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EDITORIAL



The UEFA Women's EURO in the Netherlands was the keynote on the European football calendar in 2017 and The Technician mirrored this focus on Women's football with feature interviews with World, European and Olympic champion Silvia Neid and the victorious Sarina Wiegman after her team's tournament win.

These successful female coaches share the pages of this annual edition of The Technician with UEFA Champions League winner Fabio Capello, UEFA Cup winner Mircea Lucescu, UEFA Youth League winner Adi Viveash and UEFA Futsal Cup winner Jesús Velasco who sat with us to share their experiences, stories of success and failure and advice for young coaches.

This standalone edition also features summaries of club and youth competition technical reports and an investigation into the ever expanding area of football analytics. We hope that this collection of articles will provide you with entertainment and food for thought and we encourage you to check out The Technician in UEFA Direct throughout 2018.

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SILVIA NEID

"WOMEN'S FOOTBALL HASN'T HAD ITS HEYDAY YET"

At the start of the year, Silvia Neid was named FIFA Women's Coach of the Year for the third time, capping an unprecedented coaching career. She stepped down as national team coach after winning gold at the Olympics in Brazil, and now heads up the DFB's women's and girls' scouting department. The Technician met up with the former world and European champion to talk about her new role and the future of women's football.

Silvia Neid, congratulations on being named FIFA Women's Coach of the Year. How was the awards ceremony?

I was very happy just to be there as one of the three shortlisted nominees. It's always a wonderful evening; you meet some really exceptional people. It was a great honour to win the award for the third time. It felt like the icing on the cake. There's no better way to end my career with the women's national team. Although I'm well aware that I couldn't have done it alone. You can't win without your team, and the team behind the team. I really can't emphasise that enough.

You are now running the DFB's women's and girls' scouting department. Can you tell us what that involves and what your priorities are in this new role?

We want to keep an eye on other countries. It's important to be looking out for new trends and developments in women's football. That's my responsibility. Our aim is to be a few years ahead of the game and the players need to be trained accordingly. I share my findings with the new national team coach, Steffi Jones, and she decides what to do with the information.

To what extent is your role as head of scouting about watching

"We want to keep an eye on other countries. It's important to be looking out for new trends and developments in women's football. That's my responsibility."

matches on the one hand, and discussing what you see on the other?

After 20 years in various coaching roles, I've learned a thing or two. Anyone involved in women's football will have noticed that the Asian countries are making great strides. It's not for nothing that they're winning so many titles at youth level. I'm thinking of North Korea and Japan in particular. And in my new role, I'm very keen to know how they're doing it. How has Japan got so many well-trained players? And consistently over time, also at youth level, i.e. Under-17 and Under-19. That's something that's really struck me. They must be doing something special in terms of player development, and that interests me. There are also things happening in Spain. These are all trends that we have to keep an eye on.

Can you share with us your initial insights? What makes the Japanese so good, for example?

They place a lot of emphasis on the basics and on technique. They work very hard and coach intensively in these areas. Take looking over your shoulder as an example: every player looks over her shoulder three times before receiving the ball. So she knows what's going on behind her. I find that pretty impressive, and fascinating. I would love to go to Japan to see for myself what exactly they're doing there. At the same time, I must say that in Germany →



we are also trendsetters, and will continue to be so in the future. We're already doing a good job, but you have to keep your eyes open and want to learn from what you see going on elsewhere.

The boom in women's football development over the last few years has been plain for all to see. What are your thoughts on this and how do you see things now?

The progress has been incredible. When I think back to my first international in 1982, it really is unbelievable what has happened since then. Everything has improved, athletically, tactically, technically, and in terms of speed. It's now more or less on a par with men's football. Everything has progressed and improved.

What tactical improvements have impressed you the most?

Lots of trends are taken from men's football. Like screening midfielders, for example. At the Olympics, Sweden showed that they play deeper than usual. They tried to allow very little space in their own half. These are also trends and tactical developments. The players are simply better trained. In that sense, we're all on the right track.

To what extent have tactical elements and even playing styles been taken over from the men's game because of all the footage available that you can use with the team?

I have done that. I really like how Dortmund were playing a few years ago. I still really like their style of play. We watched a few bits and pieces and took some footage to show to our players. Then it was a question of putting it into practice.

Did you also have technical discussions with Joachim Löw, the men's national team coach?

A few times a year at least. I used a few of the things they were doing in the men's game. I already had a good relationship with the scouting department and when I found something interesting, I could get whole sequences edited together. In that respect, there was always a lot of very close cooperation.

How would you describe what Joachim Löw has achieved with the men's national team, starting as assistant coach and over the course of the DFB's restructuring in the early 2000s?



The city of Frankfurt welcomes the national team home from Sweden in style on 29 July 2013, the day after they claimed their eighth European title.

Joachim Löw has done a lot for the men's game. He has shaped men's football in Germany and moved it forward. He has also been FIFA Coach of the Year and is world champion. I think we play really excellent football. We play offensively and had some great games at the EURO in France. Obviously there's also always an element of luck involved. You have to hit the back of the net at the right time.

Let's talk briefly about grassroots football. Which particular areas need more attention, in your opinion?

I think we can be very pleased, just looking at the numbers. Lots of women and girls play football. In Germany, at least, it's the number one sport. We have schools and academies where football is offered. We're very much on the right track. Obviously it's good for the sport when you get titles. We see that in tennis too: Angelique Kerber is now world number one and tennis has become more popular again among youngsters as a result. We need to keep winning in women's football and make sure that girls get interested in the sport. Naturally, we must then also ensure that we have a strong elite. It's all about player development.

Research in Europe shows that you can get lots of girls into football but most of them drop out as teenagers. What's your take on this trend?

It's perfectly normal. Perhaps girls that aren't so good or aren't 100% into football decide they'd prefer to play tennis. Perhaps they're better at tennis. Often they only work these things out as teenagers. But I honestly don't see this as a problem. We can be proud that we're the number one sport overall.

What do you think can be done Europe-wide to promote ambitious coaches, male or female, in women's football?

We've always tried to encourage female players to train as coaches. And it's paid off. We have lots of women who used to play on the national team now working in coaching. Germany has been leading the way for years in that respect. [Former national team coach] Tina Theune started it off and I kept it going. The important thing is to have players who really put their hearts into it. They have to pass on their experience to the next generation. To be honest, I don't really know what it's like in other countries. I can only say that the tendency seems to be to promote women. In Japan, for example, they have now appointed the first woman as head coach of the [women's] national team.



Why do you think it's important for national associations to try to keep successful female players in football after they hang up their boots?

Because they obviously serve as role models for young girls and they do what they do first and foremost because they are passionate about it. When you love what you do, you can give it your all. We've had very good experiences of this.

As long-standing European champions, the expectations on Germany at Women's EURO 2017 will once again be extremely high. How do you deal with that pressure?

Everyone expects you to win. But the teams that ultimately do know only too well how hard it is. You need absolute concentration. It's hard work and you need a pinch of luck too, to come out on top. I have only ever taken it one match at a time. Germany certainly have the potential, but it's never a foregone conclusion. It has to all come together at the decisive moments. You need to score at the right time, and when you make tactical changes, they have to be the right ones.

Which team could cause an upset at the Women's EURO?

Spain, perhaps? The favourites are the four usual suspects: Norway, Sweden, France and Germany. Unfortunately for France, they have still never won a title, despite being considered one of the favourites for years now. They really have first-rate players who

are very technically accomplished. They play a very intelligent game, but somehow it's never quite been enough. I've got my eye on Spain, and maybe also England. Both teams have made outstanding progress over the last few years.

The field has been expanded from 12 to 16. What effect will that have?

I'm very curious to see. There are definitely enough good teams in women's football, in my opinion, to increase the field by four without there being any drop in quality. Take Scotland, for example, where we've also seen steady progress. I think we have a good format. It's clear at the outset that the top two teams in each group go through and the third and fourth-placed teams go home. I don't know what will happen but I think it'll be good.

Berti Vogts once said it was 'getting crowded at the top' – to what extent does that also apply to women's football over the last few years?

A lot of countries have made a great deal of progress. There are more favourites now than 12 years ago. Obviously I'm thinking of France, Sweden, Norway, Spain, England and Germany. But more and more countries have come along that are now out to win titles.

No European team has won the Women's World Cup since 2007. There wasn't even a European team in the last two finals. Do you think this is just a question of luck or is Europe being overtaken by other countries?



There are excellent teams all over the world that are capable of winning the World Cup. Take Canada, for example, who have taken bronze in the last two Olympic Games. And the US, who we know have been preparing together very intensively for a long time. Then there's Japan, whose praises I've already sung. And Brazil. Obviously Europe also has to keep advancing if we're to have another world champion. But it's not that easy. I think that every country is investing a lot more than they were just a few years ago, to prepare their players for such tournaments.

How do you view the evolution of the UEFA Women's Champions League?

It's fundamentally a good competition and one I really like. There are four teams that are contenders for the title. The others are still a bit too far behind the pack.

The quarter-finals are fast approaching. Who do you think has the best chances?

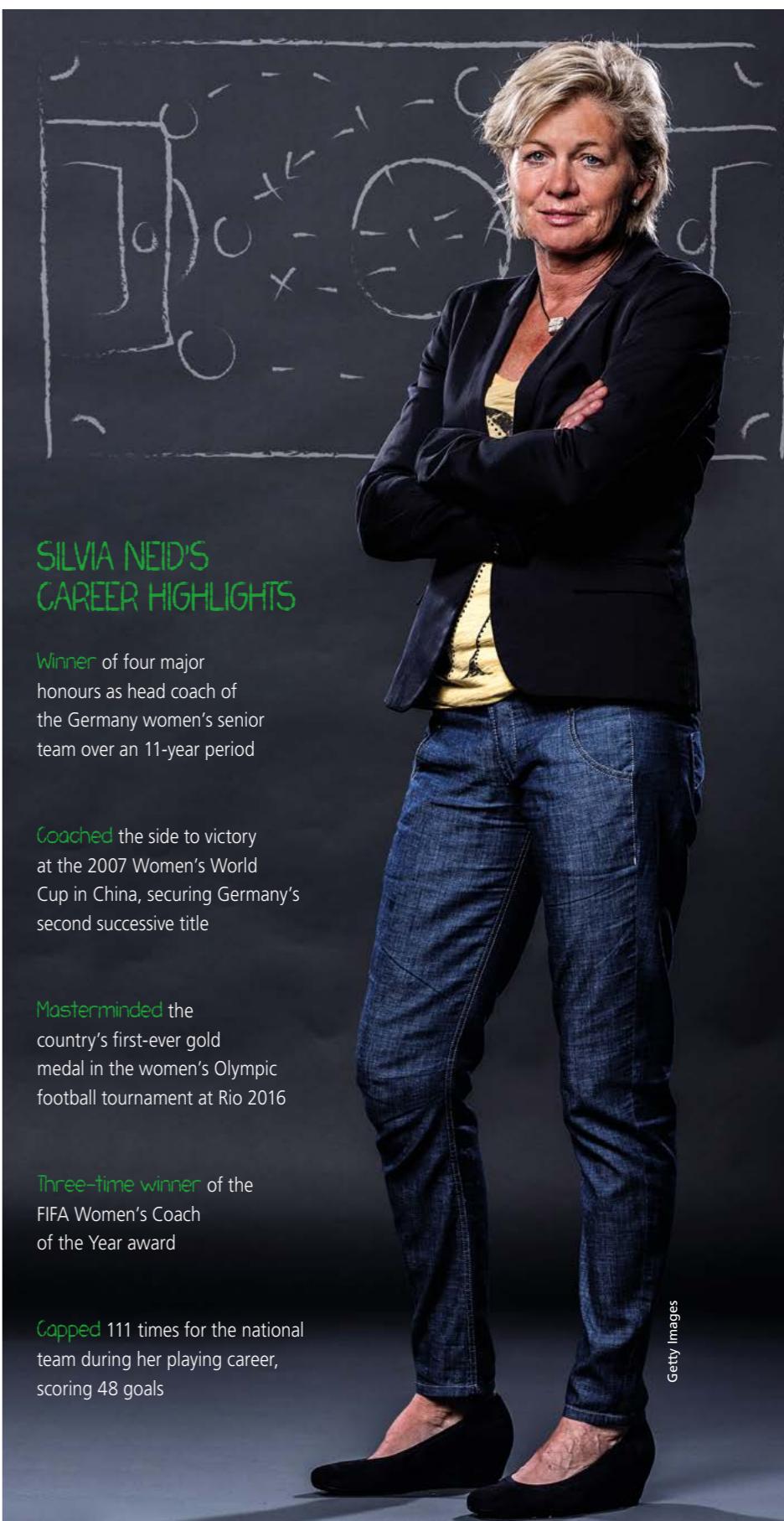
The four best teams have been drawn against each other: Paris against Bayern München, and Lyon against Wolfsburg. All of them have the potential to go all the way, but only two of them can get past the quarter-finals. My favourites are Bayern München and Wolfsburg.

Clubs are signing lots of top players from Brazil, Japan and the US. To what extent is this a challenge for European clubs and local player development?

If you look at it in a positive light, the overall standard is being driven up. Players coming in from other countries add a lot of quality to the mix. We just have to make sure that the young players don't get sidelined or perhaps get loaned out. It's important that they get to play. And it's important that when they're at that stage of maximum potential, they're given the opportunity to develop it. That may mean they have to play for other teams and push their way through the ranks. But young players at teams that sign the big names can also learn a lot. There are pros and cons, at the end of the day. Ultimately each team has to decide for itself.

Where do you see women's football in five years' time?

Reaching new heights. Perhaps even faster and more athletic. I think there will be even more players and bigger squads. In any case, I see it advancing. Women's football hasn't had its heyday yet. ☑



SILVIA NEID'S CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Winner of four major honours as head coach of the Germany women's senior team over an 11-year period

Coached the side to victory at the 2007 Women's World Cup in China, securing Germany's second successive title

Masterminded the country's first-ever gold medal in the women's Olympic football tournament at Rio 2016

Three-time winner of the FIFA Women's Coach of the Year award

Capped 111 times for the national team during her playing career, scoring 48 goals

ADI VIVEASH

"I DON'T TELL THEM THINGS THEY WANT TO HEAR; I TELL THEM THINGS THEY NEED TO HEAR"

As Chelsea FC's development manager, Adi Viveash is the man responsible for the group of Under-23 players one step away from Antonio Conte's first team. Here he reflects on the challenges his young players face and explains his role in nurturing their talents. He begins, though, by remembering his Chelsea youngsters' triumphs in the 2015 and 2016 UEFA Youth League tournaments ...

How beneficial has the UEFA Youth League been for your players?

I think in terms of how much you can gain from a tournament like that. If you're looking at Chelsea as a model then the players have to be adept at playing international teams, coming up against different styles, different cultures and different systems, and the feel of the matches, I think, was a high level of learning experience for our boys. The biggest testament is what you do with the knowledge, and the fact that so many of those players have now kicked on into the senior game all around Europe, certainly from the first year we won it, shows that they've learned that skill set that they probably didn't have beforehand and added it to their armoury. You come up against players that you don't come up against week in, week out in your domestic league and it's a different kind of challenge. That's what you want – you want them to experience different challenges at a young age.

How does it feel to see a player like Andreas Christensen go on and play on a bigger stage as he has done in the UEFA Champions League with VfL Borussia Mönchengladbach?

When you work with players of that level and you put a lot of your own knowledge into them, to see them perform at the highest level makes you extremely proud. I think Andreas, within five months of playing in the Youth League final against Shakhtar and winning it, was marking Sergio Agüero against Manchester City in the competition proper, and that's the biggest gauge. There are boys around the first-team set-up now, in Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Dominic Solanke, who've played for Chelsea in the main competition as well. It gives you immense pride and makes you feel in some small part that you've helped them along their journey to success.

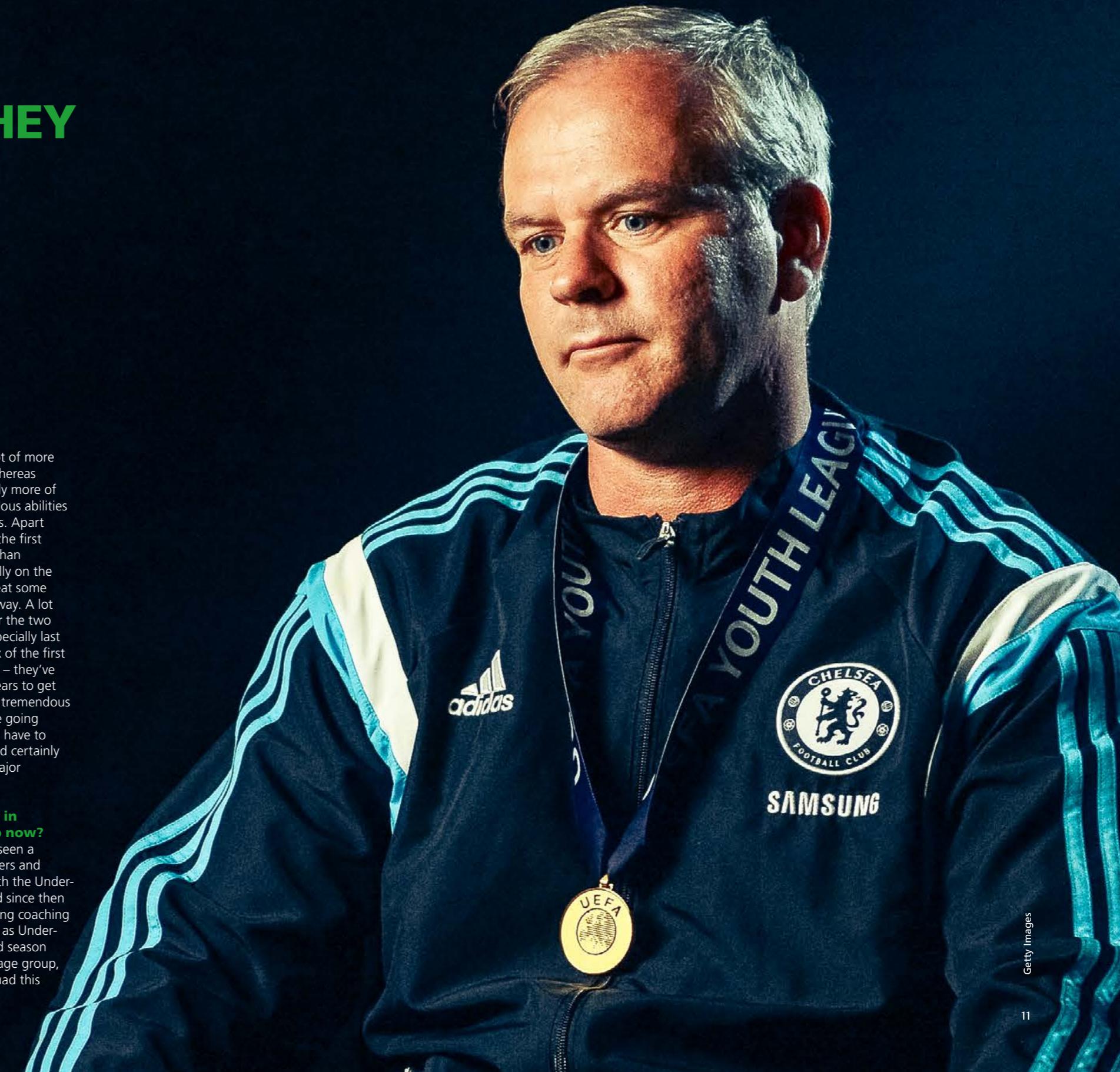
How important was it to see your players actually win the competition?

