in a development stage in which the physiological differences can be as wide as four years for boys of the same age,” he explains.

The French federation requires its talent spotters to select a number of players in the July–December category; it is a form of positive discrimination and the final search for talents among a pool of 17-year-olds is focused exclusively on those born in the

second half of the year. “We exclude those born between January and July because we feel they’ve already had the opportunity to show what they can do, so we have a repeat test for boys from the end of the year,” says Blaquart, who notes that the France team who won the European Under-17 Championship in 2015 featured “four players from this final test. They’d been overlooked by the system, which makes it satisfying.”

#### Physical gifts are secondary

Blaquart suggests other responses to the problem. He would prefer less competitive football at club level for players aged from 13 to 16, suggesting coaches inevitably favour “players who are more ready athletically”. In his view, the physical gifts are secondary. “Until 16 we look for footballers; the athlete can be developed between 16 and 20.” Additionally, he argues for more mature players to be promoted to the age category above. This happened with France’s victorious European U19 Championship side from last season – the generation of 1997 – which included two players, Kylian Mbappé and Christ-Emmanuel Maouassa, born in 1998. →



## How to measure biological maturity

Peak Height Velocity (PHV) refers to the moment when children go through their main adolescent growth spurt. For many young male footballers this begins during the Under-14 age category though early maturing players can reach puberty at U12/U13 and late maturing players at U16/U17. To measure a child's maturity timing (early/on-time/late) and predict their biological age and time of entering PHV, there are different methods used.

The widely employed Khamis Roche method takes into account a child's height (seated and standing) and weight and the average stature of their two parents to calculate adult height as well as timing of maturity. This allows coaches to gauge a player's current % of final maturity which is vital for bio-banding – grouping them according to their biological age. The test has been found to be very reliable with a mean average error from childhood to adulthood of 2.2cm and can be administered by internal staff to a large group of players.

Another non-invasive test is the Mirwald maturity offset method which is calculated by using body measurements (standing height, weight, seated height) and plotting against the Mirwald algorithms.

Professor Werner Helsen points to a third non-invasive method, proposed by Moore, for use in youth football (including age x height equation for boys). Clubs seeking more information on this should email [werner.helsen@uefa.ch](mailto:werner.helsen@uefa.ch).

A wrist X-ray is the most accurate method of assessing biological maturity in players under 18. The X-ray is assessed by an expert who can observe sizing and calcification of the bone joints to reasonably predict the child's biological age (particularly helpful when a player's date of birth is unknown).

"Clubs don't do this," he adds, "because they prefer to win trophies." This leads, he argues, to a levelling-down of talent.

### Benefits of bio-banding

This wish to challenge players who are dominant figures in their own age group is echoed across the English Channel by James Bunce, head of sports science for the Premier League. His solution is bio-banding, which involves measuring boys to predict their final height and then grouping them according to their level of physical maturity. Bunce uses the Khamis-Roche method – which factors in a youngster's sitting height and his parents' heights to estimate their adult stature. "You can still get a five foot five player and a five foot nine player but they've a much more level playing field in terms of maturity," he says.

"Bio-banding is a benefit for the early-maturing guys – bio-banding says, for this game we are stripping away the advantage you get physically and you have to come up with solutions technically, tactically, mentally. These guys suddenly feel less confident as they're being put under pressure for the first time."

The late-maturing players benefit too, obviously, and Bunce is equally sensitive to their needs, having worked previously at Southampton FC, where he helped Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, now an Arsenal FC and England winger, overcome difficulties caused by his delayed development. With the selection year running from 1 September in England, Oxlade-Chamberlain, born in August, was one of the youngest in his group.

"There was a time in his career when he almost got released for being too small," Bunce recalls. "He was technically gifted but he couldn't thrive when he was getting put into game situations because he'd get bullied physically. At Southampton we made the decision we would keep him back a year so he would develop and that kept him in the system. He said playing with that group allowed him to build his confidence and believe in himself."

In August last year Bunce helped organise the first bio-banding tournament in England, involving four clubs – Southampton, Stoke City FC, Norwich City FC and Reading FC – for boys in the 85/90% maturity category. A second tournament followed in April this year, and today at least eight clubs train with

bio-banded groups each week.

Over in the Netherlands, AZ Alkmaar have been doing the same since the beginning of the decade. The Eredivisie club's coaches measure their new arrivals when they join the academy aged 10 or 11, and each week AZ's youngsters train twice on the pitch and once in the gym with their biological age group. "It is helping us a lot," says AZ's head of youth development, Paul Brandenburg, citing the successful case of first-team players Dabney Dos Santos and Guus Til. "These players might have dropped out of the academy if we hadn't known their biological ages."

"They were younger players by their biological age throughout the youth academy and, as a result, they weren't players who were decisive during matches. We saw by their biological age they were really young compared to their team-mates, so we kept them, and over the years they developed really well and are now playing for the first team. If all clubs incorporate biological age like we do, I think the relative age effect will disappear."

### Smaller nations lead the way

Jean-François Domergue, UEFA's head of football development, encourages every UEFA member association to act to address this problem. "There's no magic recipe for talent identification, but we try to persuade the associations in our academy and development tournament projects to focus not on immediate results but on helping players to meet their own individual potential in the medium and long term," he says.

