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## EDITORIAL



During the past two seasons, The Technician has highlighted the diversity of the coaching profession. From national team coaches such as Michael O'Neill, Marcel Koller, Vladimir Weiss and Stanislav Cherchesov – who looked back at Russia's amazing performance during the 2018 World Cup on home soil – to youth and amateur team coaches such as Marco Rose et Grzegorz Kowalski – winners of the UEFA Youth League and UEFA Regions' Cup respectively – their interviews provide an incomparable panorama of the playing philosophies, training and coaching methods in operation in Europe.

While acknowledging that head coaches are the most visible faces, The Technician has also highlighted the relevance of a dynamic team-behind-the-team – a facet of coaching underlined in an interview with Franck Riviot, France national team goalkeeper coach and one of the pioneers in implementing the national elite goalkeeper diploma. The diversity of coaching methods extends also to the burgeoning sector of futsal.

No matter where and how, the importance of good coaching at all levels is summarised by four words from the interview with Slovakia's globetrotting coach Vladimír Weiss: "Education is the key".

**Frank K. Ludolph**  
Head of Football Education Services



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# FOOTBALL, A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE?

Since 1995 and the Bosman ruling, European football has become such a cosmopolitan affair that even language barriers are shifting.

“I speak seven languages. Once you can speak two languages, it’s easy to learn a third, a fourth, or even more. I now speak Romanian, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian. It’s essential for my job.” One can imagine a diplomat or the CEO of a multinational company uttering these words – people whose linguistic skills and ability to communicate in different languages enable them to look after the interests of their country or company. But those are the words of a football coach – and not just any coach at that. Mircea Lucescu, 72, is the head coach of the Turkish national team, having previously worked for 12 clubs in five countries. A life spent moving from pitch to pitch ... and from language to language. Is he unusual in the football world? Not at all, according to Lucescu. “These days, high-level coaches are more

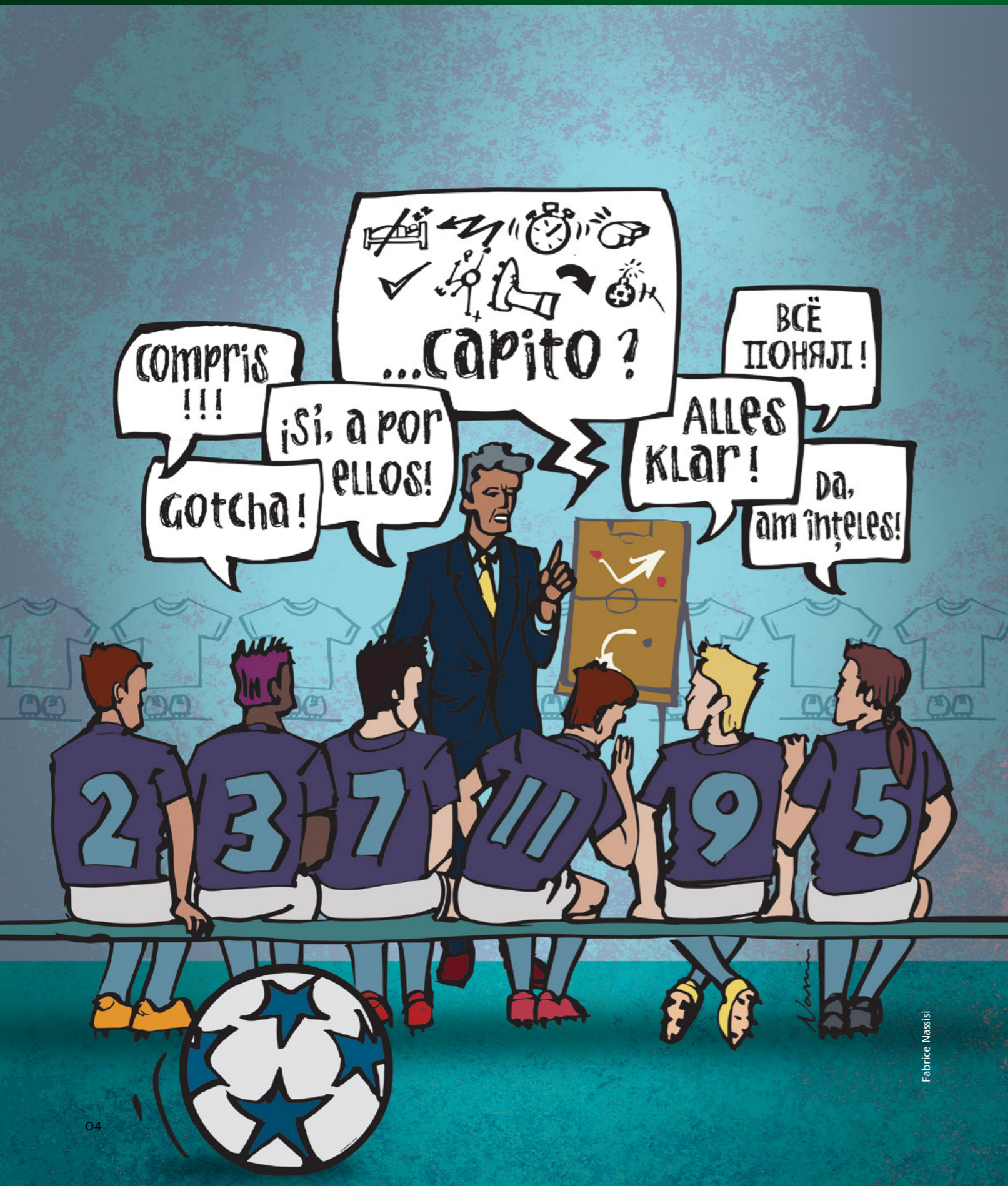
or less obliged to speak several languages. Carlo Ancelotti must speak four or five languages, Pep Guardiola the same, José Mourinho maybe more ... Coaches are in charge of players who come from all over the world and they need to be able to tell them what they want. Getting our ideas across to our players, that’s our job!” Coaches have always had to adapt to changes in football: tactical, physical, technological, sociological changes, and so on. Adaptability is part of a good coach’s DNA. Since 1995 and the Bosman ruling, European coaches and technical staff have also had to add linguistic adaptability to their CV. Pre-1995, the situation was relatively simple: each club was allowed up to three foreign players, who were looked after with varying degrees of success in order to help them integrate and understand what they were being instructed to do.

Since 1995, there has been a huge shift in European football. “Since that moment, clubs have recruited more and more foreign players. Of course, having 15 different nationalities in the dressing room is different to having just three,” says Portugal’s Luís Figo, winner of the Ballon d’Or in 2000. According to the Neuchâtel-based International Centre for Sports Studies (CIES), 39.7% of top-division players in this season’s European domestic championships are foreigners. The figure can be as high as 65%, as is the case in Turkey. In the English Premier League, foreign players make up 59% of first-team squads and it is not unusual for clubs to field teams composed almost exclusively of foreigners. On 26 February 2015, for example, the UEFA Europa League match between Tottenham Hotspur and Fiorentina was the first UEFA competition match in which neither side included →



“In Donetsk, since we had up to 14 Brazilians on our books, I spoke to the whole squad in Portuguese once I felt my Portuguese was good enough. And an interpreter would pass on my instructions to the Ukrainian players in Russian.”

**Mircea Lucescu**  
Turkish national team coach and former Shakhtar Donetsk coach



Fabrice Nassisi

### TERMINOLOGY AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



In 2008, UEFA and Langenscheidt published a trilingual football dictionary in UEFA's three official languages (English, French and German).

A useful reference for any football translator, interpreter or administrator, it contains some 2,000 entries covering everything from the game itself to stadium, equipment, medical and media terms.

The printed version quickly sold out but the dictionary is now available for free online on UEFA.com:

[www.uefa.com/insideuefa/dictionary/index.html](http://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/dictionary/index.html)

a player from its own country in its starting XI. The 22 players who started the match represented 15 nationalities, but there were no Englishmen in the Tottenham team and no Italians in Fiorentina colours, although the Italian side did include Englishman Micah Richards in their line-up.

#### Arsenal with a French accent

How can a coach get through to all his players when they come from different countries, speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds? Robert Pirès, who won the 1998 World Cup with France, has first-hand experience of the internationalisation of football.

“At Arsenal, there were never any problems between the English and French players. We didn't all speak the same language, but we spoke the same football.”

**Robert Pirès**  
Former Arsenal player

At Arsenal, he was a member of the Premier League's first-ever totally foreign starting XI, which beat Crystal Palace 5-1 in 2005. “It didn't matter who was playing, Arsène Wenger always conducted his team talks in English. Afterwards, anyone could ask a team-mate for help if they hadn't understood something. At the start, I always asked Thierry Henry or Patrick Vieira to tell me what the coach or the players were saying in English.” While coaches often use the local language for their team talks – unless, as we shall see later, they do not speak it themselves – language barriers are much easier to break down when it comes to one-to-one conversations between player and coach. “When it was just the two of us, Arsène Wenger always spoke to me in French. It was the same when he was talking to several French players at the same time,” explains Robert Pirès. In fact, the ability to speak to each other in their native language can be good for the relationship between players and coaches from the same country when they are abroad. Luís Figo found himself in such a situation twice in his career, firstly with Carlos Queiroz at Real Madrid and later with José Mourinho at Inter Milan. “In both cases, if we were on our own or if they wanted to explain a tactical detail, we spoke to each other in Portuguese. Both of them could speak several

languages and had no trouble using the local language, so I never had to help them with any translations,” smiles Figo, who can now speak Spanish and Italian fluently, even though he did not know a word in either language before playing in the two countries.

While the similarities between Portuguese and Spanish or Italian made it easier for Luís Figo to learn the local languages quickly, Bixente Lizarazu was not so lucky. When he arrived at Bayern Munich in 1997, the Frenchman came up against a more difficult obstacle than opposing Bundesliga strikers. “Although I had learned English and Spanish at school, I didn't understand German at all. I tried to avoid German when I arrived. However, I spoke a lot of English when I got to Munich because the Germans are very good at English.” French-speaking former Swiss international Patrick Müller was able to compare the experience of moving to a country where he spoke the language with moving to one where he did not. He left Switzerland for Olympique Lyonnais, where he went on to win three French league titles in four seasons. In 2004, he joined Spanish club RCD Mallorca, but only stayed for six months. “Adapting to life in Lyon was easy. When you speak the language, you soon feel



Bixente Lizarazu admits that he did not know a word of German when he joined Bayern Munich.

as everyone else,” he recalls. After only six matches in Spain, he returned to Lyon, where he won three more league titles.

At Olympique Lyonnais, Müller found himself playing alongside a large contingent of Brazilians. The club had specialised in recruiting players from Brazil and making them feel at home, especially off the pitch. “The Brazilians were very well looked after and they settled in quickly because people made their lives easier by dealing with everything for them. There was no interpreter for them in the dressing room, but if a Brazilian player didn't understand an instruction, another Brazilian would explain it in Portuguese,” Müller says.

#### Portuguese the lingua franca in Donetsk

Brazilian footballers play all over the world, the ultimate symbol of the game's globalisation. It is estimated that over 1,200 of them play in professional leagues →

at home. However, when I arrived in Mallorca, I could not speak a word of Spanish and none of the players in the dressing room could speak French, German or English. I discovered how hard it is to become part of a group when you don't speak the same language

### NATIONAL TEAMS ARE (ALMOST) SPARED

Whereas language issues are a daily challenge for clubs, they are much less of a problem where national teams are concerned. In most countries, all the players and technical staff speak the same language, which makes communication much easier.

However, there are exceptions. Firstly, if the coach does not speak the language of the country in which he is working, as in the case of Mircea Lucescu, the current Turkey coach, for example. In such situations, an interpreter often translates all the coach's instructions into the local language. The situation can be more complex, and more akin to that found in clubs, in countries with more than one official language or a number of different regional languages.

In Europe, Belgium and Switzerland spring to mind. While German, French and Italian are all official languages in Switzerland, along with Romansh, things are different within the national team.

“German has always been the language of the Swiss team. Throughout my time with the national team, all the coaches spoke German and there were more German-speakers than French,” says Patrick Müller, who won 81 caps between 1998 and 2008, a period when Michel Pont assisted Köbi Kuhn, and then Ottmar Hitzfeld, and was responsible, among other

things, for interpreting their instructions for the players who only spoke French. “To be honest, even in Switzerland, where several languages are spoken, there are far fewer problems than in clubs. As head coach of FC Lugano, I had to manage a squad with 11 different nationalities, and that certainly requires a lot more work!” says Michel Pont.



French-speaking Patrick Müller (No20) played 81 times for the Swiss national team, where, despite the country having four official languages, German is predominant.



### WHAT MAKES A GOOD FOOTBALL INTERPRETER?

Nowadays, it is impossible to imagine the football world without interpreters. In an era when players and coaches are constantly moving all over the world, interpreters have become essential cogs in ensuring mutual understanding between the different components of numerous clubs.

But what is it that distinguishes a good football interpreter? Strangely, the quality that is often mentioned first has nothing to do with language. "They need to know a lot about football, otherwise they won't last long!" says Graham Turner, an English journalist who worked as an interpreter for coach Terry Venables during his three seasons at FC Barcelona from 1984 to 1987.

Many coaches have had the unfortunate experience of not choosing their own interpreter when arriving in a new country, and have quickly decided to replace them after a few mistranslated instructions. However, tactical nous on its own may not be enough, according to Graham: "The other indispensable quality

for an interpreter is the ability to adapt their translation. It's not a case of interpreting things literally, but of getting the message across by adapting it to the language

and the local culture. It's important to have someone who is truly immersed in both cultures so they can find the best translation." So what it really boils down to is that an interpreter working for a football club needs to be more than a language specialist, and a member of staff like everyone else. Someone who can get on well with the players as well as the coach. "Since English is a much more concise language than Spanish, Terry Venables would sometimes ask me to say two words to a player and I would need 30 words

to explain it in Spanish. He would burst out laughing and ask if he was doing the coaching, or whether I was in fact giving out whatever instructions I wanted," says Graham, who returned to his career as a journalist after his Barcelona experience.



across the world. All clubs try to help them integrate and cope with being away from their families, who often stay behind in Brazil. One club, however, leads the way when it comes to the recruitment of Brazilian players: FC Shakhtar Donetsk, who were coached between 2004 and 2016 by ... Mircea Lucescu, the ideal coach to manage the Brazilian diaspora both on and off the pitch.

"When I arrived, there were not many Brazilians, but we gradually started to recruit more and more of them. Most of them were young when they came, which meant that the coach also played an important role in their education. To help them adapt to life in Ukraine, I needed to be able to speak to them directly so we could form a close relationship," says Lucescu, whose initial idea was to work on his Portuguese. He then took an incredible decision. As a Romanian coach working in a part of Ukraine in which Russian is the everyday language, he began to deliver all his team talks in Portuguese! To him, it seemed the natural thing to do. "In my coaching career, my knowledge of several languages has been an enormous asset. One of my strengths is my ability to get my point across to my players, to understand what they say, and to make their lives easier

as players and as people. In Donetsk, since we had up to 14 Brazilians on our books, I spoke to the whole squad in Portuguese once I felt my Portuguese was good enough. And an interpreter would pass on my instructions to the Ukrainian players in Russian."

#### Are interpreters really necessary?

While not all coaches are prepared to learn another language in order to talk to their foreign players, everyone we spoke to was unequivocal: even though communication is less fluent than between people speaking the same language, it is never really a problem in a cosmopolitan dressing room. "With my Italian coach Giovanni Trapattoni, we spoke in a mixture of Spanish and Italian, and we understood each other. In the dressing room at Bayern, players spoke to each other in German, English, Spanish and Portuguese, and everyone got on perfectly well. You can't have long discussions on the pitch anyway. Twenty words is enough to get your point across!" explains Bixente Lizarazu. Luís Figo wholeheartedly agrees: "Even though I didn't speak Spanish when I arrived at Barça, I managed to communicate with the other players and we understood each other." A view shared even more

enthusiastically, almost poetically, by Robert Pirès: "At Arsenal, as soon as a player arrives, his level of English is assessed and a teacher is assigned to him, with the possibility of attending lessons every day. I quickly learned the important words that I needed to use on the pitch, so I could pick up the basic vocabulary. There were never any problems between the English and French players. We didn't all speak the same language, but we spoke the same football."

Opinions on interpreters in the dressing room are more varied, especially when the coach does not speak the local language. "I can't understand it when clubs or national teams recruit coaches who do not speak the local language. People management is so important in football that it's hard to see how a coach can manage a dressing room without speaking the same language as most of the players. There are bound to be things that do not come across properly," says Michel Pont, assistant coach of the Swiss national team from 2001 to 2014. "When I arrived at Barça, Johan Cruyff spoke to the players in Spanish. Then Bobby Robson and, after him, Louis van Gaal spoke in their own languages, and it was all interpreted into Spanish. It was José Mourinho who translated everything that Bobby Robson

"People management is so important in football that it's hard to see how a coach can manage a dressing room without speaking the same language as most of the players. There are bound to be things that do not come across properly."

**Michel Pont**  
Former assistant coach of the Swiss national team

said to us, for example. For the players, having an interpreter does not change much in terms of what is actually said, but it is more difficult to form a close relationship with a coach if you don't speak the same language," says Luís Figo. In his last season as a player, Robert Pirès came across a rather unusual linguistic conundrum in India. At FC Goa, Brazilian legend Zico would issue instructions in Portuguese before an assistant translated them into English for most of the squad. Then another member of staff translated into Hindi for the Indian players who did not speak English. "It was easier for me because I speak Portuguese, so I understood immediately. But I could tell it wasn't always straightforward for the Indians," remembers the Frenchman, who also spent time at Villarreal, where he was

able to speak Spanish, the language of his maternal grandparents. "In some clubs, almost every player seems to have an interpreter. It's quite bizarre. I can't understand how a coach can develop a strong relationship with his players like that," says Lucescu. Nevertheless, even though he has been coaching the Turkish national team since August 2017, he has decided not to learn the national language, preferring to issue instructions to his players in French before an assistant translates them into Turkish. "But as far as one-to-one conversations are concerned, many Turkish internationals play abroad, so in order to form a closer relationship with them, I can speak to them in whichever language suits them best, as long as it is one that I can speak," he says. A diplomatic answer if ever there was one. 🇧🇷



Juninho and Edmilson are two of the large contingent of Brazilians who have adapted to life in Lyon.

### ENGLISH, THE 'GO-TO' LANGUAGE

"These days, if you don't speak English, you're dead!" Even though he never played in the Premier League, Luís Figo speaks English very well and has no doubt that, for a footballer, a basic knowledge of Shakespeare's language is very useful, if not indispensable.

Patrick Müller, who now uses English every day in his job at UEFA, agrees: "In football, the thing that's different about English is that it is spoken all over the world. Even among people whose mother tongue is not English. Let's imagine a Belgian and a Spaniard playing together in the Czech Republic. How do they communicate with each other? In all likelihood, it will be in English, or at least 'broken English'".

"If there was one message I could pass on to young players, I would tell them to take their English lessons seriously, because you never know what life is going to throw at you. I wasn't a very good student, and I suffered later because of that," admits Robert Pirès, who communicated with his Indian team-mates at Goa FC in English, for example.

For Bixente Lizarazu, English was a lifeline when he moved to Bayern Munich, especially outside the dressing room. "Nowadays, as a club ambassador, I am much more comfortable speaking German in public. I love speaking it, even to the media. But when I was a player, I preferred to speak English so I could be sure that my words wouldn't be misinterpreted."

Mircea Lucescu also mainly uses English to speak to the members of the Turkish FA, although he occasionally uses French with the players. And he can always resort to Romanian, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese or Russian if someone has difficulty understanding him ...

# WRITING NEW CHAPTERS IN THE FUTSAL STORY

When the ball started rolling at the Stožice Arena in Ljubljana, the history of the European Futsal Championship was entering its 20th year. During those two decades, ten EUROS have been written into the futsal story. The event in Slovenia bade farewell to the 12-team format which had been in force since 2010.

Getty Images

The coaches at Futsal EURO 2018 not only applauded UEFA's move to expand the final tournament to 16 contestants; they gave equal importance to the parallel decisions related to the introduction of an Under-19 Futsal EURO and a Women's Futsal EURO in 2019. From a coaching perspective, UEFA's projects afford exciting player development opportunities and incentives. This, in turn, has prompted a revamp of UEFA's technical report on Futsal EURO 2018. The content, which forms the hard core of the shortly-to-be-published tournament review, sets out to examine aspects of the event which will hopefully be useful to the coaches responsible for leading national associations into the new competitions and to all those involved in player development work at club level.