It's the equivalent of winning the Champions League for young players, so it's a major tournament to win. We know how much hard work went into both campaigns and we know how difficult it was to achieve success in both. The players knew that as well. They really targeted those tournaments, as we did as an academy, as [competitions] we wanted to do well in. We felt we had a really strong group of players in both tournaments – the first year was slightly different to

the second in that we had a lot of more individually talented players whereas the second group was probably more of a team. But both had tremendous abilities and characters within the sides. Apart from players progressing into the first team, there is nothing better than winning tournaments, especially on the international stage, and we beat some outstanding teams along the way. A lot of the players who played over the two years are made in Chelsea, especially last year's [squad] and probably six of the first year's group. So it means a lot – they've worked together for several years to get to this stage, and winning is a tremendous form of development. If you're going to play for a top club then you have to know what winning means and certainly the UEFA Youth League is a major tournament to win.

How long have you been in the Chelsea youth set-up now?

I've been here nine years and seen a lot of development in the players and obviously myself. I worked with the Under-12s when I first came here and since then I've had different roles, including coaching the Under-16s and three years as Under-18s lead coach. This is my third season coaching the oldest academy age group, renamed the development squad this



Adi Viveash consoles
Anderlecht's Nelson
Azevedo-Janelas after
Chelsea's semi-final
win last season.



Getty Images

season, and I also coached the Under-19 team in both of the UEFA Youth League triumphs as part of the role.

Looking at your academy, are different coaches suited to different age groups? How do you decide who coaches a particular age group?

That's a decision made by the head of youth development. There are two coaches per age group and it depends on what skill sets you have got and how successful you are in all facets of the job – not just the tournaments, but your day-to-day work and planning. Obviously if you are deemed as being good enough and capable, then you move through the age groups. In my time it's obviously been relatively successful and I take that as being that you have the required skill sets that they want at the highest levels in the academy. That's the level I am at now, but you do it by doing a good job on a daily basis and showing the requirements needed to work at a club as big as this in bringing players through into the first-team squad.

How does training differ across the different age groups at Chelsea?

Up to Under-11 they are playing nine-a-side or seven-a-side, so it is different. In the Under-12s they step up to 11-a-side and generally the level of information you can give to the players and they can take on board is slightly different. You're working a lot on the core technique required to be moving through those

stages. Generally there's not a lot of movement with players up and down age groups at that age. It is a lot more about working on positional movements, etc. because they are still going through their growth stages.

Moving further on, with the programme at Chelsea, from Under-13 now they come in one day [a week] on a day release from school so they train here and do their schooling here. You are getting more of that into them at a younger age than when I started. The Under-16s have a full-time programme with full-time school, so they train every day. You're running them like a youth team. And with the Under-18s you're working the players like you would do in a first-team environment. They train every day, they do double training sessions,

in the morning and afternoon; they do gym, and they do individual programmes. They keep developing the areas of their game where they need to work. They do football education and programmes outside of here, and some of them do A-levels.

The main difference from the Under-18s to the Under-23s is that the Under-18s play regularly on a Saturday – so they work Monday to Friday and play Saturday. With our age group we can play Friday, Saturday, Sunday or Monday, so you have to have different programmes and be a bit more inventive with your day-to-day work. And because you're the nearest [group] to the first team you have to be as close as you can to the real game. Those are the challenges and you need to acquire those skill sets as a coach through the years to

"It's very important that they've got freedom of speech. Here we like a two-way, open relationship. They are able to communicate with us strongly and that's built up over the years."



Getty Images

be able to work at that level. That is what's happened with me. I've been able to acquire those skill sets as well as being an ex-player with a 20-year career that helps you understand dressing rooms and situations that arise and dealing with certain players.

Can you talk about sports science and how it helps you in your planning?

We work with a GPS system so every training session we do is monitored. Players will wear the heart-rate belts and it plays quite a big part in our planning. We produce a daily report and go through that every day before we do our planning for the next day. We can look at certain areas with players – we target them, either through fatigue where we have to ease off and give them a rest, or see where we need to step on the gas with certain players. We also use it in all our matches so we can compare against our first-team players, as well as previous years' players at this age group and also our opposition.

It's a big part of our programme, it aids the players, and they're interested in it. They are all learning. We have two conditioners here with this age group who present to the players regularly and have discussions and look at them, and give them feedback on what they're looking at when they look at the data. It's important for them to understand their bodies and what it is when it feels like they are pushing their bodies to the max.

At what age specifically do your youngsters start using the GPS devices?

At Under-13 and Under-14, they'd have trialled it. They'd have used it sometimes when they train in the evenings and had a look at it. With Under-15s, this year they've used it in certain games. With Under-16s, Under-18s and Under-23s you are looking at the data every day.

Looking at non-football factors like schoolwork, diet and sleep, what steps do you take to ensure the boys' well-being?

They get checked in terms of that. There will be checks in the morning where the physios are speaking to

"Andreas, within five months of playing in the Youth League final against Shakhtar and winning it, was marking Sergio Agüero against Manchester City in the competition proper."



Getty Images

players and if we're aware of anything or see anything then we make sure we stay on top of that. With how hard we work every day it's pretty easy to see if somebody is having a difficult time or they're a bit run down. But generally there's the data and just general communication with the players. We have a very good, open relationship with the players here. It's a two-way thing. Any time anybody spots anything, there are strategic plans in place to give the necessary individual the help they need if they are suffering from anything – be it illness, injury, or something personal off the pitch. There's a very good structure here and a couple of staff members who work in that department full-time.



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You mentioned the players' schooling before. Can you elaborate on this?

Teachers come here from a school in a town nearby, Epsom, and teach players on a group or individual basis from Under-13 upwards. We also have a relationship with the school next door, Parkside School in Cobham, whereby the Under-16 boys go in there for part of their academic day on certain days of the week. So there is a big academic programme going on within the academy.

Is it hard to keep them focused on their school work when they have dreams of becoming professional footballers?

I see driven players, but the academic results for them are very important here. The top ranks at the academy are certainly looking at those exam results very stringently, and they make sure the boys get all the necessary support from the coaches and staff to make sure they get the best results they can. There is a lot more emphasis nowadays anyway in society in general on trying to achieve because football is a precarious industry

"Social media means they haven't just got one coach like we had, or one assistant manager analysing their performances – they've got whatever followers they've got on Twitter making comments on their games."



"It's important for them to understand their bodies and what it is when it feels like they are pushing their bodies to the max."

and the fall-out is big as well, so you have to make sure that you are doing as well as you can to have a back-up plan.

We hear people say that young players have it easy compared to when you were coming through. But how do the challenges they face today compare with 20 or 30 years ago?

Social media means they haven't just got one coach like we had, or one assistant manager analysing their performances – they've got whatever followers they've got on Twitter making comments on their games. Here, every game is filmed and most games are shown live so they have a worldwide audience critiquing everything they do. There were obviously the pitfalls with finances in our day, though not to the extent there are now. The outside influences away from the game are still a big pitfall and falling into the trap of everything that is out there. But now they face a big mental challenge because of the exposure, and it means you are all around the world. There is nowhere they can hide. You can't hide, you don't get a minute's piece as a young player now. Some bring it on themselves but with others it's nothing to do with themselves.

The attention is massive and dealing with all that and knowing how to handle that stage of your youth development is a big problem for some young players and they need a lot of help in those areas. I think the biggest challenge for football in the next decade is the influences outside – the support teams that are built around these top talents now and how much they start to take over, and does it become something like in American sport where the American football quarter-back is a major, major person. Look at Tom Brady, the rigmarole around him is just enormous, but they are able to handle that. But as a young person they have a lot of people within their off-field camp, not just agents but support staff and you

"The attention is massive and dealing with all that and knowing how to handle that stage of your youth development is a big problem for some young players and they need a lot of help in those areas."

have to be careful they're getting the right information all of the time. That is a big challenge to them as young players.

What particular qualities are you looking for in a young player at Chelsea? What does a 16-year-old need to ensure he is kept on?

By the time you are 16 here now you've been here eight years, so the people making the decisions are forming a picture. You're looking for personality and for different traits in different positions. There are the usual things – have they got a change of pace? Are they a powerful player? Are they a technical player? And that is nothing to do with size. They don't have to be six foot four; they can be five foot four. But is there explosiveness? Are they able to take a tackle? Can they make a tackle? Can they see a pass? Do they show bravery under intense pressure? What are they like defensively? How are they off the pitch? Do they take on tactical information? It is many things. Are they good around the group? What's their personality? What's their home life like? We do a lot on [this] so we know a lot from a young age but it's those characteristics that we are looking for.

Also, is there growth in them? Not in size, but as a player. Is there still more in them and what are the bits you're going to have to iron out? Obviously they're young, and to enable them to play at the highest level, have they got that desire to go the extra step? Most of the top players around the world are mavericks, I'd say. There's a little bit of a difference with them – a different kind of steely determination. It's different in each player but if you see that different quality it's worth working with every day to try to help them with the other bits that don't come so naturally as the God-given talent.



Chelsea's Under-19s in action during their two victorious UEFA Youth League finals: above against Shakhtar Donetsk (3-2) in 2015 and against Paris Saint-Germain (2-1) in 2016.



At what age do they start training with Chelsea?

Now they have a training group at Under-7s in our development centres around London, so kids will go in from the age of six. Coaches will work with the Under-7s and identify the players who they think have the skill sets required to move up. Then they come into Chelsea at Under-8s and then we whittle that down to a group that will start in the programme at Under-9s, and that's three evenings a week training and then a game on a Sunday.

When do they begin playing competitive football?

You don't play competitive leagues here until Under-18s but they play in a lot of

Chelsea's Tammy Abraham is on loan to Bristol City to gain some first-team experience and hone his skills.

tournaments. They travel abroad to play in tournaments from Under-9 onwards and now from Under-12 they play Premier League cups too against teams from other academies in England. At Under-16 it is friendlies apart from when they play the Premier League tournament.

How important are loan spells elsewhere for your young players at Chelsea?

It's vital for players to go and experience the senior game. If they're good enough they should be out as early as they can if that is the pathway and it looks now that playing in the Premier League regularly is getting a bit older. You're looking at 21, 22 in some cases. You have to be playing in the senior game to understand what

Do you work closely with Antonio Conte and his first-team coaching staff in providing updates on players in the academy?

Yeah, obviously the manager has been at quite a few of our games, and we train with them on occasions where we are playing 11 v 11 training matches with some of their players. He keeps an eye on the next group of players coming through and takes a keen interest in the players out on loan like Andreas Christensen and Tammy Abraham, Kasey Palmer, Charlie Colkett. There are many out on loan and a couple he has in his own squad. So he takes a keen interest in what's happening with them as well as the younger ones in my group. He wants to know about them and has seen a few of them in his pre-season programme this year. He'll be finding out all the key attributes they've got and he has a general interest in what we're trying to do and asks very interesting questions about the work and we ask the same back about his.

How difficult is it to manage young players' expectations and disappointments?

That is a key part of the job. For me you need experience to be able to do that properly. You have to have an understanding yourself. If you've been in the situations they've been in, then you can understand what they are going through. It is being able to know which players you can use, a different skill set that you have ... being able to cross-challenge, if you like. Sometimes players just come in and have a chat with you because they just need an arm around the shoulder and need to feel the support; other times they probably need to be told things that they don't want to hear. Managing expectations at



Since Adi Viveash became Chelsea development squad manager at the beginning of the 2014/15 season, the following academy players have made their debuts in the senior team:



DOMINIC SOLanke
Striker
(Chelsea first-team squad)



ANDREAS CHRISTENSEN
Defender
(currently on loan at Borussia Monchengladbach)



RUBEN LOFTUS-CHEEK
Midfielder
(Chelsea first-team squad)



ISAIAH BROWN
Winger
(currently on loan at Huddersfield Town)



JAKE CLARKE-SALTER
Defender
(currently on loan at Bristol Rovers)



FIKAYO TOMORI
Defender
(currently on loan at Brighton & Hove Albion)



TAMMY ABRAHAM
Striker
(currently on loan at Bristol City)



OLA AINA
Defender
(Chelsea first-team squad)

this level is one of the hardest things because they are some of the best young players in the world, and then at times they find their progress blocked by world-class senior players, and that can be difficult to understand. But again, I feel that is one of the areas I am particularly strong in because of the years in the game that I've had and the situations I've been through personally. The more life

experiences you have, the more you are able to be very honest and open with players and that's how I deal with it – I deal with it by being the same with each one: always put the players first and deal with each case individually and just be very honest with them. I don't tell them things they want to hear; I tell them things they need to hear. Sometimes that is something that helps, other times it makes them go

away and think, and other times they may directly say they have a different view on it – and there's nothing wrong with that. I tell them we've each got our opinion. It's very important that they've got freedom of speech and here we do allow them ... we like a two-way, open relationship. They are able to communicate with us strongly and that's built up over the years of trust that you have got with the players. ☺

THE FUTURE OF FOOTBALL

The coaches of all the clubs involved in this season's UEFA Youth League were invited to the House of European Football in Nyon on 20 and 21 March for the inaugural UEFA Youth League Coaches Forum.

A total of 75 coaches and heads of academies participated in the first-ever UEFA Youth League Coaches Forum, which featured discussions and debate on coaching trends, the Laws of the Game and the role and importance of the Youth League, as well as a question and answer session with UEFA Champions League-winning coach Fabio Capello.

All attendees received a certificate recognising their participation in the event as further education within the meaning of Articles 24 and 29 of the UEFA Coaching Convention.

The event began with a look at the technical report on the 2015/16 Youth League and a presentation on coaching trends by UEFA's managing director of technical development, Ioan Lupescu. That presentation highlighted the variety of playing styles being used by successful teams at EURO 2016 and in the Champions League.

It is noticeable that the approaches adopted by the top teams of today tend to be reflected in the youth teams

of tomorrow. As a result, academy and youth team coaches are spending more time readying their players for the step up to first-team duty, thereby playing an increasingly important role in young players' careers.

'A better chance of succeeding'

"In the past, players often had to go into the world of professional football and adapt very quickly on the hoof," said Manuel Jesús Cano Martín, coach of Club Atlético de Madrid's youth team. "But now, a footballer from the youth academy can go in with their Youth League experience, having played one or two seasons in a competition like this, and they'll know a lot more about that environment and that atmosphere. They will be much more used to playing at that level, which will give them a better chance of succeeding."

The presentation also looked at the need for coaches to strike a balance between the players they have at their disposal and their favoured philosophy.

One of the ensuing discussions focused on the role of academies, and there was unanimous support for even greater emphasis being placed on the development of young players.

"Academies play a fundamental role, and all of us here have the huge responsibility of coaching those players and helping them to become the future of football," said Valencia CF coach Mista.

"Everything is much more professional now. There is no doubt about that. These days, a player at an academy is already semi-professional. That's the trend within football nowadays. Maybe youngsters will now start to have a lifestyle that's exclusively dedicated to football at a younger age."

However, what these players may lack in comparison with previous generations is raw talent shaped by the largely disappearing phenomenon of street football. While players of the past were brought up playing – sometimes barefoot – on cobbled streets and in alleyways, improvements in facilities and across



UEFA

society as a whole mean that this tends not to be the case nowadays. Participants were asked whether this was leading to a decline in the number of naturally creative footballers, with fewer players now capable of running at opponents with the ball.

Innate talent and development

"It's true that, with today's academies and systems of play, players improve, but they also lose the value of that innate talent," Mista said. "Academies churn out mechanical players in many cases, and you lose some of that talent. I think 50% of each would be the ideal ratio, so that a player can be part of the team dynamic, but once he takes to the pitch within a structure, he can play his own football. We sign players because they have innate talent, so we have to foster that, rather than take it away from them."

Sevilla FC coach Agustín López Páez had a contrasting view on the subject, with the forum encouraging coaches to air their opinions and discuss them with their colleagues. He said: "I don't feel like street football has been 'lost'. In reality, we're evolving at an incredible rate, and in practical terms, coaches and coaching staff are much better prepared and the players are much better prepared. There are still a lot of talented players, and they're getting even better. But if we're going to focus on the essence of what we've talked about, playing in the village square, we can't go into that kind of teaching, because hardly anyone plays in village squares nowadays! We have to adapt to how life has changed. I also think it's positive that, at all the various youth academies, there is also work being done at an individual level, with technical development departments helping players to refine their technical skills. Players nowadays are much better prepared in every way, and we have to try to avoid getting confused by this kind of terminology."

Participants also had the opportunity to exchange views on the Youth League and make proposals to UEFA that could potentially benefit the competition and its development.

"This competition is the pinnacle of a youth player's development and education process, since – as we all know – they are playing against the best in Europe, the best players of their generation, and sometimes older generations," said SL Benfica coach João Tralhão, who will



return to Nyon on 21 April with his side in the final four of this season's Youth League. "That forces them to compete at a level exceeding their own ability – which, of course, helps their development. I think the future of European football looks bright, as many young players are increasing in value and standing out in this major competition."

As part of the two-day forum, Tralhão and the coaches of the other three semi-finalists, Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona and FC Salzburg, all took part in an entertaining friendly match at Colovray Stadium – the venue for the semi-finals and the final. Those four footballing pedagogues were exemplary in their respect for one another on the pitch, and that will continue when they return to Nyon later this month.

A presentation on the Laws of the Game by UEFA refereeing officer Hugh Dallas ensured the coaches were up to date on recent refereeing issues, before Fabio Capello, who guided AC Milan to the 1993/94 UEFA Champions League title and has won domestic league titles in both Italy and Spain, talked to participants about coaching and youth development as part of a round-table discussion (see interview on next page).

Capello brought with him an array of anecdotes and a wealth of advice, and the coaches, many of whom are right at the beginning of their careers, certainly appreciated his input. They will now be seeking to emulate the 70-year-old Italian, armed with all the insight they gained from the inaugural UEFA Youth League Coaches Forum. 



FABIO CAPELLO

'MY PHILOSOPHY? COPY AND MOULD THINGS TO MY OWN IDEAS'

A fine art enthusiast, Fabio Capello can look proudly at the wealth of football silverware that sits alongside the artworks he has acquired over the years. Successful as a midfielder with AS Roma, Juventus and AC Milan, winning four Serie A titles and earning 32 caps for Italy, he has gone on to become an outstanding coach, amassing a total of five Italian domestic championships with AS Roma and AC Milan, and two La Liga titles at Real Madrid CF.

When you consider that his CV also features 1994 UEFA Champions League and UEFA Super Cup titles with Milan, as well as stints coaching the national teams of both England and Russia, it is obvious that Fabio Capello draws from a vast reservoir of experience and knowledge when he talks about football and coaching – as he did as guest of honour at the recent UEFA Youth League Coaches Forum in Nyon.

How did you transition from player to coach?

I stopped playing in 1980, and I started coaching the 15-year-olds at Milan. I moved on to the 17-18 age group, and then the 20-year-olds. I coached youth teams for five years. In my opinion, it's very important for coaches with ambition to understand how to manage youngsters.

When did you have your first taste of coaching a first team?