"As a result, the associations are encouraged to identify young players who fit their playing philosophy and have good technical ability, vision and game intelligence, amongst other qualities, regardless of their physical maturation."

Research highlights the fact that the relative age effect is most prevalent in larger countries, which – according to a widely held view – is the product of the bigger pools of players available. It may be more than a coincidence then that the first international tournament for 'future' talents in Europe – in April this year – featured four of the smaller nations: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark and Sweden.

As Browaeys puts it: "The biggest countries have ten times more →



Coaches are encouraged to play down the competitive stakes so as not to discourage the smallest, youngest members of the team.

Getty Images

## Late bloomers' longevity

Our table shows that in the long run, the biggest and strongest players in their mid-teens have shorter careers than their later-maturing peers. Indeed, the relative age effect is actually reversed by the time footballers – and other athletes – reach their mid-thirties.<sup>6</sup>

Dr Steve Copley, a leading researcher in athlete development at the University of Sydney, has previously identified similar occurrences in Canadian ice hockey and rugby league in Britain. "If you think about Under-15 or Under-16 level for example, it's very easy to select

the one who's got the brute strength or power – it is often predicated on advanced maturation, but actually those players are less likely to go on to make it. It is more likely to be the player who's a late maturer at 15, lean and very quick, that excels later."



potential talent than Belgium. At the highest level we cannot miss one talent.”

The event in the southern Swedish city of Helsingborg featured not just matches for the young footballers involved but also a workshop for the coaches. This was an invaluable experience for the Czech delegation present, according to Václav Černý of the Football Association of the Czech Republic. “We’ve just started with this project in the Czech Republic and I have to say that we really appreciate the experience of our foreign colleagues.”

The Czechs have now incorporated future squads at U15, U16 and U17 levels, following the lead of the other nations involved, and are now seeking to get the message across to their clubs.

In Sweden, they are further down the road in their efforts. “We started four years ago,” says Claes Eriksson, head of the Swedish Football Association’s youth department. The Swedish FA’s programme for its future talents involves four training camps for 33 players – three for each position – and Eriksson notes with satisfaction that four of his youth talents have already made their debuts in the

The goalkeeper question

The relative age effect has a particularly strong impact in certain positions – notably, goalkeeper and centre-back. Indeed, as Claes Eriksson of the Swedish Football Federation explains, the four-nation tournament for future talents in April did not include any goalkeepers. “It is very hard to find a small player who is a goalkeeper,” he says. “If you’re going to be a very good goalkeeper at the highest level, you must have some height. Maybe centre-back is also difficult to find.”

Professor Werner Helsen adds: “There’s a position-specific effect, in particular for goalkeepers, central defenders and central attackers.” To illustrate the point, at the European Under-17 Championship in May, 16 of the 32 goalkeepers had January–March birthdays; just two had October–December birthdays.

Swedish top flight: Carl Johansson at Kalmar FF, Jesper Karlsson at Falkenbergs FF, Adin Bukva at IFK Norrköping and Albin Lohikangas at Gefle IF.

A key point for Eriksson is how involvement with the future squad affects the confidence of young players – and shifts others’ perceptions of these players. “If they get the message that they’re going to Stockholm for a camp with the Swedish FA they don’t believe it – they think, ‘There are ten guys better than me in my club’,” he says. There is then a knock-on effect whereby fellow players, then coaches and even parents will ask why a certain boy is going. “This is a big positive with this project,” adds Eriksson. “Parents, coaches, members of the board – everyone is looking at the players through a different prism. It means coaches and parents are more patient with the players.”

This raises once again the question of talent identification – and the importance of looking beyond the physical attributes of young footballers. In the case of the Belgian FA there are six boxes any hopeful must tick: winning mentality; emotional stability; personality; explosiveness; understanding of the game; and body and ball control.

“It is very important we try to convince clubs not to discriminate against late-maturing players – a high performer is not the same as high potential,” says Browaey. “There are players we think will be ready when they are Under-19 or Under-21. We try to explain to our elite clubs they also have to identify high potential. Not all the players who are good at the age of nine are talented sometimes.

“It’s the reason we organise talent days and games: to say to clubs, ‘This player is always on the bench but look how much talent he has when he is playing with only the late-maturing

<sup>1</sup>Lovell R, Towson C, Parkin G, Portas M, Vaeyens R and Cobley S (2015) ‘Soccer Player Characteristics in English Lower-League Development Programmes: The Relationships between Relative Age, Maturation, Anthropometry and Physical Fitness’, PLoS ONE 10(9): e0137238. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0137238

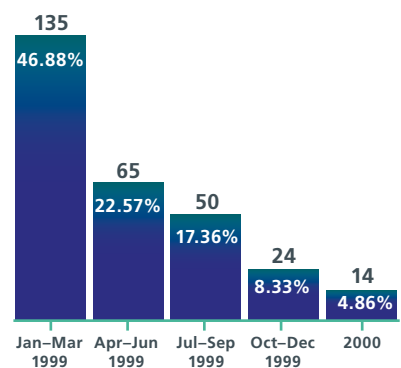
<sup>2</sup>Cobley S, Schorer J and Baker J (2008) ‘Relative age effects in professional German soccer: A historical analysis’, Journal of Sports Sciences, 26(14), 1531-1538