### Prime movers

By coincidence, the prime movers in the reconstruction of the technical report were prime movers when the European Futsal Championship was officially launched in 1998/99. "Ball skills are important," Spain coach Javier Lozano was quoted as saying in the technical report on the first final tournament in Granada, "but high-speed decision-making is even more important." "There is too much emphasis on defensive aspects of the game," said Portugal coach Orlando Duarte, "and not enough on attacking play." The two former national team coaches met again in Slovenia, teaming up as UEFA's technical observers. While the general concepts they had expressed in 1999 retained their validity, they were keen to inject more detailed coaching content into the technical report they generated in 2018.

At the same time, they reiterated long-standing concerns – and the hope that UEFA's new strategic plan for futsal will help to erode or erase them. In Slovenia, they expressed disquiet about a trend that had first raised their eyebrows at EURO 2010, when the technical report stated: "Of the 60 most regular starters, 38 had reached or passed the age of 30." At EURO 2018, 46% of the 168 players on view had passed their 30th birthdays – some by a considerable distance. The "lack of players from the Under-21 age group" which had been a cause for concern eight years previously was echoed this time round by the fact that the 19-year-old Poland goalkeeper Michal Kaluza was the only player below the age of 21.

### Bridging the gap between youth and senior level

The coaches in Slovenia acknowledged the problem. "Older players are important as role models," said Serbia coach Goran Ivančić, "and we have young talent coming through. But our youngsters must get more opportunities to play because they need more international experience if they want to make the jump to the senior team."

"It's not easy to select younger players to blend in with the seniors," agreed Slovenia coach Andrej Dobovičnik, "as they lack playing time at top level." "We need to reorganise structures," Kazakhstan coach Cacau commented, "because, at the moment, young players have few opportunities to compete." "The gap between youth and senior levels is a big problem," admitted Italy coach Roberto Menichelli. "There are good youngsters but [they are] not yet ready for the top. They would suffer if they were thrown into a competition of this level. And many coaches are finding that a transitional phase can mean a serious risk in terms of results."

Romania coach Robert Lupu, who competed as a player at EURO 2014, added: "We have Under-17 competitions but then there is a huge gap to the senior team. It's not easy for the players because the lack of opportunities to acquire international experience doesn't help them to bridge that gap. We now have games under futsal rules in our schools, but it will take some years for that to bear fruit. This is why the introduction of an Under-19 competition can only be →



19-year-old Poland goalkeeper Michal Kaluza was the only player aged under 21 to feature at Futsal EURO 2018.



**A 10% increase in blocked goal attempts raises questions about decision-making (i.e. when to shoot) and the value of feinting and dummying.**

beneficial. And the technical reports on the futsal events are useful in encouraging senior players to become coaches. I think it's important for former players to move into coaching in order to raise the level of competition."

**A valuable development tool**  
In other words, the introduction of the U19 Futsal EURO aims to add a valuable tool to the coaches' youth development toolbox. But what qualities need to be prioritised when it comes to designing elite development programmes? The coaches highlighted the importance of sustained physical and mental intensity but, at the same time, cited the diversity of standards in domestic competitions as an impediment. Poland, back in the final tournament for the first time since 2001, and debutants France both acknowledged the inherent difficulties in pitting amateurs against professionals, explaining that squad members had travelled to Slovenia only after securing time away from jobs such as driving buses or mining.

As Poland coach Blazej Korczynski commented: "This means that when you get the national team together you cannot overlook basics, such as the ability to visually cover ball and opponent at the same time." Goran Ivančić also stressed the need to prioritise "basics such as

passing principles, the use of both feet, body positioning and so on". Their comments prompted Javier Lozano and Orlando Duarte to feature in the technical report illustrations and details on games played at EURO 2018 which coaches might find useful when working with young players.

**Where were the goals?**

This gave added value to their overview of a final tournament where the main talking point was an abrupt downturn in the number of goals scored. The total fell from 129 in 2016 to 91. And the average of 4.55 per match was the lowest ever recorded during two decades of futsal EUROs. The average would have been even lower had the two semi-finals not provided 15 goals between them. As the technical report points out: "Portugal, with a total of 23, provided one quarter of the tournament total and the five matches involving the eventual champions accounted for 35% of the goals."

A drop of 29.5% was at odds with, as Russia coach Sergei Skorovich put it, "the classic image of end-to-end futsal". The obvious question for the technical observers was quite simply: Why?

As coaches, Javier Lozano and Orlando Duarte started their quest for answers with a degree of self-examination. "I think there were risk management issues," said Lozano, "especially during the group stage, when we started to talk about fear of losing and the number of players committed to attack." Portugal and France, they felt, were exceptions to the general rule in that they were prepared

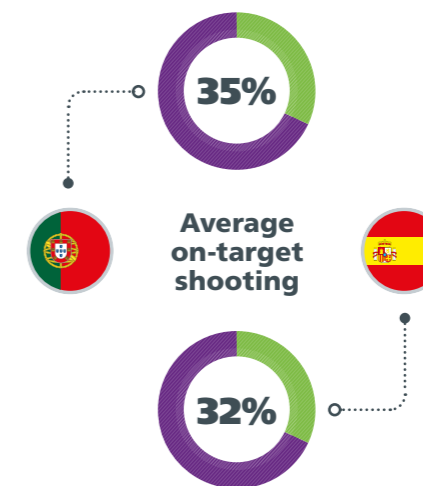
to throw players forward rather than adopt a more conservative approach of keeping numerical balance behind the ball. "You could detect a tendency to defend deeper rather than go for the high press," Azerbaijan coach Alesio mentioned to the technical observers. "But you have to pace the team for knockout matches in a heavy match schedule."

**Polishing the art of finishing**

The observers discussed the relative scarcity of direct counterattacks (in normal play rather than power play with the flying goalkeeper) as opposed to a lower-risk retain possession approach. "There seems to be a greater tendency to play across the pitch," Italy coach Roberto Menichelli said to the technical observers. "It is easy to overlook the importance of verticality. And if teams focus on defending ten metres in front of their goal, it is difficult to maintain levels of spectacle and entertainment."

But to attribute the downturn in goalscoring exclusively to game plans designed on the bench would be facile – and even unfair. On-court factors also exert a major influence. For example, the technical report points out: "The striking decline in goals was not backed by a striking decline in the number of goal attempts. The 2018 statistical balance showed no more than a 2.7% downturn in the number of attempts and a 3.7% drop in the number of shots on target. A negative trend, yet way out of line with the 30% shortfall in goals."

Coaches responsible for polishing the art of finishing might find it interesting that, even at elite level, half the teams



were off-target with more than half their goal attempts, with percentages of on-target shooting varying from 26% by Slovenia to 50% by Romania. Among the others, Azerbaijan and France were alone in passing the 40% mark, while the on-target finishing by Portugal and Spain – the two finalists – averaged 35% and 32% respectively.

The percentages are evidently based on the total number of goal attempts – including those blocked by the defending team. And the total in the latter category registered a 10% increase. This prompted, in the technical report, the comment that: "This raises questions about decision-making (i.e. when to shoot) and,

bearing in mind the growing tendency for defenders to put themselves momentarily out of the game by spreading themselves horizontally on the court to block, the need to emphasise at development levels the value attachable to the arts of feinting and dummying".

Efficiency in front of goal – or rather, the lack of it – went some way towards explaining the decline in goalscoring. At Futsal EURO 2016 in Serbia, the least efficient scorers required 25 attempts to hit the net. In Slovenia, six of the finalists were even less efficient than that. The extreme examples were group-fallers Poland and Italy, each with two goals to show from, respectively, 86 and 89 shots. By contrast, Portugal lifted the trophy for the first time on the basis of one goal per 7.9 attempts.

**Four clean sheets**

As the technical report hastens to point out, goalkeepers were not alien to the goalscoring issue. Clean sheets are a rare species in futsal. But the 20 games at EURO 2018 produced four. On 14 occasions, a goalkeeper left the court having conceded only once. It is easy to glibly launch a theory that sound work in training by specialist goalkeeper coaches has contributed to a rise in standards. But the final tournament yielded statistical evidence to support the theory. In Serbia at Futsal EURO 2016, Stefano Mammarella topped the goalkeeping chart by stopping fractionally over 87% of the shots directed →

**91** goals scored in total, a fall from the **129** scored in 2016

An average of **4.55** goals per match, the lowest ever recorded

**23** goals scored by **Portugal**, 25% of the tournament total





Bruno Coelho scores the winning penalty for Portugal.

at the Italy net. In Slovenia, that percentage was topped by Russia's Georgi Zamtaradze, Serbia's Miodrag Aksentijević, Kazakhstan's Higuita, Slovenia's Damir Puškar and, by a few decimal points, Mammarella himself.

The first two on that list saved in excess of 90% of everything that opponents threw – or, rather, kicked – at them, with the Slovenia keeper amply topping 90% during a memorable performance when the hosts eliminated Italy in Group A. The technical observers were at pains to emphasise, however, that there is no 'photofit' picture of the futsal keeper on which development programmes can be based. The tournament in Slovenia showcased a diversity of personalities and leadership qualities with, for example, Aksentijević dressing his competence with nice trimmings of showmanship. Lozano and Duarte remarked that the two keepers they ultimately selected for the UEFA team of the tournament (from a hearteningly ample list of candidates) represented two different styles of goalkeeping.

Zamtaradze defended his net with sobriety, consistency and reflexes seemingly at odds with a man of such physical stature. Higuita, more flamboyant, defended and attacked, pushing forward to become an effective fifth outfield component whenever power play was conducive to the Kazakh cause.

**The role of the flying keeper**

Mention of Higuita inevitably prompts a review of the roles played by flying goalkeepers – a topic which has been a constant debating point in recent years. At EURO 2010, the subject had no more than relative importance, with ten goals hitting nets during power play. In 2012, all but one of the finalists used the flying keeper, with more goals conceded than scored. In 2014, the total soared to 30 power-play goals (11 scored; 19 conceded); and in 2016, the negative trend in power-play successes was extended: of 19 goals only six were scored by the team with the flying keeper. In Slovenia – even though Higuita's

dual role meant that, officially, Kazakhstan did not operate with a flying keeper – the teams played a total of over 83 minutes' power play, with a balance of eight goals scored and ten conceded. It meant that 28% of the tournament's open-play goals were scored while the flying keeper was on court and that the number of goals scored in 'normal' open play was 46 in 20 matches.

Among the goals scored with the flying keeper on court was the volley by Bruno Coelho which brought Portugal back to 2-2 against Spain with 102 seconds of normal time remaining in the final that they went on to win 3-2. Resorting to power play when chasing a result is a ploy which respects the spirit of the tactical option. Debate kicks in, however, when the option is, as Russia coach Sergei Skorovich put it, "used to slow the game down in other situations. This is not good for the game".

Romania sent on the flying keeper after 10'30 when trailing Portugal 1-0 and after only 6'12 when leading Ukraine 1-0. Slovenia played out the last five minutes of the first half against Italy as a damage-limitation measure when struggling to remain only 1-0 behind. Azerbaijan resorted to five outfielders eight times during the first periods against Portugal and Spain. "The use of power

Among the goals scored with the flying keeper on court was the volley by winger Bruno Coelho, which brought Portugal back to 2-2 against Spain with 102 seconds of normal time remaining in the final that they went on to win 3-2.



The opening match between Slovenia and Serbia drew a crowd of 10,212 to the Stožice Arena.

play can be terrible," Serbia coach Goran Ivančić opined. "I once saw a game where the flying keeper was on for about 30 minutes and killed it as a spectacle. We have to find ways to avoid this."

Still with goalkeepers, the technical observers also commented on a disturbing tendency for keepers to feign injury with a view to cooling down the game. And, bearing in mind their increasing specific gravity within team frameworks, the

importance of their ability to distribute accurately with hands and feet. Many teams used the long throw to the attacking pivot as a weapon in their counterattacking armoury – with varying degrees of precision – but Javier Lozano reiterated his long-standing concern that: "Keepers sometimes use the long throw just to get rid of the ball, to put it out of play and to oblige the opposition to start again versus a regrouped and reorganised

defence." He and Orlando Duarte fully endorsed the view expressed by Azerbaijan coach Alesio: "The worry is that, at development levels, coaches sometimes encourage goalkeepers to play long – which means that the kids don't learn how to play a passing game."

**Shaping the future of futsal in Europe**

The imminent introduction of UEFA's Under-19 and women's futsal competitions has incentivised the aim to transmit useful information to those responsible for the education of young players. The overall Futsal EURO 2018 tournament review also features the commercial, marketing, hosting and media aspects which play major roles in developing and promoting futsal. The technical content, however, offers statistics, analysis, opinions, comments from coaches, illustrations based on specific technical aspects of matches. As the introduction to the publication indicates, "by highlighting trends at the peak of the European futsal pyramid, [it] provides coaches at senior and development levels with information that may be helpful when working on the qualities required by the players and coaches who will play leading roles in shaping the future of futsal in Europe".



The hosts bowed out in the quarter-finals, having lost 2-0 to Russia.



MICHAEL O'NEILL

## 'WHEN YOU'RE MANAGER OF YOUR COUNTRY, IT'S VERY PERSONAL'

He is the man who has revived the fortunes of Northern Ireland's national team. Prior to his appointment as his country's national coach in 2012, the Northern Irish had not qualified for a major tournament since the 1986 World Cup.

**T**hat all changed under Michael O'Neill, the former Newcastle United, Dundee United and Hibernian winger who led his country to EURO 2016 as group winners – and then on to the round of 16 at the finals in France. More recently he guided them to a World Cup qualifying play-off against Switzerland that ended in narrow defeat.

Here, the 48-year-old reflects on the road travelled in football management – from his early days with Brechin City (2006–08) and Shamrock Rovers (2009–11) to the task of helping one of Europe's smaller nations rise up the rankings and to the challenges still to come.

**Before becoming a manager, you had a spell outside the game working in finance – how did this help you?**

With coaches that come from a playing background, it's almost like a vacuum of football – they're constantly surrounded by football. My experiences outside football helped me in terms of dealing with people,

“My role is to help (a) player step out from his club, sometimes not the most glamorous club, to step on to the pitch against Cristiano Ronaldo. That's where the coach plays a vital role.”

and seeing other people's side of things. As a player I always felt aggrieved – 'the manager's not seeing my side of things'. That understanding, that tolerance, is something that I developed away from football. There were also the practical skills – to become proficient with a laptop, with email, with presentations. I worked on the side of the business where we were trying to generate investment and I'd be in a room with 10 or 12 people saying, 'This is why you should invest in this company'. It gave me confidence. Sometimes to develop as an individual is more difficult if you're in the one environment all the time and my experiences outside of football definitely benefitted me.

**Your first manager's job was with Brechin City in Scotland. How important was this as an apprenticeship for you?**

A lot of people want to start higher up now. I understand particularly the players with the big, big reputations – the English game has become so cut-throat now that managers are [easily] damaged and I can understand big-reputation players not wanting to step outside their comfort zone. But for me you learn the real aspect of the game at the lower level – you learn how to manage people better, you learn how to get people all working together because at the likes of Brechin, so many people at the club weren't working for financial reward; they were working because they loved the club, so you had to get people all pulling in the same direction, which was a big part of it.

**During your time at Brechin, you were completing your Pro licence. What is your view about the importance of education for a coach?**

I think it's vital. Coach education shouldn't be a case of 'I need to get my coaching badges to get a job'. Many people want to get to the Pro licence in the shortest space of time. I see coaches that go from the A licence straight to the Pro licence but have not actually used the A licence – they've not coached, they've not been managers. Every time you achieve a qualification, it should enhance your career, so you need to bring it into the real life, bring the theoretical side of it into the game.

I also like to look at other sports and listen to other coaches. We don't know everything and the game is constantly changing, so we must evolve with it, and education is the key point in that.

**At Shamrock Rovers, you went to a club that had not won honours for so long then won two league titles. How did you change things when you arrived there?**

I inherited a squad that had finished seventh. I was fortunate I had a good handle on the Scottish game, which enabled me to access better players at less cost. Players were on all sorts of different contracts, so I brought in a maximum wage and an appearance and bonus structure that was the same for every player so there was uniformity in the group. Some clubs in the League of →

Ireland had two or three times our playing budget, but the first year we finished second and slowly the other clubs started to have financial problems while we were stable. We were champions the next two years but our budget never increased.

**Another achievement was to take Rovers into the UEFA Europa League group stage. How do you look back on that achievement?**

European football was very important for the League of Ireland clubs because of the financial benefits. We were a little bit unfortunate against FC Copenhagen [in UEFA Champions League qualifying] and were eliminated, but then we dropped into the Europa League and had play-off against Partizan. It was a fantastic achievement for our group of players. We were up against teams who were spending fortunes on players and wages, so it was a fantastic achievement. It did break the ice as Dundalk have done it subsequently, so it let people see it was achievable. It's something I use regularly for our clubs in Northern Ireland. I say to them, 'This is achievable, you can do this but you're going to have to do things better.'

**You took the Northern Ireland job in the midst of a 13-match winless run. How did you start changing the culture?**

If you'd been walking into a club job in the same situation, you'd have gone, 'Let's get rid of all these guys and start from fresh.' I didn't have that luxury. I had to slowly assess the squad, I had to slowly ease players out. But you need players to come through. There is a process there – 'I might need him for another 12 months.' That was the first part of it. The second part was just trying to build a team that believed they could win. That belief had gone out. So many of our players had played a lot of international football and the experience had not been that positive so it had to become a positive experience, they had to turn up at the ground feeling different about themselves. They had to realise the significance of wearing the shirt and playing for their country and also what a successful Northern Ireland football team means.

Above: 16 June 2016, Stade de Lyon, France. Northern Ireland beat Ukraine and book their place in the last 16 of EURO 2016. Opposite: During Michael O'Neill's two years in the coach's seat, Shamrock Rovers won two League of Ireland titles and played in the UEFA Europa League.



We brought in people from other sports – we brought in Rory McLroy, we brought in Carl Frampton the boxer, we brought in Gary Lightbody the singer from Snow Patrol. For too long it had been the same old, same old and we had to get away from that.

I played international football in Northern Ireland when perhaps the atmosphere was not so good. There were problems in the stadium as well. But the association has

worked very hard to manage that and the experience for the Northern Ireland supporter and player is so much better. In the past we'd turn up at the stadium and there was nothing for the players to relate to. Now there is positive imagery of the players – there is France, there's history of the team in the past, the 1982 World Cup, the 1986 World Cup. There's a lot of positive branding around the stadium

for the players to relate to as well. Germany and Switzerland are the only two teams to beat us there in four years.

**Could you elaborate further on the psychological aspect, and the steps taken to improve self-belief?**

I spoke to the players and had a really frank, open meeting with them after the first qualifying campaign [for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil]. We had to refocus the group and make sure the senior players recognised it wasn't just about coming away with the national team, playing and going back with another cap. We had to change that mentality. We had one of the top players in our squad who hadn't played in a winning Northern Ireland team for four years. So we pointed these things out to the players – what do we want from being a national team player? Do we want 60, 70 appearances but it doesn't matter whether we win or lose, or do we want to achieve something as a group? Another thing we did was, we showed them the qualifying group where we'd finished fifth and had seven points. And then we showed them the group of the same ten games after 70 minutes and we had 17 points. So we showed them we weren't that far away.

When you finish fifth it feels like qualification is miles away, but it wasn't – it was 20 minutes away in each game and 17 points would have gotten us third place in that group, which in the new EURO format would have got us a play-off, so we had to create belief that it was achievable because results didn't tell us that.

We'd played better in the World Cup than our results showed. For long periods, the games were very tight but we lost them in the last 15–20 minutes. For the EURO we ended up as the first Northern Ireland team ever to win our qualifying group. We were the first pot 5 team ever to win their group. We went into the EURO's 12 games unbeaten – the longest run Northern Ireland had ever had, with our highest ranking, our highest number of points.

**In that EURO qualifying campaign, when did you really start thinking, 'We can do this'?**

After winning the first three games, we played Romania in Bucharest and lost the game 2-0. Evans didn't play, [Steven] Davis didn't play, so personnel-wise we were weaker. So the fifth game became so important – we came back in March and played against Finland, and I said, 'If we beat them here we'll put nine points between ourselves and Finland.' We were well ahead of the Faroes already, but if we won that one, we'd be in a group of four. We were second at the time. We won the game and suddenly you could see it in the players. We had to play a game against Romania in June. It was a difficult game because of the timing of it, as normally in June you have all these withdrawals, but we didn't have a single one.

**As for the EURO 2016 experience, how do you view it when you look back?**

It was a phenomenal experience. I look at it and our games were so tough – we played Poland who were beaten in the quarter-finals on penalties, we played Germany who were beaten in the semi-

finals and Wales who were beaten in the semi-finals, and Ukraine. Ultimately, though, it comes down to disappointment. We didn't deserve to lose against Wales [in the last 16] – it was an own goal that separated the teams. My biggest disappointment is that when we went into the tournament none of our forward players had had good seasons at their clubs, so we didn't have that player who could make a difference attacking-wise.