I became assistant to Milan's first-team coach, Nils Liedholm, in 1987. The president asked me to take charge of the last five matches, and we qualified for the UEFA Cup. Nils Liedholm stayed on with us, and I wanted that. He was

a coach who had made history in Italian football. He had vast experience, and he had given a lot to the game.

You studied at the Italian federation's technical center in Coverciano and gained experience in other sports. That must have given you considerable insight into all aspects of management?

I worked at Mediolanum Sport [Milan's multisport club], where I was in charge of basketball, ice hockey, rugby and volleyball. That was actually very important for me, as it helped me to understand the psychology of different sports, of different players, of different ways to approach a match. Milan's president, Silvio Berlusconi, sent me on management courses. It was all hugely valuable.

Is there anyone who has had a particular influence on your coaching career?

I was lucky enough to play at Roma under Helenio Herrera, who also coached the great 1960s Inter Milan team. He used to say something very simple: "You play the way you train." He said that you can't train at 60km/h and then think that you can play at 100km/h on a matchday. Then, at the end of my playing

career, I worked under Liedholm, who made me realise that you can always improve technically. To improve tactically is important, but technique is equally important.

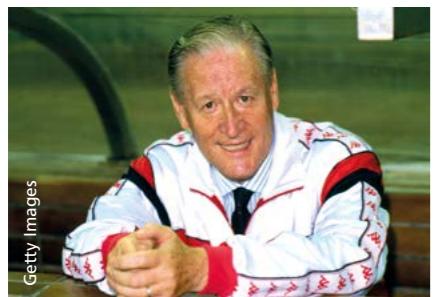
In a discussion with UEFA last year, Carlo Ancelotti also mentioned Nils Liedholm as one of his main mentors, saying he didn't copy him, but still learned a lot from him.

Liedholm was a very calm person, but with great personality. I learned from him the importance of understanding the moments that your team goes through. He always exuded extreme calm.

Is it fair to say that a coach might take inspiration from a variety of important sources – but, in the end, you still have to be your own man?

Our job – like the job of any artist – is to go around 'stealing' and copying. But after you've 'stolen' and copied, you must mould things according to your own ideas. Think of the great artists ... Picasso copied the African artists, and he became a genius. So, my philosophy is 'steal, copy and develop' ...





'I was lucky enough to play at Roma under Helenio Herrera [below], who also coached the great 1960s Inter Milan team.'



You've managed big clubs and national teams. What is the major difference for a coach between coaching a national team and coaching a club?

It's a different job. Managing a national team has nothing to do with managing a club. A national team manager is lucky if he has a consolidated block of players who come from one or two clubs, have a winning mentality, have desire, can carry other colleagues along with them and, above all, can quickly apply your style of play on the pitch. You also have to find leaders in the squad. If you don't, it's very difficult.

You only have a short period to work with players for national team matches ...

If you're playing on a Thursday, the players arrive on the Monday after playing a league match, so you do nothing that day. On the Tuesday, you have a 'half' training session; on the Wednesday, you prepare for the match; and on the Thursday,

Top left: Fabio Capello's first senior coaching experience came at AC Milan as assistant to Nils Liedholm.
Above: European Cup-winning coach Helenio Herrera (right, holding glass) who Capello played under at AS Roma. Below: Capello during his playing days in 1976.



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you're on the pitch. It's essential to have a group of players who feel part of the national team and want to win trophies. On the other hand, a club manager works on a daily basis and understands how he needs to work, what he needs to improve and where the relevant strengths lie. He can work on the team psychologically when they win and when they lose, so it's a daily job. With a national team, the job is completely different.

Your teams are usually quite intense and physically well prepared. Do you regard specific fitness training as something important within general training?

You need to find the right balance. In my opinion, the most important thing is the work that you do in pre-season. I have always stressed the importance of good pre-season preparation. But this depends on the league that you're coaching in. In England, they are always playing. They don't train as much because they have to recover. In Spain and Italy, you can do more. It also depends on what competitions you're in – if you're taking part in European competitions and playing a lot of matches. I keep saying that you can plan, but the most important thing is the manager's eye – his ability to understand the team's level of fitness and understand whether it's a physical issue or a mental one. And nowadays, you obviously have to work on things like technique and speed as well.

How do managers adapt when they coach teams in different countries?

I can say from experience that in Italy, you have to adapt to the city where you work. There are significant differences between coaching Roma, Juventus and Milan. If you change countries and go to work in Spain, you have to understand where you are going. The players are used to doing things in a certain way, the football is different, the culture is different, the media are different ... There's a big difference in Italy between Rome and Milan, and there's a bigger difference between Italy and Spain. If you go and work in England, you need to understand where you are, what their customs are, and so on.

Capello imparted his wisdom during a question-and-answer session at the UEFA Youth League Coaches Forum in Nyon. Below: The Italian won La Liga in 2007 during his second coaching spell at Real Madrid, pipping FC Barcelona to the title.



UEFA

I had two spells at Real Madrid, the second of which was after they had gone a few years without a trophy. That second spell gave me the greatest satisfaction, as we won the title in 2007 despite having been some way behind FC Barcelona with only a few matches remaining.

Quite an achievement ... Tell us more about that.

I told the team that they were as good as Barcelona, both in terms of strength and in the way they played. I told them that we had to play each match as if it were a final – and if Barcelona still ended up ahead of us, so be it, we would applaud them.

You must have created a fantastic team spirit on that late run ...

There was a unique team spirit – a level of commitment that was almost crazy. It's very important to tell you about

the key role that psychology plays in the minds of experienced players ... or how it can block them. Our last match was against RCD Mallorca. We were level on points with Barcelona, but having drawn in Barcelona and won at home, we were top of the table. We just needed to win the match. However, in the first half, international players – experienced players – were playing with fear. They weren't doing anything right. And we were one goal down at half-time.

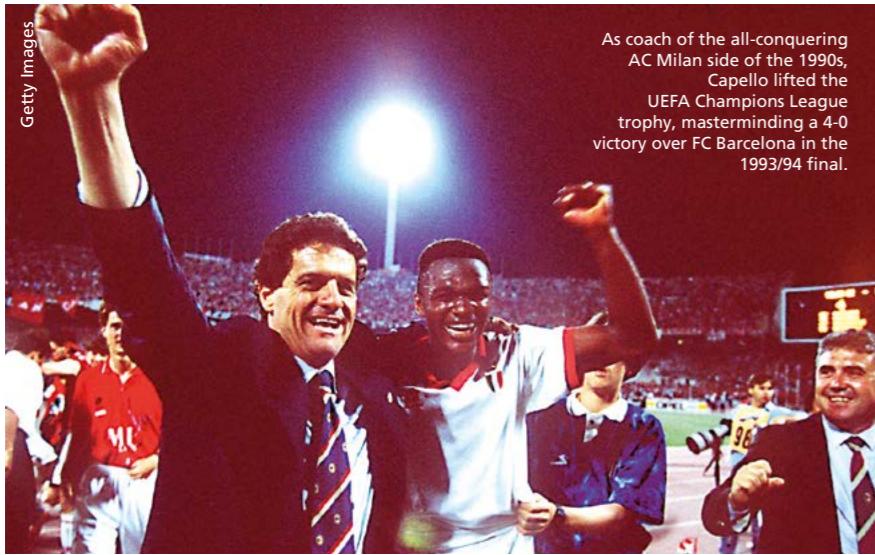
So, what did you do at half-time?

I usually asked the players not to say a word for the first four or five minutes. They could change their kit, wash themselves and do whatever they needed to do. Because if you start talking as soon as you enter the dressing room, you risk saying stupid things because you are nervous. It's important that a coach stays calm. I used those four or →



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'That second spell at Real Madrid gave me the greatest satisfaction, as we won the title in 2007 despite having been some way behind FC Barcelona with only a few matches remaining.'



'I have never accepted compromises. The team is my responsibility. You need to have a strong personality. You have to be fair, but you need to have the strength of character to stand your ground when you're in the right.'

five minutes to think about how to change things around, because a tactical switch is simple, but there are also times when you have to work on the psychology of the team.



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And on this particular occasion?
You can't always act the same way to change things around. There are times when you have to shout to wake the players up ... but in a moment of fear, what do you do? What do you say? I used that time to think. Should I get upset? Should I laugh? Should I talk quietly? Usually, I would stand up and tell the players to do this or that. This time, since the players were showing fear, I asked one of them to make space for me and I sat down. I was sat at the same level as they were. I simply told them that we'd done something unbelievable and asked why we should gift Barcelona the title now. I said: "Go out on the pitch and play like you do in training." That's all. I didn't say anything else. And we came back to win, meaning that we were crowned champions.

Are there any players you have coached that stand out?

The greatest player I've ever coached is the Brazilian Ronaldo, although I ended

Left: Capello coached Brazilian great Ronaldo at Real Madrid during the 2006/07 season. Bottom right: His most recent coaching role was as Russian national team manager between 2012 and 2015.

As coach of the all-conquering AC Milan side of the 1990s, Capello lifted the UEFA Champions League trophy, masterminding a 4-0 victory over FC Barcelona in the 1993/94 final.

up selling him at Real Madrid! He was so technically skilful at speed – like no other player that I've seen. Over 30 metres, he did things at full speed, starting and stopping, changing direction ...

You've come to UEFA for the UEFA Youth League Coaches Forum. At the clubs where you've worked, have you been able to dictate the philosophy and decide how to develop young players?

At every club where I've coached, when I arrived, I always asked for four or five youngsters from the academy to train with the first team. Sometimes, we would speak with the person responsible for the youth system to assess who deserved to be training with the first team. In this way, you would find out about young players' characters and how they would adapt.

What if they had difficulty adapting?

If, after training with us, they behaved arrogantly, we would react by not calling them up for first-team training. They then understood that if we did call them back, they would have to give more – that they had to change. What happens, therefore, is you find out that one player is ready for the first team, while another might perhaps need to be sent out on loan [to another club] to gain experience. There are young players who have character and go out on the pitch with no fear, and there are others that don't have such self-confidence.

How different is managing players now in comparison with the past?

The difference is huge. Many things need to be taken into consideration. In some respects, managing the group was easier then. There were no agents, so clubs could manage all of the whims that today's players have under the influence of their agents. They were also more relaxed times: there was a president who took decisions, and the manager was in charge of the team. Nowadays, you have agents, and club owners come from countries with different cultures. The rules have changed, and that makes life difficult for a coach.

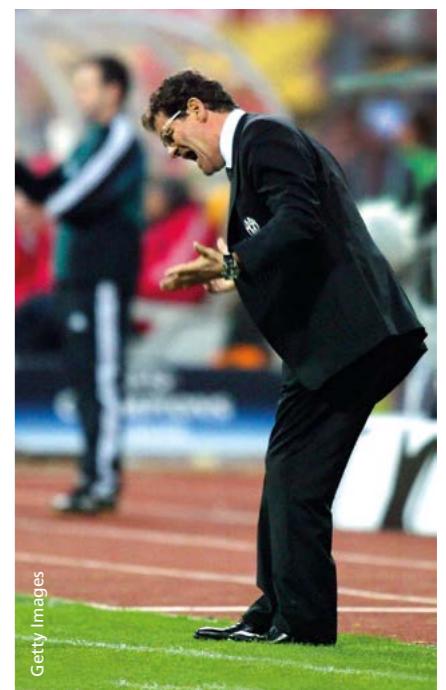
At some stage, a coach may have to make some compromises.



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advanced in the area of statistics, and through things like heart rate monitors, and especially with the use of video technology, which allows you to watch and prepare your team, and then helps you to sell your ideas to them.

Where is the limit for a coach in making such compromises with owners and players?

I have never accepted compromises. The team is my responsibility. You need to have a strong personality. I think you have to be fair, but you need to have the strength of character to stand your ground when you're in the right. Because if you give in – with the players, as well – you show your weak points. We're judged on how we treat the star players, how we treat the young players, how we behave after a loss or a win, what our reactions are, and so on. You're constantly under scrutiny, so you need to be extremely careful and prepared. I treat stars and youngsters the same way. No one has ever asked me: "Why aren't you saying the same thing to that guy?" or "Why can that guy do that?" In a team, we're all equal – all of us – if we want to win. If you don't want to win ... then accept compromises.

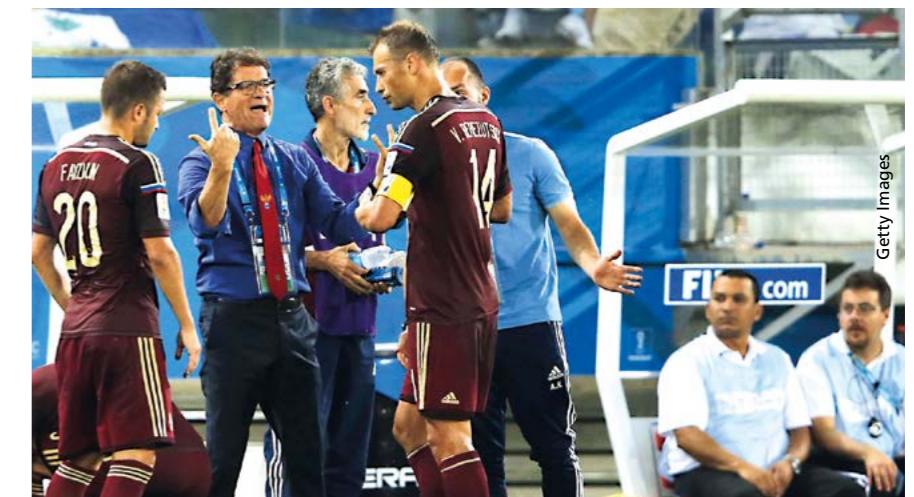
How do you see the game evolving in tactical and technical terms in the future?

I believe that football will be more tactical in the future, so we need to be more tactically aware, better prepared and technically faster. There will be a need for much more focus on the pitch. We're very

the best. A manager has to be able to understand the potential of his team.

Finally, what would you say is the hardest thing for a manager?

Choosing the starting 11, deciding who will sit on the bench and who will be in the stands – that's the hardest thing. It's a matter of courage and having a winning mentality. The coach has to have the courage to choose. He must be brave and understand why a player who is perhaps only at 85% might – or might not – perform better than another player. And you have to understand players' worth. If you don't understand the real value of your players, you can't help them to improve. ☑



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JESÚS VELASCO

"AS A COACH, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS BE TRYING TO IMPROVE AND REINVENT YOURSELF"

Having been pipped at the post in the final last year, Jesús Velasco led Inter FS to victory in the UEFA Futsal Cup this season, earning the Spanish club their fourth European title. Velasco looks back on his team's road to success and offers his take on the evolution of the indoor game, drawing on a wealth of experience both in Italy and his native Spain.

Inter FS last lifted the UEFA Futsal Cup in 2009. After falling at the final hurdle in 2016, how do you explain your success this season?

One of the main reasons is that, this season, virtually all our players arrived at the final tournament in good physical shape, in contrast to last season. The final that we lost in 2016 also helped us enormously to prepare for this year's comeback, when we were determined to take our revenge.

Was the team better equipped to win this season?

We were able to prepare better in numerous ways. We approached the competition differently, with a clearer idea of what we had to do to win it. The fact that the players were injury-free was also a major factor.

"All coaches know they have to win matches, but it's even more the case at Inter than elsewhere. Here, if you lose three matches in a row, it's a disaster."

Since you joined Inter in 2012, the club has won countless trophies in Spain without ever managing to lift the UEFA Futsal Cup. Did your recent victory fill you with more relief than joy?

From a personal point of view, it made me very happy. It was a great moment. But from a professional perspective it also felt like a huge weight had been lifted. The club has UEFA Futsal Cup ambitions virtually every season and to have finally won it is a huge relief, both for me and for the club as a whole. Inter FS is a club made to win titles, and the Futsal Cup is the most prestigious there is, so it was about time we won it after several years of missing out.

The UEFA Futsal Cup finals are a unique tournament, with two matches – semi-finals and final – in the space of three days, against the best clubs in Europe. How do you prepare for such intense, high-level competition?

Our training method is fairly intense, which means that our players can recover very quickly. Playing two high-level matches in three days is not a problem for our team because we are used to

playing three matches in three days in the Spanish Cup. It's a very useful way of helping us prepare for the challenge of the finals.

The 2017 finals were played in Almaty, Kazakhstan, more than 8,000km from Madrid, with a four-hour time difference between the two cities. Did this make the journey and preparing for the competition more difficult?

Given the distance, we tried to find the quickest way of flying between the two cities and looked into chartering a direct flight to Almaty. But we gave up on that idea in the end because it was too expensive. We took a regular flight in the end, with a stopover in Frankfurt. We arrived in Kazakhstan three days before the semi-finals, to give us time to recover from the journey and get used to the time difference. Everything went as planned and the players were in perfect physical condition for both matches.

Do you think the standard at the UEFA Futsal Cup finals is the highest in the world? →

I don't think you'll find a better standard anywhere else today. It's the moment when the top clubs reach their peak, all aiming to become European champions. As winners, we will never forget the 2017 edition, of course. On both technical and tactical levels the standard was very high and all four teams stood a genuine chance of winning. For all these reasons, I believe this year's edition was the best so far.

Portugal's Ricardinho was man of the match in both your games in this year's finals. What role did he play in your victory?

Ricardinho played a vital role in our success. When he's at his best, he can make a huge difference, especially in attack. He's also able to defend with high intensity. He was determined to shine and to finally lift the UEFA Futsal Cup with Inter. He showed that he could be relied on when it mattered and was one of our keys to victory.

He has already been voted the world's best player four times (in 2010, 2014, 2015 and 2016).

"I would like to see the game get faster in the future. However, I'm afraid it'll become slower unless the rules change."

Do you think he's on a different level to the rest of your squad?

He's a player like any other, in the sense that he's part of the team, but at the same time you can say he's on a different level because he does extraordinary things on the pitch. He's extremely creative, which – combined with his intelligence, technical skill and physical strength – makes him a very special player. He plays for the team, fits in perfectly with our style of play and often finds ways of breaking the deadlock when matches are tight.

When he scores an outstanding goal like the 2-2 equaliser against Kairat Almaty in the semi-final, are you still taken aback or does nothing he does surprise you any more, having

coached him for a number of seasons now?

It's the type of goals he scores that makes Ricardinho so special. He has it all: the physical qualities needed to make quick changes of pace, technical skills that enable him to beat three opponents in one move, and tactical intelligence that helps him to find space on the pitch. I'm used to seeing him score goals like that now and pull off other incredible moves.