<sup>3</sup>Salinero JJ, Pérez B, Burillo P, Lesma ML and Herrero, MH (2013) ‘Relative Age Effect in Spanish Professional Football’, Revista Internacional de Medicina y Ciencias de la Actividad Física y del Deporte, 14(56), 591-601

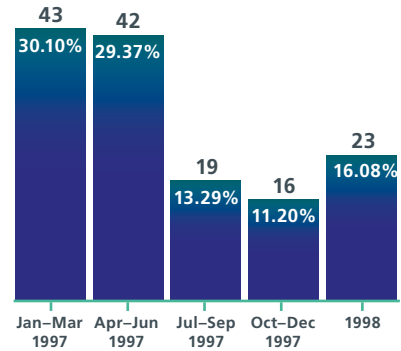
<sup>4</sup>Helsen WF, Baker J, Michiels S, Schorer J, Van Winckel J,

PLAYERS’ MONTHS OF BIRTH

2016 European Under-17 Championship final round (288 players)



2016 European Under-19 Championship final round (143 players)



players’. Then you see he is very skilful, has good insight into the game, is very explosive and has a very good game mentality. The clubs sometimes open their eyes and see.”

Williams AM (2012) ‘The relative age effect in European professional soccer: did ten years of research make any difference?’, Journal of Sports Sciences, 30(15), 1665-1671

<sup>5</sup>Helsen, W., Starkes, J., Van Winckel, J. (2000). Effect of a change in selection year on success in male soccer players. American Journal of Human Biology, 12 (6), 729-735.

<sup>6</sup>Deaner RO, Lowen A, Cobley S (2013) ‘Born at the Wrong Time: Selection Bias in the NHL Draft’, PLoS ONE 8(2): e57753. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0057753

<sup>7</sup>Gladwell, M. ‘Outliers’ (2008) Penguin Books

<sup>8</sup>Romann M, Cobley S (2015) ‘Relative Age Effects in Athletic Sprinting and Corrective Adjustments as a Solution for Their Removal’, PLoS ONE 10(4): e0122988. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0122988

Thirty years and the search for solutions goes on

Research into the relative age effect began in the 1980s in Canada, with the focus on ice hockey. Roger Barnsley, a Canadian psychologist, was the first academic to investigate the problem, his interest sparked by attending a junior hockey league game where his wife pointed out the disproportionately high number of players on the team sheet with January–March birth dates.<sup>7</sup> His ensuing research highlighted that players born in the first quartile formed 40% of all elite teams – at both national and junior level. Spool forward to the second decade of the 21st century and the problem has not gone away, even if awareness of the relative age effect has grown. When Professor Werner Helsen co-authored a 2012 paper asking if ten years of research had made any

difference to the problem in European football, the evidence highlighted “the robust nature of this phenomenon”.

Dr Steve Cobley was co-author of a 2009 meta-analytical review study which examined the prevalence and size of relative age effects across studies in 14 sports between 1984 and 2007. Based on these findings, he notes: “It seems that sport is less likely to be an activity or career pathway for relatively younger individuals, whose birth dates coincide with the last three months of an annual age-grouping strategy. With any event where power or exertion or acceleration are required during the growth and development ages, you are going to get these kinds of effects.”

It is not just football seeking solutions. In his study of the 100m trials

in Swiss athletics,<sup>8</sup> Cobley performed an experiment where times were adjusted according to the chronological age differences of the participants. He explains: “If you’ve got two kids running in a trial for 100m and they have clearly different relative ages with the same age group, such as Under-14s, then you can’t treat them the same. It is more likely that the relatively older one will run faster. However, if you correct for the chronological age difference between two runners, then you can potentially remove its influence and you are left with examining something else, e.g. technical skill. This potentially represents a better way to more accurately evaluate kids and might be more motivating for those who are relatively younger.”



The first research into the relative age effect was conducted in ice hockey in Canada in the 1980s.

Getty Images



**"A manager needs to be a people person – you've got to like people, you've got to care for people"**

ROY HODGSON

## "FOOTBALL COACHING IS NOT A SCIENCE, IT'S A GAME"

After 40 years of club and national team coaching in nine different countries, former England manager **Roy Hodgson** has a wealth of experience to share with the next generation of elite coaches. Taking questions from UEFA Pro licence students at a recent coach education student exchange in Nyon, he covered a wide variety of topics, from his first steps on the coaching ladder to the delicate task of dealing with the media.

**I** was very lucky in my education with the English FA in the 60s and 70s. They simplified things for us coaches in those days. We didn't have anything like the wealth of information you have now and we didn't work as hard to get our qualifications as you do to get your Pro licences today. But we had to follow very closely the simple methodology that the English FA, under Allen Wade and Charles Hughes, had set up. They taught us good habits. They taught us a lot about how we should approach a group: where we should stand, how we should take care of our appearance, our coaching manner, that we should be sympathetic when we coached. They didn't want people screaming and shouting abuse at players; they wanted us to coach in a way that would show our sympathy for the players.

They were very strong on words like energy, enthusiasm and passion, and they gave us very simple tasks. They said: "When you're doing your coaching session, first you must prepare it in detail. Second, before you start coaching, you need to

observe. When you've observed and you've found something you think needs to be said, that's when you go in and give your instruction."