**With a small football nation like Northern Ireland, how did you prepare players tactically for big games like these?**

We knew how we'd have to play. We knew we'd have to defend for long periods. We knew we'd have to defend deep. We'd lost Chris Brunt, which meant we lost our left-back, so we worked on playing three at the back. We knew if we had to go to a four we'd have to play Jonny Evans in that position, which we did against Ukraine. We just got them so disciplined: how you stay in the game, how you defend. We had to become a good team without the ball. That was our message from day one – we can't be like Spain. The players have to accept that message and they have to take it on board but they have to have a pride in how they want to play – 'This is how we play, we are different, we take pride in being difficult to beat.' And pride that these big-name players are thinking, 'This isn't going to be an easy game against Northern Ireland.' I remember the German players being complimentary about us and there's no bigger compliment than that.

On the training pitch, for example, we designed games where we created all the emphasis on how we thought Germany would play – we gave them an extra player in each half of the pitch as it made it more realistic because when you play Germany it's as if they have another player in each half of the pitch so we did things like that. We played ten v eight. We gave the eight who had to defend different goals to achieve – how to defend without the ball. →

“If you have a player in a team who's incredibly offensive and you're saying, 'I don't want you to play like that for us', you're asking him to do something that's slightly unnatural for him and you have to give him the reasons behind that because players are inherently selfish. I was exactly the same.”





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**How did the EURO change you as a coach?**

It gave me belief that I was capable of working at this level. I took a team to a major tournament and we came away with a lot of credit. It also gave me inspiration to see how we could develop as a team and as a nation. I've taken that too from the World Cup [qualifying campaign] where we just missed out. I want us to evolve. I don't want us to always have to play the way we do. It's not enough for us to say, 'This is us'. Yes, this is us, but we want to be better than what we are and that's the challenge now – to develop as a nation and get to the point where our style of play has changed and developed.

**As a general coaching question, what is the difference between club and national team management?**



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It's three or four days of team development. Within that you have to do little things with individuals – it's more about mentally getting them in the right frame of mind to play. There's always a step in a player's head when he pulls on a national team shirt and that is a step that the coach has to help him make. My role is to help this player step out from his club, sometimes not the most glamorous club, to step on to the pitch against Cristiano Ronaldo. That's where the coach plays a vital role.

The other side of it is you have to manage the players who don't play – the players who play come away, they get an international cap, go back to their clubs and are happy. But the ones who don't play are the more difficult ones to manage. I know that through my own experience – I had 31 international caps but I was in about 80 squads, so I sat on the bench and in the stand a lot, and I know that's difficult when a player comes away for seven, eight days and goes back with nothing. You have to manage that aspect closely as well because you need those players – those players are vital for the preparation of the team, you can't prepare the team with 11, you have to prepare it with your 22 players.

I always say to the players, 'I know it's difficult when you come away and don't play but cherish it.' When we won the [EURO qualifying] group in Finland, I said beforehand to Steven Davis to get up and thank the players who hadn't played. It was quite emotional. He said, 'Look, it doesn't work unless there are 22 or 25 of us' and

“All our young players at 16 go to England or Scotland. We don't have any players who go to France or Holland or Germany, which I'd like to see but our players are not of interest to those countries.”

that was really important to hear it from the captain. Those players are annoyed at me as I've not selected them but when your skipper says, 'It's so important you're here', that message is significant.

**Just how important is good communication with players?**

You have to find a way where your message is received and understood to the maximum and that's the most important aspect of man management and understanding players. Not everything works. The same approach will not work for every player. Some players need nothing. Some players need something. Some players will challenge you and you have to deal with that and there's no problem with that. That man management aspect, from getting in the hotel on a Sunday night to playing a massive game on the Thursday night, it's about the mental approach more than anything else and communication is vital in that.

The communication when they're not with me is very important too – watching what they're doing at their club, texting them, little messages like 'Well done today'. Constant communication is vital, particularly when they're maybe not doing so well at their clubs – when they're not in the team or they're injured. I do think players put a lot of emphasis on communication like that – the personal side, the human side of management, is more important now possibly than it's ever been.

**In terms of the other work you do to influence a result, can you talk more about the tactical preparations in the build-up to a game?**

I have three or four meetings leading into the game in the week. I don't have any meetings that last more than 15–20 minutes because the players do not concentrate. We will have one on the morning of the game where we do set pieces – we always do set pieces twice in the week.

Set plays are very, very important, for and against. There's also if you don't have the ball, when do you press, how do you press? Where is your defensive line going to be? Are you going to be deep? Are you going to press in the middle third? Are you going to try to press the opposition high up? Once the game is in play, you've less control over that. We always work off trying to defend

in a team who's incredibly offensive and you're saying, 'I don't want you to play like that for us', you're asking him to do something that's slightly unnatural for him and you have to give him the reasons behind that because players are inherently selfish. I was exactly the same. The player has to understand what his role in the team is and why that's so valuable to the team.

**As Northern Ireland manager, is it possible to have a 'philosophy' of how you want your team to play?**

We don't have enough players to have that luxury and we don't have enough players at the same level of club football to do that. We have to be realistic in our approach. I'd love to be in scenario where my team could play the most expansive game possible but national team football is driven by the players. If you don't have the players and you try to impose a style of play on a group

game and integrated it into their own game. They've kept their identity as Germany. But tactically they test you – they've tested us more than any other team we've played. If you block up one area of the pitch, they find a solution. The German players are so good they find a way to set you another problem – just as you've solved one they hit you with something else.

**Returning to your own progression as a coach, you extended your contract earlier this year. What does the future hold for you?**

I had opportunities to go into the club game, I had opportunities to work for another association as well, but I think there's a lot of scope to develop the game in Northern Ireland. We want to maintain where we are. We don't want to go back to a team that can't compete or challenge for qualification. We want to maintain our level as much as we can. For me the important thing is to develop that pathway for players in Northern Ireland to have good club careers and subsequently good international careers.

In Northern Ireland we have no professional clubs, and so our young players work within the association from the age of 11. For example, our 11 to 13 year-olds work two nights a week within the association and two nights a week with their boys' teams. We don't have the luxury of professional clubs to do that so we have to fill the gap for young players. All our young players at 16 go to England or Scotland. We don't have any players who go to France or Holland or Germany, which I'd like to see but our players are not of interest to those countries, so we have to try to build a better pathway because the English model is so ruthless for our young players.

A lot of my focus is on how we can build a better model and I'd like to see our domestic league play a bigger role in that and see an age category in our league where we should play players under a certain age. It's very difficult with politics to enforce that with our clubs but I can give you an example. In our domestic league the percentage of minutes played by players under 21 was 12%. It's very low for a league with no foreign players, so we have to reduce the age profile in our league, so our domestic league becomes a development league for us and, hopefully, a good grounding for players to go on to England, Scotland or wherever and become international players.



24 January 2018, Lausanne, Switzerland. The Nations League draw puts Northern Ireland in the same League B group as Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

– we're tight, we're narrow. We're good at defending crosses, it's in our DNA, so we try to force the opposition into that scenario. It's very important your team, the players, know their roles. It's only three or four days and if you play right-back for your club, it might be totally different from what I want, so it's about your players knowing their roles. If you have a player

of players that it isn't suited to, that's bad coaching. As a national team coach you can't afford to have an attitude of 'this is my philosophy' unless you're operating right at the top end. One of the countries I admire the most in terms of style of play is Germany, internationally. I love how the Germans play. I think they've evolved. They've taken the best bits of the Spanish



## MARCEL KOLLER

## 'BE READY TO ADAPT'

Marcel Koller has known highs and lows during his two decades as a football coach. The former Switzerland midfielder won league titles in his home country with both FC St Gallen and Grasshopper Club Zürich, before spells working in Germany with 1.FC Köln and VfL Bochum 1848. Subsequently he became the first coach to earn Austria qualification for a major tournament since 1998, when guiding them to UEFA EURO 2016.

In the space of 20 years, the 57-year-old has seen significant changes in the way the game is played – and in the dynamic between players and coaches. Little wonder his advice to young coaches is to be flexible: “You have to adapt your idea to fit the pace, technical ability or intelligence of what’s available to you.”

**As a player with Grasshopper, what were the first steps you took towards a career in coaching?**

When I was 25 I wondered what I’d do after playing, so I started off with kids’ football. I did coaching seminars in Switzerland for the B and A diplomas, and then I got the instructor’s diploma, which at that time was the highest diploma in Switzerland. At 31, I had the highest qualification but I was still a player and it was good to be able to watch coaches at first hand. I broke my leg and was out for a while and got the chance to manage the youth team. In my recovery period, when Leo Beenhakker was the coach, I also assisted with the first team.

**Was there one particular coach who influenced you?**

During my playing days, which were quite a while ago, I always wondered how I could bring the training on to the pitch.

It wasn’t as if you had your laptop and mobile and all the social media possibilities you have now. What would happen, for example, was that somebody would play a defender as a striker even though they weren’t a striker. That’s something that wouldn’t happen today. When Roy Hodgson arrived as Swiss national-team manager he had very concrete ideas about how to automate a lot of training drills and then you could see how these drills would play out on the pitch to bring you goals. I think he was one of the first people to do this very practically and then the second was Leo Beenhakker [at Grasshopper]. I was privileged to be his assistant coach for three months and he imported a lot of ideas, in terms of playing systems, from the Netherlands and Spain, and that helped me a lot.

**You’d played at the top level and won 55 caps for Switzerland. Why did you decide to step down a level to take your first job at FC Wil 1900 in 1997/98?**

For me it was clear that I wanted to start in the lower leagues to gain experience. It was good to understand how to treat players and how to communicate with them. Wil was still not a professional club then – we only had two professionals, plus myself as the manager. The rest worked

80% and we started training at 4.30pm. We trained four times a week and it was difficult. They were still at work in their heads and you could notice that. So for me it was important to greet every individual player with a handshake. I didn’t just go into the dressing room and say ‘Hello everyone, now training will start’. Instead I went to every player, shook their hand, looked them in the eye and spoke with them for short while. I tried to talk about football to make them forget about work, and get them involved as quickly as possible. I was there for a year and a half and at that time we still had the relegation/promotion play-off round. We were in first place [before his January 1999 departure], and we’d use the team spirit to try to manage it. When you don’t have top players at your disposal, my philosophy is to have a good team spirit.

**How would you describe your leadership style back then and how has it developed?**

I think I was most likely cooperative. It’s important to know what you want, to be able to convey that to your players. At the end of the day, they need to know how we want to play, what my ideas are, and I have to convey that. I think you have to be funny but in the same way you want to be successful, so you also have to demand things if one or two players are failing to implement something. It’s important to talk to the players and to use video, with today’s possibilities, to show the players. Back then, I used to get my own TV from home and bring in VHS cassettes. →

“For me it was clear that I wanted to start in the lower leagues to gain experience. It was good to understand how to treat players and how to communicate with them. Wil was still not a professional club then – we only had two professionals, plus myself as the manager.”

**At St Gallen, you led the club to its first Swiss title for almost a century. How did you do it?**

That had to do with communication. St Gallen is a city with a population of 80,000, which is relatively small. The players were just happy if they won one or two games and the locals would give them a pat on the back saying everything was super. I was used to something different at Grasshopper. We didn't just try to win two games, but to win titles and cups or make it to international competitions. I got there halfway through the season, in the winter, and in Switzerland there was the play-off system, and I learned that the players only got a bonus for the first stage of the season, and then during the [second] championship stage they stopped getting them. I remember after the second game, there were talks, and I said that it was important not to get complacent but to continue to work. I tried to convey that, but the players didn't take it on board. We had talks with video clips and everything but then a player said to me, 'Boss, we get bonuses until December and then it stops. So after that, there's nothing to play for'.

And then the penny dropped. The president wanted to give me the same bonus but I said I didn't want a bonus for staying up, but a bonus for the title, for the

cup or for the UEFA Cup. And after negotiations, he gave it to me. With the players, it was the same – I went to the board and said: 'We have to change this. The players can't just have motivation for half a year, it should be a whole year.' I wanted them to understand that, as their coach, I wanted them to have goals. I didn't want them to receive money to achieve the minimum, but to help them to achieve something big. We had a great team spirit. We weren't the best team in terms of player ability – Basel, Lugano and Zurich were better – and at the start our opponents underestimated us, but I was there putting on the pressure, saying that we could hold on until the end. And in the end, after 96 years, we won our second championship, which was a great surprise.

**Your next step as a manager was back at your old club, Grasshopper, where you won the championship again. What was it like managing there?**

We had players who were individually better than those at St Gallen. Straight away, in training, I noticed there was a better technical ability and speed that enabled them to play quicker.

There were also some foreign players there and it was important for me to make the team a collective. That doesn't

mean you have to spend time with players or be friends off the pitch, but you need to have the same ideas and follow the same path, and if you have that, you can be successful.

**Regarding the foreign players, what were the challenges of a dressing room with different languages and cultures?**

We had a lot of Spanish speakers, South Americans who are a little bit different from the Swiss, who can be a little colder and reserved. We tried to bring these groups together with training camps and made sure we didn't have the Swiss on one side and the South Americans on the other. We tried to connect them so that people wouldn't feel uncomfortable if they couldn't understand everything – you can always speak with your hands and your feet!

**Why did you want to go and work in Germany, as you did with Köln and then Bochum?**

I wanted to get to the Bundesliga because it was too quiet for me in Switzerland. I thought: 'I want to talk about football every day'. At that time in Switzerland, when you had a game, two or three journalists would come to training on Thursday but were gone the rest of the week. In Germany you'd be in contact with journalists almost daily. They'd watch training and wanted a comment after every session. It's much more fun to play in a stadium full of 50,000 people rather than 5,000. That fascinated me and it was something totally different. Everything was more direct and aggressive. The Swiss are calmer, but with the Germans if something goes wrong, they'll tell you to your face. It doesn't matter if it's a fan or a player. It can be good because you know exactly what the problem is, but it's difficult to manage. You have to handle them first, to establish guidelines. But in terms of training, it was no different.

**Looking at the media, do you have any recommendations how to handle them?**

Maybe I'm a little bit different in that I try to treat everyone equally. By that, I mean I wouldn't take those who criticise me most out for dinner to avoid criticism in the press. I try to treat everyone the same and don't give special bits of information to some people just because



Marc Janko playing against Hungary at EURO 2016, 18 years since Austria had last qualified for a major tournament.

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they're my friends. That does mean that when things don't go well, the criticism comes in thick and fast, and you have to be able to handle that. In the end it's important to be able to find that out for yourself – maybe for you, it could be better to speak to a couple of journalists to give them some information so they write nicer things about you. Ultimately, though, it's their job and they have to fill their notepad and write a story. When the manager loses, maybe for two weeks they'll write nice things, but if everyone is writing bad things, then even they can't write nice things so it all comes back to bite you.

**Some coaches say they don't read the papers. How about you?**

I think it's important to be informed, and also to know what your players are saying in public. They might reveal a tactic or strategy, so it's important because the players get asked: 'How's the manager? Do you want to play offensively/defensively?' It's important to stay in the loop, to be able to intervene if need be.

**On a similar line, could you talk about the significance of the press officer?**

It's important for them to have a thick skin because journalists want a lot. They want to talk to the players and, more often than not, they want to speak to the good players and it's important for the team that

you share it out a bit. You shouldn't always take the same players; you should include the others because they also belong to the team, and this is good for players that don't get a lot of exposure.

**An even more important ally of the coach is his or her assistant. What's your approach to choosing whom to work alongside?**

For the majority of my time as a coach, I took on the assistant coach who was already there, meaning we had an assistant who already knew the players and the set-up and I was ready to work with them. You need good support too, which is why it's very common for managers to take an assistant with them. The advantage of that is your assistant knows your ideas and approach and can therefore pass them on. The disadvantage is not having all the information when you start somewhere new, and that can take time.

**During your time as a coach in Germany, you won promotion with Bochum but also lost a relegation battle with Köln. How different are these two challenges?**

They're very different because if you have the chance to win titles then there's positive euphoria – you notice it in the stadium, with the fans; you even notice it at home with family. Everyone pats you on the back. When you're on the other side battling relegation, it's brutal. I experienced that in Germany, the negative energy. Everyone thinks they know better, everyone comes to tell you that – people come to training, and have a go at you and the players, and your colleagues come in scared that they're going to lose their jobs and they unload all that pressure on to you too.

It's huge pressure that you have to try to cope with all the time. You need to be wide awake every day and as a →

“At Grasshopper, there were also some foreign players there and it was important for me to make the team a collective. That doesn't mean you have to spend time with players or be friends off the pitch, but you need to have the same ideas and follow the same path, and if you have that, you can be successful.”



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“For the majority of my time as a coach, I took on the assistant coach who was already there, meaning we had an assistant who already knew the players and the set-up and I was ready to work with them.”

manager you have to lead by example. The players need to see that you still have energy. Even when it's going badly, you have to be the first one that says, 'We can do this'. If you stand in front of the players not knowing if you can do it, then you can forget it.

#### How about presenting the right message to the media, in the face of this pressure?

For me, the best way, if you're disappointed or angry, is not to go on camera. Just walk away, take a shower to cool off or get some air. If you're full of adrenaline or you're a bit disappointed and you react, it's more difficult to get things under control. From my experience, I give myself five minutes to clear my head and prepare what I want to say. You're a coach and the players watch TV, so if you speak in front of the press and you're in a bad mood then the players will hear that too. It's important to speak with the players, to pass on the criticism or praise before you talk to the press, so the player feels important that he heard it first, and then you can talk to the press.

#### Moving on to your most recent role, how did you find the switch to international football as a coach with Austria?

With a national team, you only have them ten times a year. When you start as the manager, you only have ten days to convey your ideas in November, and then they're away for three months. Then in summer you have some friendly matches, and then in October it all starts. In September, October and November they come every month, but to get your ideas across is very difficult. I used to say: 'I'm a manager

“Patience is difficult these days; everything moves so fast. You notice with the young players that patience is hard. If I say to them, 'Be patient', the patience is gone the next day.”

without a team!' It took almost two and a half years to convey the ideas that I had in my head, to the point where I thought, 'OK now they've got it.' It's not just about what goes on on the pitch. Every time, 23 new players come with another 10 or 15 in the support team, and people come from places with their own coaches and their own ideas, and to get them on the same page takes time.

#### How did you maintain a dialogue with your Austria players outside of the international get-togethers?

If you want to convey your ideas, then you have to talk a lot. I visited the players at their clubs, and I'd travel in the week to meet the players and have more time for conversations. I took my laptop with me, and we worked with videos, and I edited sequences together of the players so I could tell them what I wanted from them – 'I liked that, but this I'd like done differently'.

#### Overall, how would you say the coach's job has changed since you started as a head coach in 1997?

Today there's a lot more communication. I had managers in the past that hardly spoke to me. When you had an injury, they'd say: 'Make sure you get better'.

They only cared about the players who were there. That just made me more determined to come back, but nowadays it wouldn't work. Now it's important to talk to players, and even to put your arm around some of them, or to talk about things that aren't related to football. Sometimes people have troubles at home or feel they're under pressure from their families. The players don't always say that to the manager because they think they won't get played on the Saturday, so they keep it in. But it's important to be able to build up a relationship. It doesn't always have to be friendship as it's important to shake them occasionally when you're not pleased with them. Patience is difficult these days because everything moves so fast. You notice with the young players that patience is hard. If I say to them, 'Be patient', the patience is gone the next day.

#### What tactical trends have you observed that exist today compared with even five years ago?

If you have one playing system, that's not enough these days. You have to be able to play two or three. You need to be able to react to the opponent if your system doesn't work. You have to reposition the players. That's the work done in training. At the top level, it's down to athleticism, pace and technical ability. It can be different, but the top players are unbelievable. When you're over 30 and every three days you play your best game, it's a lot to handle, and you're constantly travelling. It's very intense and I think it's harder now for players over 30. If you're a top club with 18 top players, maybe you can give some players a break, and that's important because it's high intensity. For

## My favourite system

As a manager, you have your favourite systems. When I was in Switzerland, I usually played 4-4-2 or 4-3-3. People will say it's the manager's idea, but it's important to include the players – if you have four top players, maybe it's better to play 4-3-3 or in 3-4-3. In that respect, it's important not to restrict yourself. If you're in a club where you have the option to buy certain players, then you can orientate yourself around that – whether you want to play counter, offensive, pressing or defensive.

I'm more active. I was like that as a player – I didn't like just watching, waiting for the opponent to make a mistake I could take advantage of. I was always the kind of player who preferred to attack.



your fitness regeneration and muscle health, it is better to catch it earlier than to tear something and be out for three months.