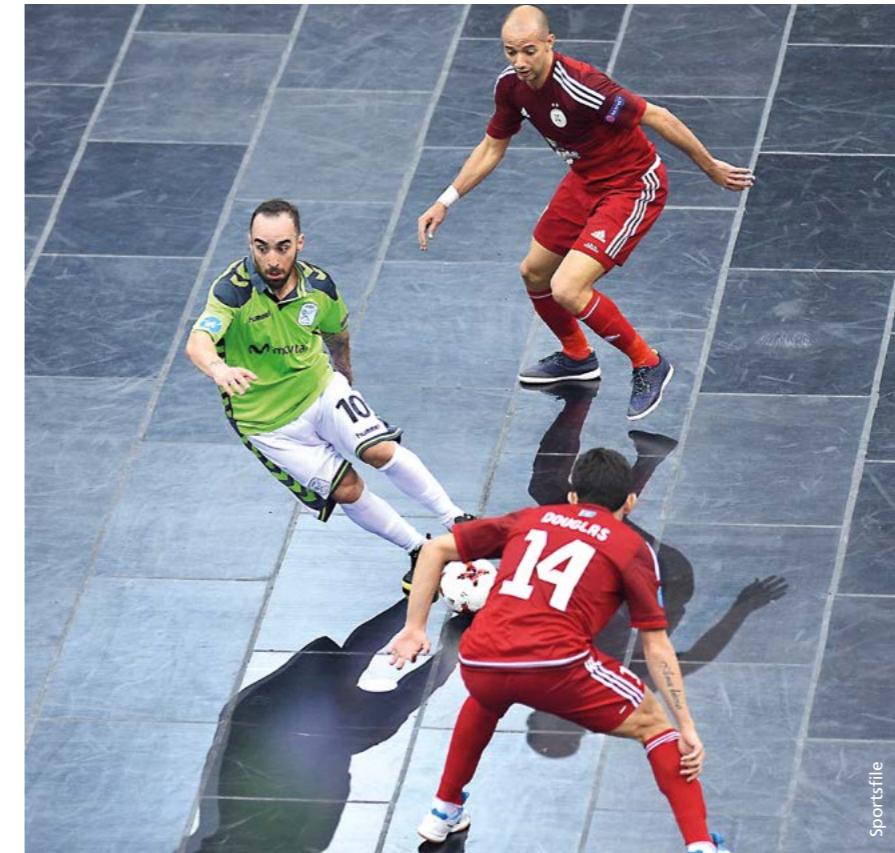
He's a very creative player. As a coach, do you try to give him as much freedom as possible?

I give him very general instructions. He assimilates our game plan perfectly, both defensively and in attack, but he also has plenty of freedom to do what he wants. Sometimes, this can cost us goals, because he makes a mistake and loses the ball in a dangerous area, but we have to let him take risks so that he can produce those game-changing moments.

In last season's final, Jesús Velasco and his team lost out to Russian debutants Ugra Yugorsk, who beat the hosts 4-3 in Guadalajara.



Sportsfile



Ricardinho and his team-mates took it to the wire against Kairat in the semi-finals in Almaty but snatched a 3-2 win.

on this system a lot in training. Because we win most of our matches, our opponents often play without a goalkeeper towards the end, in an attempt to get back into the match, and we've developed strong tactical discipline that helps us to take advantage of our opponents' mistakes and score from a long way out, as we did in the final against Sporting.

With four titles, Inter have won the UEFA Futsal Cup more times than anyone else. What is it like to work at such a prestigious club?

Firstly, I have an advantage over other coaches because our club has greater resources than the others, which means we can build a large squad of high-calibre players. I have the privilege of being able to choose from a squad of 15 players, all of whom are capable of being first-team regulars. But it's also a huge responsibility, because the team is expected to win titles every season. All coaches know they have to win matches, but it's even more the case at Inter than elsewhere. Here, if you lose three matches in a row, it's a disaster.



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In this season's final, after a tight opening period, Inter dominated against Sporting CP, coming out 7-0 winners. In the last few minutes, you got three goals with long-distance shots from your own half, while your opponents were without a goalkeeper. Is this a tactic you work on a lot in training?

It's something we're working on more and more. In futsal, you can put an outfield player in goal, which is something that a lot of teams often do to give them a numerical advantage on the pitch when they have possession of the ball. Personally, I'm not a big fan of it, but we have to be adaptable and we work



"I think opportunities to bring the goalkeeper out should be limited and it should only be done by teams that want to score goals rather than those that just want to keep hold of the ball, which is sometimes the case at the moment."

"At the top level, futsal and football are very different. But there are some areas in which we can learn from each other: training methods, technical work, individual tactics, attacking play, and so on."

You coached in Italy for a number of seasons. Is there a real cultural difference between Italian and Spanish futsal?

Italian futsal is more physical and the playing systems there are less flexible than in Spain. The players are very disciplined and have less room for manoeuvre, whereas Spanish players have more freedom and can be creative. Also, the standard of goalkeeping in Spain is the best in the world, which makes it more difficult to score goals.

What have been the biggest changes in futsal since you began coaching in the 1990s?

The rule changes have had a big impact. Before, the goalkeeper wasn't allowed to leave the area and there was a lot more room in the attacking third. Now, goalkeepers can come out, there's less space, and that's made it easier to defend. The opportunity to attack with five outfield players against four also makes the closing stages of matches more exciting.

In what areas have futsal players improved the most in recent years?

They have improved both strategically and physically. These days, players are tactically very disciplined and much stronger physically; they're quicker, more resilient and more powerful.

How do you see the game of futsal developing over the next few years?

I would like to see the game get faster in the future. However, I'm afraid it'll become slower unless the rules change. At the moment, coaches can do little more than make sure their teams defend well,



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take advantage of dead-ball situations and have strong '5 v 4' [flying goalkeeper] tactics. Futsal is a great sport to watch when it's fast-moving, when there are plenty of one-on-ones, when the ball moves quickly from one end to the other ...

What rules would you change to ensure that futsal develops in the way you would like it to?
That's a difficult question. For example,

I think opportunities to bring the goalkeeper out should be limited and it should only be done by teams that want to score goals rather than those that just want to keep hold of the ball, which is sometimes the case at the moment.

In 2018/19, the UEFA Futsal Cup will be renamed the UEFA Futsal Champions League. European Women's and Under-19 Futsal

Championships are also being introduced in 2018. Are you pleased to see UEFA doing more with futsal?

These are very important decisions, and ones that have been well received in the futsal world. UEFA wants to develop our sport and, in the years to come, there should be more and more teams not only in the men's competitions but also in the women's and youth events. It's our job to make futsal a spectacular sport that attracts spectators. Futsal is already a fascinating sport to watch when it's played at a fast pace. When it's slower, it's much less interesting for everyone. Futsal needs to be spectacular to keep everyone happy.

Inter have links with Club Atlético de Madrid. Do you have any contact with Atlético coach Diego Simeone and his staff?

The two clubs are linked at administrative level and they're working on a cooperation agreement, but I don't know yet what exactly it's going to involve. I've never spoken to Diego Simeone, but he's clearly someone I would like to talk to. He's a coach who can instil a lot in his players, so it would be great to establish professional links with him.

Generally speaking, can futsal coaches draw inspiration from



With nine domestic titles under his belt – six from Italy and three from Spain – Velasco had his sights firmly set on European glory.

"In my 20-year career, I've never run the same training session twice. You always have to keep the players on their toes and guide them towards achieving the club's objectives."

the work of football coaches, and vice versa?

At the top level, the two sports are very different. But there are some areas in which we can learn from each other: training methods, technical work, individual tactics, attacking play, and so on.

Do you watch other indoor team sports, such as handball or basketball, for inspiration?

The main reason I watch these sports is because I enjoy sport in general. I think you can learn things anywhere and it's important to always be thinking about what you can learn from watching a coaching session at youth level, or one in handball, volleyball or some other sport. If you think creatively, you can get ideas from almost any sport. As a coach, you should always be trying to improve and reinvent yourself. In my 20-year career, I've never run the same training session twice. You always have to keep the players on their toes and guide them towards achieving the club's objectives. Coaching is a great way to spend your days. I love what I'm doing right now! ☺



Sportsfile

FOOTBALL'S NEW FRONTIER

The flood of data and statistics into football has been one of the big changes the sport has witnessed since the turn of the century. But how do coaches and clubs make sense of it all?

In football there's an overflow of useless data, like pass completion rates and possession stats. Part of the problem is that people start with the data, not with the questions, and as a consequence they end up answering questions no one has asked."

These are the words of FC Midtjylland chairman Rasmus Ankersen. Midtjylland are a club whose analytics-based approach not only won them a first Danish Super League title in 2015 – it has also placed them at the forefront of what some would call football's quiet revolution. Some of it may be "useless", as Ankersen puts it, but amid the reams and reams of data now out there, there is much that is useful – and fewer clubs across the continent work harder than Midtjylland to apply it to their benefit.

If analytics is football's brave new world, then Midtjylland are out there in the advance party, exploring uncharted territory. "Being able to collect and interpret data is a key skill in recruitment, sports science, coaching and medical departments," says Ankersen as he begins to underline the Midtjylland ethos. The club's majority shareholder is Matthew Benham, owner of the English second-tier team Brentford FC, and a man who earned his wealth as creator of Smartodds, a company which used mathematical models to predict football results.

This approach is quite at odds with traditional thinking, explains Ankersen, and it involves far more than, for instance, the employment of a specialist kicking coach to work with players.

"Fundamentally we believe that 'the league table lies,'" he elaborates. "When we're evaluating progress, we're looking

more at our internal model rating, which is a better indicator of how the team is developing than a snapshot of the table. We know there's so much randomness in football that you rarely get what you deserve, and the head coach knows this. He understands that being number one in the table while performing as number five in our model rating is not acceptable.

"We look at what all football teams seek to do – to create as many high-probability scoring opportunities as possible and reduce the number of scoring opportunities conceded," he adds. "We know there's a lot of randomness in conversion rates and, as a consequence, a team's ability to consistently get into positions where the probability of scoring is high and prevent the opponent from doing it against you is, over time, more predictive of how a team is doing and is likely to do in the future than its league position at that particular moment. Results can easily swing between 10 and 15 points over a season solely down to randomness."

The Midtjylland approach is undeniably different, but all around Europe clubs are increasingly influenced by analytics. Just take this example from Ernesto Valverde, the new FC Barcelona coach. During his time in charge of Athletic Club, Valverde consulted an econometrics professor at the London School of Economics, Ignacio

Palacios-Huerta, for advice on playing games at Athletic's new-but-not-quite-finished San Mamés stadium in 2013/14. Behind one goal, a new stand was not ready and, contrary to the expectations of Valverde and his players, they learned from Palacios-Huerta that statistics – some taken from Rayo Vallecano's experience of an identical situation – suggested they would have more success attacking the wall of the unfinished stand, than the spectator-filled end of the ground opposite.

"Getting that answer was crucial to us because the stand was going to take most of the season to complete and the information would help us plan which goal we chose to attack in the first half," Valverde later recounted. "We talked it over with the players and they said that if we were more likely to score in the goal against the wall then that's the direction they'd like to be going in the first half. And it must have worked because by the end of the season we had qualified for the Champions League."

The first steps

The Numbers Game, a thought-provoking book by Chris Anderson and David Sally, describes analytics as "football's newest frontier". Mapping the early milestones, it notes the arrival of Opta Sports in English football in the mid-90s, followed by such early market leaders as Prozone, also in England, and Amisco in France. Paul Boanas remembers those early days at Prozone when the company worked with "four or five teams" in the Premier League and he and his colleague would sit in front of TV monitors "tracking the movement of the players on the field and inputting whether it was a shot, cross or pass." Today, Boanas is director of sales of Catapult Sports, a provider of scientifically validated metrics for clubs around the world, via its GPS tracking devices.



At each UEFA match, a venue data coordinator collects all the match statistics.



He reflects on the boom his industry has witnessed: "There are so many data analytics companies, tracking companies, etc., looking at football and thinking, 'We'll develop something now that will revolutionise the world. Frankly, it will not'."

For Boanas, revolution may not be the right word – yet he believes the technology available today does make a telling impact and quotes Arsène Wenger, who once said, "There are 22 players on the field and I have two eyes". This naked-eye view has been enhanced, he says, following FIFA's 2015 decision to permit the wearing of GPS devices in matches albeit with the proviso that the resulting data could not be viewed during the action. "Managers can now get data at half-time and full time about how a player has 'performed', adds Boanas, those inverted commas his own. "It does help bring some accountability. Just because you've run better doesn't mean you've performed better but you can look at a heat map and say, 'Are you in the right position? Is your high intensity work in the right areas of the field?'"

Today Catapult Sports provides GPS systems for some of the world's biggest football clubs – Real Madrid CF, FC Bayern München, Paris Saint-Germain and Celtic FC. At this elite level, a club's GPS equipment is tailored according to their needs and can include such metrics as PlayerLoad, which measures explosiveness

"As well as the GPS and heart-rate data ... we try to link the objective performance output with a player's feeling so that we have the whole picture."

Xabier Ruiz de Ocenda
Analyst at Real Sociedad

Statistics showed that Athletic Club would have more success attacking the wall of the unfinished stand at their new-but-not-quite-finished San Mamés stadium.

Getty Images



and helps assess an individual player's workload to reduce the risk of overdoing it.

It is not just the biggest clubs who benefit. AFC Flyde, a club in the northwest of England, newly promoted to the fifth rung of the English ladder, recently signed up for a GPS system. "Clubs in lower divisions can wear a device and get accurate monitoring of their players in a game, whereas before they couldn't afford a ProZone or Amisco tracking system that was based on a camera and video system," Boanas explains. Indeed one of the company's systems, Playertek, even caters for "sub-elite players" as Boanas puts it, sending ten metrics – such as distance covered, sprint distance, players' power output, etc. – to their mobile phone.

Daily gains

Xabier Ruiz de Ocenda works as an analyst at Real Sociedad de Fútbol in the Spanish top flight, and he offers an insight into the day-to-day application of technology within the club's first-team squad.

Match data is far more complex than mere ball possession – "it's also, for example, whether the play is more direct or possession-based or involving counterattacks," he explains, and there are also metrics to help with the players' conditioning.

"As well as the GPS and heart-rate data, we also want to know, with RPE [Rating of Perceived Exertion], how a player feels before, during and after training and competitive matches. We try to link the objective performance output with a player's feeling so that we have the whole picture.

"Before each training session we ask the player about their psychological and physical condition," he continues. "Whenever we detect an anomaly, we talk to the player and medical department, to understand it better and to adapt the workload of the session for that particular player. In short, we talk with them regularly and show them the data that's put up on the dressing-room wall. And if it's a more individual matter, we'll call them to discuss it."

Oleg Yarovinsky concurs that the capacity to measure a player's workload is one of the big pluses of this new technology. Yarovinsky is the sporting director of Russian Premier League side PFC CSKA

"At every training session they wear the vest and every player has an electronic card, where all their training session data is kept."

Oleg Yarovinsky
Sporting director of CSKA Moskow

Moskva and he explains: "We have to keep the training intensity at least at 85% of the playing intensity and to understand that you have to use the data. During a training session where there's a high intensity, your eyes cannot see how intense each player's work is so we use the data for that.

"At every training session they wear the vest and every player has an electronic card, where all their training session data is kept. When a player is coming back from



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A COACH'S VIEW

Lars Lagerbäck
Norway national team coach

"It was around 1998 or '99 that we started working with PowerPoint presentations with the Swedish national team and a year or two later, our then analyst, Paul Balsom, introduced computers to our work.

"Today, working with the Norway national team, my analyst takes all the defensive and offensive set-pieces of our opponent's last seven matches, along with all the scoring chances, and from that we pick out the examples we want.

"Sometimes we pick out other things. When I was coaching Iceland and we played the Netherlands in EURO 2016 qualifying, we did something special on how to play against Arjen Robben. With the Dutch style of playing, it's so important that you don't sell yourself one v one so after the first game we took out a lot of clips of one v one situations and we emphasised this.

"As for my own players, we film each match ourselves with a wide picture where we can see all the outfield players all the

time and how they're doing their job without the ball, and that's also really important for me.

"Our team meeting is normally not more than 40 minutes long. As well as looking at the opposition, when it comes to our defending, I use some PowerPoint clips from the last game or two – this could be 10 or 25 minutes depending on the opponent or how well we've been doing things.

"Regarding data, I find all statistics are useful to me as a coach. I do look into it but there's very little I use for the players – it's more helpful to give me as clear a picture as possible of our performance. I don't go into it with the players unless it's something really special – like the one v one situations, as this is a decisive part of the game.

"Perhaps the most important thing for me with data is I can give players feedback and they don't just think it's my opinion. With statistics and video analysis you can easily pick out different situations and show them to the players and say, 'You did this right and that wrong'. Overall, my experience is if you give players too much information it can have the opposite effect and be too much so they don't take it on board."



Getty Images



2016/17 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE IN NUMBERS

833

The number of passes made by Real Madrid's **TONI KROOS**, the most of any player during the campaign



601'

The number of minutes played by Salzburg's **CHRISTIAN SCHWEGLER** during the qualifying stages, the most of any player



142,345m

The distance covered by **KOKE** for Atletico, the most of any player during the campaign



27

The highest number of successful crosses made by one player, Juventus' **DANI ALVES**

98%

The highest pass completion rate of any player who made more than 100 pass attempts, achieved by Real Madrid's **MATEO KOVACIC**

says, when assessing potential new signings. For a start it helps to measure the merits of teams from different countries and so allows for a better understanding of the level that would-be signings are performing at. "Primarily we use it to compare the strength of teams in different leagues," he explains. "That's very hard to do with the human eye, and good models are often a lot more accurate. It's important to know if we're recruiting a player from a team at a higher level or a lower level than us, and we believe that we're very good at measuring that."

Midtjylland also carry out detailed checks on the character of prospective signings. "Personality is a huge thing for us," he adds. "We don't want any cultural misfits. The best way to find out the real character of someone is to speak to people who've played with him and experienced him when he's at his best and his worst. We don't really believe too much in interviewing the player himself because he's likely to give us the answer he thinks we want to hear. In my opinion, the best way to do a job interview is when the person doesn't know he's being interviewed, and that's why we do a lot of work collecting confidential references from people who know him very well."

Midtjylland's approach may appear extraordinary but there is no doubting the increasing belief in the importance of analytics across the football world. In England, Arsenal FC went so far as to buy the Chicago-based sports analytics company StatDNA and bring it in-house. Last November, Liverpool FC appointed as their sporting director Michael Edwards, who had arrived at the club originally as head of analytics.

And yet according to Rob Esteva, director of The Stats Zone, we are still just at the beginning of the process of mining this rich seam of information. Esteva, who once worked with Matthew Benham at Brentford, says even the biggest clubs are still finding their way. "Elite clubs are beginning to recognise the fact that the mainstream data available to them does not necessarily fully cater to their needs. I fully expect that more will follow the trend of building their own data collection systems and working to their own sets of definitions that suit their style of play, and players."

The players of Danish club FC Midtjylland wear GPS devices during matches.

they could identify players who have similar attributes. You go through the process, look at which attacking midfielders score 15 goals a season, make five to ten assists per season, can run 11–12km per game and can average 70–80 passes per game. You can come up with a list of players that fit within that sphere but you're looking at different leagues and different teams. That is difficult and there's also the context of what happened around Lampard at Chelsea so you need to look at the data around two defensive midfielders sitting behind him that enabled Lampard to do what he did.

"So you have to look at what those around him did to allow him the freedom to do the attacking side of things. That was one aspect. Then you look at other countries and other players and, for instance Diego, the Brazilian attacking

midfield at Wolfsburg, had similar stats but in Germany, where he was in a very attacking team and where the average goals per game at that time was something like 2.9 per game. In the Premier League the average was about 2.6 and Chelsea were not creating to the same degree. So there's nothing to say that Diego can do those things as well if you put him into a team that doesn't have as many chances and doesn't play as open. There are just so many variables but context is key and using techniques like cluster analysis to look at units within a team can be vital to project player performance when recruiting.

"Everything with data and small gains is about minimising your risk," he continues. "It is giving you a slightly better chance of succeeding. It might be 1% or 2% but you're not changing the whole system. There's no magic formula."