They always wanted us to build training sessions up. You started at a certain level and then you moved it on so the players didn't get bored just doing the same thing over and over again. That led to progression. They also told us everything we did had to be with opposition. Now, of course, I don't do absolutely everything with opposition. Let's say your topic was coaching your full-backs to go forward and help out in attacking situations.

First you had to think about what sort of practice to do to create the opportunity to coach the player. What sort of things am I going to be looking for in the session? What sort of things will the full-back need to know? Then I observe carefully and try to find a situation where it's valid for me to go in and coach. When I've found that situation, I stop the game, I coach in the way that I've been taught to coach, and then the game moves on.

### Changing attitudes

I don't know that players have changed that much deep down. I think society changes. Today, players are much more serious, much more professional in some ways. For example, if I take the England team, the way the players look after themselves, the way they think about their diet, the extra training they want to do themselves without you having to ask them, the seriousness with which they approach the training sessions, the intensity they're prepared to work at – all of those things are as good if not better than anything I've experienced in the past.

When I first went to Italy from the Swiss national team, what struck me was the seriousness with which the players approached things, the enormous attention to the physical side of the game, the importance of the conditioning trainer. We hadn't paid that degree of attention to that. We thought that the work in training every day would take care of it. I saw another level of professionalism and I see an even greater level of professionalism today. →





**Getting your message across**  
Unless you can see in matches the effects of the work you're doing in the training sessions – such as the tactical patterns and ideas that you have in possession and out of possession, even if they might not be succeeding – then something's wrong with the way you're preparing it. One of the things I've learned in the last two years was overestimating players' understanding of exactly what you want. You have to make certain that they themselves take ownership of the situation. In the last couple of years [with England], we filmed training sessions, we filmed the games in wide angle, and we started having meetings in smaller groups. The goalkeeper and the defenders, the midfield players, the attackers.

Sometimes defenders and midfield players, sometimes midfield players and attackers. We went through things, but we got them to tell us back what we'd been trying to tell them. We'll work on it in training, but then I want the player in the unit meetings, when he sees it, to say: "I should have gone out there, I should have gone quicker there," or "I've gone too fast, I should have slowed down there – I've gone so quickly that the guy's gone past me before I can hold him up with the ball." That type of thing. We got the players to take ownership.

**Managing the media**  
It's important you have someone with you who you trust, and who understands the media world, who can give you some

advice before you go into press conferences. I think it's dangerous, directly after a game, to go out with the emotions that you're feeling because you can make mistakes. You need to settle down. It could just be your assistant coach, who says: "Don't forget, be careful." At top level a media officer might tell you what's being said in social media, so you don't get caught out.

The television is the most important media because people see your face and they hear the nuances in your voice, and they feel to some extent what they think you are feeling. The written press is very dangerous. They can take the words that you say and make it sound very, very different to how it actually was. But you can't beat them. You've got to try to avoid the temptation to get some sort of revenge the next time you're in front of that media group when you've read something you don't like.

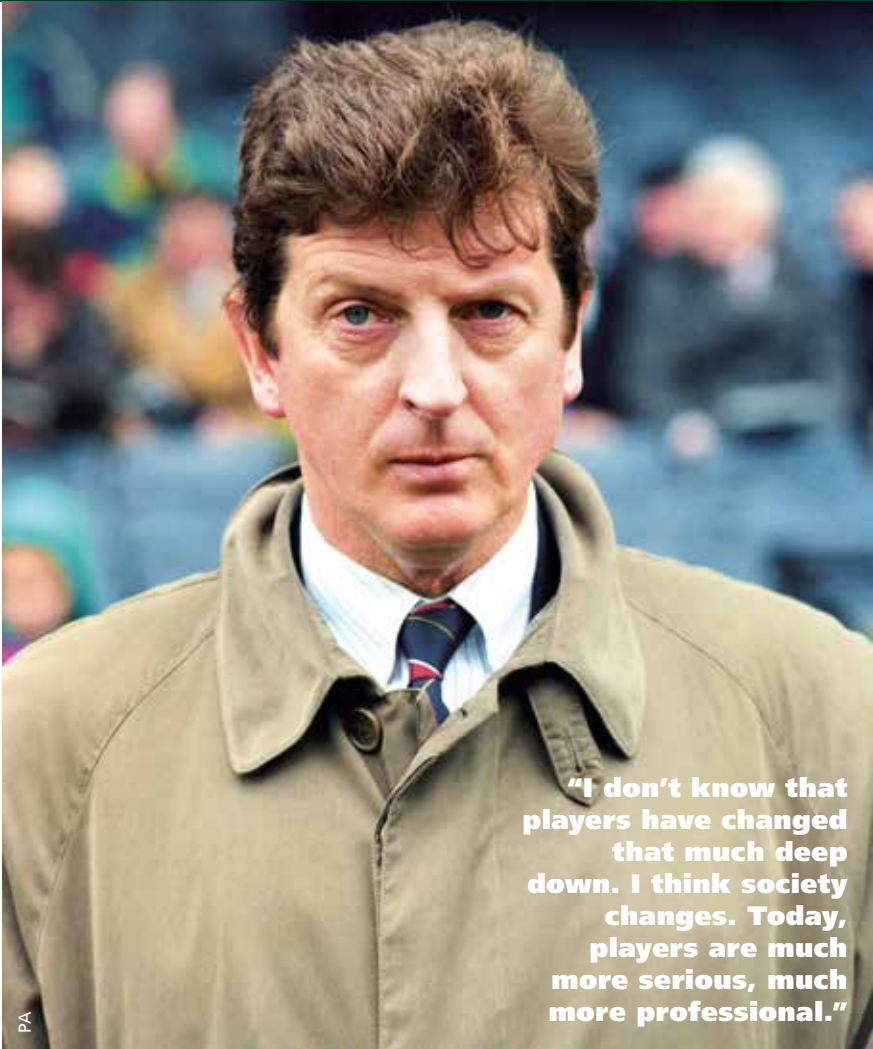
Most importantly, speak through the mass media to three very important groups of people: your players, your fans, and the owner [of the club] and other people above you. Use the media to get your message out. Be aware that whatever is written, or whatever you say, whether those people like it or not might be the most important thing. They'll be watching every word you say, and they can be very, very disappointed sometimes in your comments to the media. You can lose them by saving yourself with the mass media, protecting yourself.