#### What advice would you give to young managers starting out today?

I'd always advise young managers to learn how they should act with players. It always comes back to bite you if you lie to them – I prefer the direct approach, which is difficult as a manager. When you have two players who are equally as good as each other, with only one position available, you have to explain that and there's no real explanation. As the manager, you need to make a decision and it's important to be open and honest. Sometimes you have to explain that you just had a feeling. It can be that the player gets upset and slams doors, but that's part of it. Another thing is, as a manager, you can't always introduce ideas for which you need top-quality players. The players might not have the technical ability or speed, their touch might send the ball three or four metres away, which at the top level, results in the loss of the ball.

So, it's important to adapt – it's important to have an idea about how you'll work at the highest level, but you need to look at the players you have available. If you see you don't have enough strikers or not enough pace, maybe you need to back off a bit. You can't play high pressing with that, so maybe you need to play defensive or on the counter-attack.

To give an example, when I started with Austria, during one of the first training sessions, a player took the ball and David Alaba was three metres away from him. I stopped play to say: 'If your opponent receives the ball and you move in quickly, he won't have time to control the ball, but if you're three metres away, we're at a disadvantage. I want you to be right next to him.' Two minutes later, almost exactly the same situation happened: the ball comes in, and Alaba is right there. Sorted, in two minutes. That's what it's like with David Alaba – he's a top player, with quick reactions and perception. You don't have top players everywhere – you have to work with what's at your disposal to try and convey the ideas you have. Some get it quickly, some more slowly and some not at all. 🧠





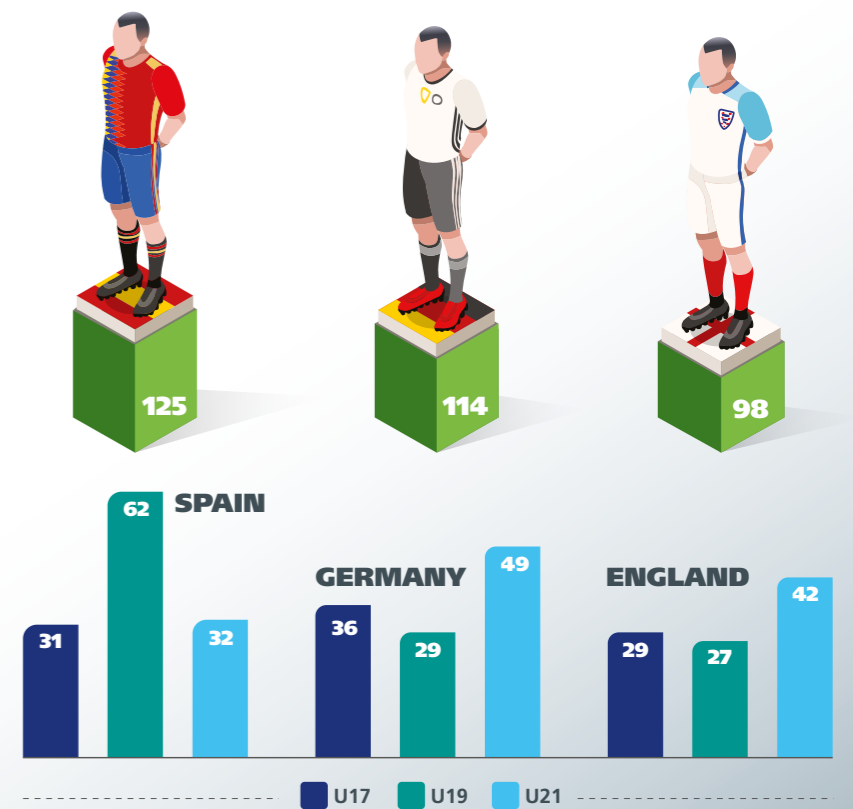
# BOYS TO MEN

Skill and maturity grow hand in hand as players go up through the ranks of youth football. But the key is in the competition.

Before excelling at EURO 2016 (below, against England), Iceland's Birkir Bjarnason cut his teeth at the European Under-21 Championship finals in 2011 in Denmark.

Getty Images

## National teams with the most youth experience at EURO 2016 (by caps won)



To gauge the value of youth tournament football, it is worth opening the pages of Andrés Iniesta's book *The Artist: Being Iniesta*. Inside is a fascinating insight from Iniesta's former Spain team-mate Fernando Torres into the precious learning curve that a youth competition can provide. In this case, the U-17 World Cup in Trinidad and Tobago in 2001. Iniesta and Torres were then 17 years old and key players in a Spain team eliminated in the first round after defeat by Burkina Faso. On the plane home, Torres and Iniesta sat writing a letter about the difficulties encountered. "The awful training facilities, the completely unacceptable standard of hotels, the debatable

quality of the food, the travelling ..." Torres remembered.

"That tournament helped both Andrés and me grow up fast, because it showed us the flipside of this game, the pain of defeat," added the Atlético icon. "We were the main players in that squad and so we were singled out for blame when it all went wrong." The lesson served both men well.

As Torres explained, he wrote a message on a shirt that he gave to Iniesta on their homeward journey from the Caribbean. It read: "One day, you and I will win the World Cup together." The striker's prescience was impressive. Iniesta, as we now know, would score Spain's winning goal in the 2010 World

/// The Under-21 competition certainly provided crucial experience for the Iceland players who went on to stun England, and the watching continent, at EURO 2016.



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Cup final against the Netherlands, two years after Torres himself had decided the destiny of the EURO 2008 final against Germany.

This just shows that there can be something significant to learn in defeat as well as victory. And the intensity of the occasion can give the lesson extra force.

Spain's regular participation in the final stage of youth competitions meant their footballers had plenty of learning opportunities before that unique winning sequence, at senior level, of two European titles and one world crown between 2008 and 2012.

The Spanish team continue to arrive at the major tournaments having garnered the most know-how as youth footballers – by EURO →

2016, for instance, they had accumulated 125 games combined in Under-17, Under-19 and Under-21 finals. Second on the list, meanwhile, were Germany with 114 matches between them. Back in 2009, they served early notice of the World Cup-winning potential that was realised in 2014 when Manuel Neuer, Jérôme Boateng, Mats Hummels, Benedikt Höwedes and Mesut Özil helped capture the European Under-21 title in Sweden. In that same summer of 2009, Mario Götze, scorer of their 2014 World Cup final-winning goal, became a European Under-17 champion.

Ginés Meléndez Sotos, technical director of the Royal Spanish Football Federation, speaks of the 'positive baggage' that a player collects through such participations at youth level. He was coach of the Spain team, including Juan Mata and Gerard Piqué, that won the European Under-19 Championship in 2006.

"The players who pass through these competitions act differently when they're older and have greater potential than those who've not had the same experience," he says. Piqué, he notes, was "always a leader, with a winning mentality" but he still gained from

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**"The players who pass through these competitions act differently when they're older and have greater potential than those who've not had the same experience."**

**Ginés Meléndez Sotos**  
 Technical director  
 of the Royal Spanish  
 Football Federation

his experiences with Spain's junior sides. And so did his team-mates.

"Players who learn to compete as Under-17s and Under-19s have an advantage when they go on to the senior national team. A player develops when he's competing, and if he doesn't compete at the highest level he doesn't develop properly. If you do things that are too easy, you hardly get better at all. Competition is everything. It's what makes the biggest mark. It's fundamental. Without competition they can't improve."

There are "completely different" challenges at each age level, adds Meléndez, who notes how Under-17 players, for instance, face the test of handling a spell of time in a foreign country. "Three weeks is a long time not to have some drop in morale with the younger age groups, especially when results aren't good."

**A good tradition**

These opportunities are nothing new for the best teenagers in European football. The first UEFA Youth Tournament was played in 1957, taking over from the FIFA Youth Tournament that had been introduced nine years earlier.

In 1981, this became the European Under-18 Championship, then a year later UEFA created its sister competition for the Under-16s. In 2001 the two competitions were relaunched as Under-19 and Under-17 tournaments respectively. While they had a long-established tradition of a final round involving 16 teams, it was not until 2000 that a group-stage format was introduced to the Under-21 final round, then featuring eight teams.

The Under-21 competition certainly provided crucial experience for the Iceland players who went on to stun England, and the watching continent, at EURO 2016. The team that overcame England en route to the quarter-finals in France included five players – Birkir Bjarnason, Johann Gudmundsson, Aron Gunnarsson, Kolbeinn Sigthórsson and Gylfi Sigurdsson – who had earlier caused a ripple or two by beating Germany 4-1 on their way to their first Under-21 finals in 2011. Once there, they eliminated the hosts, Denmark. Indeed it was Sigthórsson, scorer of the opening goal in the 3-1 defeat of the Danes, who would hit the winner against England in Nice five years later.

John Peacock watched the recent European Under-17 Championship in England in his role as a UEFA technical observer. Formerly coach of the England side that won the event in 2014, he believes every opponent now offers different hurdles to overcome.

"Whatever country you play nowadays, in Europe or the world, they're very difficult to beat," he argues. "If you're England playing one of the smaller nations, invariably they will defend deep and defend in numbers around the box, and that's a different aspect from what they are used to back in England, where they play pretty much toe to toe, week in week out."

Facing different tactical questions is just one of the challenges, as Peacock adds. "When you're playing for your country and you're abroad, with different facilities and a different culture, it's a massive learning curve. When they get into senior football these are things they're going to have to contend with.

"You want a little bit of pressure to try and do well, but the skill of the head coach now is to make sure the environment isn't so pressurised that players don't perform. →



Gerard Piqué, with Mario Suárez, basks in the glory of winning the European Under-19 title in 2006, little knowing that four years later he would be clutching the World Cup, along with Cesc Fàbregas.



In the space of five years, Manuel Neuer went from being a European Under-21 Championship winner in Sweden in 2009 to a World Cup winner in Brazil in 2014.

**'THE BOY DONE GOOD'**

UEFA Youth League graduates

Number of mins/ appearances in UEFA Champions League

**HÉCTOR BELLERÍN** (Arsenal)  
 1,391 mins, 15 apps

**KYLIAN MBAPPÉ** (Monaco, PSG)  
 1,321 mins, 18 apps

**ANDREAS CHRISTENSEN** (Mönchengladbach, Chelsea)  
 1,321 mins, 15 apps





Getty Images

It's about getting the right balance really," Peacock continues.

"The ones that reach the very top are the ones that have this drive and can handle pressure. Sometimes, for the ones that can't handle it, it's going to be difficult to sustain the level of career at the top level that they'd want. You do find out a lot more about the player, and a lot more about the team, trying to compete in this environment.

"The acid test is you are trying to get to a World Cup and these experiences that the players have gained can hopefully stand



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In 2003, Wayne Rooney went straight from the England Under-19 team to the senior team. He made his final England appearance on 11 November 2016 in their 3-0 win over Scotland in the World Cup qualifiers.

them in good stead at a senior level." Wayne Rooney, England's record goalscorer, was also involved in this year's European Under-17 Championship as tournament ambassador. In what now feels like a different age, the then 16-year-old Rooney earned the golden ball for his five-goal feat at the 2002 finals in Denmark. Speaking ahead of the latest tournament, Rooney dwelled on the potential these competitions hold as a launch pad for a young footballer's career.

**Glimpse of the future**

"I got used to scoring goals for my country, which at any level is a great moment," said Rooney, who made his first-team debut at Everton FC within three months of his Under-17 feats. "I think it's brilliant to see what level you are, but also to try and get into the rhythm of playing tournament football.

"There are things you can show in these games that can make your club manager stand up and think, 'Well he's got a chance, I'm going to take a chance on him, give him

a go'. These tournaments can catapult players to the next level, into the first teams in whatever clubs they're at," he added.

One up-and-coming England midfielder, Lewis Cook, highlighted his own promise as part of John Peacock's triumphant side at the 2014 finals in Malta. He went on to captain England to victory at last year's U-20 World Cup and became a Premier League regular with Bournemouth in 2017/18, to earn a place in Gareth Southgate's standby squad for the World Cup finals.

Peacock remembers the small but significant steps the then Leeds United player took with England's Under-17s. "I saw a definite improvement in that 2013/14 season. I saw a very committed player with lots of ability but who just needed to fine-tune parts of his game. He was very competitive, but on the international stage you need to be a little bit more careful about when you can produce that tackle. He matured as the season went on and he did outstandingly well in the finals in Malta."

**Club competition**

This decade has brought further opportunities for young players at the continent's leading clubs and then in the UEFA Youth League, which was launched in 2013/14.

The Youth League enables youngsters to get accustomed to the routine of midweek international club football – travelling and testing themselves against their counterparts from other countries – and, in theory, lessens the impact when they step into the senior European game.

In all, 135 players have stepped up from the UEFA Youth League to the UEFA Champions League. The equivalent figure for the UEFA Europa League is 170. One particularly noteworthy graduate from the Europa League is teenage defender Matthijs de Ligt, who played for Ajax in the Youth League in February 2017 and three months later produced a display of extraordinary composure for the Amsterdammers in the Europa League final against Manchester United.

Jason Wilcox, academy manager at Manchester City, is appreciative of possibilities that the UEFA Youth League provides for his young prospects to sample different styles as well as environments.

Speaking in Nyon ahead of City's semi-final defeat against eventual Youth League champions FC Barcelona in April, he said: "One thing we always say is that our development programme is not all about 'win at all costs' at academy level, but there are going to be times when we have to put the boys under a little bit more pressure to go and win.



Three months after playing in the UEFA Youth League, Matthijs de Ligt was in the starting XI for Ajax in last year's UEFA Europa League final.

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"There are certain tournaments abroad where we make a real effort to win, and I think that's important. But we try and build the boys' character so that this game is not a development game, this is about learning how to win big football matches, and the pressure that involves. If the boys can't handle the pressure of playing in a [UEFA Youth League] semi-final, they've got no chance of handling the pressure in a senior Champions League final, which is what the ultimate aim is."

And, as Andrés Iniesta and Fernando Torres can vouch, reaching that ultimate goal can mean some harsh lessons along the way.

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 "These tournaments can catapult players to the next level, into the first teams in whatever clubs they're at."

Wayne Rooney



## STANISLAV CHERCHESOV

# 'WE'RE THE CHAMPIONS OF PEOPLE'S HEARTS'

Stanislav Cherchesov's Russia team defied all expectations with their journey to the quarter-finals of this summer's World Cup, winning the affections of an enthralled nation along the way. Here he offers a coach's perspective on how they tore up the script – and reflects on his career in football.

**T**he dust has yet to fully settle on the 2018 World Cup, but for Stanislav Cherchesov there is no need to distance himself further from this summer's giddy swirl of drama and emotion before making a judgement. The man responsible for guiding Russia's footballers through their home tournament has a clear verdict in his mind.

"There are always two sides to success – a sporting side and an emotional one," he begins. "I believe that we're clearly world champions when it comes to the emotional side. We provided some success, we enjoyed the tournament and the nation was proud of us. As for the sporting side, we couldn't pick up the trophy but I consider our team's performance to be a success."

It would be difficult to find a single dissenter across the vast expanse of Russia after a tournament in which the host nation exceeded all expectations. On the road to a quarter-final defeat by Croatia,

they defeated the 2010 champions Spain in the round of 16 – thus travelling further in the competition than any group of Russian footballers in the post-Soviet era.

In the process they shredded a script that foresaw an unhappy World Cup for a team that had struggled to win matches in the year leading up to the tournament.

In the previous summer's Confederations Cup, Russia were eliminated in the group stage after losses to Portugal and Mexico.

Following a friendly defeat in Austria in late May, Sport-Express, one of the nation's most popular sports newspapers, quoted the 19th-century Russian patriotic poet and statesman Fyodor Tyutchev by declaring: "We can only trust in Russia." The implication was there was nothing more substantial in which to place their hope.

Cherchesov, a former national-team goalkeeper with experience of World Cup and European Championship campaigns, saw it differently. "All teams get criticised and our national team is no exception.

"We came to the national team with our own vision, which we adjusted with time. We studied all the materials left by our predecessors – Fabio Capello, Guus Hiddink and Leonid Slutsky. We took into account during the preparation period the things they hadn't managed to achieve and to implement."

It wasn't an issue for us as we knew how to prepare ourselves, and the players trusted their coaches. We managed to create a competitive environment, whereby we had a fair and equal attitude to each player. There were no exceptions. "You always know your players; you trust them," he adds. "That's why we just focused on our job and staged the training camp in Austria where nobody could disturb us."

Cherchesov has much to reflect on. The route travelled between his appointment as Russia coach on 11 August 2016 and 8 July 2018, the day after their quarter-final elimination when he and his players stood on a stage at Moscow's fan zone and felt a wave of appreciation wash over them, has been a long one.

The 54-year-old starts his reflection at the very beginning, with the early days in the job as he set about assembling a strategy to make the World Cup hosts competitive. Two months earlier Russia had exited EURO 2016 with just a single point from group matches against England, Slovakia and Wales.

"We came to the national team with our own vision, which we adjusted with time," he observes. "We studied all the materials left by our predecessors – Fabio Capello, Guus Hiddink and Leonid Slutsky. During the preparation period we took into account the things they hadn't managed to achieve. →



Cherchesov during Russia's World Cup opening game against Saudi Arabia, which the tournament hosts went on to win 5-0.

"I took part in selecting the friendly matches from a sporting perspective. All other issues – TV, commercial, etc. – were left to the association. We worked closely as we each had our own job to do. I had good access to the players and all of them were happy to be part of the national team. Obviously, though, they'd come to me in different states from their clubs."

One notable question mark against Russia's players in the lead-up to the World Cup was their lack of club experience abroad. There were only two foreign-based players in his final 23-man squad: Villarreal CF's Denis Cheryshev and Vladimir Gabulov of Club Brugge KV. "It's just a statistic, nothing more," Cherchesov says. "There were times when some members of the national team played abroad and even then we could not produce good performances. What's crucial is the commitment, readiness, potential and the desire to play for your country."

Cherchesov's players ticked all the boxes and more when their World Cup campaign kicked off on 14 June with their opening Group A fixture against Saudi Arabia. Any fears about Russia's weaknesses subsided as the host team won 5-0. "We knew the opposition very well," says Cherchesov. "We knew how to play against Saudi Arabia. I could say a lot about the choice of tactics, but the main thing I told the team was: 'It's our first match at home, we have to show we can perform. There are 150 million people full of expectations out there watching us.'"

"We knew how to play against the Saudi Arabia team. I could speak for a long time about the choice of tactics but the main thing I said to the team was, 'It's our first match at home, we must show we can perform. There are 150 million people full of expectations watching us.'"

It was an evening where Cherchesov's substitutes played key roles. When Alan Dzagoev left the pitch injured after 24 minutes, his replacement, Denis Cheryshev, proved he was more than ready to fill the void by scoring the first two of the four goals he would deliver at the finals.

Another substitute, Artem Dzyuba, found the net just 89 seconds after taking the field. He would start every match thereafter and overall contributed, as scorer or assist maker, to five of Russia's 11 goals. Was this good luck or good planning? "We knew the shape Cheryshev was in. We knew who would substitute for who in what situations," Cherchesov replies. "The main thing was not to make mistakes. All the players who came in fitted naturally into the game."

With the boost to morale from that five-goal victory, Russia overcame Egypt 3-1 in their second fixture to secure early qualification for the last 16. Although they then lost 3-0 to Uruguay, Cherchesov ensured his players were ready to face Spain in their round of 16 meeting in Moscow. "Before the game against Spain we focused on tactics," explains



Russia's Daler Kuzyaev and Sergei Ignashevich surround Spain's Diego Costa in the round of 16 tie that caused one of the biggest upsets of the World Cup, with Russia eliminating the 2010 World Cup winners in a penalty shoot-out.

Cherchesov. "It was the usual training camp regime. There were no psychological problems. We just knew we had to change tactics." This entailed a switch from a four to a five-man defence. In came Fedor Kudryashov into the middle of the back line alongside Sergei Ignashevich and Ilya Kutepov. Spain dominated possession, and over the course of 120 minutes accumulated 1,114 passes to Russia's 290, yet they struggled to penetrate the deep Russian rearguard. Cherchesov had experimented with three centre backs

before the tournament, but this was the only match where he employed the strategy. "Many teams play in a back three," he reflects. "We had two players, [Viktor] Vasin and [Georgii] Dzhiykiya, who were injured and unable to take part in the tournament. So, we altered our tactics. Preparing for Spain we'd watched many matches, and playing an attacking and open game against them does not lead to success. So, we changed the set-up of the team, which the Spanish did not expect, and we achieved our aim." →

## Reflections on a coaching career – 'My work became my life'

**Can you tell us a little about your coach education? When did you decide you wanted to be a coach and how did you go about it?**

I got my A licence in Austria. My Pro licence I got in Moscow as I returned to Spartak in 2006. I took the decision to become a coach during my career as a football player. I played until I was 40 and decided right after that to become a head coach.