UEFA SUPPLYING THE STATS

"We're up to around 2,300 games each season," says Andy Lockwood, UEFA's data services manager, as he reflects on the European governing body's work in gathering data for each match played in its competitions. "UEFA has a venue data coordinator (VDC) at every match and the minimum data gathered is the line-ups, yellow and red cards, substitutions and goalscorers – the key events that the referee validates after the game," he adds, "together with shots, corners, offsides and fouls. Information such as the timings of events and the reasons for bookings is used by the administration and the disciplinary unit."

This is the bare minimum, and UEFA collects rather more extensive data from Champions League and EURO matches,

Europa League finals and the Super Cup. Lockwood explains: "We work with a company which deploys an optical tracking system at these matches. There's an operator at the game and when the teams come out on to the pitch they tag each player and the cameras follow the players. Every player is followed in terms of distance covered, speed, sprints, and passing. There's a heat map and a plan showing where their passes went on the pitch. The clubs receive PDFs of this tracking data for all their players, and we also send the feeds to the clubs so they can integrate them directly into their systems. This is private. It is beyond what the broadcasters and other media are allowed to use and is reserved for the clubs' performance analysts to look at."

37



TAKING THE FAST TRACK TO GOAL

UEFA's technical reports on its 2016/17 elite club competitions highlight a trend for quick, counterattacking football – and a record number of Champions League goals.

Positive attacking football is firmly in fashion. This is the uplifting message to draw from UEFA's technical reports on last season's men's club competitions, which found ample evidence that the quick and direct counterattacking football currently in vogue goes hand in hand with a fast flow of goals.

To underline the point, for the first time in the 25 years of the Champions League, the 2016/17 campaign ended with a goal average of above three per game – a record total of 380 scored at a rate of 3.04 per match. The Europa League witnessed its own scoring spike last term, with 565 scored at a rate of 2.76 per game, the highest in five years.

The technical reports for both competitions provide considerable food

for thought, with the prevalence of swift transitions just one significant trend noted by UEFA's technical observers, who also highlighted the importance of wing play as a route to goal – albeit a route more commonly taken these days by full-backs than old-fashioned wingers. They identified an increase in the use of longer balls too, and a changing relationship between forwards in the same team.

UEFA's technical reports are the product of the work of a team of observers who attend every knockout match in the Champions League and Europa League. For those present at the Champions League technical observers' meeting chaired by UEFA's chief technical officer, Ioan Lupescu, the morning after the Juventus v Real Madrid final in Cardiff, there was also much to savour – a point

summed up by experienced German coach Thomas Schaaf.

"It was refreshing to see so many teams playing high-tempo football with great changes of play," Schaaf says in the technical report. "All of us who are fascinated by football could see lots of duels, one-on-one situations, deep running, fast vertical attacking and an emphasis on creating chances. We saw lots of goals, and I hope that this is a trend that will continue."

It was a trend writ large in the identity of the winners in Cardiff, Zinédine Zidane's Madrid, who were – as the Champions League report says, "the ones that had scored the most goals in a season when goalscoring records were shattered." In the wake of the more cautious approach witnessed by some

of the participants at EURO 2016, the report adds: "The flow of goals in the 2016/17 season contradicted the theory that today's exhaustive levels of scouting and match analysis might encourage coaches to focus on pre-empting the opposition's attacking play."

The direct route

As regards the specific brand of attacking football on display in 2016/17, Fabio Capello, speaking in Cardiff, described a move away from the Barcelona-inspired possession game. "We are certainly seeing an evolution in that the teams who opt for the Barcelona possession-based style that set the trends a few years ago now seem to be running into difficulties," said the Italian, a Champions League-winning coach with Milan in 1994. "This is normal. Any successful model – the elements implemented by Arrigo Sacchi, Johan Cruyff or Pep Guardiola, for example – is analysed in depth. I would say that, now, the trend is that if you win the ball, you immediately run at the opponents while they are out of balance and can be surprised. The key is to win the ball quickly and then mount direct collective attacks, entering the penalty area quickly." A case in point were Juventus, one of Capello's former clubs, who based their run to the final on proficient defending and quick



"It was refreshing to see so many teams playing high-tempo football with great changes of play. We saw lots of goals, and I hope that this is a trend that will continue."

Thomas Schaaf
UEFA technical observer

transitions into attacking mode. There were other examples and overall, just below 20% of the goals scored in open play in the Champions League could be directly attributed to counterattacking. As for the Europa League, the fact that only four of the ten teams who had most possession in matches reached the last 16 of the competition highlights this same tendency. In the final itself, winners Manchester United had only 33% of the ball against Ajax.

Another of UEFA's technical observers, the former Finland striker and coach Mixu Paatela, says in the Europa League report: "Teams have that fast transition when they win the ball and pass it forward, instead of taking their time, and I think the onus now in football, for success, is: 'What happens when you win the ball? Can you win territory, can you beat men early and quickly?' Possibly there will be an increase of long balls in the future, because if you just pass it short or sideways, teams will throw themselves into their compact unit, and it's very difficult to break that."

As well as quick, long passes forward, one trend detected in the Champions League was the sight of attackers staying high up the pitch to disturb their opponents' build-up and try to force the rival goalkeeper to play long,



GOALS, GOALS, GOALS

The unprecedented number of goals in the Champions League – 380 at a rate of 3.04 per game – meant that the competition's global audience was offered one goal per 31 minutes of play. According to UEFA's technical report: "[This] balance represented an increase of 9.5% in comparison with the previous season but the goalscoring pattern registered an unusual variation. The group stage produced two goals fewer than in 2015/16. And the season ended with record-breaking figures because nets were ruffled on 102 occasions during the knockout rounds, compared with 67 in the previous season – a massive increase of 52%."

As for the most productive time for scoring goals, in the Champions League it was the period from 46 to 60 minutes, while in the Europa League it was from 61 to 75 minutes. Yet when goals scored in added time are included in the 76–90 minutes period, this becomes the most fruitful period – yielding 21% of goals in the Champions League and 22% in the Europa League.

If that stat suggests an emergence of similar patterns in the two competitions, so too does the dead-ball goals tally: 24% was the total for both the Champions League and the knockout stage of the Europa League.

Period of the game in which most goals are scored
76 – 90+ mins



21%
of goals scored in UEFA Champions League



22%
of goals scored in UEFA Europa League

Full-backs like Real Madrid's Carvajal and Marcelo are equally capable of helping to create goals in the way that wingers used to.

thereby increasing their own team's chances of immediately regaining possession. Juventus used this ploy effectively in the first leg of their quarter-final against Barcelona, when Marc-André ter Stegen was obliged to play long on 12 occasions, with only three of those long passes reaching a team-mate. Massimiliano Allegri's team repeated the dose in the home leg of the semi-final against AS Monaco, when 60% of the passes made by Danijel Subašić were long. Only four found a friendly target.

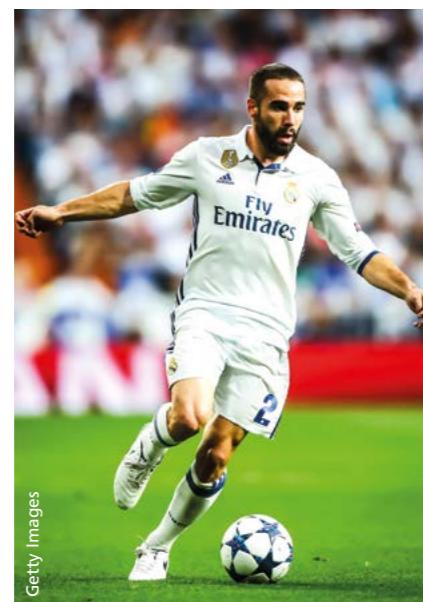
Wide boys

Another theme commented on by UEFA's technical observers is a recurring one from recent campaigns: the onus on full-backs to provide attacking width. The Champions League technical report includes the thoughts of ex-Man United winger Ryan Giggs, a new addition to the ranks of technical observers last season and a man perfectly placed to talk about wing play.

"Wingers are definitely going out of the game," he says in the report. "Full-backs are now the wingers. No matter what system you play, there are simply not the wingers that we saw 10 or 15 years ago, unfortunately. Of course, there are still players like Gareth Bale or Eden Hazard who can play the role of wingers but, more or less, they play inside now and tend to look for space in the pockets."

"When I played on the wing, there was a big reliance on the other players to give you the ball. Now, the star players don't wait for that to happen. They go to look for the ball and they tend to look for the ball in those little pockets where they feel the ball is going to come. This is obviously a shame but, on the other hand, teams like Real Madrid show us full-backs who are equally capable of helping to create goals in the way that wingers used to do it."

It was not just at Madrid. Giggs' former team-mate at Old Trafford, Antonio Valencia, was praised for his efforts in the Europa League report as one of two full-backs – along with Lyon's



Jérémie Morel – named in the official team of the tournament the morning after the Ajax v United final in Stockholm. What

such players have to do, unlike genuine wingers of old, is make dynamic runs into the spaces where they can deliver or test

their 1 v 1 skills. And one popular ploy to give them the opportunity to break forward, UEFA's observers also suggested, is the diagonal pass.

As Sir Alex Ferguson said: "If you've got two wide players, then penetration from midfield on a diagonal ball is very useful." The other useful diagonal ball, he added, was to the centre forward. "If you're building from one side and you've got a Diego Costa or Sergio Agüero, then you'll use it."

The statistics for the 2016/17 campaign lend further weight to the importance of a good supply from the wide areas, given the increase in goals from this source. The Champions League report notes that: "crosses, cutbacks and diagonal passes into the box accounted for 43% of the open-play goals. This marks a significant increase on the 36% registered in 2015/16." The same applied with the Europa League where, in the knockout rounds, 34% of the open-play goals were from crosses – a figure that rose to 43% with the addition of cutbacks.

Relationships between forwards

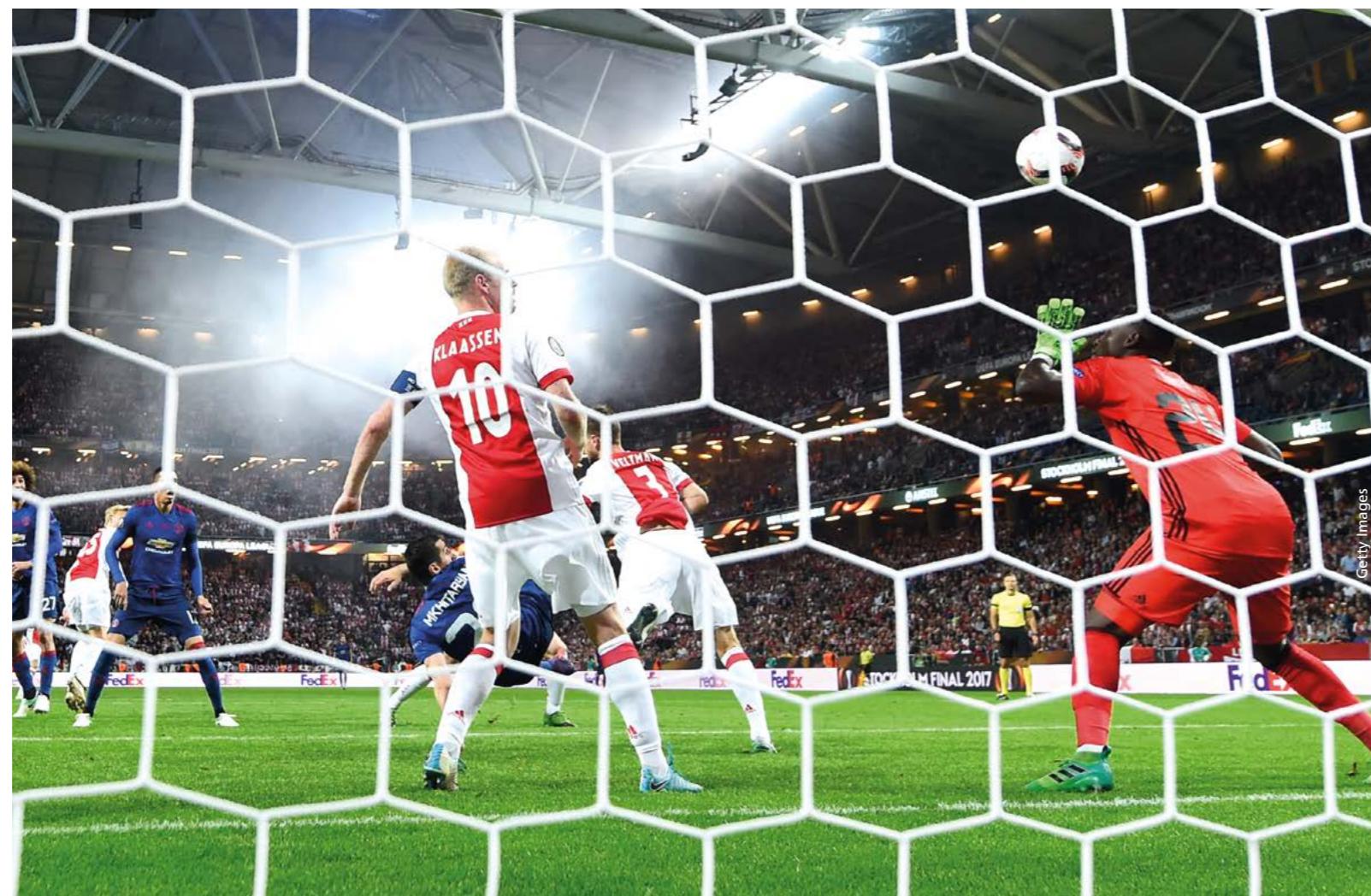
Another intriguing discussion point that emerged during the Champions League technical observers' meeting concerned the way that relationships between front players have evolved.

The report offers the example of Real Madrid's front two of Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema in the final. "Few teams operated with a genuine attacking partnership of twin strikers operating in parallel," it says. "The final provided an illustration of how even the 1-4-4-2 structure did not entail a 'partnership' as such, with Benzema and Ronaldo splitting wide and rarely striking sparks off each other. Among the 491 passes completed by Zidane's side during the final, there were three by Benzema to Ronaldo and none in the reverse direction.

"Much the same could be applied to the two-pronged attack of AS Monaco, where [Radamel] Falcao and [Kylian] Mbappé formed an effective partnership in terms of their movement but without indulging in combination play as a duo.

During the three hours of the semi-final against Juventus, they exchanged four passes." Instead, adds the report, while there were exceptions, such as semi-finalists Atlético de Madrid, a "more general pattern was for a lone striker to receive support from in-cutting wide players (the relationships between Messi and Neymar with Suárez at Barcelona providing a high-profile example) or for danger to emerge from a cluster of middle-to-front players (Marco Reus, Ousmane Dembélé and Shinji Kagawa at Dortmund) grouped behind the advanced attacker".

Meanwhile, if Monaco's front two did not fit the convention of old, they still helped to make the surprise semi-finalists from France a joy to watch, according to Giggs. "I enjoyed watching Monaco," he said. "They had pace and power throughout the team. Falcao supplied the goalscoring instinct with younger legs all around him." There was much else to enjoy too, of course, as the goals flew in across the continent.



UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE GOALS



*Percentages exclude finals which are played on neutral territory



Goals scored with headers
2015/16: 63
2016/17: 54

A drop from
18% to 14%



Goals generated after solo runs
96 games
17 goals scored

Group stage
Knockout stage



U17 right-back Mateu Morey typified the trend for fast-moving defenders pushing forward as he helped Spain to victory in Croatia.



YOUTH COMPETITIONS SHOW WIDENING HORIZONS FOR FUTURE STARS

There was an emphasis on wise wing play, defensive organisation and more goalkeeper involvement in the 2017 youth tournaments, which were also used to test out a new penalty shoot-out system.

Photos: Sportsfile

A football pitch is – by and large – 68 metres wide, but if there is one thing the 2017 final tournaments of UEFA's youth competitions highlighted, it is that coaches simply cannot get enough width.

They try to exploit every centimetre at their disposal. The ball may spend a greater amount of time in the more congested central areas of the field, which is understandable given the nature and flow of the game, but the efficiency of wing play – making the most of the time the ball does spend out on the flanks – was one of the key elements encompassing all competitions, men's and women's, this summer.

It was not purely about wingers either. Overlapping full-backs were one of the biggest trends observed across the board, starting – chronologically – at the Under-17s in Croatia in May.

There, the prevalence of wingers prepared to run into the interior channels and open up spaces for full-backs to exploit was notable. Instances of full-backs making high-speed runs right through to the byline and delivering crosses or cutbacks were also prevalent, with 10 of the 16 participating nations frequently implementing such tactics, including tournament winners Spain. The powerful runs and combination moves by their full-backs proved to be an important weapon in such teams' attacking armoury.

France right-back Vincent Collet offered prime examples of aggressive running along the touchline, allowing right-winger Yacine Adli to transfer his dribbling skills to the inside channels – sometimes on the other flank, which was also noted as a trend in Croatia – or to probe the opposition from a central playmaking position. Much the same could be said of England right-back Timothy Eyoma, whose marauding runs allowed Phil Foden to drift inside and operate across a broad section of the attacking front.

Using width at the Under-17 and Under-19 finals

This was a trend carried through to the Under-19s in Georgia. France were conspicuous by their absence, but England were one of the nations who made capital out of their flank play.

As in Croatia, the most common – and successful – approach to attacking in Georgia was down the wings, and half of

the eight nations regularly employed a strategy aimed at increasing productivity from the wingers and overlapping full-backs. A total of 15 goals – more than one in three – were scored from either crosses or cutbacks, with excellent movement and combinations down the flanks creating numerous opportunities, with a focused team effort to create spaces.

Wingers were doing this by moving into the middle, with full-backs exploiting the gaps this movement ripped open. The Czech Republic, Germany and Portugal all deployed similar tactics in this area, mixing the approach with full-backs taking a more central trajectory for their runs and wingers hugging the touchlines, before a quick turn outside by the full-back, going around his winger, exploited even more space.

This was well highlighted at the Under-17s, where Spain came back from 1-0 down against France in the quarter-final, with right-back Mateu Morey producing a high-speed 'underlapping' run to gain space for a left-footed shot. Minutes later, his Barcelona team-mate Juan Miranda embarked on an almost identical underlapping run on the left to earn the penalty that put his side 2-1 ahead. Morey burst through the inside channel again to equalise with another left-footed finish during the final against England.

"This is a tactical shift," says Savvas Constantinou, UEFA technical observer at the Under-19s in Georgia. "The wing play was coming increasingly from the full-backs and not just the wingers."

The technicians watching the Under-17s in Croatia also noted that wingers were not necessarily sticking to convention. Instead, there was a marked trend towards the use of change-footed wingers, with England →



"This is a tactical shift. The wing play was coming increasingly from the full-backs and not just the wingers."

Savvas Constantinou
UEFA technical observer at the Under-19s in Georgia

providing a striking example of the tendency with right-footed Jadon Sancho on the left and left-footed Foden on the right. Serbia and the Netherlands also regularly fielded 'wrong-footed' wingers, while Hungary and Ukraine were among those who switched wingers during games to mix the change-footed and orthodox approaches. Turkey did likewise, with the variation that both wingers were left-footed. Ambidexterity was a boon.