**ROY HODGSON  
CAREER FACTFILE**

Roy Hodgson has managed a number of club and international sides during his long career in football:

Halmstads BK (SWE)	1976-1980
Bristol City FC (ENG)	1982
IK Oddevold (SWE)	1982
Örebro SK (SWE)	1983/1984
Malmö FF (SWE)	1985-1989
FC Neuchâtel Xamax (SUI)	1990-1992
Switzerland	1992-1995
FC Internazionale Milano (ITA)	1995-1997
Blackburn Rovers FC (ENG)	1997/1998
FC Internazionale Milano (ITA) (caretaker)	1999
Grasshopper Club (SUI)	1999/2000
FC Copenhagen (SWE)	2000/2001
Udinese Calcio (ITA)	2001
United Arab Emirates	2002-2004
Viking FK (NOR)	2004/2005
Finland	2006/2007
Fulham FC (ENG)	2007-2010
Liverpool FC (ENG)	2010/2011
West Bromwich Albion FC (ENG)	2011/2012
England	2012-2016

**First coaching experience**  
I didn't even have an assistant coach when I went [to Halmstads BK in 1976], so it's a very different world to the world we're talking about, and certainly the world I've just come from with the England national team. In those days from the moment the players arrived I did everything – I took the warm-up, I took the cool-down, I did the physical training, I did the technical training, I did the tactical training. It's a bit different today. Going into a job today you'll be thinking: "Who am I going to take with me? What people do I need?" You need a balance in the people around you. People travel in groups – you don't just appoint a manager; you appoint a team and they become very, very close. I've never done that, and I'm not certain it's such a good thing. You might lose people in the club who could help you, because they've got a good knowledge of the club. Over the years, the people that I've inherited at



**"I don't know that players have changed that much deep down. I think society changes. Today, players are much more serious, much more professional."**



Roy Hodgson is thrown in the air as Halmstads BK celebrate their first Swedish league title in 1976.

football clubs have turned out to be not only good coaches but very good people. I've benefited from them. It would have been a mistake to go in and say: "Right, all of you out."

**The qualities of a top coach**  
If you believe in your coaching skills, you've got to believe that you'll make the team better. Even though they might not be as good, player for player, as the top teams, you'll make them into a better unit. The top side might have better individuals but they might not be a better team. When you're coaching, you've got to be prepared to take some risks, because football and football coaching is not a science, it's a game. You never know quite what's going to happen in the game. You've got to sell everything you do to the players. You've got to make certain that the players understand it and they agree with it and then it's well worth taking risks sometimes.

You need a philosophy of leadership. A manager must be able to transmit to his players his passion and his enthusiasm for the game – and that takes energy. I would never employ anybody, if I was a chief executive or owner of a football club, that I didn't think had those qualities: energy, enthusiasm and passion.  
The manager must always be thinking of the players and putting himself in their shoes: what's best for them, not what's best for me. You need to be a people person – you've got to like people, you've got to care for people. Bobby Robson was fantastic for that. That's a great skill. When they lose a game, you've got to feel sympathy with them, and not anger that they've let you down.  
There's a lot more. One is resilience, being able to bounce back; another is humility. It's very easy in football to get carried away – a sense of perspective is important in coaching, just as it is in life. 🌱





# LEARNING THE GAME

Two recent student exchange events in Nyon have helped budding coaches move a step closer to obtaining the UEFA Pro licence.

The lecture hall may not be somewhere you would normally expect to find some of the world's top players, but for those looking to stay in football after ending their playing days, it is becoming an increasingly popular destination. That is thanks in part to the UEFA coach student exchange programme, which is equipping the next generation of coaches with the skills they need to obtain their UEFA Pro licence and make a career in the game after hanging up their boots. The likes of Fabio Cannavaro, Andriy Shevchenko, Filippo Inzaghi and Marcel Desailly are among the programme's successful alumni who, in the short term at least, have swapped the pitch for the pen as they look to broaden their knowledge.