**You had different managerial jobs – in Austria, Russia and Poland – before taking the job with the national team. Is there anything you wish you'd done differently?**

I began with a small team, Kuffstein, and then step by

step I grew until I became the head coach of the national team. I wouldn't do anything differently.

**How do you work with your fellow coaches? How much are you involved in the day-to-day training sessions? What responsibilities does your goalkeeper coach have?**

We started working together in 2009, so we've been a team for over eight years – myself, my first assistant Miroslav Romaschenko, physical trainer Vladimir Panikov, and goalkeeper coach Guintaras Stauche. We worked together as club coaches and I then included Paulino Granero, our physiotherapist, for our work in the national team. I play an active part in planning each



to train the keepers in terms of physiology and psychology. He has an important say with regard to the choice of main goalkeeper.

**Finally, a more personal question. For a head coach at this level, the stress is extremely high. How do you control your emotions? How do you keep calm and relax?**

A head coach is also a person, a human being. I have my family, my wife and two kids, who support me. I need their support, which is the most important thing. It helps not to get too tense, after all! I work on staying fit, by running and swimming. The main thing, though, is that I love my work and am passionate about it. My work became my life, and my life became my hobby.



At the other end of the pitch that day, Russia were heavily reliant on their big front man, Dzyuba, holding the ball up. After his goal-scoring cameo against Saudi Arabia, he was now playing a key role, meaning that Fyodor Smolov, the Russian top flight's leading scorer for each of the past two seasons, had to settle for a substitute's berth. Dzyuba it was who converted the penalty equaliser against the Spanish. "Smolov has been one of the main players for two years," says Cherchesov, discussing his two front men. "He was also one of the main players at the beginning of the tournament. Dzyuba performed very well during the training camp and was in very good physical and psychological shape. Both players were very important during the tournament, but Dzyuba showed himself to be in better shape and that's why he became a focal point of our attack." It is an illustration, Cherchesov adds, of the importance of competition for places in a squad: one player can suddenly find a moment of good form and step in to replace another. Hence the need for flexibility. "There were some variations in the selection. Some of them were due to injuries, some due to the questions set by the games, when we had to find a right answer. A coach's choice is also sometimes down to necessity. It depended on the situation. We had a line-up [in mind] but, as I mentioned, we managed to create a competitive environment. No one is irreplaceable. All the players knew it was down to merit who took the field."

Feeding off Dzyuba, incidentally, was Aleksandr Golovin, the 22-year-old that Russian football fans hope can become a standard-bearer for a new post-World Cup era for their national team.

Within a month of the World Cup ending he had agreed a move to AS Monaco from PFC CSKA Moskva. "Golovin had already performed well during the Confederations Cup," says Cherchesov. "He also played well this year at CSKA. We're happy he's making progress and we hope he carries on improving. There was a lot written about him during the tournament and he reacted in a way that was reasonable and correct."

The same words – and more – could have applied to his entire squad in the final reckoning. The manner of their World Cup exit, defeat on penalties by Croatia in a dramatic Sochi quarter-final where they forced a shoot-out with a 115th-minute Mário Fernandes equaliser, meant they departed with heads held high. It was a match for which Cherchesov had reverted to a back four. "As far as the game against Croatia is concerned, we know that they play attacking football and they also let their opponents play, and so we didn't play defensively."

It was in the immediate aftermath of that contest that an understandably proud and emotional Cherchesov declared: "The whole country loves us. They know what their Russian national team is worth. We hope we have turned the situation for the better."

The question now is: what words did he have for his players on that emotional evening at the Fisht Stadium? He explains that there is not so much a coach can say on an occasion like that. "In the dressing room I thanked the team for their performance during the tournament and said nothing more. After such games words are pointless. I talked to them the next day."

And now, is he hopeful that the love affair ignited during the World Cup can continue? Has the relationship with the nation's football fans changed for good? "It's difficult to give a clear-cut answer to this question," he remarks, "as fans have always got their own perspective when evaluating the national team. We now have to analyse our preparations. On top of that, some players have already announced that they're retiring, so we need to find good quality players to replace them. We must improve and we'd like to discover some new names." Such is a coach's life. You can make a nation fall in love with you, but the world of football never stops turning. At the end of July, Cherchesov signed a two-year contract extension and now turns his attention to the UEFA Nations League and EURO 2020 qualifying. Time to go again ...

“There were some variations in the selection. Some of them were due to injuries, some due to the questions set by the games, when we had to find a right answer. A coach's choice is also sometimes down to necessity. It depended on the situation. (...) No one is irreplaceable. All the players knew that it was down to merit who took the field.”



### Cherchesov's CV

Born in Alagir in the southern Russian region of North Ossetia-Alania, Stanislav Cherchesov began his career with Spartak Ordzhonikidze before moving to Moscow for spells with FC Spartak Moskva and FC Lokomotiv Moskva. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union he moved abroad and played in Germany with 1. FC Dynamo Dresden and Austria with FC Tirol Innsbruck. The changing political landscape meant that Cherchesov experienced international football with the Soviet Union, the CIS and Russia, representing the latter at the 1994 World Cup, where he made one appearance, and EURO '96, where he played twice. He had previously had a watching brief as back-up to Dmitri Kharine at EURO '92.

Following his six years as a player in Austria, he returned there in 2004 to embark on his coaching career at FC Kufstein in Austria's Regional League West, before moving on to FC Wacker Tirol (2004–06). In 2006 he headed back to Russia as sporting director of his old club Spartak before taking the reins there as head coach. Subsequent stints followed at FC Zhemchuzhina Sochi, FC Terek Grozny, FC Amkar Perm and FC Dinamo Moskva. His last club assignment before the Russia opportunity arrived was in Poland with Legia Warszawa that he guided to a league and cup double in 2015/16.



# UNDERSTANDING THE TEAM BEHIND THE TEAM

Today's football coaches have large medical teams to help keep their players in optimum physical condition ... but what exactly do all those people do? UEFA Direct takes a closer look.

France's victorious 2018 World Cup campaign did not stem solely from the brilliance of men like N'Golo Kanté, Paul Pogba and Antoine Griezmann. Nor, indeed, from the experience and tactical acumen of national coach Didier Deschamps. When you travel to a major tournament with a 20-strong backroom team, as happened with Les Bleus, there will inevitably be a long list of unsung heroes.

What, for instance, about the contribution made by Franck Le Gall, the 54-year-old team doctor who journeyed around Russia with a portable ultrasound machine? Or Grégory Dupont, the fitness coach, whose suggestions to his players included drinking cherry juice to help them sleep? As Deschamps himself noted at the FIFA Football Conference in London in September: "I need them – they are there to support me at all times."

In an era when 'marginal gains' is a sporting mantra, the little details matter. Coaches have always had an assistant or two to help them with the football side of things, but as Sir Alex Ferguson recognised in his later years at Manchester United, it is essential to work on the medical side as well. Hence, for instance, Sir Alex's decision to employ an optometrist for his players. Meanwhile, on the other side of town at Manchester City, Pep Guardiola's current backroom team includes a doctor, three physiotherapists, six sports scientists, a strength and conditioning coach, a nutritionist and five sports therapists.

This is a clear illustration of Manchester City's desire to be the best – by giving their players the best possible care. →

France's coach Didier Deschamps with his assistants during a training session at the 2018 FIFA World Cup.





However, size is not everything. No matter how big the backroom team is, the pivotal factor, as Deschamps said, is the relationship between the head coach and the individual members of that team. Sir Alex once said that “if you micromanage and tell people what to do, there is no point in hiring them”, and the wisdom of those words has recently been borne out by a study suggesting that good communication between a coach and their medical staff is correlated with a reduced incidence of injuries.

That study, which was carried out by Professor Jan Ekstrand and colleagues working on the UEFA elite club injury study, looked at 36 elite European teams and found that players were at greater risk of injury when a head coach did not communicate well with their medical staff. “The incidence of severe injuries on a team was significantly lower with coaches that employed a transformational or democratic leadership style than with coaches that employed more aggressive styles.”

According to Professor Ekstrand, risk management plays a central role in the handling of injuries, and trust between a coach and their staff is highly important.

“From a medical point of view, there are certain injuries, and illnesses, where doctors should have the final say – for example, in the case of a fever. The same applies to concussion and major ligament problems like ACL injuries. But these make up less than 5% of all injuries, and most coaches understand the situation.

“In 95% of cases, injuries are very minor and there is no risk of later problems,” he adds. “What you risk is a re-injury, which will take time but will heal eventually. In most cases, the doctor will need to talk to the coach about risk management. The doctor has to provide the coach with information about the extent of the risk, and I’d say that the ideal scenario is for them to agree about whether or not the person should play. In many cases, you have to accept that it is up to the manager and say: ‘Are you willing to take this risk?’ This communication is very important and is built on trust.

“The risk is not all on the coach’s side, though. There is also risk on the medical side. A person in a medical team working at elite level has to understand the specificity of professional football: you sometimes need to take a chance, and that is very

unusual for medical professionals.”

Looking at the issue from a coach’s perspective, Mixu Paatelainen, the head coach of Latvia’s national team and a UEFA technical observer, says: “If there’s an illness and your doctor advises you not to play a certain player, you have to listen to the doctor, as you don’t want to risk anybody’s health. Sometimes it’s a bitter pill to swallow, but you have to accept it.”

**A club doctor’s perspective**

At club level, it helps to have constant communication between a team doctor and their head coach, according to Dr Aboul Shaheir, the director of medical service at Premier League side Everton. “I used to feel a bit uncomfortable when I contacted the coach after work but I’ve realised it’s extremely important and it’s my job to keep everyone up to date, regardless of the time of day,” he says.

Dr Shaheir’s day begins with a meeting with his medical team, followed by a briefing with the manager. “On a daily basis I have to brief the manager about the players’ health, injuries and the time to return to training and playing from injury,” he explains. “I give the coach an update on

player’s scans results, specialists’ advice and recommendations.

“I usually meet up with my medical team first thing in the morning before the players arrive to have a general run-around with all the players’ general health and injuries, and we discuss the logistics of the day in terms of who’s having what treatment, going for a scan, who’s leading the rehab of each particular player and any update on the progress of each of the injured players. I also discuss with the sport scientists the data produced by the GPS during training sessions.”

The club’s medical team includes three physiotherapists, two masseurs, a podiatrist, three sport scientists, a sport nutritionist, a second doctor (who works as a ‘tunnel doctor’ on matchdays) and, finally, a head of performance who oversees the medical and sports science departments.

Such is the attention to detail in elite football that Everton’s players are required to provide a daily update via a well-being app before arriving at the training ground each morning. “It’s an app which is used daily by the players to record their sleep quality, fatigue, muscle soreness etc,” he explains. “The results are accessible to medical staff and sport scientists and we discuss them in our morning medical meeting and address players who scored low in any of these parameters.”

On top of this, of course, is the data made available by GPS vests. “Sports science has revolutionised the way sport is played and how the game and training are analysed, because with the invention of GPS it gives us an idea, like with the dashboard in a car,” Dr Shaheir reflects. “Without the dashboard you’d not be able to know how far you travelled and how much fuel is in the tank.” Or, in the case of a footballer, “working time, total distance covered, high-speed sprinting, explosive distance and deceleration parameters”, all of which, he says, “helps to customise the training loads subsequently.”

**Changing attitudes**

Jari-Pekka Keurulainen, the Finnish national team’s physio, agrees that modern technology is an aid to good communication. His long career has involved spells on the other side of the fence, as the assistant coach of Finland’s national team and a title-winning manager with HJK Helsinki, so he appreciates the pressures on coaches and their desire to have players available.

“Sometimes we have a different view from our coaches,” he says. “If you think about it, the national coach only gets to work with the players for a few days a month. He might want to do three against three or four against four in training, and I’ll say: ‘Hold on, we have to give them a rest so they are fit for the game.’ Sometimes we have discussions about that kind of thing – how long we train for, and at what tempo. Coaches today have more knowledge about the physical side of things, and they understand its importance. The GPS data helps us to ascertain players’ fitness levels and monitor their recovery, so that’s not such a big problem nowadays.”

Keurulainen – or ‘Gene’, as he is known in Finnish football circles – also sees players showing more interest these days. “They’re very interested in the physical side. They will ask what their maximum heart rate is or say ‘I’m feeling this and that’ or ‘I’m eating this and that’. I can’t say the same about players in the 1980s. After a game, they’d have a few beers and go to a disco. That’s not possible nowadays.”

Although the riches in football today mean greater access to technology at the top end of the game, they can also bring complications, with other voices also wanting to be heard when it comes to analysing a player’s condition. It is not unknown for superstar players to have their own physio – as happened at Manchester United with Zlatan Ibrahimović.

“I’ve been aware of it on a couple of occasions, and it’s a really difficult question,” says Paul Balsom, head of performance for the Swedish national team, as well as England’s Leicester City and Oud-Heverlee Leuven in Belgium. “I can understand the player, because there might be someone there that you’ve worked with for a long time, but when that person isn’t completely in sync with what everyone else is doing or suggesting things that the club’s medical or sports science staff aren’t in favour of, it can definitely become difficult.”

A more common practice, Balsom adds, is for players to hire their own

“The players are very interested in the physical side ... I can’t say the same about players in the 1980s. After a game, they’d have a few beers and go to a disco. That’s not possible nowadays.”

**Jari-Pekka Keurulainen**  
Finnish national team’s physiotherapist



chef, although these will often work closely with the club's nutritionist. "This is a happier relationship. Together, they will work out a weekly menu based on game time, training and intensity that is specifically tailored to the individual player in question."

Another question for clubs is whether to bring in new staff when they sack their coach and recruit a new one – something that happens with greater regularity these days. "One model involves the manager having an entourage of backroom staff that follow him wherever he goes," Balsom says. "And the other model involves having all the staff in place already, so the manager comes in and works with the existing staff. There are advantages and disadvantages with both models. A manager will want his wingmen and his allies – people he can trust – but a club will want the stability of not having to rip up contracts, pay people off and start all over again if things go wrong."

**Growth industry**

Mixu Paatelainen has his own reflections on the way that that medical teams have grown considerably since he started playing in the 1980s. In national-team football today, even a mid-ranked side may well have two doctors together with two physios, two masseurs, a head of performance and analysts, and Paatelainen says: "This is a very important part of our daily work with the players. Masseurs, for example, give players a little massage before training and make sure there are no knots in their muscles, helping them to avoid injuries. Of course, the back is also essential for any athlete, and that is where chiropractors come in. Football puts a lot of stress on your hips and pelvis, and these people who specialise in these areas and crack you back into line again are very important."

The treatment room is a place where players can relax, according to Jari-Pekka Keurulainen. "People enjoy the treatment they receive," he says. A central element of his work is Pilates, which he considers important for control. "We don't have so many problems with hip joints or groins once they've started doing that," he says. "When we warm up, I normally use Pilates. We start with running, then we do some exercises and some ball work, and then we do Pilates. It's only a few minutes, but they work on it every day. When the squad have recovery training the day after a game, it's mostly Pilates."



SVFF

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**"We educate players about modern sports psychology, as influenced by cognitive behavioural therapy, and try to implement those ideas in a football context."**

**Daniel Ekvall**  
 Swedish national team's performance psychologist

"If you think about the lower back, the hips and the pelvis, it all has to be able to move. You need flexibility and fluidity so you can run and turn without getting injured. Body control is so important, and you have to learn it. It's not a question of power; it's a question of feeling."

**Working on the mind**

Medical teams do not just work on players' bodies. These days, it is common for clubs to have a part-time psychologist available for consultations when necessary. As Dr Shaheir at Everton explains, no machine can measure a player's mental well-being, so it is important to earn their confidence. "There aren't any gadgets for assessing the player's mental health and telling you if a player is happy, stressed, anxious, or sad. You need to rely on the human touch here, not the machine. You need to eyeball your player, watch how they perform, how they react, and interact."

Paul Balsom believes that psychologists are becoming increasingly important, given the growing pressure on players. He cites the example of Sweden's play-off against Italy for a place at the 2018 World Cup, explaining that one player said he felt his heart thumping with tension at lunchtime on the day of the game. "When Sweden play Italy at San Siro and the game is estimated to be worth €1bn to Italy, you're putting players under pressure to make thousands of decisions per game, and a single bad decision could potentially cost



Getty Images

A swarm of doctors and physios take care of Germany's players before extra time in their EURO 2016 match against Italy.

their nation €1bn. Now, that's a lot of pressure," says Balsom, who eventually helped Sweden to reach the quarter-finals in Russia.

"And then you've got that game at the World Cup where Jimmy Durmaz made a poor decision and a poor tackle in the last minute of Sweden's match against Germany. Germany scored, Sweden lost 2-1, and he received racial abuse," Balsom adds. "We were forced to go out and make a stand as a team the following day, making it clear that such abuse was not acceptable. With social media, every game, every angle and every action is scrutinised. How much more mentally demanding can it really get?"

Indeed, the Swedish national team's performance psychologist, Daniel Ekvall, played a key role at the World Cup, carrying out group sessions, with the Swedish squad divided into groups according to their positions on the pitch.

Ekvall explains that he focuses on the 'next action', asking players: "If you've missed a chance or the other team have scored a goal, or you're upset with the referee, how can you focus and carry out your next action to a high standard?" He also gets players to focus on how they can help their team-mates.

"We have group meetings, in smaller groups, where we talk about these things, and we back them up with video clips," he says. "In these meetings, we also educate players about modern sports psychology, as influenced by cognitive



Everton FC

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**"There aren't any gadgets for assessing the player's mental health. You need to rely on the human touch here, not the machine."**

**Dr Aboul Shaheir**  
 Director of medical service, Everton Football Club

behavioural therapy, and try to implement those ideas in a football context. "One important message here is that it's normal to be nervous and think negatively sometimes, but we can learn to perform and do our jobs in spite of those feelings and thoughts, instead of fighting to get rid of them and striving for a perfect environment in which to perform."

"If your goal is always to be positive, feel good and so on, you might get more stressed if your body doesn't react in the way that you want it to, and ironically you might end up feeling even more anxious. But if, instead, you can accept those thoughts and feelings and learn that you can perform pretty well with all sorts of things going on inside – as is perfectly natural – you can feel pretty safe."

It is a measure of Sweden coach Janne Andersson's regard for the contribution Ekvall makes that he is involved in pre-match team talks, delivering a closing message with the use of slides. "Often I summarise the group meetings and create an image which illustrates what the players have said to me – a kind of mental plan for the match – which goes on the wall together with the tactical information."

This is all a far cry from Totò Schillaci psyching himself up before 1990 World Cup matches by listening to the Rocky theme tune on his Walkman. As Didier Deschamps would testify, the team behind the team has taken on a whole new dimension since then. 🌱



FIFA

Sweden coach Janne Andersson (second from right) surrounded by his staff before his team's match against Germany in the World Cup in Russia.



MARCO ROSE

# GIVING YOUTH A CHANCE

Marco Rose has made an impressive start to his career among the elite. In 2017/18, his first season in charge of Austrian club FC Salzburg, the German coach took the team to within a whisker of the UEFA Europa League final, as well as to the final of the Austrian Cup. This was an excellent addition to the former Bundesliga player's CV, which already included honours at the highest European youth level. In 2017, Rose guided a talented Salzburg squad to the UEFA Youth League title – and this achievement was the catalyst for his promotion the same year.

**R**ose was recently in Nyon at the UEFA Youth League coaches' forum. He looks back at his team's success and how it came about, how he has found the transition from coaching youngsters to occupying the first-team hot seat, and why a coach should be courageous enough to give youth a chance when the opportunity arises.

**Let's start by looking at how you got into coaching. You played in the Bundesliga with Hannover and Mainz 05, ending your professional career in 2010. You then started as an assistant coach with Mainz's second team, before transferring to your home-town club Lokomotive Leipzig in the German Regionalliga, where you stayed for one season in 2012/13. From there, you moved on to work as a youth coach with FC Salzburg. When was the defining moment when you knew that you wanted to go into coaching?**

I played at a high level, and I worked a lot on mentality, and I think I realised early on that I could possibly go into coaching. I can't say that I always thought I'd be a good coach at a high level. I just wanted to try it. I had to see if it was for me.

**As a player, you worked for a number of renowned coaches in Germany – Jürgen Klopp and Thomas Tuchel at Mainz, Ralf Rangnik at Hannover. Have you brought any of their influence with you into your coaching career?**

Jürgen Klopp influenced me, probably more than anyone. Not so much in terms of football, but as a person, and in my approach and personality. Thomas Tuchel is, in my opinion, an extraordinary expert, and I have used what he taught me, especially when it comes to movement on the ball. I was still young when I was with Ralf Rangnick, but he taught me the importance of honesty. He released me from Hannover because I wasn't good enough, and I always thought it was a good thing that he was open and honest with me. →

“For me as a professional, there have always been uncomfortable truths – but you have to talk about them in an honest way. That's the best way to deal with it.”