At the Women's Under-17s in the Czech Republic, 25% of goals were scored by wingers thanks to a greater emphasis being placed on swift counterattacking and direct wing play, with players notably showing a greater comprehension and grasp of tactics. "There were some very, very mature performances all round," said UEFA's technical observer in Plzeň, Anna Signeul, who reflected on the high-quality tournament and its entertaining, highly sophisticated matches. According to Signeul, defensive organisation was often equally strong, ensuring tactical battles in all transitions. Such a level of tactical awareness among players aged 14 to 17 is not to be taken for granted and illustrates how well prepared the teams were in the Czech Republic – and not only there.

In fact, detailed defensive preparation appeared to be another of the priorities at all of this summer's youth tournaments. The old adage that attack is the best form of defence appears to be mutating somewhat into defence being the best form of attack.

With Phil Foden on the right and Jadon Sancho on the left, England provided a masterclass in the use of 'wrong-footed' wingers in Croatia.



With Phil Foden on the right and Jadon Sancho on the left, England provided a masterclass in the use of 'wrong-footed' wingers in Croatia.



"The goalkeepers have been a nice surprise. England have got two really good goalkeepers, while the Netherlands' number one will be pushing for the senior team, and Scotland's and France's were also very good – it's encouraging for the future of goalkeeping."

Hope Powell
UEFA technical observer at the Women's Under-19s in Northern Ireland

In Croatia, where Spain defeated England in a penalty shoot-out – and there will be more on that later – the Iberians' captain Abel Ruiz and Turkey's three frontmen (striker Malik Karaahmet and the two wingers) were unstinting in their efforts to disturb the opponents' build-up while team-mates completed their transitions to the defensive block.

The aforementioned offensive vocation of full-backs offered counterattacking opportunities through the wide areas, and the top teams were adept at pre-empting penetration along the wings. In the construction phase, the norm was for a controlling midfielder to drop into the area between the spread centre-backs while the full-backs advanced. Centre-backs rarely made deep runs. Instead, the onus was on the midfielders and even forwards to drop back for possession to be regained, before launching themselves into surging counterattacks.

This shift towards a safety-first approach was accentuated at the Under-19s, where

all the head coaches acknowledged that set pieces were being worked on in training, but it appears the emphasis was more on defensive than attacking behaviour in dead-ball situations.

"Most of the teams were using all ten outfield players to defend set pieces," said UEFA technical observer Ghenadie Scurtul in Tbilisi. "There were different approaches, with man-to-man or zonal marking, but whereas before there would be one player remaining up the field to force their opponents to leave one player back, maybe as a reaction to seeing a lot of goals being scored after set pieces, the teams are now keeping these players in the penalty area." Just eight goals came from set pieces in Georgia, plus five penalties, perhaps as a result of the extra attention afforded to not conceding from such situations?

Scurtul also noted that defenders were not afraid to choose the long ball, bypassing the congested midfield areas if a build-up down the wings was not possible, "because you have a risk in midfield of losing the ball when you play combinations there, so they prefer to leave this part of the game".

Goalkeepers playing a greater part in the men's and women's game

Route one was not the predefined choice of the first line of the defence on the other hand. The goalkeepers – particularly at Under-19 level – demonstrated to what extent they have now also become the first line of attack.

To be an excellent goalkeeper, it is no longer enough to simply save shots. This was underlined, in particular, by the Netherlands' number one, Justin Bijlow, England custodian Aaron Ramsdale and the last line of the Portuguese defence – or perhaps, one might argue, the first line of their attack – Diogo Costa. Bijlow was picked out for particular



Netherlands keeper Daphne van Domselaar showed great promise in the Czech Republic.

praise, and all the more so for his active involvement in his team's games.

"He participates in the build-up and shows a very good feeling for the game," Scurtul said. "He is able to regulate the rhythm of the game and to take the right decisions." He and his fellow goalkeepers varied how the games were restarted, no longer restricting themselves to a long punt forward when playing out from the back was the preferred option. This is why their decision-making and discipline was so important and their performances demonstrated how much a part of the overall tactical shape of the teams goalkeepers have become, instead of just focusing on defending their goal or penalty area.

The same was evident at Under-17 level, despite the record number of goals scored – which, according to technical

observer Dušan Fitzel, was not down to poor goalkeeping. "What we saw in Croatia was confirmation that the job description has changed, with a much greater emphasis on the keeper's work with his feet," he said. "In the past, the Dutch excelled. But goalkeeper education has changed. In Croatia we saw teams who didn't hesitate to use the keeper to pass the ball. And keepers are increasingly integrated into training sessions rather than sent to one end to practise on their own."

The quality of goalkeeping has been a bone of contention in women's football, but both this year's Under-17s and Under-19s suggested that standards are on the rise. While the Women's EURO may have been tinged by various goalkeeping errors, some of the highlights in the Netherlands were spectacular saves and there were predominantly positive things

to be said about the goalkeeping in the Czech Republic and Northern Ireland.

"The goalkeepers have been a nice surprise," said Hope Powell, one of UEFA's technical observers at the Women's Under-19s in Northern Ireland. "England have got two really good goalkeepers, while the Netherlands' number one will be pushing for the senior team, and Scotland's and France's were also very good – it's encouraging for the future of goalkeeping."

Jury out on 'ABBA' penalty shout-out trial

Goalkeepers still had to get the basics right, though, and this in a summer when trials were undertaken into a new penalty shoot-out system aimed at altering the way the players feel the pressure, the aim being to even out what is perceived as an ➔

advantage for the side that takes the first penalty. It has been estimated that around 60% of teams who take the first penalty in the habitual system go on to win the shoot-out. Under the trialled approach – labelled ABBA to reflect the order in which the teams take their kicks – it is envisaged that parity could be obtained, eradicating any perceived advantage from winning the toss of a coin – a method that was previously used, let us not forget, to determine the winner without even the need to trapse to the spot.

The first experiment took place in the Czech Republic, where Norway and Germany fought it out for a place in the Women's Under-17 final. Norway had four 'match points' in the semi-final shoot-out and lost them all, raising interesting questions as to how the pressure got to them.

Germany missed the opening spot-kick; Norway then missed the first and scored the second of their consecutive opening efforts. The pressure was therefore considerable on Germany's second and third penalty takers – arguably more so than if the second had stepped up immediately after Norway's first miss. Germany missed what were the fourth

and fifth penalties of the shoot-out overall and after Olaug Tvedten scored to put Norway two up, Vilde Birkeli wasted their first match point with their fourth kick of the shoot-out.

The ball was back in Germany's court for consecutive kicks and, had Melissa Kössler missed their fourth, Norway would have won without needing to go again. She scored, but the same pressure subsequently befell Sjoeke Nüsken, who had to convert hers to keep Germany's hopes alive. She did just that, bringing Germany back level at 2-2, although Norway were left with a fifth penalty and their fourth opportunity to reach the final. Silje Bjørneboe missed and the psychological turnaround was complete. My Sørsdahl Haugland squandered Norway's next attempt, providing Andrea Brunner with Germany's first opportunity to win, which she took.

"Penalties are always exciting, but I'm not sure this made it any fairer," said Monika Staab, one of UEFA's technical observers in the Czech Republic. "When Norway had four chances to win the game and they didn't, is that fair? It's not clear where the psychological advantage would be. It could actually be the opposite – that

more pressure is on the team that takes the first penalty because if they miss it and then their opponents score two in a row, suddenly you are two penalties down."

Germany went on to lift the title after another ABBA shoot-out which appeared to emphasise how being first up could, in truth, be a greater advantage – assuming you open the scoring. "You could see how it became a big advantage for Germany after scoring the first one," said Signeur. "After Spain then missed two, Germany had two penalties to lead by three. The pressure was therefore greater on the second Spain penalty-taker after their first had just missed. She knew that missing would effectively offer a 3-0 lead to Germany, who would then take the next two."

Either way, there was certainly consensus that more excitement had been provided for the fans, even if few were fully aware of how the situation was evolving. Clear indications of who has already taken a penalty, whether they scored or missed, and who is up next would be necessary to ensure all involved can follow and understand the stakes of each spot kick. Even Germany's Kössler did not initially realise that she



Germany beat Spain in an 'ABBA' penalty shoot-out to claim victory in the women's Under-17 final.

had scored their title-winning penalty until she saw her team-mates racing jubilantly towards her.

The experimental shoot-out system was also trialled at the men's Under-17s, where Spain showed more composure than their female contemporaries. They claimed a record third European Under-17 Championship title in dramatic circumstances thanks to a late goal in the final against England – in their record 12th final tournament – earning them a second chance, which they took, in the fifth final in the past six editions to be decided in a penalty shoot-out.

As in the Czech Republic, where Germany were all the wiser for their semi-final shoot-out experience, in Croatia Spain latched onto their own semi-final spot-kick success against Germany and held their nerve better in the showpiece, slotting away all five of their kicks while England missed the target with back-to-back efforts.

It was enough to earn Spain a record third Under-17 title in an impressive summer for the Iberians. Their women's Under-19s gained revenge for the disappointment of losing out to France a year ago by beating Les Bleuettes 3-2 in a dramatic final in Belfast, while at Under-17 level, María Antonia Is's team lost out in the final to a Germany side who secured

a record sixth title at that level, and the second in a row for Anouschka Bernhard, who has now lifted the trophy on four occasions.

England were too hot to handle in Georgia, securing their first-ever Under-19 title and condemning Portugal to a record third final defeat. The Three Lions' victory rounded off an impressive summer for them, which also included victories at the U-20 World Cup in South Korea and the Toulon Tournament in France.



"Whereas before there would be one player remaining up the field to force their opponents to leave one player back, the teams are now keeping these players in the penalty area."

Ghenadie Scurtu
UEFA technical observer at the Under-19s in Georgia

2017 will be a year England hopes to build on as qualifying for 2018 gets under way, and they are not the only ones. After seeing the Faroe Islands reach their first youth finals – with their Under-17s taking on France, a country of 65 million compared to their 50,000 – Kosovo are among an even greater field of nations bidding to reach a UEFA youth final tournament, which is widely considered a crucial part of player development.

Having previously led Portugal's Under-17s to the European summit in 2016, Hélio Sousa, now the coach of his country's Under-19s, beaten for the third time in a final, confirms this philosophy: "They are at an important age to catch their dream. It is an important time in their life, between Under-15 and Under-20. At Under-17 you have three or four teams who develop from this and in a few years their players are stronger. Guys like Danilo Pereira, William Carvalho, Gelson Martins and André Silva were in the UEFA Under-19 finals in Hungary in 2014 and the U-20 World Cup in New Zealand in 2015 – I am more proud of that than I am of winning the European Under-17 Championship."

Their names indeed live on and there are likely to be many more like them to emerge from the UEFA youth tournaments in 2017 and beyond. ☘



Sportsfile

SARINA WIEGMAN

"WE GOT PEOPLE EXCITED – THAT IS WHAT WOMEN'S FOOTBALL NEEDS"

After only half a year in charge of the Oranje women, Sarina Wiegman led the Netherlands to a historic first-ever European title on home soil.

Sarina Wiegman, you have been head coach of the national team for six months now and have already achieved so much success. Did you ever imagine it would be like this?

Well, that it would be this big and this fantastic is the stuff of dreams. Of course, it's fantastic it went like this and we put in such an excellent performance. It all came together. Our performance, teamwork and a bit of luck, which we went looking for. So yes, it was a dream come true.

You say you went looking for it: what did you personally contribute as a coach?

People have worked very hard over the last couple of years to help this team and the players to grow, and I continued with that the very moment I was hired for the job.

What I did in particular was to add some new people to the coaching staff. Then we set up a plan leading up to 16 July and prepared ourselves as well as we could for anything that we'd come up against and might possibly happen during the EURO. We addressed those matters in the months prior to the tournament. But that process had already started before I was appointed as head coach.

During the tournament, it showed that we were very well prepared, both in the way we played and what we expected on the pitch, but also in what we expected off it. Only it became much, much bigger than we had hoped for and dreamed about.

One of our goals was to conquer the hearts of the Dutch people and we really did it together with them. Preparations played a very important role, but also the way in which we worked together. There was a very open atmosphere with the staff and the players and that appeared to be the right approach.

When looking back on the tournament, what stands out the most for you in terms of tactics or technique?

What struck me is that during this tournament the pace of the matches increased: the players are getting fitter and you also see that players from other countries are increasingly better coached. The conditions for young women and girls to develop into top, professional players are getting better and better, and you can see that during matches.

The next step is to improve tactically and also technically. The Dutch team had a very good tactical set-up. We saw that against England and Norway, for example: those teams are much stronger physically than we are, so we have to be stronger technically and tactically. We have to be clever. This is essentially the Dutch way of thinking about football. And that went very well at this tournament.

According to UEFA's technical observers, the trend was very

much focused on ball possession and passing. Was this also something from which you derived your strength?

Yes, we have been working on that a lot in the past couple of years. When we first qualified for the Women's EURO in 2009, the players started training more often and harder. The demands were higher and the players got fitter – that was the first step we did here in the Netherlands to make sure we made it to the EURO. But we also knew in 2009 that we weren't ready yet to dominate ball possession. In the following years, we worked very hard on defending better and using that as a platform for more ball possession. We have been working on that; my coaching staff and I have continued to work on that. What happens is that the players also start developing as our positional play improves. This is linked to the fact that everyone knows how we want to play, but it's also down to the quality of the players.



→

Sarina Wiegman became coach of the Oranje women in early 2017, having herself received 104 caps between 1987 and 2001.

And yet, 9 out of 26 matches were won by the team with the least possession of the ball. England are an extreme example: they beat Spain with only 26% of the ball.

I only saw part of that match, however I do know that Spain had a lot of ball possession, but mainly in their half of the pitch; they didn't go forward and attack a lot. And England, they dropped deep and let Spain have the ball in that area of the pitch. I can easily imagine how Spain had more possession of the ball, but in the end, it's all about scoring goals. England opted for the long ball, so they had less possession but they reached the opposition's goal much quicker. And that way they are more threatening, perhaps. So those statistics are all nice, but they are mainly useful to see what happens in football and what we're seeing in games. And then you can link the two. If you have a lot of ball possession and you're deep in the opponent's half, then it's much harder to keep the ball than when you are in your own half of the pitch. So, you have to



"England and Norway, for example, are much stronger physically than we are, so we have to be stronger technically and tactically. We have to be clever. This is essentially the Dutch way of thinking about football"



filter that out and find out where the numbers are coming from. Women's football is developing more and more, so the demands are increasing, especially when attacking and trying to score goals. And for that, you need quality and if you can mix it up with long balls and possession, I think it's a good development for women's football.

You did drop deep every now and again, but your game was more focused on going forward. Was that something you worked on?

Yes, we had starting principles in games, covering the four areas of the pitch and restarts. There were several things we thought were important and we continuously went back to them. We know that with the strikers we have and the players behind them, if we win the ball, we have players capable of brilliant passes but also strikers who can attack and score. So that is a big quality in this team. We had a plan about how we wanted to win that ball, where and at what moment, and how we wanted to get close to the goal – we really worked hard on that. The players have their jobs to do, and then you have to make use of the quality of the players.

We all know that Shanice van de Sanden is really fast, so you shouldn't play the ball to her feet. Sometimes you must, but in general, the starting principle is that she always gets a long ball.

That is one of the things that has developed since 2013: fast switches of play were the key to success.

Yes, I think that you also have to take into

account the defensive qualities of the other teams. I am curious to find out if there's also information on that. How did the other countries do? It was quite difficult, but I think that we did a great job with our team as far as that is concerned.

The technical report mentions Austria as an example of a team that did surprisingly well but also played very defensively, put on a lot of pressure and were able to counter very quickly.

And they were very fit and really defended together as a team. I must say that I didn't see many of their games, but we played against them in the run-up to the EURO, when they were still working on some things. On that occasion, they went 2-0 down after 15 minutes. That match was a huge learning experience for them and they built on it during the EURO. And they were very successful there, so that was very clever. But also against us in June, they were a team that was physically very strong and very fit, which is a great achievement when it's your first EURO.

The technical report also states that one of your star players, Lieke Martens, was one of the few players who wasn't afraid to try to beat her opponent to create a misbalance in the other team.

I have seen more players who can do that but, of course, Lieke Martens has fantastic dribbling skills and can create numerical superiority by beating her opponent. Shanice van de Sanden can also get behind the defence, getting behind her marker

and creating numerical superiority, forcing the defence into a decision. It was a combination of Lieke, Danielle van de Donk and Jackie Groenen, who did very well in midfield when they were in possession of the ball, so it really was a team effort. We have many exceptional qualities in attack, but Pernille Harder and Line Hansen can also beat their opponents.

The technical observers concluded that the focus was on defence in this tournament and teams found it difficult to break through. Are crosses from the wings a good alternative then?

Yes, and the crossing opportunity itself. The quality and the opportunity of the pass in combination with the player's position in front of goal. If it takes too long, the opponent is already back in position, which is something you saw a lot.

And then it becomes difficult to break through and you have to come up with other things. That's something to work on together and to improve.

You played on the wings too. According to the statistics, you were not the most thorough with regard to assists, and yet you scored four goals from the flanks. Was that something you worked on?

Yes, of course we did. It's a quality we have in our team. Perhaps our assists weren't so good, but when you look at the number of assists and the percentages, I think we didn't do all that badly. We got behind the opponent's lines so often that the chance of things going the right way was quite big, but so was the chance of things not going the right way. If you have one player who manages to get behind the defence twice and chooses the right ball once, or you get behind the defence ten times and play the right ball five times, then it's the same 50% for both. But in that latter case, you're getting there ten times and not many players can do that. That was the case with us.

Plus, the most important thing: you scored four times from these areas.

Yes, also with set pieces. And those assists were quite good, yes. Four times: Shanice twice, Lieke once and Jackie once. Really good.



2.19

The average number of goals per match was the lowest ever at a Women's EURO



18%

Increase in the number of attempts on goal compared with the last Women's EURO



35%

of matches were won by the team with less possession



88%

of matches were won by the team that scored first

The number of attempts on goal was also a noticeable trend: an increase of 18.5% compared with 2013. But in the end, the average number of goals was an all-time low of 2.19 per match. Is that the result of stronger defending?

I think that the pace of the game is much faster now, the defence is more organised and so the demands in attack are higher. That's a development we're going through and, as I said, I didn't watch all the matches, but when I look at how we did, we played some very open matches, I think. If you go towards your opponent's goal too slowly, then they will already have regrouped when you get there. So, you must do it faster and that requires better offensive play. And then you have to make choices: do you take a shot on goal straight away or do you decide on another pass? It's all about quality and higher demands because of better defensive play; this improves your game.

What also stood out was that there were quite a few errors made by goalkeepers when trying to reach high balls.

That also has to do with the development of the game. The game is faster, the quality of crosses, attackers and defenders is higher and the goalkeepers need to do better. That says a lot about the way the goalkeepers train. For example, we now have a young goalkeeper who was in the Under-19s last year. She was part of our squad last month and she was great. When she was playing with us everything moved faster. She played some matches in the Eredivisie and she has to act faster in front of her goal. She has to think faster, react faster and make decisions faster, and then sometimes she is not in the right position to claim the ball. So, she has to get faster in those situations. She has to experience it during training, so that she learns to make decisions faster.

"You need experience, experience at the top level and that takes time – years, an age"



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UEFA

"One of our goals was to conquer the hearts of the Dutch people and we really did it together with them"

That was also the case at the EURO. The keepers were found wanting in that regard. They need to make the next step and that requires a certain way of training.