UEFA is committed to helping train the new wave of coaches, and its four-day student exchange events at UEFA headquarters in Nyon

give Pro licence students from member associations the opportunity to share experiences on a European level and participate in practical and theoretical sessions to deepen their understanding of the profession.

Since the exchange programme began in 2011, students have also profited from the insights of experienced top-level coaches, with David Moyes, Georges Leekens, Gareth Southgate and Ottmar Hitzfeld having all attended as special guests. So far this term, Thomas Schaaf and Roy Hodgson have made themselves available to pass on their knowledge, with Q and A sessions proving particularly popular as the coaches are quizzed on every aspect of the job.

"This programme allows attendees to benefit from access to some of Europe's top coach educators, but also to meet and interact with

**"This programme allows attendees to benefit from access to some of Europe's top coach educators, but also to meet and interact with students from other countries"**

**Ioan Lupescu**  
UEFA chief technical officer

students from other countries and use the opportunity to broaden their coaching experiences by exchanging opinions and examples of best practice," UEFA chief technical officer Ioan Lupescu said.

More than 150 students from Moldova, Poland, Scotland and Ukraine (October) and Belgium, Denmark, England and Kazakhstan (November) came to the most recent courses in Nyon. Topics addressed in the classroom included trends in the game, decision-making, team-building and elite youth player development, before the focus shifted to the training ground at the Colovray sports centre across the road from UEFA HQ.

The first of the practical teaching sessions for the November course was inspired by that night's UEFA Champions League tie between Manchester City and Barcelona, with an emphasis on the two teams' different attacking styles and how to combat them. Grouped by association, the student coaches were asked to prepare and run a 45-minute practical session involving one head coach, one assistant coach and one goalkeeping coach, using video clips to illustrate the objective of the training session. Coaches were given ten minutes to introduce the exercises, explaining what they wanted to train (i.e. the goal of the session), how they wanted to do it and why they wanted to do it that way. Each session was reviewed, giving the coaches the chance to evaluate their performance. The different groups were also asked to analyse the evening's match and conduct a ten-minute presentation, including video clips, illustrating the teams' strengths and weaknesses.

Further subjects covered by UEFA's technical instructors included learning from the best and a talk from former Republic of Ireland international Packie Bonner on the goalkeeper coach. The aim is to balance theory and practice, and the students were on their feet to conduct flash interviews during a session on handling the media. A discussion on match-fixing, meanwhile, highlighted that getting the most out of players and a squad is not the only challenge facing coaches.

The UEFA Pro licence is the highest level certification available to coaches, and can be obtained after completion of the UEFA A and B licences. Head coaches must have the Pro licence (or the highest licence available if the association is not a member of the UEFA Coaching Convention at Pro level) in order to work for a top-division club, or in the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League.

The student exchange programme has become an important step towards achieving that target. Since 2011, some 21 events have

taken place, with an impressive figure of 1,800 students having attended courses on the UEFA campus. Coach educators from the different associations also participate in the programme, and for the Football Federation of Kazakhstan's technical centre director, Kairat Adambekov, who was at the November course, there was plenty to pass on to colleagues back home. "We had 21 students and five coach educators there and we are really benefiting from what was a great experience," he said. "We received lots of information and knowledge about organising, structuring, conducting and analysing training and have had the chance to communicate with colleagues from Belgium, Denmark and England. The course really helped both our students and our educators to develop."

For Peter Rudbæk, who delivered a talk on possession at the November course and is a technical director of the Danish Football Association, the international perspective that the students gain from the programme should serve them well in the future. "The students really benefit from being with other countries and seeing what they do," said Rudbæk, a member of UEFA's Jira Panel, the group of respected technicians helping nurture the next generation. "The Danish students we've brought here always leave happy and go home with new information and a more international view on things."

Since 2011, some 1,800 student coaches have taken part in the UEFA coach education exchange programme.







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## FERNANDO SANTOS

## "THE KEY NOW IS TO CONTINUE BEING SUCCESSFUL"

Two months after guiding Portugal to victory at UEFA EURO 2016, Fernando Santos joined his peers at the UEFA Conference for European National Team Coaches in Paris on 12 September. Fielding questions from coaches from all over Europe, he talked about a range of topics, from pre-tournament preparations to changing tactics and getting the balance right in the squad.

**"P**ortugal weren't one of the favourites to win the EURO. The favourites, as always, were Spain, because they were the holders, and Germany, who had just won the World Cup, followed by traditionally strong footballing countries such as Italy and hosts France. But I always said that Portugal were in with a chance. I think every coach at the tournament had that ambition."

### Perfect blend

"This Portuguese team had some experienced players – 30, 31, 32-year-olds – who were very important, but more than 50% of the squad had never been to a EURO before, and some had only three or four caps to their name. I thought that if I could find the right way of combining the great experience and quality of players like Cristiano Ronaldo and Pepe with the youthful exuberance of the younger generation, we'd be in with a shout. I've always thought that the balance between experience and youth is very important. The young players have the quality – including the ability to learn tactics – otherwise they wouldn't be playing at international level. They were there on their own merits. Those young Portuguese players bring with them the ability to improvise and take risks, which is very important for a team."