**Honesty is the best policy, as they say.**

For me as a professional, there have always been uncomfortable truths – but you have to talk about them in an honest way. That’s the best way to deal with it, and these are things that I use in my work as a coach.

**This work brought you a particularly noteworthy success at youth level, when you led Salzburg’s youngsters to the UEFA Youth League title in Nyon in 2017. You were back in Nyon for the UEFA Youth League coaches’ forum in November. How did it feel to return to the scene of that triumph?**

Everyone loves returning to a place where they’ve had success. On the way to the forum, I passed by the stadium where I celebrated with the boys. That’s something special, and it makes you proud.

**Looking at the road to the UEFA Youth League title, how did you approach the competition?**

It was a new experience for us, and I was lucky as a coach to be part of a very well-structured club. It meant that a lot of weight was taken off my shoulders, and I could concentrate on the sporting side of things. Everything was very well organised, and we approached everything very professionally. Aside from all that, it was an adventure for us.

**Some people may have viewed Salzburg’s UEFA Youth League title in 2017 as a surprise. Is that a justified view?**

We never really saw ourselves as outsiders, because we knew we had a strong squad. I think I was lucky to have a motivated young team hungry for success who believed in themselves. They had the feeling that they could achieve something. We always approached the task ahead with confidence. It was a fascinating experience.

“I think I was lucky to have a motivated young team hungry for success who believed in themselves. They had the feeling that they could achieve something. We always approached the task ahead with confidence.”



UEFA



UEFA

**So do you feel that the structures were in place for the team to achieve what it did?**

For an Austrian team to win that title isn’t very usual. That being said, if you know anything at all about Salzburg, you would know that a brand-new top-of-the-range academy was built there several years ago, with the aim of producing top talent. So, in that sense, there was a clear plan.

**Did the players realise the significance of winning the Youth League?**

Well, it’s a title ... It’s nice, because it rewards all the work you put in and how hard the boys worked. Everyone who has won a title knows that it builds a bond with the players. You’ll always be happy to see them, to remember it all and talk about it, and that’s very special. It also made the whole club proud, and reverberated around Austria. The president congratulated us, because it was the first international title for an Austrian team. Yet from my point of view, I was aware that football moves on quickly, and new challenges are waiting for you where you need to prove yourself again.

**A general question about the UEFA Youth League’s overall mission – how important is it for young players to gain international experience and face different playing styles?**

It is fascinating to play against top teams at an international level. It takes you further, makes you better, and that’s very important. You learn about new styles, and can see how you fare against top talent from other countries.

**After the successful Youth League season, you were then appointed first-team coach at Salzburg that same year. Did the Youth League title have any bearing on your appointment?**

I’d be lying if I said that the Youth League didn’t help me get there. I think, for the club, it was the final box to be ticked, and they thought, “We trust this guy now.” That’s how it works in football: sustained success is observed, but it helps if you have great highlight moments like the Youth League. I was lucky to have a brave sports director who said, “Right, we’re going to give Rose a chance.”

**How big is the difference between youth coaching and professional coaching?**

I don’t think that there is that much difference. It’s all the same in terms of content. You always adapt to your team, but as far as training is concerned, it’s very similar. This is also because we have one fundamental idea [at Salzburg], from the youth team up to the first team. In addition, when you’re working with established professional adults, you’re able to communicate in a straightforward and effective way.



Getty Images

Amadou Haidara opens the scoring against Marseille in the second leg of the 2018 Europa League semi-final. FC Salzburg almost made it to the final.

**Would you agree that, so far, your experiences as a youth coach have stood you in good stead at senior level?**

Football is football, and people are people. One group is younger, and the other has more experience, so you have to adapt yourself a little. I definitely believe that it can help you. Without a doubt. You draw on situations you’ve found yourself in, hard situations, good situations that you’ve experienced. You then have a greater understanding of the things that happen in a team, of course. →

**How important would you say that winning is at youth level in relation to development?**

I always believed the classic approach in youth football was that coaches would lose and say, “Well, we’re still developing.” They would always try and find a way of justifying why they lost. You can always find a way to develop while winning games. It’s also a key part of development to teach the boys how to have a winning mentality, so that they go out to win games. That’s important at the youth stage. And it’s also important to learn how to lose. As a coach at youth level, you need to find the right balance while you also develop. That means you shouldn’t make players obsess about winning games to satisfy your own ambitions. You shouldn’t want to win games because you, as a coach, want to make the next step and end up as the first-team coach. It would be wrong to do that.

**Do the stakes change when you become a first-team coach?**

With the first team, it’s all about winning games. Because that’s the measure of your success. I’ve already noticed this in my first 18 months. Unfortunately, it’s irrelevant if you’ve played well or not ... in the end, it’s the result that matters most. But I’m convinced from my [youth coaching] days that if you play well, you’ll end up getting results.

**What were the expectations when you became Salzburg’s first-team coach? Were there any new challenges?**

Their 2017 victory in the Youth League enabled Salzburg’s young academy players to hone their skills – and Marco Rose to step up to the first team.



There were expectations, of course. You take on a new coach to aim for the top. The UEFA Champions League remains a difficult hurdle for us. We’ve been on the brink [of making the group stage] for some years, but haven’t made it so far. Despite that, we’ve managed to develop something that we’re proud of. You notice that more and more spectators are coming to the stadium, and that football is valued more highly in Salzburg.

**In the first season at FC Salzburg, with the first team, you went all the way to the UEFA Europa League semi-finals. You beat some big teams along the way – Lazio, Dortmund, Real Sociedad. What were the reasons for this fine run?**

At the top level, you need to make the right decisions, and you need a little bit of luck, but we all worked hard. We deserved it. If I’ve learned anything as a coach from this last year

and a half, then it’s to play football and go out onto the pitch to win, regardless of who you’re playing against. Regardless of the opposition, we’ll prepare the best we can and devise a plan, and by that point the players are so confident that they will go out there to play football, work hard and, most importantly, do their best to win.

**The narrow defeat against Marseille in the semi-final was a tough experience. How did you as a coach and team cope with this blow?**

The important thing in football is that the game always goes on. You have to live with setbacks, you have to deal with them, you have to make the right choices and push on. I believe you’ll always get another chance to pursue new major challenges.

**You’ve integrated some of your youth players into the first team. Has that contributed to the progress you’ve made?**

It’s been easy, because the boys are good enough. It’s important to have the courage, as a club, to give them a chance to play in the first team. I feel that it’s a little easier to have that courage in Austria than it is in top European leagues, but it’s my duty to give young players an opportunity in the first team if they’re good enough – to give them the platform and trust them to take the next step to continue developing. And, of course, it’s important to have open-minded coaches in that sense. So, I’m always ready to bring in new players – that’s part of my role – but I have to point out that there’s no such thing as a free lunch. Professional football is too hard for that.

**In the Bundesliga we’ve recently seen that youth coaches have made the step up to coaching the first team. Have you noticed the trend and is there a reason for this?**

The fact is that every coach learns and develops and, at some point, has to take the next step. There’ll always be good, new coaches coming through. I don’t know if we can speak of a trend. There are plenty of older, experienced coaches as well. It’s clear that you do need certain skills as a coach to be successful nowadays. You obviously need expertise. It’s important to be competent socially, and to be able to mediate. I’ve noticed that in the first team as well. Perhaps the most important thing is for the players to want to win for you, and to keep them all on board. I can only choose 11 of them. To handle that and to keep them happy is a large part of the job.

**As you said earlier, FC Salzburg has created a top-range academy to nurture talented young players. What do you think of the academy’s progress?**

The infrastructure that was set up many years ago obviously created a different environment. When you work in that kind of environment, you have bigger goals. On top of that, we had clear ideas and a clear structure for the club, and then things developed by themselves. We don’t just have Austrian players in our academy. We have good connections and scouting in Africa. So we are under way on an international scale. What’s important for me, however, is that we don’t forget our own home-grown talent. That’s a very important issue for me. We can’t forget to develop and encourage local talent.

**So is the academy achieving its aims?**

Of course, this huge academy has been built for a reason – to eventually integrate those players into FC Salzburg’s team. The good thing is that, as head coach with a youth football background, I know how it works. I see the youngsters playing and, eventually, as I say, it will be my duty to give these youngsters a chance.

**To conclude, if you could give coaches one piece of advice, what would it be?**

My advice is to stay as you are, work hard and stay calm – because even though football is important, there are more important things. Like family, for example. If you’re able to keep that in mind, it’s easier to deal with it better, especially in the professional world when you’re in the public eye. 🧘

“My advice is to stay as you are, work hard and stay calm – because even though football is important, there are more important things. Like family, for example.”





## VLADIMÍR WEISS

# 'MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PLAYERS IS KEY'

"I've always prioritised my relationship with the players, and tactics come second," says Vladimír Weiss when asked about the foundations of his managerial philosophy. For Weiss, now coach of Georgia, it is an approach that has reaped rewards at club and national-team levels, notably with FC Petržalka in the UEFA Champions League and the Slovakian national team at the World Cup.

In a wide-ranging interview, Weiss reflects on a coaching career that has included spells in Russia and Kazakhstan, reveals his most difficult decision, and discusses his ambitions for a Georgia team he guided to the top of their UEFA Nations League group.

### Why did you decide to become a football manager, and how did you achieve it?

You could say that I became a coach overnight. My football career was drawing to an end, and I was 33 years old. Straight away, I was appointed as a player-coach. At the time, I was at Artmedia (ed. note: the club is now known as FC Petržalka). In 1997/98, I became the player-manager of that club. There were certain requirements, but, at the time, there were no UEFA coaching courses like you have today. We used to work alongside somebody more senior in those days, so I worked as an assistant to the head coach. In the space of a year, I passed my exams, and became the head coach when I was quite young. My coaching career started straight away. It was a

“Being a footballer, you just assume that it’s all about football. You assume that you know everything. But that’s not the case. Education is key.”

small club, but we had some real success, even though conditions were rather modest. The club grew stronger every year and won the Slovak Super Liga twice, as well as qualifying for the 2005/06 Champions League.

### How has your coach education helped you as a manager during your career?

Being a footballer, you just assume that it's all about football. You assume that you know everything. But that's not the case. Education is key. I gained experience, studied for two years and I took exams. So I learned a lot. I learned that a good manager should be able to convey his ideas about how a team should play and what he wants from the players, but also explain what is needed, such as tactical requirements. Everything depends on this ability.

### Which manager has inspired you the most, and why? Do you consider anyone your role model?

There are a lot of good managers, but I think it's not only about those managers who win titles at big clubs. There are a lot of other managers who are doing a great job without anyone noticing them.

Of course, I respect José Mourinho, Josep Guardiola and all the other big-name managers, but I think one of the true footballing geniuses in terms of tactics and strategy would have to be Marcelo Bielsa. We played against

him in 2012 when I was managing Slovan Bratislava in the Europa League and, after our game against Athletic Bilbao, I stayed on in Bilbao for a couple of days to observe his methods and training sessions. Incidentally, we lost 2-1 against them both at home and away in the group stages.

He's a great coach, so tactically aware, and I learned a lot from him – especially the way he prepares for a match. He keeps an incredible portfolio on all his opponents, down to every player. He assembles a fantastic team of assistant coaches. He works on creating his own training programme, which is unbelievable. His tactics are spectacular; I think they could be the best in the world. And he continues to prove this at Leeds United. I wish them luck, and hope they get promoted to the Premier League. →



**How would you describe your management style?**

I think the best endorsement a manager can get comes from his team, or from his chairman and board of directors. In modern football, we're used to measuring a club's performance in two ways – it's either success or failure. A coach is assessed based on how he is doing and his results.

In this respect, I think you could say I've achieved something during my career as a manager. But I'm never satisfied, and I want more – I want to grow and work more. I want to get to the next level and give everything 100%. So, let's see what can be achieved with Georgia.

**What does success depend on in your job?**

The most important thing for me as a manager, or the most important part of my philosophy, is my relationship with the players. If the relationship is bad, you'll never be able to achieve anything. My approach is to create a friendly environment of mutual respect within the team. Having bad blood between a manager and his players isn't an option, as it would make it impossible to succeed as a team, so I've always prioritised my relationship with the players. It's the most important thing. Tactics come second. If you don't communicate with the team in a positive way, then you'll never achieve success.

**You have mentioned your work with Petržalka and Slovan. Could you expand a bit more on what you managed to achieve while in charge of these clubs?**

Of course. I don't really like looking back, as life goes on and we should think about the future, about tomorrow, about our next training session or next match. But moments like that will stay as memories that can be relived again through books and videos.

Artmedia/Petržalka had an amazing journey. We qualified for the Champions League after beating Kairat Almaty, who I actually went on to manage. We then beat Partizan Belgrade on penalties and Glasgow Celtic, which was an unbelievable match, as we managed to win the first leg 5-0 at home before losing the away game 4-0. It was amazing.

We ended up in the same group as Inter Milan, Porto and Glasgow Rangers.



We picked up six points in that group, and were very close to winning the last match against Porto at home and qualifying for the knock-out stage.

So, it was a great success story, bearing in mind we were just a small Slovak team.

I arrived at Slovan in 2011. I was managing the Slovakia national team at the time, and Slovan's owner asked me to help out after they'd sacked their coach, because the team hadn't qualified for the Champions League.

So, I stepped in three days before the match with AS Roma in the Europa League play-off round. We went through against Roma. We won 1-0 at home and drew 1-1 away against a team who had the great Francesco Totti in their side.

The group we ended up in was a tough one with Paris Saint-Germain, Salzburg and Athletic Bilbao. But the memories are still nice. Not every manager can tell you about their experience of being at the World Cup and in the Champions League.



**"I made a tactical decision not to include my son, and we won 3-2 – but my wife wouldn't speak to me after that!"**

I don't want to boast about it, but this is what I've achieved and I'm proud of it.

**Your first experience working abroad was with FC Saturn Ramenskoye. What memories do you have from that season?**

I worked with Saturn for about a year in 2006/07. Back then, we'd created a young and ambitious team, but I lacked experience working abroad – it was the first foreign club I'd managed. I was 42, which is young for a coach, and I wasn't experienced enough.

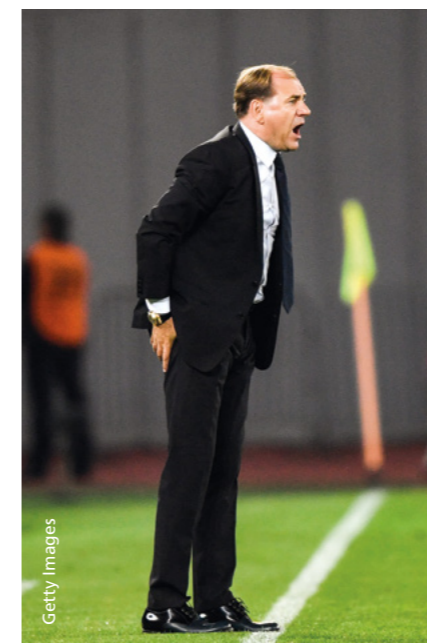
So, I left after about 18 months or, to be more precise, I was removed from my position following too many draws. We'd drawn 16 matches, which turned out to be a record in Russia. I only have fond memories of that period. It was a great club.

**What can you say about your experience in Kazakhstan with Kairat?**

When I started working with Kairat, they were 10th in the Kazakh League. They nearly got relegated. The club's owner got in touch with me and showed me what he'd planned for the future, and I shared his vision.

There was no training ground, nothing really, when we arrived. Since then, the chairman has built one of the best training bases in Europe. This was the start of Kairat's renaissance, when the club started claiming back its status as a champion and taking pride in its history again, as it was the only Kazakh club that played in national competitions during Soviet times.

I accepted the offer. The working environment was great, and we started building a team. It was very hard in the beginning, in the 2013 season, when we didn't do well in the league, but the next season we ended up taking third place and won the Cup, which was great, then in our third season we came second and won the cup again.



Jaba Kankava celebrates Georgia's opening goal against Latvia on the fourth day of Nations League fixtures.



My contract was for three years, and I worked there until it came to an end. We realised, both myself and Kairat Boranbayev, the club's chairman, that we needed new challenges, so we decided not to extend my contract. I took some time off – a couple of months – before moving to Georgia.

**What's been the most difficult decision in your career as a manager? Can you think of anything specific?**

I would say that one of the most difficult decisions I've had to make as a manager was not to include my son in the starting line-up for our third group game at the World Cup in South Africa, when we played against Italy.

It was a make-or-break game. I made a tactical decision not to include my son, and we won 3-2. It was a historic victory. My wife wouldn't speak to me after that, so I'll have to carry that with me for the rest of my life! We then played against the Netherlands in the last 16 and lost 2-1. It's a bit funny, but it'll still be a burden I'll have to carry around with me.

**What are the requirements for the coaches on your staff, and what do you expect from them?**

In modern football, one person can't do everything: work has to be divided up, and you have to respect your colleagues.

The assistant coaches are not here just to help carry the equipment to training. Every coach has a particular job. The head coach has to establish his footballing

philosophy and set the basis for training, and then each assistant can do their job.

My first-team coach is in charge of different aspects of training. Then, of course, the fitness coach takes care of the warm-ups, and the video analyst draws conclusions from training and also prepares training sessions, and so on.

Everyone has their own job. I have a great coaching staff that I've been working with for around 10 years. Everyone does their job, and you could say that we can all work together with our eyes closed, because we have known each other for so many years.

**How do you use sports science?**

My football is pretty straightforward, as I said before, but someone has created a science out of football, and we have to get used to that. You have to work with computers, you have to understand aspects of physical preparation, etc. Nowadays it's a science, it's not just a head coach who is involved when preparing the team – there's also a doctor, a fitness coach, video analysts and others. The head coach puts across his football philosophy, discipline, tactics, the formation and how the team will be set up. Everything has to work together, in harmony. I will be 55 this year, so I was brought up with an older football philosophy.

**As a national team head coach, how do you manage to get the best out of your players in the very short periods of time you spend with them?** →

You have to work with what you have, which is two to three days of preparation time. And the most important things are your relationship with the players, your tactical work and their mentality. As the coach, I have to get the team up and running, and I emphasise that they are playing for the national team, representing their country. They have to feel that responsibility – but not in a way that would pressure them. They need to feel relaxed and enjoy playing football in front of our amazing fans – it's unbelievable how the nation is getting behind the team at the moment, and I try to make the footballers enjoy playing for their country. But, of course, you have to be well prepared tactically for each opponent. There are your ideas, your passion, and you have to put that across to the players and connect with them. That's when you can achieve good results.

**That's precisely what you did with Slovakia at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, reaching the second round ahead of holders Italy.**

Of course, after the World Cup in South Africa, the nation was happy. It's possible to achieve it again. I believe in the Slovakia national team. Many of the footballers who played in South Africa are still playing, like Martin Škrtel and Marek Hamšík.

**Your work with Georgia didn't start out as well as you would have hoped – you didn't manage to win a World Cup qualifying game, drawing five times, but in the Nations League you won five games out of six. How important was this second tournament for your team?**



Vladimir Weiss looks forward to seeing his players progress abroad, just like Georgian hopeful Giorgi Chakvetadze, seen here playing for KAA Gent.

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We performed well in the Nations League, but it wasn't easy for me before that. When you manage a national team, it's not only an honour but, first and foremost, you have a responsibility to the Georgian people.

It's not easy to establish the connections that we've been talking about. I believe we have a good relationship with the players, the football federation and the fans now.

Everything depends on results, and your job depends on results and the team's performance. We managed to turn things around, but it wasn't easy for us. We were on a bad run at first.

We drew with Kazakhstan in my first game in charge, then we lost to Slovakia and Romania, then we won away in Spain [in a June 2016 friendly]. That's when something changed in our mindset and in the players' minds – it was like: 'Wow, we can do something with this squad.'

I believed in that, and we've been gradually working our way to where we

want to be. Our previous qualification tournament [for the 2018 World Cup] wasn't easy, with five draws and five losses. We were just missing something to get a win.

**Does this mean the quality was there, yet the results weren't?**

You have to carry on – sometimes coaches don't get results, but I could see some hope. Now we've done well in the Nations League, and we're really hopeful for the future. We're not just thinking about next season and waiting for March 2020 [when Georgia play Belarus in the Nations League Group D play-off match].

We have a new qualification group for EURO 2020, a very tough one where we have to play two teams, Denmark and Switzerland, who are ranked in the top 10 according to the current FIFA rankings, and we've got Republic of Ireland and Gibraltar too.

It's a hard group, but we'll try to get as many points as possible and fight to qualify. That's our goal. We can't think otherwise.

We can't prepare for that one game in March 2020. We'll compete with Switzerland, we'll go to Ireland and see how we match up against the other teams in this group. Of course, we'll prepare for each match, but the players' form will be vital.