You just mentioned the Under-19s: the technical report also concludes that there's a gap between them and the senior players.

Yes, that's also our conclusion here in the Netherlands. The game has developed in a way that there's a big gap. For the group in between, there's a need to develop further.

We think about it with the coaching staff but also with other personnel. We've now played at four big tournaments – three European Championships and one World Cup – and we want to belong to the top bracket. We achieved something great by winning the European Championship in our own country. But we are still developing here and we don't want this to be a one-time-only achievement. We want more. So now we have to decide what steps to take, so that we belong in the top bracket of football nations.

Lieke Martens was named player of the tournament at Women's EURO 2017 and UEFA Women's Player of the Year for the 2016/17 season.

The variation in tactics has increased a lot. Is that also proof of the development of women's football?

Absolutely, it has been four years and a lot of Dutch players have moved to top teams and have become professional players. They play for top clubs now. You need experience, experience at the top level and that takes time – years, an age. It requires experience of playing at big tournaments, being together for a long time, being away from home and achieving at a high level. It requires you to keep the focus and a lot of players in our squad now have that experience. You need those experiences to keep on developing. The players can also pass on their experience to the next generation, who also need those

Apart from the tactical, there's also the psychological aspect. There were huge crowds and

experiences. That's why it's important that the Under-17 and Under-19 teams play at big tournaments – European Championships and World Cups.

For the first time in history, our Under-19 team [Under-20 next year] will participate in a World Cup. This will speed up their development and build the experience the players need to play at the top level. When you look at what has happened in the last four years, when you look at the players individually from Sweden to the Netherlands, they now have that experience and it's reflected in their maturity, but also in the quality of their game.



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not all players were used to that. How do you prepare your players mentally for that experience?

In Canada, we played in front of 55,000 people against the Canadian team. It was great. We also played World Cup play-offs in sold-out stadiums here in the Netherlands. Some players have also experienced the Champions League at club level, so luckily they were prepared. What we did with the players in the build-up to the tournament was to talk with them about what they could expect and were expecting.

We were comprehensive. We asked them what they were expecting from their team-mates, agents and clubs. We managed expectations and made everything clear about what they should expect. We talked about everything because otherwise you don't know how the players will react while under pressure. We said, 'This is what happens. How do you react? What can you do to achieve and keep your focus?' We discussed those things and put the players under pressure during training.

It begins with playing good [warm-up] matches, for example hard matches that put you up against different styles of play. We had a great warm-up campaign with full stadiums and a lot of enthusiastic

people. In the end, our supporters were an incentive and that remained so throughout the whole tournament, keeping the momentum going. That was an advantage for us.

Pressure depends on the individual. For one person, a situation can be extremely stressful and for another person, it can be really motivating. We tried to make it motivating and we succeeded.

88% of matches in which goals were scored were won by the team that scored first. The final was an exception, as there were many goals. Was it a special aim for you to score the first goal?

We were looking for goals. In the beginning, it was our aim to show who we were: a team that wants to fight, work together and play good football. The spectators joined us in that enthusiasm.

Then you have to look for goals and defend well, have a tactical set-up: you can't just run around the pitch without a plan. We were not thinking we have to score the first goal. Fight, work together and play good football, then the results will follow automatically. We didn't focus on the result. We also said, 'We want to play like this when it's going well and when it's going badly.' You can't have the whole match entirely under control,

your opponent can score first, but you have to stick to your plan. When Denmark scored in the final, it was the first time it did not go how we wanted, but everybody knew that we had to stick to our plan and in five minutes we scored the equaliser. We had discussed that before it happened.

It was a beautiful tournament and the final was spectacular. Did the tournament and women's football generally need a final like this?

I don't know whether the tournament needed it, but I know we did. We thought, 'We're in our own country and the only thing we have to do is win this match. We've already achieved so much and now we can win even more!' That is how we went into the match. Last weekend, I was in France to watch Montpellier v Lyon: the players, directors and supporters told me they really enjoyed our style of play, and that we played the best football. Besides winning the tournament, this was the biggest compliment we could get. We got people excited – that is what women's football needs. We cannot all stand in front of goal and just kick the ball away for a counter. Nobody should do that actually. We have a responsibility to aim for good football. That is my opinion and that is what the tournament needed. 

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"In football, being able to listen is as important as patience, as important as confidence, as important as respect. The players should learn this responsibility, this professionalism, from their coaches."

MIRCEA LUCESCU

'A GREAT COACH IS A COACH WHO HAS DOUBTS WITHOUT LETTING ANYONE ELSE KNOW ABOUT THEM'

Accolades are nice. But sometimes they are not enough. It would be a shame to condense more than four decades of coaching into a rosary of titles, coach of the year awards and appearances on UEFA Champions League benches. On the other hand, it would perhaps be churlish to ignore six Romanian league titles as a right-side attacker and 70 caps for Romania, including three wearing the captain's armband at the 1970 World Cup.

Coaching achievements in Romania, Italy, Turkey, Russia and Ukraine reached their zenith with eight league titles, six domestic cups and seven Ukrainian super cups with Shakhtar Donetsk, along with a historic victory against Werder Bremen in the last-ever UEFA Cup final, played in Istanbul in 2009. However, when Mircea Lucescu took time out from his current duties as Turkey's national team coach to visit UEFA's headquarters in Nyon, it was not to bask in such achievements but to share his wealth of experience with UEFA's managing director of technical development, Ioan Lupescu, and a cosmopolitan audience of would-be coaches at one of UEFA's Pro licence student exchange courses.

Mircea, the first thing I would like to ask you is how your coaching career started.

It started with a misfortune that became an opportunity. I didn't intend to become a coach. But there was a huge earthquake that killed thousands of people in Bucharest. I was playing at Dinamo at the time and that earthquake destroyed my home. We were not professionals. We were paid as amateurs by different institutions. That is how the communist system worked back then. At the same time, I was studying hard for a career in economics, specialising in external commerce, hoping to become one of the very few students selected to work for a company that dealt with commerce

beyond the country's borders, or at an embassy. My aim was to find a way of leaving the country. As a youth player, my first match outside the country had been in Turkey and I saw that the reality of capitalism was not how it was described by Romanian newspapers or television. I wanted to travel, to learn about different cultures.

After the earthquake, I moved to Hunedoara, in Transylvania, to play for a team belonging to a steel plant. The team had financial strength and good salaries. I had spare time to repair the house in Bucharest that had been destroyed by the earthquake. I was 30 years old, I played for the national team and I had some experience. So I also started working with children. In Hunedoara, children had nothing else to do but play football. I loved sharing my experience with them, telling them stories about the matches I played and so on. I showed a lot of passion and I managed to get some of them so interested and passionate about football themselves that five years later, when I became the national team coach, seven of my players were from this group of kids.

Is that what persuaded you that you had the qualities to succeed as a coach?

We do the most difficult job. I don't think there's a harder job out there. And I'm mostly referring to the impact it has on your mind, the passion that is required and the fact that you constantly go through a huge variety of feelings. That is why I

believe that a good coach should, first of all, be a very balanced person. I quickly realised that there were talented players everywhere and that what mattered most was for them to be guided, educated and organised by someone who is passionate about the sport and who manages to pass some of that passion on to the players. I think this is one of the most important qualities I had, and one that has helped me tremendously everywhere I have gone throughout my career.

At Corvinul, in Hunedoara, I was a player and coach. Slowly, older players who were only there to get a salary were replaced by talented and passionate players that I discovered. People started realising that I was able to make a difference for the team, and I did. The communist party made me return to Bucharest and within a year I was a player, a club coach, the national team coach and head of the school of coaches, among other things. And it was all because of the passion and love I had for football.

But passion is not enough, surely?

You need to love football tremendously because that will enable you to get through the toughest moments of your career. Because we all have many hard moments. If you don't love football, if you are doing it just to make money, this is not the job for you. Your love of football will make you the first to bounce back after a loss and it will make you able to motivate your team and give your players hope. →

The second most important thing is knowing the game and being able to speak about it with players, with journalists, with everybody, including the [club's] president. There are a lot of coaches who hide. They don't speak to the press, they try to stay under the radar. No. You should be able to talk about the game and give an interview with a smile even under the most difficult circumstances.

A coach should also be very organised – able to organise the team efficiently and plan training sessions and matches. And able to analyse matches and find ways of extracting positive aspects even from the worst games. A coach should also learn to treat players equally, whether they are superstars or debutants. If he doesn't manage to do this, he will face difficulties. Players can be leaders in popularity, but the true leader is the coach.

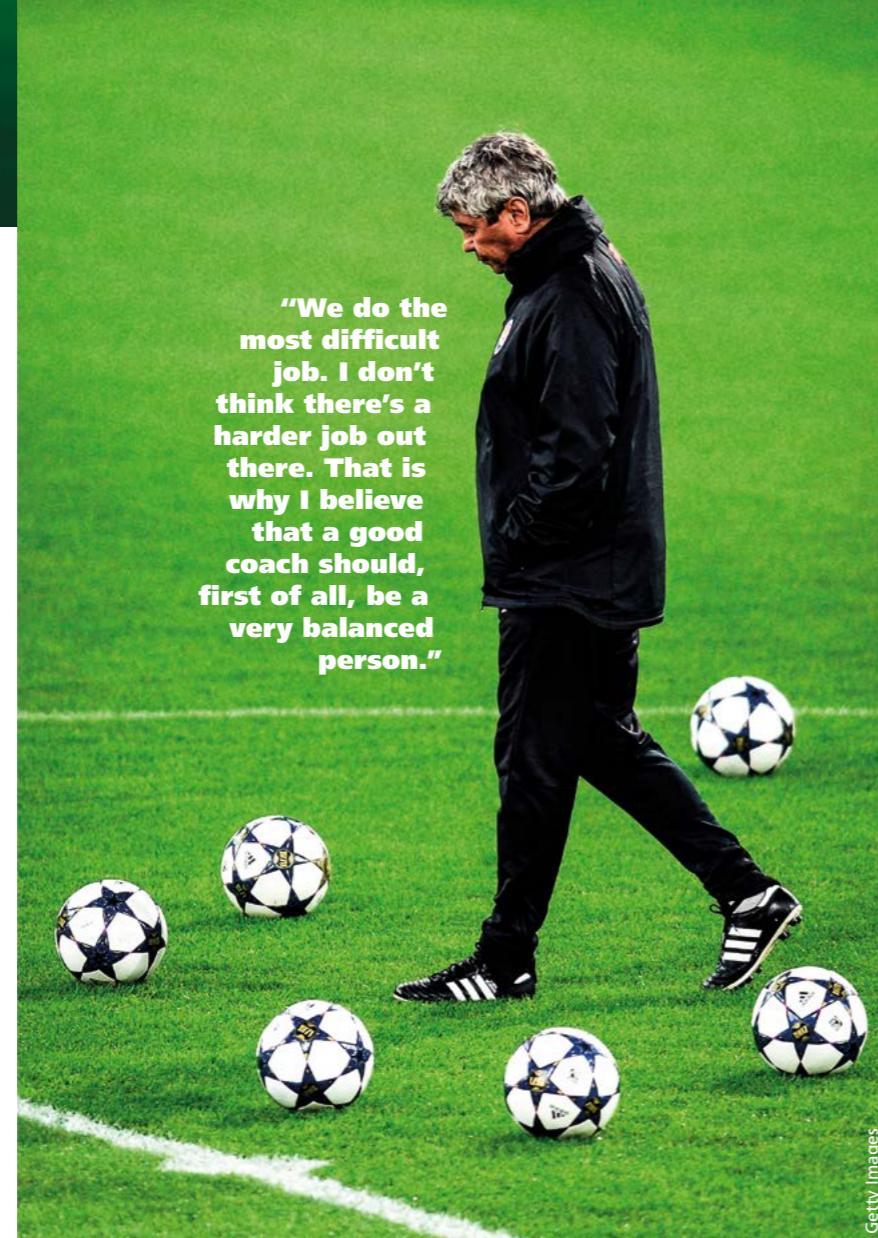
When you were getting started, did you have any role models in the coaching profession?

Don't forget that in eastern Europe there was not a culture of individual values. It was difficult to stand out from the crowd. I became so popular that I was punished by the communist party – sacked as national team coach after we had beaten Austria 4-0. But I would mention Angelo Niculescu, who was our coach when we went to the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. He was very calm and paid great attention to everything that was going on around him. Even though I didn't work with him for very long, I also learned a lot from Štefan Kovács. He taught me what it meant to be a citizen of the world.

But I think I learned more from reading biographies of great leaders and, in my younger days, exchanging football magazines with people in different countries and reading publications like *El Gráfico* from Argentina, *A Bola*, *France Football*, *L'Équipe* and *World Soccer*.

Did this help when you left Romania in 1990?

I went to Pisa because the president [of the club] wanted me. It was an amazing experience, coming from communist Romania to a team where everything was very evolved, very well organised. At that time, I still couldn't understand how it was possible for people to actually make a living playing football. When I had to leave Pisa I didn't know what to do. I talked to Porto and Standard Liège. I also talked to



"We do the most difficult job. I don't think there's a harder job out there. That is why I believe that a good coach should, first of all, be a very balanced person."

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my wife and she didn't want to leave Italy. So we let fate decide for us. We made some notes with a bunch of Italian clubs on them, with the idea of pulling one out of a hat to see where we could go next.

But one of the notes went missing: the one that said 'Brescia'. I couldn't find it anywhere. The next day I found it on the sole of my shoe and figured it was an omen. I spent five years at Brescia, clinching promotion to Serie A twice.

I also learned something important. Serie A was actually a championship involving some very good [club] presidents who led a lot of people and companies. The best specialists in the Italian championship were not the coaches.

They were presidents like Andrea Agnelli, Silvio Berlusconi, Vittorio Cecchi Gori ... guys who understood relationships between people, who led people. These were guys with whom you were able to discuss psychological and mental issues. Because organising groups works the

same way in industry, in commerce and in football. These are people who can help you evaluate players' potential. They can help you with an idea; they can give input when it comes to organising your formation. But they should never interfere to the extent of telling you what to do. If they interfere once, it's all over.

Serie B was the division of the coaches. That was where tactics mattered; that was where the great games were. It was so intense. That experience helped me a lot. I worked hard at Brescia, and worked a lot with young players. Italian football played a huge role in my career. That is where I first learned what it really meant to be a coach.

How important is the relationship between the coach and the club's president or owner?

Players may come and go, but the rapport you establish with the club's president is

essential. I had good relationships with Luigi Corioni at Brescia, Massimo Moratti at Inter, Rinat Akhmetov at Shakhtar – part of the reason I spent 12 years there – Faruk Süren at Galatasaray, and Serdar Bilgili at Beşiktaş. You need the ability to establish these relationships. Unfortunately, when I joined Zenit I had no direct contact with the president in order to make my thoughts heard the way they should have been. This was the hardest thing for me. If you don't share the same philosophy, conflicts can quickly arise.

You mention the word 'philosophy'. How important is it for a coach to have one?

When I was a player-coach at 30 years old in Hunedoara, I basically had the same philosophy as I have now. It just became clearer and better because of performances and experiences over the years. The most important thing in the world is the way we evolve as people. And I think that's about curiosity. It is curiosity that makes us different from people who lived 5,000 years ago. Football is no exception, it transforms every day. Technological innovations,



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"Even though I didn't work with him for very long, I also learned a lot from Štefan Kovács. He taught me what it meant to be a citizen of the world."

for example, will force the coaches of the future to act differently.

That is why it was important for me to change countries and clubs. Not too much, because I am very conservative. I get attached to people, places; I get attached to history and many other things. But the changes helped me because I had to adapt each time to new places, a new culture. Because you are the one who needs to change and adapt. I always had to learn new things and to bring new things to the lives of the people who surrounded me.

Other than that, my philosophy remained the same. Coaches are different. There are coaches who build teams, pragmatic coaches, opportunist coaches ... Each has his own style. Philosophy is personal.

How do you communicate your philosophy to your players?

Education is key. My first concern is to explain my philosophy and to educate my players, to show them a certain kind of behaviour. Even as a young coach travelling with the team abroad, I made →



Lucescu's career timeline

1979-1982	Corvinul Hunedoara (ROU)
1981-1986	Romania
1985-1990	Dinamo Bucuresti (ROU)
1990-1991	Pisa (ITA)
1991-1996	Brescia (ITA)
1996-1997	Reggiana (ITA)
1997-1998	Rapid Bucuresti (ROU)
1998-1999	Internazionale (ITA)
1999-2000	Rapid Bucuresti (ROU)
2001-2002	Galatasaray (TUR)
2002-2004	Beşiktaş (TUR)
2004-2016	Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)
2016-2017	Zenit (RUS)
2017-	Turkey



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"On Sunday, your interventions can be intuitive, but everything you do during the week, the way you prepare, plays a decisive role in how the game plays out."

At Shakhtar, we had players from places in Brazil where school was almost non-existent. They knew the bare minimum. They signed contracts and started getting paid. They bought diamonds, watches, cars. I slowly started to educate them, discussing things with honesty. This is linked to discipline. I never force discipline on the players. I prefer it to come naturally. I always explain to each player that his freedom stops where somebody else's freedom begins and that what he does has an influence on others. With proper education, these people will be grateful to you for their entire lives. Young players arrive with a certain temperament and we have the job of moulding them into great people with good characters. Once they grow, you need to transform them into personalities, into role models. From these personalities, leaders are born. Leaders are not necessarily people with great attributes; they are people with great achievements. They are people who can pull others behind them and push them towards success. They need to be passionate, they need to push others to go further.

the players visit museums. I had Brazilian players who would try to run out immediately through another door. I always found ways of bringing them back in. I had this power to convince them. In Hunedoara, I used to take the players to evening courses and waited for them outside to make sure they didn't escape. Why? Because I realised how important intelligence is: how important it is for players to be able to listen and understand. In football, being able to listen is as important as patience, as important as confidence, as important as respect. The players should learn this responsibility, this professionalism, from their coaches.

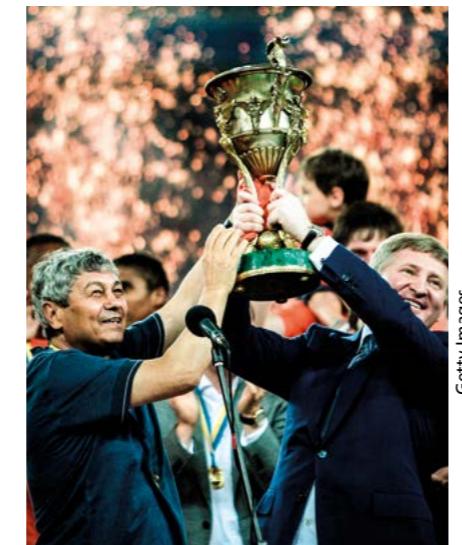
"When everyone is celebrating, the coach should be the first to think about the next step."



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How do you reconcile your philosophy and the long-term education of players with the need to produce results?

Of course, without results, any philosophy is dead. As a coach, you need to develop a playing system that depends on the qualities of the players you have, along with a series of other factors. My concept is based on the way the team is distributed over the playing area, the techniques of progression throughout the game, the manner of disarming the opposition and, only as a fourth aspect, the game system. If all this is well organised and well controlled, the result should be positive. There is no way it will not succeed in the long run. But coaches need time. It is precious. But it is difficult to obtain.