### Pre-tournament preparations

"Training was due to begin on 23 May, a week after the Portuguese Cup final, but I gave all the players an extra week off before reporting for

national team duty. Indeed, Ronaldo only arrived on 6 or 7 June – a week or so after we'd got together. Physical and mental recovery was much more important, given the players' heavy workloads, so we gave them a bit of freedom. We then replicated the experience of playing every three days. We had three friendly games with the same amount of recovery time between them so that the players could get used to it. We made the most of our training sessions, working on tactics and strategies – and, to a much lesser extent, aspects of fitness. Having only three days of rest [between games] really restricted the team's ability to recover, so we had to try to find a way of recovering while training and recovering well. Players have free time after games in Portugal, and in France we were always careful to replicate that. We thought it would be good to let the players mentally unwind, that giving them a mental rest would help them in some way overcome any physical problems they might have. Then there's the issue of team spirit, without which it's difficult for things to go well. And in this respect, things went really well. To be crowned champions of Europe ahead of France, Germany, Spain and all of those other teams, things needed to go really well."

### Road to the final – the group stage

"We went to France to see if we could win the competition. I don't think it could have been any other way. We had to have a specific objective to focus on. We were theoretically the →





SANTOS  
CAREER  
FACTFILE

1987-1994	Estoril Praia
1994-1998	CF Estrela da Amadora
1998-2001	FC Porto
2001-2002	AEK Athens FC
2002-2003	Panathinaikos FC
2003-2004	Sporting Clube de Portugal
2004-2006	AEK Athens FC
2006-2007	SL Benfica
2007-2010	PAOK FC
2010-2014	Greece
2014-	Portugal

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favourites in our group, but ours was the only group that had two teams from the top ten of the FIFA rankings [Austria and Portugal]. The two games in which we had the most possession were the first two – 66% in the first [1-1 against Iceland] and 59% in the second [0-0 against Austria]. Along with Spain, we were the team that attacked the most, had the most shots and made the most crosses, but we didn’t win, and our opponents must be given credit for that. They stopped us from playing our game. After the first two draws, things were tricky, but the hardest game was against Hungary. We went behind on three occasions, and we came back all three times. We played in a typically Portuguese style, it was the game in which we ran the least, and it ended up being a bit chaotic. The result was pretty good – 3-3. A great game, and fortunately Ronaldo drew us level twice. He was crucial. This was very important for us, because in some ways it was difficult to control the players. They really wanted to win and forgot that our main objective when we arrived in France was to get past the group stage. We knew a draw would be enough for us to reach the next stage, and I wasn’t able to control the players for the last 10 to 15 minutes. They kept going for goal, trying to score in any way possible, but I wanted them to calm down because we could have gone out. I think this game woke the players up and made the team stronger, because it made them more realistic – not stronger in terms of individual technical quality or the concepts of the game, but more realistic. The next round was completely different. With no points at stake, from then on every game was a final. It was important for me to make my players see this.”

Road to the final –  
the knockout stage

“Croatia were really difficult opponents. They were one of the favourites, and it was because of them that Spain had finished second in their group. That game was one of the most tactical of the tournament. It wasn’t very attractive to watch, and there weren’t many goalscoring opportunities, but tactically speaking there were two really strong teams that cancelled each other out. From then on, we kept growing. The games and the opponents we faced were always tough. Poland were good at counterattacking, with two really good forwards, and Wales were a real surprise package. They were great from dead-ball situations, and it took a lot of analysis to see how we could stop them and cancel them out, because they’d won three games in a row. I spent two hours trying to figure out how to beat them. And the final – playing against

France in France – couldn’t have been trickier, but we always believed. I had told my players after the Austria game that we would not be returning home until 11 July. I didn’t just say that for the sake of it: it was what the players and I truly believed.”

The final

“Ronaldo’s injury was a really important moment. I tried to reorganise the team, putting Nani in the centre and [Ricardo] Quaresma on the right, but what I really wanted was to try to get through to half-time. It was a difficult moment for everyone – we’d had a clear strategy, and that had to be changed. It was difficult. You need to stop and think and then try to organise. I needed the half-time break to speak to my players – to explain what we would change and what we would try to do. I needed to instil in them something very important – that we had lost the best player in the world and were facing one of the best teams in Europe, if not the world, and only by playing as a team could we win. There was no point in thinking about what Cristiano might have done. We had to try to win the game as a team. I asked them to give an extra 10%. I said to them – I remember this perfectly – that 100% was not enough and they needed to give 110%. France are a fantastic team, and only by playing at 110% could we beat them.”



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Changing tactics

“We sat back a bit deeper [after the group stage], but no player was going to change from their fundamental role – their defensive and attacking duties. The way the team was set up on the pitch didn’t change overnight, because it was the result of all the work we had put in up to that point. Twelve of our players had never taken part in a EURO before, so we had to carry on our work from the qualifying stage and our pre-tournament preparations. We were having problems, getting caught out by opponents because we were playing too high up the pitch. We understood that, given the characteristics of our players, it would be best to withdraw a bit and play further back. That would make our opponents play differently and we would have more space. We would take advantage of the natural talents of our players.”

Philosophy and pragmatism

“All managers have a preferred formation or style of play, but we’re all conditioned by the players available to us, without changing our philosophy. Many people in Portugal were talking about this and saying that Portugal traditionally played with a 4-3-3 formation. When I became coach, we changed to 4-4-2, and yet I had always been a coach who used a 4-3-3 formation more. When I was coaching the Greek national team I used that formation, because of the characteristics of the players →

“Life is about growing and evolving – not just as a manager, but as a human being – and we adapt as part of a natural evolution.”