Georgia celebrate with their fans after their 2-1 victory against Kazakhstan in Tbilisi on 19 November. Unbeaten in the Nations League, Georgia move up to League C.



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**"Bad blood between a manager and his players isn't an option, as it makes it impossible to succeed."**

My biggest issue as coach of Georgia is players getting enough playing time for their clubs and maintaining consistency. If key players are injured or not playing for their clubs, that's a huge problem.

**Has there been a time, as coach of the national team, when you've been able to pick your best starting XI, or something close to it?**

There was one game when we were able to field a strong team, and that was away to Wales in the 2018 World Cup qualifiers. We drew 1-1, but Jaba Kankava couldn't play. He's an incredible footballer, and an incredible guy that I respect a lot.

He's incredibly important to me and my team, and is in my top five in terms of the most professional players I've ever worked with. He does everything I ask of him, and puts in not 100%, but 150%.

He has great physical attributes, he grafts and does the dirty work well. Even when I changed his position and moved him higher up the pitch, he scored two goals – he was very dangerous in attack and played unbelievably in the Nations League.

You could say I've not had the chance to put out my strongest team, the one I have in my head, for one single game since becoming coach. But not having your strongest team at your disposal is not only my problem – many coaches face the same problem. It's not an excuse either, as there are injuries and suspensions in football.

But Georgia has, and always will, produce big talents, no matter if I stay here or not. If you look back, there's been Kakha Kaladze, Shota Arveladze, Levan Kobiashvili, Giorgi Kinkladze and lots of other footballers. Apologies to anyone I've forgotten, but there've been a lot who went on to play for some big clubs, and there always will be.

The most important thing, and I've asked agents to pay great attention to this, is where Georgian players are going to play. At the moment, Giorgi Chakvetadze is an example of this – he's a good example of a Georgian football player.

He is a product of Dinamo Tbilisi's academy; they are nurturing some real

talents there. They have great facilities for young players, a good training ground and a good stadium. They have everything necessary for young lads to become great players.

Chakvetadze chose a good club, and you could say that he's already become a key player for KAA Gent. He's a rising star of European football. He could become a real star – he's on the right track, and it all depends on him. He has a good family behind him, and I've spoken to his parents a couple of times. If all Georgian footballers chose such a path, then I'd be thrilled, because the national team would benefit from that.

**What do you think you can achieve with this team?**

Everyone dreams of going to EURO 2020. Of course, we're only halfway towards that goal now, or only a third of the way there really. But, we have a chance to go to the EURO through the Nations League play-offs. We'll try to reach this goal through the qualifiers first, and will take it game by game.

The first game is against Switzerland, then Ireland away. We'll fight for the points that will allow us to have a chance of finishing in the top two. All coaches and players have to be realistic and prepare for what it's really going to be like.

It won't be an easy group. There aren't teams on a similar level to us like in the Nations League – they're a level higher. But I'm sure we can prove ourselves, and pick up some similar results to the ones we had in Spain and Austria, against Ireland at home, as well as Wales away [the last three matches were all draws].

As a group, we can win against teams ranked higher than us and compete with the best teams in the world with our fans at home, where we have an amazing atmosphere. That makes it hard for any opponent. I always say during my press conferences that nobody thinks a trip to Georgia will be easy. We've earned respect, which is nice, and now we have to prove ourselves on the pitch and show we can compete with these big teams. 🇯🇵



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**A family affair**

"I was born in 1964. My father was playing at the Olympic Games, and he didn't see me when I was born, because he had to be at the team's training camp and wasn't allowed to leave. The first time he saw me was when I was one month old.

"He was a good defender, very talented. He won a silver medal at the Olympics in Tokyo in 1964. He spent most of his career playing for Inter Bratislava. My son has played for the national team too, and took part in the World Cup in South Africa in 2010. He also played at EURO 2016, and he still plays for Slovakia. I also played international football; I played for Czechoslovakia at the 1990 World Cup in Italy. After Czechoslovakia was split, I continued to play for Slovakia. I don't think there are many families out there that can say they've had a grandfather, father and son who are all called Vladimir and played for their nation's football team in a World Cup, European Championships and an Olympic Games. We managed to achieve that, and we can be quite proud of it."

## FRANCK RAVIOT

# 'KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON EVERYTHING, ALL OF THE TIME'

France's national team goalkeeper coach since 2010, 45-year old Franck Raviot loves his job. As the UEFA EURO 2020 qualifiers begin, he explains his way of working and sets out his vision of the role of national team goalkeeper.

## How did you become a goalkeeper coach?

I finished my professional playing career in 1988, when I was 25. I was always the understudy [at RC Lens and FC Martigues] because the number one positions were all taken. Becoming a coach or trainer is not a trivial undertaking. It's something you have within you. As a player, I always wanted to understand what was going on and to know why I was doing a particular exercise or session, whether it was just with the other goalkeepers or with the whole squad. Aimé Jacquet, who had just become the national technical director after lifting the World Cup, advised me to get my coaching qualifications so I could look after the young goalkeepers at the Clairefontaine national football centre. That is where I first met Alphonse Areola. I was then put in charge of the Under-21 goalkeepers, which is when I worked with Hugo Lloris and Steve Mandanda for the first time.

## Did any specific goalkeeper inspire you when you were younger?

Yes, two in particular: the first, as far as I was concerned, was a model of level-headedness, simplicity and efficiency. When he stretched out his arms ... That was Rinat Dasaev, the USSR goalkeeper. And in France, it was Bruno Martini, because he had everything: he kept things simple and always knew exactly what to do. He was a model professional because he was a real perfectionist. I was fortunate to meet this great technician when I first arrived at the national football centre and to work alongside him for more than ten years.

## How did you train to be a coach?

I did my coaching qualifications very early on because a coach is, above all, a coach in the broad and noble sense of the word, and not just a goalkeeper coach. During my playing career, I had already started attending various coaching courses and gaining qualifications. And one of the conditions when I started working at the national football centre some 20 years ago was that I should continue my own education and gain further qualifications. I helped Bruno Martini set up the elite goalkeeper coach diploma in France, a line of work that I am continuing to pursue as part of my role at the centre. In February, the inaugural UEFA Goalkeeper A diploma course took place here at Clairefontaine, with eight participants.

## Apart from by attending courses, how do you try to improve as a coach?

You can learn from anything, at any time, and from anyone. I therefore keep a very close eye on what's going on in the football world, as well as learning from things that might be happening elsewhere. I had the pleasure of meeting Thierry Omeyer [former goalkeeper for the French handball team, five-time world champion and double Olympic gold medallist]. Occasions like that are always rewarding because, if you want your goalkeeper to be a good all-rounder and a proper athlete, you sometimes have to look further afield ... In 2011, during a French national team get-together, Thierry Omeyer came to share his experiences with the goalkeepers. He spent a day experiencing what our world was like.

## Did you put him in goal?

Yes, he took part in the training exercises we had planned for the day, but the skill set is different. What we have in common with handball goalkeepers lies in the mental side of the game, anything directly linked to the psychological dimension. The physical skills required are different, though, because in handball, the ball comes from a height, whereas in football it comes from ground level.

## What are the main differences between your work and that of a club goalkeeper coach?

The main difference is the day-to-day management. With the national team, we don't have our goalkeeper every day, but only during international breaks, when we play one or two matches, sometimes more. The way we manage the goalkeeper is therefore different.

## What do you do to maintain that link?

You have to know how to be present without being overbearing. You have to strike the right balance. Different goalkeepers have different needs. And all goalkeepers have their own daily routines and their own club coaches, whose work you have to respect. It seems logical and useful to establish and maintain contact with my club-based counterparts. A national team goalkeeper coach always keeps a close eye, seeking the right balance not only during team get-togethers, but at other times as well. Keeping your eyes open means learning as much as you can about your goalkeeper, whether by speaking to them directly on the phone, exchanging text messages →



or meeting up in person, because as well as WhatsApp messages and phone calls, face-to-face contact is essential.

**How many times a season do you visit Hugo Lloris at his club, for example?**

It varies a lot. In principle, I visit the four or five goalkeepers who have been selected or are in contention during the weeks leading up to each get-together. But I don't just visit the ones who are doing well. It's important to monitor all their performances and to be especially supportive when they are going through a tricky patch.

**Is Didier Deschamps involved in planning your training sessions or are you completely independent?**

It's a luxury and a privilege to have the trust of the national team coach because it means he gives us complete freedom in our work and what we do. However, we are constantly talking and sharing ideas with each other. And during group

sessions, of course, I have to provide whatever Didier wants as far as the goalkeepers are concerned. I work closely with Didier, so when I plan our goalkeeper sessions, I have to take into account what he will be doing with the group as a whole. And, in the same way, we have to plan for certain scenarios that are directly linked to our opponents' style of play. Will they put our goalkeeper under a lot of aerial pressure, for example? If so, the goalkeeper should practise this specific aspect in preparation for the match.

**How do you think the goalkeeper's role has changed over the last 20 years?**

Goalkeepers now have a much greater influence and impact on the game. Nowadays, goalkeepers are players just like the others, they think about the game and play an integral part in build-up play. For many years, goalkeepers were seen as the last defender, but now they are also the first attacker, playing a fundamental role in the instigation of attacking moves. They also set the tempo of the game.

These days, we are seeing more and more short throw-outs and goalkeepers being used to build up play from the back, which are very recent developments. Modern elite goalkeepers need a good all-round game and the ability to react to any problems they might come up against during a game. They need to think, evaluate and analyse. They also need to be instinctive. They no longer just play with their hands. They play with their heads, their feet, and even their heads.

**What makes one goalkeeper more 'modern' than another?**

The modern goalkeeper is complete and masters every aspect of the position. The goalkeeper of the future will also be equally comfortable using either foot. More and more of them are already emerging, but in the future, all goalkeepers will have a complete all-round game and be able to control play thanks to an array of technical skills and tactical understanding.

**When you watch a goalkeeper for the first time, what do you look for in particular?**

For me, active involvement in the game is fundamental. A goalkeeper is an active player who participates in and has a feel for the game. A goalkeeper is just as important as an outfield player. Being actively involved means taking part in

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**"Didier gives everyone a voice. Ultimately, however, someone has to make the decisions, and that person is Didier. And when he makes a decision, we get behind him and give it our full support."**

the game as much as possible and having the ability to influence the game, as well as team-mates and opponents. It's also being able to spot a problem quickly, assess the options, make a decision and do the right thing. To do this, you need genuine discernment and to be one step ahead.

**And, since you are also a trainer, how do you assess young goalkeepers?**

It's very similar. You have to judge whether they have a feel for the game. Technique can be learned, improved and fine-tuned, but that deep-seated understanding of the game is an essential element to look for when talent-spotting for young goalkeepers. They should want to play and not be fearful. Most young goalkeepers do not take risks and are not active participants. They remain on the back foot, waiting for things to happen, and take on the role of the last defender. But they should not be the last defender, they should be a player. Their presence and influence are important. They should not be reactive, but proactive. There is nothing worse than a young goalkeeper paralysed by fear, afraid of something that might interfere with or harm their game. They need to take risks and be active rather than passive. In order to aid their progress, goalkeepers should play an active part in their own development.

**These days, at set plays, we see sophisticated strategies such as screens and blocks being used. How do you manage that?**

You have to make use of all the information and data available. After collecting and studying it closely, it is important to pass on as much knowledge as possible to the goalkeepers so that they are able to analyse situations on the pitch and, as I said before, stay ahead of the game. You can never be totally certain because football is not an exact



Didier Deschamps with Franck Raviot and assistant coach Guy Stéphan.

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science. This is group work that we do with the goalkeeper, and with the other players as well, because goalkeepers should not always be isolated from their team-mates. So, as far as this kind of preparation is concerned, video analysis is the main tool we use.

**Do you prepare video compilations of shots on goal and set plays?**

Yes, we compile clips of attacking play, focusing on its main characteristics and key forward players, individual players' strengths and weaknesses, a particular set play, or even a passing combination. The goalkeepers need all this information and are given access to it, but they are free to choose what to focus on and how they want to use it. It is often the tiniest details that make the difference in the end. Because the difference between winning and losing the ball is sometimes only a few centimetres.

**Looking at the mental side, what are the differences between a goalkeeper and an outfield player?**

Playing in such a thankless and difficult position, young goalkeepers need to pay attention to every little detail. They cannot afford to be careless. They have to be rigorous, precise and methodical,

aiming not just to 'get things done' but to 'do things well'. A goalkeeper is an instinctive player with an above-average ability to analyse and reflect. Such a combination of skills will help them to do the job well which, in turn, will boost their confidence.

**What do you think about the debate on how tall goalkeepers should be?**

Who said you had to be tall to be a goalkeeper? I disagree with people who say you need to be around two metres tall to play at the highest level. It's not true! These days, the best goalkeepers are the ones who see things and react the fastest, who are therefore quicker than average, who can analyse and absorb information much faster than others, and who have a good understanding of and feel for the game. As far as physical prowess is concerned ... there are some tall goalkeepers – 1.98m tall, for example – who move slowly, don't read the game well, fail to assimilate information correctly, lack timing and body control, make bad decisions and do the wrong things. I'm sorry, but I prefer a goalkeeper of more average height, but who has all the necessary qualities. Look at Anthony Lopes [Olympique Lyonnais goalkeeper], who is one example among many. He compensates for his relatively average →

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**"Who said you had to be tall to be a goalkeeper? I disagree with people who say you need to be around two metres tall to play at the highest level. It's not true!"**



Hugo Lloris makes a memorable save from a Martin Caceres header in France's quarter-final in the 2018 World Cup.

Pre-sports

“Just before the match, it’s mainly just a few simple messages (...) but to use words that will have a positive impact. It’s very short, between 30 seconds and a minute. It’s almost a kind of ritual.”



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height [1.84m] with other qualities: vision, speed, and so on.

**How did you approach the World Cup as a goalkeeper coach?**

First, it was a matter of taking the baton from my club-based colleagues, because that transition is important. When you meet the players at the start of the pre-tournament preparations, you have to bear in mind that they have only just finished a long, mentally and physically gruelling season. Most of them have played lots of matches and have been under pressure to produce results for their clubs. After the initial welcome, the first step is to quickly assess how everyone is and suggest an appropriate recovery programme. You might need

to focus on their physical condition or short-term fatigue, or it might be a stage of the season when they need to be doing more, or, on the contrary, taking it easy and doing a bit less so they can recuperate. We do this so they feel fresh and revitalised. It’s this first phase that enables us to crank things up and build their confidence. The final stage, just before the tournament starts, is when we put the finishing touches to our preparations, because you have to be at your peak when it all kicks off. We’re therefore looking for both efficiency and performance. That was the case when we played Australia in Russia on 16 June 2018. With Hugo, we had to realise that, although we needed to prepare and play warm-up matches, the most important thing was 16 June. He needed to be

100% on 16 June and to stay at that level until 15 July.

**Since your first major tournament, EURO 2012, there has been a clear hierarchy among your goalkeepers. Is that important for you?**

It’s an advantage and it makes life easier because a clearly defined hierarchy produces a sense of calm and tranquillity. It keeps the atmosphere healthy and positive. There is no ambiguity or misunderstanding, and everyone knows where they stand, fully aware of their responsibilities, role and objectives.

**What part do you play in determining this hierarchy? Is it Didier Deschamps or Franck Riviot who chooses the French national team goalkeepers?**

The great thing about the way Didier works is that things are very clear within the technical staff. We are constantly talking, interacting, sharing ideas and discussing among ourselves. Didier gives everyone a voice. Ultimately, however, someone has to make the decisions, and that person is Didier. And when he makes a decision, we get behind him and give it our full support.



The three France goalkeepers in Russia: Steve Mandanda, Hugo Lloris and Alphonse Areola.

FIFA

But before we get to that point, we have the chance to say what we think. We have to make our case and justify our opinions: Why? Why not? Why more? Why less? Once Didier has all this information, he makes the decision.

**The third-choice goalkeeper is often a topic of discussion. Is there such a thing, in your opinion?**

At the end of the day, since we have a clearly established hierarchy, we can talk about a number one, a number two and a number three. Alphonse Areola played the role of third-choice keeper perfectly at the World Cup. More than anything, being the number three means being on top of your game. It’s important to know that, if there is a problem with the other two, you have a goalkeeper you can count on to step in. It must be someone who demonstrates motivation, enthusiasm, freshness and dynamism on a daily basis.

**Is there a sense of togetherness among the French national team goalkeepers?**

The adventure we experienced together was unique, and such things should never

be played down. They must be enjoyed and savoured. It was the victory of a lifetime, producing moments of collective happiness and joy that were shared by the whole squad, starters and substitutes alike. There’s an image of Hugo lifting the cup, for example, but there’s also a picture of the three goalkeepers together for a few seconds at the final whistle. For me, that image is highly symbolic because it represents everything that those 55 days of competition were about. That photo says it all: sharing, togetherness, solidarity, smiles, faces, arms, mutual support. It is to Hugo’s credit more than anyone else’s that he played well during the tournament: they were his performances, his successes and it was his World Cup. But he also knows that Steve and Alphonse played an important part.

**We often see you talking one to one with Hugo Lloris on the pitch just before matches. What do you say to him at those moments?**

It’s mainly just a few simple messages, because at times like that it’s important not to say too much, but to use words that will have a positive impact. It’s very

“It is to Hugo’s credit more than anyone else’s that he played well during the tournament: they were his performances, his successes and it was his World Cup. But he also knows that Steve and Alphonse played an important part.”



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short, between 30 seconds and a minute. It’s almost a kind of ritual.

**Do you keep talking during the match or at half-time?**

No, not during the match, but we talk briefly at half-time to make any adjustments we think are necessary.

**His mistake against Croatia in the final was a paradoxical moment in what was an almost perfect World Cup. What were you thinking when it happened?**

That incident will be remembered as a temporary blip, a misjudgement of the situation. We should not forget that it occurred in the 69th minute. There was still plenty of time left and, during those final 20 or so minutes, Hugo continued to put in an impressive performance. He was able to reassure us and put us at our ease, which is also a mark of greatness. It’s that ability to react well in difficult circumstances. As I’ve said before, what he did from start to finish commands respect. His performances during the tournament command respect. He was the best in the tournament. Once again, he demonstrated that he was one of the best goalkeepers in the world. But I had known that for a very long time. 🇫🇷



Hugo Lloris needed to be especially skilful in the air in the 2018 World Cup group match against Australia.

Pressesports



## MORGAN DE SANCTIS

## MOVING OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE

Former Udinese, Napoli and Roma goalkeeper Morgan De Sanctis discusses the changing art of goalkeeping – and the learning process he has undertaken since becoming Roma's team manager.

**T**o be a footballer at a high level means you live a life that's not real," says Morgan De Sanctis as he reflects on the adjustment from playing football to filling an off-field position in the game. The one-time Italy goalkeeper is today team manager at AS Roma, a role he embarked on in 2017 after leaving AS Monaco and hanging up his gloves following a 23-year professional career.

Now 42, he gained lessons from working under some of Italy's finest coaches of the past couple of decades and holds intriguing views on the evolution of goalkeeping, questioning whether the focus on footwork among today's young custodians has led to a neglect of the basic arts of keeping the ball out of the goal.

His own quest for knowledge goes on, as he acknowledged during a recent visit to Nyon as part of his UEFA Pro diploma coaching course. Yet one thing he is sure of already about the challenge of building a second career is that, whether as a coach or director of football, the demands of the 21st-century game mean "You can't do it all alone."

**What do you consider the biggest changes you've seen in terms of the evolution of football?**

I started a long time ago as a professional, in 1993, and football has changed since then. Footballers have improved athletically. Even the equipment – the boots, the balls – has had an influence on the acceleration of the game's development. And it's not true that there's less technical ability. The technical ability has stayed at a very high level – only the game has got faster. Players get forward just as well as they get back. Football has changed on the pitch as

well as off it. And you have to say that, in a general sense, it's improved. I'm not one of those nostalgic people. If I watch a Champions League match today, and watch a European Cup game from 20 or 30 years ago, I much prefer the games we see today and everything that goes on around them.

**How much has the goalkeeper's role changed from when you were younger?**

I was born in 1977. If I'm not mistaken, the back-pass rule came into force in 1992.

So, at 15 years old, it came as a great shock to me, because I'd grown up with certain tactics which, all of a sudden, were taken away. Maybe that was worse for those keepers who were 20, 22 at the time. I still had time to improve. Another change probably came with the arrival of [Pep] Guardiola at Barcelona, where he created this style of play which heavily involved the goalkeeper. It was already happening in some teams, but not in the same way Guardiola did it and because it was Barcelona and it was a formula for success, it captured the attention and today it's clear that the role of the goalkeeper has changed. Keepers have to know how to play with their feet. I'm from another generation, and even in the last ten years of my career, I didn't have coaches that demanded this element. However, I understand that today a goalkeeper must be prepared to do this, and to be good at it.