One of the other essential qualities of a successful coach is the ability to read the game and make decisions that will lead the team to victory. In many cases this is intuition. But the philosopher Henri Bergson said that intuition is the instinct of intelligence. So if you are intuitive, it's because you have accumulated knowledge that allows you to make a decision. I have won many games with an intuitive tactical move. But I have also had moments when I have sent on a player and lost the game. On Sunday, your interventions can be intuitive, but everything you do during the week, the way you prepare, plays a decisive role in how the game plays out. I remember reading The Art of War by Sun Tzu, the Chinese general from 2,500 years ago. He said, if you know yourself and your opponent, there's an 80 to 90% chance you'll win. If you know yourself, but you don't know your opponent, you're halfway there. You can either win or lose. But if you don't know your opponent's potential, you will lose. So games are not

decided by a momentary decision. You need thorough preparation. He also said something else which, applied to football, translates to the fact that the team that is better prepared will win. The team that wants to win. The team prepared to make bigger sacrifices. The team with the best substitutes. That is the team that will win. But all this depends on the coach. The coach should influence all these things. 2,500 years ago, people had the same way of thinking. We don't change. Only the level of civilisation changed; we are more civilised now.

Earlier on, you mentioned that a coach has to be a balanced person. Is that an easy thing to achieve?

When everyone is celebrating, the coach should be the first to think about the next step. When everyone is sad and with their guard down, the coach is the one who should motivate the players to start working again. Your experience is your best help with this – the need to find the right moment to say something, to

encourage or to criticise. A great coach is a coach who has doubts without letting anyone else know about them. A great coach is not one who is certain about things; he's the one who is not sure, but never lets it show. He needs to inspire confidence, and he needs to have a positive attitude and great optimism. Of course, it all depends on what the coach builds up in training, during match analysis and so on. This is what gives players confidence. A recipe for what you should do during a crisis doesn't exist. You should have already built a certain relationship with the players and management even before such a crisis occurs, which would allow you to get past their emotions. Football is a game of emotions, with a great emotional impact on everyone involved. Everybody has an opinion; everybody thinks they know football and understand it. The coach needs to keep an open mind and a clear head. The coach must never make the mistake of overestimating a win or underestimating a loss. They are two sides of the same coin. Both should be treated

in a balanced manner. This comes with experience. Knowledge has less to do with it than experience.

How have you maintained the stamina to coach for so many years without a break?

Coaches' lives are not relaxed. We live at 100% intensity. Over almost 50 years at the highest level, without a sabbatical, without a break, I have learned to compensate for the stress of the profession by loving things outside the game. I have always tried to strike a balance, because otherwise you lose your mind. At the end of a season, the players' physical fatigue passes after three or four days. They go on holiday to the seaside, in the mountains. Coaches need a lot more time to rest than anyone else. Because every day, every week, at every moment you have to bring something fresh, something that catches attention and doesn't become routine. Something that helps the people around you produce great performances. That is why I recommend you don't let your profession take over your life. ☺



Mircea Lucescu shares his wealth of experience with would-be coaches at a UEFA Pro licence student exchange course on 2 November.

UEFA

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES FROM THE NETHERLANDS

With the dust beginning to settle on UEFA Women's EURO 2017 and the Netherlands' ending of the 22-year German monopoly that was nestling safely in the record books, national team coaches and women's football specialists from all of UEFA's member associations were invited to a conference in Amsterdam in November, where the brief was to pinpoint the take-home messages transmitted by the final tournament in the Netherlands and translate them into useful pointers for the coaches working at all levels of the fast-growing women's game.

In Amsterdam, the views expressed by UEFA's technical observers Hesterine de Reus, Patricia González, Jarmo Matikainen and Anne Noë (also recorded in the tournament review published in print and online) provided a valuable glance in the rear-view mirror during the steady onward drive that is sweeping through the women's game.

"To be successful in the future, we need greater variety and flexibility in our attacking options" (Martin Sjögren). "The teams in possession didn't seem to find solutions against deep defensive blocks. Options in the final third were not good enough" (Freyr Alexandersson). "All teams can defend well in the box, so we need to find solutions. Different kinds of crosses, running pathways into the box, overloads with more overlapping players" (Pia Sundhage). These comments by the coaches of Norway, Iceland and Sweden encapsulate one of the major talking points to emerge from a final tournament which, on the road to the final, posted a miserly all-time low of 2.07 goals per match. Even though the thrilling six-goal grand finale in Enschede lifted the overall average to 2.19, the prevalence of defence over attack was a salient feature of the first 16-team event, where Austria – one of five debutants – laid the foundations for a historic run to the semi-finals by conceding one goal in 510 minutes of football. The goal tally at EURO 2017 was 28% lower than the average registered at the 2015 Women's World Cup.

Although statistics do not lie, they are often quite good at concealing the truth. So debate focused on whether the scarcity

of goals was down to effective defending or ineffective attacking. Or both. In presenting the 'case for the defence', Jarmo Matikainen expressed the view that for teams [at Women's EURO 2017] "all attributes related to defending had continued to improve" and that "once in defensive shape, teams were very difficult to break down". Austria evidently provided a reference point, Dominik Thalhammer's team implementing rapid transitions to defensive mode with one of the screening midfielders – Sara Puntigam – quickly slotting into the space between centre-back and left-back to complete a back line of five.

Building from the back

Defensive density was further illustrated by the fact that, even though the number of goal attempts increased by 18.5% in relation to EURO 2013, the conversion rate dropped and 24% of attempts were blocked by defenders. The arts of defending also interlocked, with noticeable improvements in athletic preparation. As Jarmo Matikainen commented: "All teams had invested in physical preparation and were able to produce high-quality defensive work during the game and throughout an intensive tournament." A glut of late goals is traditionally linked to fatigue factors – and this trend was notable by its absence in the Netherlands. Tournament data reveal that 55% of the goals were scored before the half-time interval.

Investment in fitness levels also made an impact on game strategies, with teams, as

Jarmo Matikainen pointed out, displaying "greater ability to recover quickly after losing possession" and to execute "immediate pressing to regain possession whenever possible". Defensive efficacy was further underlined by the fact that 23 of the 26 games which produced victories were won by the team scoring first. Even though the opening goal hit the net during the opening half-hour in half of those matches – giving the opposition time to find a response – teams were equipped to successfully preserve (or extend) their advantage.

Hence the doubts expressed by coaches and observers alike about whether attacking finesse had been able to keep pace with advances in the art of defending. As Spain coach Jorge Vilda commented: "When you have an opponent who shuts it down at the back and is able to sustain pace and power over the 90 minutes, you have to cope with lack of space in the final third. It's difficult, but I'm convinced we can find solutions."

This was one of the themes picked up by Patricia González when she took the stage to discuss attacking play. Spain, along with Germany and France, were alone among the 16 contestants to have more than 50% of possession in each game. All three were eliminated in the quarter-finals. Overall, eight of the tournament's 26 victories were for the team with the lesser share of possession. The same three teams topped the table in terms of the number of passes per game and per phase of possession (Spain 3.6, Germany 3.5, France 2.7) compared with, for example, England's 1.7 or Austria's 1.2. "I felt that the

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Vivianne Miedema fends off Stine Larsen in the final between the Netherlands and Denmark (4-2).



As in the match between Austria and Switzerland (1-0), strikers often came up against tight defences.

moments when we opted to clear the ball out instead of passing to our transition player."

On stage in Amsterdam, Hesterine de Reus's review of player development issues broached the subject of players ready, willing and able to engage in one-on-ones in the final third: "Could it be that coaches are underestimating the value of one-on-one abilities, not basing game plans on them, not encouraging players to use them – or even discouraging players from using them?" "What I missed," added Patricia González, "was greater bravery in going one-on-one in the final third. Players like Nadia Nadim, Lieke Martens and Pernille Harder stood out because they were willing to create disbalance by taking on opponents." Jarmo Matikainen added: "We saw excellent one-on-one defending – but not so much at the other end. There was a tendency to be very disciplined in applying game plans, and maybe not enough room for improvisation."

The coaches on stage were quick to endorse the importance of audacity in the final third. "I support this absolutely," Nils Nielsen commented. "You don't win by being careful, so the key is to go 100%. This was our approach in the final. It was certainly more interesting than if we had parked the bus in front of our goal. We would probably have lost anyway ..." Switzerland coach Martina Voss-Teklenburg added: "I always ask my players to try their one-on-one skills. It's important that they feel brave enough. So it's something that, as coaches, we should encourage even more."

Although it was fair to argue that defensive qualities had the edge at Women's EURO 2017, goals were scored – and, as Patricia González pointed out, wing play generated almost one third of the tournament's open-play goals. Teams were aware that, with defensive blocks difficult to penetrate centrally, the most

**Nadim [left], Lieke
He Harder stood out
willing to create disbalance
ments."**

Patricia González UEFA technical observer

Playing direct pays dividend

The viability of the direct approach was underlined by the fact that 24% of the tournament's open-play goals could be attributed to fast counterattacks executed before the opponent's defensive block had time to assemble. The Netherlands capitalised on coaching-manual counters to score crucial goals, while Austria implemented a clear counterattacking strategy. As the tournament review indicates: "The preference was to play as directly as possible into the final third, exploiting Nina Burger's intelligent off-the-ball running and composure on the ball. Second-ball support was provided

the ball. Second ball support was provided at sprint speed, with Laura Feiersinger breaking out fast on the right to play a key transition role in an effective defence-to-attack strategy." In Amsterdam, Nils Nielsen, during the coaches' forum session, took the microphone to express the opinion that Feiersinger was his prototype of the player of the future: "unpredictable," he said, "but everything she did made a

contribution to the team's collective play". His opinion provokes reflections on potential dividends from the development of 'transition players'. As Iceland's Freyr Alexandersson admitted: "We did not use our transition moments as well as we could have. There were

possession teams didn't have enough changes of pace in their attacking game," commented Denmark coach Nils Nielsen, "whereas teams like England were able to do a lot of damage with direct fast-forward attacking." The three 'possession teams' scored 10 goals in the 12 matches they played – 7 of which were from dead-ball situations. In other words, their 1,100 minutes of football yielded only three open-play goals. Efficient finishing was evidently a factor in the equation. Whereas England needed only 5.18 attempts to score a goal and the Netherlands 5.77, Germany required 17.6, France 21.67 and Spain 36.5.

“Players like Nadia Nadim [left], Lieke Martens and Pernille Harder stood out because they were willing to create disbalance by taking on opponents.”

Patricia González UEFA technical observer

viable solution was to go round them. However, statistics related to supply from the wide areas generated more questions than answers. In numerical terms, the possession teams – Spain, Germany and France – delivered the most crosses, with Spain registering the highest success rate (59%) based on whether the delivery found a team-mate or not. On the other hand, the Netherlands, very much a mid-table team in terms of quantity and success rate, owed four of their nine open-play goals to supply from the wide areas, largely because they were able to penetrate into the areas behind full-backs (notably by playing into space on the right to exploit the pace of Shanice van de Sanden) and deliver crosses that goalkeepers and back-tracking defenders found awkward to deal with.

By and large, they found set plays easier to deal with. Although dead-ball situations accounted for almost one-third of the tournament's goals, 37% were penalties. The major talking point, however, was the total of four goals from 303 corner kicks – two of them on the opening matchday – while the scouting of opponents was

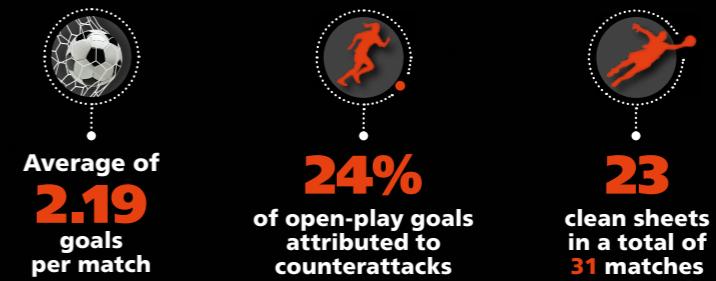
barely under way. The question for coaches is whether, with a success rate of 1:76 (1:29 at Women's EURO 2013), it is worth investing training ground time in rehearsing set plays. Nils Nielsen was among those who acknowledged the need to work on the defensive side. "If you were to lose a game because of poor defending at a corner, you would feel really bad." Martina Voss-Tecklenburg also conceded: "You have very little room for creativity at corners in attack. The options are limited and working on set plays in training is not a lot of fun. Free-kicks offer you more scope and, in general, set plays can be useful if you have a specialist in delivering them."

Scotland coach Anna Signeul (now with Finland) agreed: "The quality of delivery is everything. That's why we enlisted the help of a specialist to work on kicking techniques." Dominik Thalhammer, on the other hand, felt that: "Set plays are an important part of the game and, during the run-up to EURO, we focused on them quite a lot. Not just corners, I have to emphasise. We also scored a goal from a long throw ..."

A spotlight on goalkeeping
Maybe the hottest potato was handed to former Belgium keeper – and national team coach – Anne Noé, asked to analyse goalkeeping performances. In Amsterdam, she followed up comments in the tournament review that: “In an honest review of Women’s EURO 2017, goalkeeping is a nettle that has to be grasped. But for goalkeepers’ errors, the goal tally would have fallen even further below its record low. A compilation of important – many of them match-changing – errors might give goalkeeper coaches sleepless nights. Crosses misjudged or mishandled, shots palmed into the net, questionable positioning of keeper and wall at set plays, passes directly to the opposition striker. On the other hand, the tournament was painted in chiaroscuro – the errors were mixed with a large number of outstanding saves.”

Anne Noé reviewed the contrasting facets of a tournament which illustrated, as she put it, the route from hero to zero – and vice versa. The 31 matches produced 23 clean sheets, athletic qualities had undoubtedly improved, long-range shots →

WOMEN'S EURO 2017 IN NUMBERS



(historically a fertile source of goals in women's football) were so competently dealt with that only two reached the net, and mental preparation allowed keepers to rebound strongly after errors. But, as she pointed out, keepers often opted to parry or punch instead of catching the ball even when unchallenged – and this frequently prolonged the opposition's attack by keeping the ball in play and creating scenes of chaos in the box.

Handling and decision-making apart, her review of the take-away messages for goalkeeper development also included the fact that 34% of the tournament's goals had been scored from the zone between the penalty spot and the edge of the goal area, and 29% from inside the latter. The inference is that goalkeeper coaches should not be over-reluctant to pepper keepers from close range on the training ground.

The overall impression, however, was that, whereas goalkeeping standards had been one of the outstanding features in 2013, Women's EURO 2017 had left a more enigmatic legacy. "Have goalkeepers not made the same progress as outfield players?" Noé asked. "Or was it just a bad month at the office?" The second option was supported, as it happened, by events at the European Women's Under-19 Championship final tournament which kicked off less than 48 hours after the Dutch had lifted the trophy in Enschede. Performances in Northern Ireland prompted the UEFA technical observers to include three keepers in the tournament's all-star squad. England coach 'Mo' Marley said she had "two outstanding goalkeepers" in her squad and, even though results went against their teams, the goalkeepers of Scotland and Northern Ireland were applauded for impressive performances. Anja Palusevic, one of the observers, commented: "We are seeing results from good-quality coaching and it augurs well for the future."

The adjacency of the two tournaments provided a link with two issues of concern to the coaches in Amsterdam: how best to bridge the gap between Under-19 and senior levels, and how best to prepare players mentally for the jump into pressure-laden atmospheres at major tournaments played to huge audiences.

The responses by national associations to the challenge of steering players from youth development levels on to the senior stage are too diverse to be listed. But



"The growth in the popularity of women's football is bringing it closer to the men's game. But the men are well ahead of us in dealing with the pressures. We need to educate our players to cope with all the trappings that go with top-level sport."

Jorge Vilda
Spain's women's national team coach

Martina Voss-Tecklenburg spoke for a great many of her coaching colleagues when she said: "The biggest challenge during that transitional phase is making the jump in terms of athletic ability, reaction time and levels of match intensity."

On the athletic front, a majority of the coaches who travelled to Women's EURO 2017 acknowledged that they had worked hard on bringing fitness levels up to international standards from the more modest parameters of domestic competitions. At the same time, they admitted that indices of serious injury at youth development levels were triggering alarms. As Germany coach Steffi Jones commented: "As coaches, we need to achieve the right balance – we need to consider the welfare of the players and not just have our own results uppermost in our minds."

Being in the right state of mind

The coaches unanimously underlined the value of preparing players mentally for life at the top. Nils Nielsen, for example, explained how his players had been nervous prior to Denmark's opening game against Belgium and felt more at ease when wearing the underdog label: "We knew the tournament was going to be tough and it was important to make it clear that, if something went wrong, we were not going to lie down and cry. If

your head is not in the game, it is very difficult to be successful." Anna Signeur explained how mental preparation had been fundamental in allowing her players to bounce back after defeats by England and Portugal. Dominik Thalhammer underlined the important role played by the mental coach who has been working with the Austria team since 2011 and who has been fully integrated into the coaching team. And as Spain coach Jorge Vilda remarked: "The growth in the popularity of women's football is bringing it closer to the men's game. But the men are well ahead of us in dealing with the pressures. We need to educate our players to cope with the media work, the sponsor work ... all the trappings that go with top-level sport."

Links with the men's game provided another talking point in Amsterdam, where Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, for example, underlined the value of a holistic approach to football in general, rather than treating women's football as a separate entity. "In Switzerland," she told her colleagues, "we focus on cooperation and input from everybody – including club coaches." Dominik Thalhammer spoke of regular meetings with the coaches of the men's team and the useful tips they had given him during the run-up to the final tournament.

Focus on the future

All of this prompted Richard Barnwell, coach of the Estonia women's Under-19 team, to enquire about the fundamentals at youth development levels. "To make players feel comfortable on the ball, to stress the importance of enjoying the game, to be prepared not to win every match, and to set reasonable targets," said Nils Nielsen. "If you don't have a large pool of players," added Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, "the coach has to design a playing strategy according to the strengths of the individual players." "To have a vision and a dream at the national association and to go for them," said Dominik Thalhammer, "and, when you lose, not to look at the result but at the process and ask whether you have achieved the targets you had set." "To devise a long-term development plan," Anna Signeur chipped in, "including all competition structures. And share your vision with the clubs."

In Amsterdam, it was easy to open the floor to questions. In print, that facility ceases to exist. If readers could ask questions, the first might easily be how it is possible to write so much without mentioning Sarina Wiegman. She earned a standing ovation from her colleagues with a frank, open-book exposé of all the meticulous planning and attention to detail which had underpinned the Netherlands' run to the title – after which UEFA's managing director of technical development, Ioan Lupescu, and Anne Rei, chairwomen of the UEFA Women's Football Committee, stepped on stage to present a commemorative plaque to the champion coach. Wiegman gave an extensive interview in issue No 172, but it is only fair to give her the last word here: "The starting point was a dream. Then hard work on tasks and responsibilities among the players and the team behind the team. Then we focused on commitment and togetherness. We examined every possible scenario on and off the pitch to prevent unknown situations. And we pursued our goal of getting into the hearts of Dutch society." The Netherlands also set benchmarks for the other national associations aspiring to develop champions of the future. ☑



The Austrians were the surprise of Women's EURO 2017, making it through to the semi-finals in their first-ever final tournament.



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