Fernando Santos was presented with an order of merit from the president of Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, at a ceremony held in Porto on 31 August.



available to me. However, Cristiano is no longer a left-winger in the traditional sense; he's more of a forward. I thought that, as I had the best player in the world, if I could get the most out of his qualities, I could get results. Looking back, my dream was for the team to play a certain way, but it was clear that with the players I had this wouldn't work, so I had to make changes."

**Growing and evolving**

"Life is about growing and evolving – not just as a manager, but as a human being – and we adapt as part of a natural evolution. We start off thinking that we know everything, and we need to understand that evolution is natural and we have to grow alongside it. Football has changed radically – not the players, their qualities or their idea of the game, but the rhythm of the game, the space on the pitch and [the question of] how to manage it. The increased role of science in football has raised training levels and led to games being tighter and more difficult. Coaches – myself included – have had to adapt to these new aspects. What I was required to do as a coach 30 years ago, I don't do today; I'm a completely different manager. Thirty years ago, pre-season took place on the beach. Twenty years ago, a typical warm-up was just running around the pitch for 20 or 30 minutes. Nowadays, nobody does this. We coaches



have to change and follow the developments in science. It's not enough to just understand football to be a coach; it's a lot more technical and scientific now."

**"We had lost the best player in the world and were facing one of the best teams in Europe, if not the world, and only by playing as a team could we win."**



**Underdogs have their day**

"I lived in Greece for a few years, so I know the culture there. It's part of me now. Greece achieved a great feat in 2004, and I think from now on unfancied teams will look at the sides that have won competitions without being favourites and use them as reference points. It happened to Denmark – they were a reference point. Then it happened to Greece, and now Portugal. But the teams and players cannot and should not be compared, or their style of play. Denmark were on holiday when they were called on to take part in EURO '92, so that was a completely different situation. Greece made the most of their situation, as did Portugal in France, in different circumstances."

**Impact of the new format**

"The new 24-team format is very different to the 16-team format. The possibility of three teams going through from a group changed things greatly in my opinion. A lot of what happened in France had a lot to do with the fact that three teams could qualify. Teams would make calculations."

**Team ethic**

"One of the keys to this Portuguese team is that the only word that exists in the team even now – and I hope it continues – is 'we'. 'I', 'he' and 'you' ceased to exist in our environment. The only word we used was 'we' – 'we win', 'we lose', 'we play'. It doesn't matter who plays. Fortunately for me, the players really got into this spirit. It was never difficult for me to manage the issue of which players would play and which wouldn't. All players want to play, and those who didn't got a bit down, which is normal, but they always put the team first. Things are always easier when that is the case. At 37, Ricardo Carvalho was one of the oldest players in the tournament. He played in the three group stage matches, but after that, because of fatigue and the demands of the games, I thought it would be a good idea to freshen up the defence. That's why he wasn't a starter in the latter stages. But he was still very important to the team because of his experience and the way he played. It's important to have a player like that, just like with João Moutinho. But at a protracted tournament like this, with only ten days of rest, it was very important to shake up the team and look for changes without losing the team's identity."

**The future**

"It's going to be different now, and it won't be easy. If you're playing the newly crowned champions of Europe, there's a greater



**PORTUGAL AT EURO 2016**

**Group stage**

Portugal 1-1 Iceland  
Portugal 0-0 Austria  
Hungary 3-3 Portugal

**Round of 16**

Croatia 0-1 Portugal (aet)

**Quarter-finals**

Poland 1-1 Portugal (Portugal win 5-3 on penalties)

**Semi-finals**

Portugal 2-0 Wales

**Final**

Portugal 1-0 France (aet)

motivation, and you perhaps approach the game in a different way. That's what the game against Switzerland [a 2-0 defeat in Portugal's first 2018 World Cup qualifier on 6 September] was like. It was bad that we lost, obviously, but credit to Switzerland for beating us. But I'm going to reiterate to my players the lesson we learned from this. The key now is to continue being successful. Portugal have always had great players and great teams taking part in final tournaments – great players who have played or are playing for big European teams and have won big trophies with their clubs. But Portugal had never managed to win a [senior] competition at international level. Now about the road to success – the road is simple: we need to bring together talented Portuguese players and form a team that's pragmatic, knows its objectives and wants to win. We could just put together a team that plays nice football, but that isn't enough. I'm now 61 years old and I'm interested in winning. Winning breeds winning. There's a long way to go and space for the team to develop in many ways. At youth level, Portugal have done very well in recent years and have appeared in many finals at Under-17, Under-19 and Under-21 level. That is a result of the great efforts that Portuguese clubs have made at academy level. The Portuguese FA has put a lot into its youth teams, and now the City of Football training centre has opened. We will continue to work hard at youth level, while those who are now in the latter stages of their careers will carry on bringing all their experience and quality to the team. There's still a lot of work to be done, and a lot of room for our game to develop, as we're still far from where we want to be in some respects. But we'll continue to build on this base. We have our own strengths, and we'll always pursue our objective, which is to win." 🏆





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