**"I've started to see in the younger generation the loss of a grasp of the technical and tactical basics."**

**How has this change of job description impacted on the qualities of the young keepers you see?**

Almost all goalkeepers now are highly capable of playing well with both feet, but I've started to see in the younger generation the loss of a grasp of the technical and tactical basics. How do you block a shot? How do you parry the ball away? Which position do you take in a certain situation? Why is this happening? Because, probably, in the youth teams, they focus a lot on the feet, but neglect the technical and tactical aspects. What I'm getting at here is that the keeper must know how to do everything – and to do it well. And fundamentally, you must know how to make saves, above all else.

**How do you see the role of the goalkeeper evolving further?**

I don't know how much further it will go. I have already seen keepers who at times play 10 or 20 metres outside of the box but the problem is there'll always be a goal there to defend. When a keeper comes out, it's not a problem if his team have the ball. The problem is when they lose it and he has to track back the distance he's come. A larger distance puts a keeper in more difficulty, and this is something which has changed the playing style because, once upon a time, the keeper was rooted to his line. Today, you hardly ever see a keeper on his line. The movements [he makes] are always going back towards goal, and [you need] the technical and tactical ability to stop in the right place and at the right moment to make an intervention. Many goals are conceded because the keeper isn't in the right place, or is trying to make up the ground, so technically they're unable to make the correct movements. →



I had a coach in the latter stages of my career who worked on this aspect, which we Italians call the situational aspect, because if you have a defence like Atlético Madrid's, for example, which stays deep, you make only small movements. If, on the other hand, you have a higher defensive line, and you have to work in that space, it's a lot more difficult.

**As an ex-player working in roles off the pitch, what challenges do you face – and how can you prepare to meet them?**

I actually had one more year on my contract as a player at [Monaco], but was anxious to take on this role Roma were giving me, as team manager, because I wanted to understand how a team works outside of the dressing room. The things I

had going for me were [my willingness to] study, my diligence, work ethic, knowledge and experience. I played until the age of 40. To be a footballer at a high level means you live a life that's not real, because you work hard for two or three hours a day. The other hours of the day, you have your hobbies and your family. When you move over to the other side – whether you're a coach, director, team manager or journalist – you have to understand that your quality of life will no longer be as it was, and this is difficult for players. This was the first challenge for me, after which I started studying. I'm doing a coaching course now. I've already done the sporting director course that we have in Italy, to study the business side. My role is that of team manager, where everyone – players, coach, club, the press, and other teams – comes and ask you things, so in the end you understand how a club works. At this point, I feel more suited to a management-level role, probably as sporting director. However, I wanted to do a coaching course to understand another aspect.

**What role do these coaching courses play?**

I have an extremely positive view of UEFA's A and B coaching courses, of the UEFA Pro course, the sporting director course, the course for goalkeeping coaches. It's true that these courses don't give you all the information you need. However, you have the chance to gather information and to think like a coach or a sporting director. I'll give you an example. During the UEFA course, we've watched matches like a coach – how the teams have been set up tactically, the moves the opposition makes, if the manager makes a change, the patterns of the game, if he says something to the players. If you're doing the sporting director course, you watch it from the perspective of a sporting director, concentrating more on one player to see whether or not they're good and if they have character.

**How would you get your knowledge of football and your philosophy of the game across to players?**

I'm really fascinated by this. Today, it's true that there's been a globalisation of football, so there's no such thing as English football, Italian football, Spanish football. There's a globalised football in which an Italian team has very few Italian players.

“When you move over to the other side – whether you're a coach, director, team manager or journalist – you have to understand that your quality of life will no longer be as it was.”



De Sanctis was especially influenced by Marcello Lippi, who coached him at Juventus and in the Italian national team.

English teams are in the same position. In the Premier League, I don't know how many English managers there are. This can also be a positive. From my Italian perspective, and I think it's also the same for the Spanish and English, I think we need to claim a little bit of our originality, saying, 'Look, let's keep something Italian here.' However, globalisation is also good.

From the perspective of a coach or sporting director, you have to consider certain things. You need to know where you're going, because if Barcelona decide you're the right person for the position of coach or sporting director, you need to know the history, the philosophy. Then you need to evaluate the players you'll have and then you need to understand what the objectives are. Only at that point can you decide what kind of philosophy the team will have both on and off the pitch, though when giving the example of Barcelona, it's obvious that there's a philosophy which involves having possession and being in control. If I give you the example of Juventus, it's another type of football – getting the result at any cost, because the slogan is 'Winning is not important, it's the only thing that matters'. But then a revolution can happen through someone like Guardiola coming along. These are examples from big clubs. Not everyone will have the chance to

work at these clubs. So, there'll be clubs where the philosophy changes every year and the style of play too. You can have a club in Serie B which one year has a rich owner who invests money and as a result wants to win the championship and bring in better players. In those cases – aside from very rare exceptions involving great managers, directors and teams, where their history tells them what they are – things can change. Money changed Manchester City, for example.

**Which coaches influenced you most at the start and throughout your career?**

I was very lucky because I had great managers. My first manager was Giorgio Rumignani, and out of gratitude I always mention him, because he was the one who got me started. He played me in Serie B in a starting role for an entire season at 17. I remember him with a lot of affection because he was an expression of the type of football that no longer exists, a romanticised football. In Italy, we say 'pane e salame' [bread and butter]. It's a type of football where everything is based on enjoyment, being together, very few tactics, lots of togetherness. I like to remember him because his way of doing things, even at that time, was still revolutionary. He achieved great things at clubs in Serie B and Serie C in Italy, which were important championships at the time, so I always mention him because he reminds me of a type of football which no longer exists.

Then I had Marcello Lippi, and I remember him a lot on account of two fundamental qualities: consistency and charisma. I also had Carlo Ancelotti, a great manager for managing people, and incredible in terms of his calmness, his ability, his intelligence. I had Walter Mazzarri, who organised the team



“I think we need to claim a little bit of our originality, saying, 'Look, let's keep something Italian here.'”

completely. From start to finish, the team knew what would happen and what should happen. And then I had [Luciano] Spalletti, from beautiful Tuscany with its history, Leonardo da Vinci and everything. He was a creative coach – creative, clever, intuitive. If I have to think of managers who've given me something extra, these are the ones who come to mind.

**What are the most important aspects when choosing your technical staff, and how would you manage them if you became a coach?**

The first thing is to not confuse professional matters with friendship. You have to have people who, perhaps in some situations, know more than you. It's extremely important to have people of high quality around you, because if you have people who aren't good, they could well undermine you and your legitimacy in the eyes of the players and staff. You then have to get your colleagues on side, make them understand the importance of being together, sharing the workload and objectives, and respecting people's positions. And then there's obviously the question of character. You need some self-reflection. Am I an aggressive person, a difficult person, a demanding person? In this case, it's probably better to choose colleagues who'll lower the tension levels. If you're a calm person, a gentle person, you might need people who'll increase the tension levels, who are more intense, more precise, more methodological in their work.

**What are your thoughts on the role of a goalkeeping coach in the world of football?**

I'd prefer the goalkeeping coach to stay on the pitch a bit longer with the keepers. When you train with the team, you do one type of work. When you train with the goalkeeping coach specifically, working on parrying with the hands, it's a different kind of work. Maybe the indispensable thing that I see, from having been a goalkeeper myself, is that the goalkeeping coach [must be] very involved in defensive set-piece preparation.

“You have to have people who, perhaps in some situations, know more than you.”

When a coach does defensive set-piece preparation with his assistant and possibly other colleagues as well – corners, free-kicks out wide, and central ones with a wall – he must involve the goalkeeping coach because he's the only one who can make the goalkeeper understand certain things, depending on the keeper's attributes. If he's good at coming out, the goalkeeping coach might suggest holding a higher defensive line. Take [André] Onana, who has such strong legs and fine agility. Ajax play with a high line with Onana and it works because he comes out. If you're a goalkeeper who doesn't have that agility, it's something the coach must understand and talk about, or choose another [keeper], though not everyone has that choice.

**Do you remember any goalkeeping coaches whose methods really helped you improve?**

You never forget your first love. I had a coach called Gino Di Censo in the Pescara Calcio youth ranks who really helped me on and off the pitch because he loved me. He loved all his goalkeepers, but he really loved me and I'll always remember him. I had so many goalkeeping coaches, all of whom gave me something, but the key moment was probably when I was around 20. Udinese signed me and they had a coach called Alessandro Zampa, whose methodology was completely revolutionary. This was back in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Back then, particularly in Italy, they wanted goalkeepers to attack the ball, with

high and low crosses, and I really enjoyed that because it was a new approach for me to work on. I was exposed to it as a 20-year-old who wanted to learn, and it left a mark on me that made me different from so many other goalkeepers.

**Will your goalkeepers train with the outfield players or will they work separately?**

When I started out, 80% of my time was spent away from the team, because 20% was small-sided games, for which you needed goalkeepers, or target practice. Nowadays I think it's 50%. Goalkeepers are with the whole squad for 50% of the time to work on other areas, such as building the play as a team. It's no longer possible to imagine a goalkeeper not being part of the team's attacking and defensive tactical work.

**What sort of personalities will you be looking for, in terms of young goalkeepers' development?**

My eldest daughter is 18 and she's a goalkeeper. This was something that made me proud, [because] I think that if you're a youngster and you decide to be a goalkeeper, it means you have a sense of responsibility, you're a real character and have something different about you. The first thing I look at is how much charisma, personality and ability the goalkeeper has to lead on the pitch, and off it as well. For me, that determines the level in terms of being a top player, or being in that world-class bracket. Of course, there are technical



Morgan De Sanctis at the UEFA Pro diploma course at UEFA on 5 May.



**De Sanctis' club career**

<b>Pescara</b>	1994–97	(league apps <b>74</b> )
<b>Juventus</b>	1997–99	(league apps <b>3</b> )
<b>Udinese</b>	1999–2007	(league apps <b>194</b> )
<b>Sevilla</b>	2007/08	(league apps <b>8</b> )
<b>Galatasaray</b>	2008/09	(league apps <b>31</b> , loan)
<b>Napoli</b>	2009–13	(league apps <b>147</b> )
<b>Roma</b>	2013–16	(league apps <b>75</b> )
<b>Monaco</b>	2016/17	(league apps <b>1</b> )

and athletic qualities. You can't be a goalkeeper in football nowadays [without them] as it's faster and more physical, and players have changed physically. I'm 190cm and when I started out in 1994, I was one of the tallest goalkeepers. Today I'd be average height. When I started out, Sebastiano Rossi and [Zeljko] Kalac were very tall goalkeepers who had difficulties, maybe because they were so slender. Today, however, there are goalkeepers who are 195cm who can get down so easily, because the players' build has changed, so that aspect matters.

If you're 185cm tall as a goalkeeper now, you're a phenomenon because you often don't get the chance to push the ball away, but you just have to spread yourself. To start with you're losing 10, 15 or 20 centimetres because it's not just about height, but also your reach with your arms. If you then have to come out to claim the ball with players like [Virgil] van Dijk coming in ... Having said that, psychology and ability are important. You need the physique, but you need the technique as well, and that mustn't be neglected.

**You said that physical attributes can be key but if you're not quite at that level, can you still become a top goalkeeper?**

Football is very democratic in this regard. You can be two metres tall or 170cm. You can have legs that are thick or thin. Out of the ten outfield roles, based on your physical and technical qualities, you'll find the right one. As for goalkeepers, the physical side counts. There are goalkeepers nowadays who are a bit shorter but are still good, such as Kupa Arrizabalaga, but he's not tiny. Maybe football is harsher on goalkeepers overall, particularly at the top level where it's so fast-paced.

**You've attended this course for the UEFA Pro diploma. What are the most important points that you'll take back home in terms of leadership and being a head coach?**

When you do these courses, one thing you understand is that when you have

the responsibility of being a manager, with others working below you whom you have to lead, teach and guide, you can't just do one thing. You have to know about communication, psychology, technique and tactics, so it's a bit of everything. You can't do it all alone. You have two key areas: first is your staff and your ability to delegate and get help. You also have to keep everyone positive, and generate respect and teamwork.

I don't really believe in the English football manager [concept] which is changing and becoming closer and closer to the Italian and Spanish models, with a coach and sporting director. If you have to coach the team, decide the formation, take care of the fitness drills, work on the pitch, choose the best XI, how can a coach start to watch 30 players every day, speak to agents, decide which type of contract fits and speak with the finance department? It's not possible. That's what these courses help you to understand. We're moving towards bigger and more complex clubs, so you have to be good at understanding your role and how to do it well. 🌱

# WHY DEAD BALLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



In their analysis of the last campaign for the 2018/19 UEFA Champions League technical report, UEFA's technical observers dissected the latest tendencies in set plays – a route to goal that served not only winners Liverpool well.

Liverpool's fourth goal was a close-range finish by Divock Origi from a swiftly taken corner, knocking Barcelona out in the semi-finals.

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It was a UEFA Champions League season that began with one set-play goal and ended with another. The first, scored by Galatasaray's Garry Rodrigues, came nine minutes into the group stage on 18 September last year, in the second phase of play following a half-cleared corner in an eventual 3-0 home victory over Lokomotiv Moskva.

It will be rather less remembered than the second, scored by Liverpool substitute Divock Origi in the UEFA Champions League final in Madrid on 1 June.

This too was a second-phase strike from a corner, in this case delivered by James Milner with 87 minutes on the clock. After an inadvertent flick-on from Son Heung-Min and blocked attempt by Virgil van Dijk, Jan Vertonghen directed the ball inadvertently to Joël Matip and he teed up Origi for the goal which sealed Liverpool's triumph over Tottenham Hotspur.

These two goals bookended the collection of goals scored from set plays in the 2018/19 campaign, 66 in total. This figure represented a drop in goals from

dead balls for the second season running, yet that is not to diminish their significance. With the overall total of UEFA Champions League goals slipping too – down to 366 from 401 in 2017/18 – it means that set plays still accounted for almost one fifth (18%) of all goals recorded in the competition.

Winners Liverpool will certainly vouch for their significance. The fourth and decisive goal in their astonishing semi-final comeback against Barcelona was another dead-ball effort, Origi burying the ball high into the net at the Kop end after the swiftly

taken Trent Alexander-Arnold corner which caught Barcelona's defenders napping.

In a narrow-margins world, where elite clubs have analysts poring over the tiniest of details, set plays evidently matter and they received close attention from UEFA's technical observers in their assessment of the 2018/19 competition. This assessment included a series of reflections on the strategies used for corners, and the work of those teams at opposing ends of the various performance criteria.

### Productive Porto

Bayern Munich and Porto delivered the most set-piece goals in 2018/19 – six apiece – and the latter's success with corners was an intriguing area of analysis, given it involved their great domestic rivals Benfica also.

With five of their 20 goals coming from corners, Porto used set plays to impressive effect on their road to the quarter-finals. Only Bayern scored as many from corners, and Sérgio Conceição's side achieved a ratio of one goal for every nine corners taken – far above the average of one in 30. As for Benfica, they created a shot from a corner 66% of the time, which was double the average rate.

The approach was different in the case of each club. Porto, a taller-than-average team, took a higher percentage of inswinging corners (57%). Moussa Marega, their Malian striker stood second on the list for xG (expected goals) from corners of every player in the competition. Another player, midfielder Danilo, had five shots.

Down the road in Lisbon, Benfica employed more outswinging corners (45%). They had a tendency for well-worked routines; one fifth (21%) of their corners were played short prior to delivery in an attempt to try to disrupt the defensive set-up. Defender Jardel had four shots.

As always with dead balls, it is important to have a player with the capacity to put the ball into the right areas. Sir Alex Ferguson, who, as Manchester United manager, asked Wayne Rooney and Robin van Persie to take corners for their powers of placement, once said that "delivery is everything" and in Alex Telles, Porto, in particular, had a player adept at serving the right ball.

### Mixed approach to marking

From creating menace to curbing it, the team who were most effective at defending corners were Atlético de Madrid. For Diego Simeone's team, this was their last season with a defence featuring Diego Godín and Juanfran, and their discipline and organisation meant they did not concede a single goal from 35 corners faced; moreover, they had the lowest ratio for corners to shots conceded (4:1).

Atlético offered UEFA's observers an example of the tendency for teams to defend with a meld of man-marking and zonal approaches. On the latter point, they had one man covering the front post and another the centre of the five-metre box.

Quarter-finalists Manchester United did much the same, defending man for man with one blocker defending the front-post zone and one on the five-metre box. They had a similarly strong defensive record, posting the second-lowest shots-to-corners ratio, and they achieved this with a flexible approach which changed according to the opposition.

In the quarter-final against Barcelona, for instance, Ole Gunnar Solskjær's side defended zonally, with Marcus Rashford and Ashley Young acting as blockers. This was different from the previous round against Paris Saint-Germain when they went man for man, with Pogba defending the five-metre box zonally (albeit the ball floated over his head in the lead-up to the Parisians' opening goal of the first leg, scored by Presnel Kimpembe).

The view of Thomas Schaaf, one of UEFA's technical observers, was that goalkeepers in decades past would



FC Porto scored

20 goals

5 of them coming from corners, a ratio of 1 for every 9 taken

Their striker, **Moussa Marega**, ranked second in the list for xG (expected goals) from corners out of every player in the competition



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Despite compact man-marking, Tottenham were unable to stop Ajax's Matthijs de Ligt heading in a goal from a corner.

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demand the presence of a defender on each post whereas this is less common today. There are still exceptions, though. Against Juventus, for instance, United defended with every player back and Ashley Young starting on the back post. The other clubs in this small minority included Ajax, who would switch between one or two defenders on the post (taking the latter option against both Bayern and AEK Athens). It was more usual, though, to see a mixed approach whereby a defender playing zonally would drop back on to a post if the ball was delivered away from their zone (something seen in the defending of Roma, AEK, Galatasaray and PSG).

**Contrasting fortunes**

The goal that Liverpool substitute Origi scored in the final was illustrative of the very contrasting fortunes of the two teams that travelled farthest in the 2018/19 competition. For Tottenham, it was the fourth that they conceded from a corner – more than any other side. Mauricio Pochettino's men also had the third-highest corner-to-shots-against ratio, conceding a shot every 1.9 corners, and they conceded a goal every 15 corners (the season's third highest, when the average was 30).

The strategy adopted by Spurs was to have two or three players guarding the

five-metre box with the rest defending man for man. One of the set-piece goals they conceded highlighted more than anything the cleverness with which teams now block opposition players to create space for colleagues. It was Matthijs de Ligt's effort for Ajax against the Londoners in the semi-final in Amsterdam, which came after the centre-half escaped the attention of Jan Vertonghen, thanks to Donny van de Beek's blocking, and was then able to get a running jump on Dele Alli, the player marking the zone into which Lasse Schöne's delivery dropped.

It is worth noting too how a number of the shots conceded by Tottenham came from the second phase of corners, with clearances to the edge of the box leading to long-range strikes by the opposition.

**The strategy adopted by Spurs was to have two or three players guarding the five-metre box with the rest defending man for man.**

This was a consequence of Tottenham leaving this space unattended, something that round of 16 opponents Borussia Dortmund almost capitalised on with a clever corner that Jadon Sancho drove straight to the D of the penalty box for Marco Reus, who fired in a volley which deflected just wide.

The question of this space on the edge of the box featured in UEFA's technical observers' reflections on the tendency for teams scoring goals from the second phase at corners – eight to be precise, in 2018/19. One argument cited is that defending teams are vulnerable in these situations because of their focus on springing quick counterattacks. With Ajax, for example, there were occasions they defended corners with two wide players slightly ahead of their colleagues, waiting to counterattack.

Bayern offered a good example of a team capitalising on the second phase of corners, scoring twice in this way – including against Ajax in a 3-3 draw in Amsterdam in the group stage. A consistent play seen from Bayern at corners was for three players to remain on the edge of the box, ready to win the ball once it was cleared by the opposition.

**Reds rewarded**

If Bayern and Porto had the most goals

to show from their efforts with dead-ball opportunities last season, another side who made good use of set-piece situations were Liverpool. Interestingly, this was a direct consequence of a decision taken in the pre-season when Jürgen Klopp and his players and coaching staff spoke together about spending more time practising set plays. The club even recruited a throw-in coach, Thomas Grønnemark, and this increased focus bore fruit over the course of the season.

Liverpool averaged one goal for every 18.8 corners taken in the UEFA Champions League – well above the average figure of one in 30. A key contributor was right-back Trent Alexander-Arnold, a fine striker of dead balls who took 33% of all their kicks (from right and left sides).

The aerial ability of the 1.93m Virgil van Dijk was another factor. The Dutch defender ranked second-highest for xG from set plays and was the highest scoring defender in this category too (1.88xG).

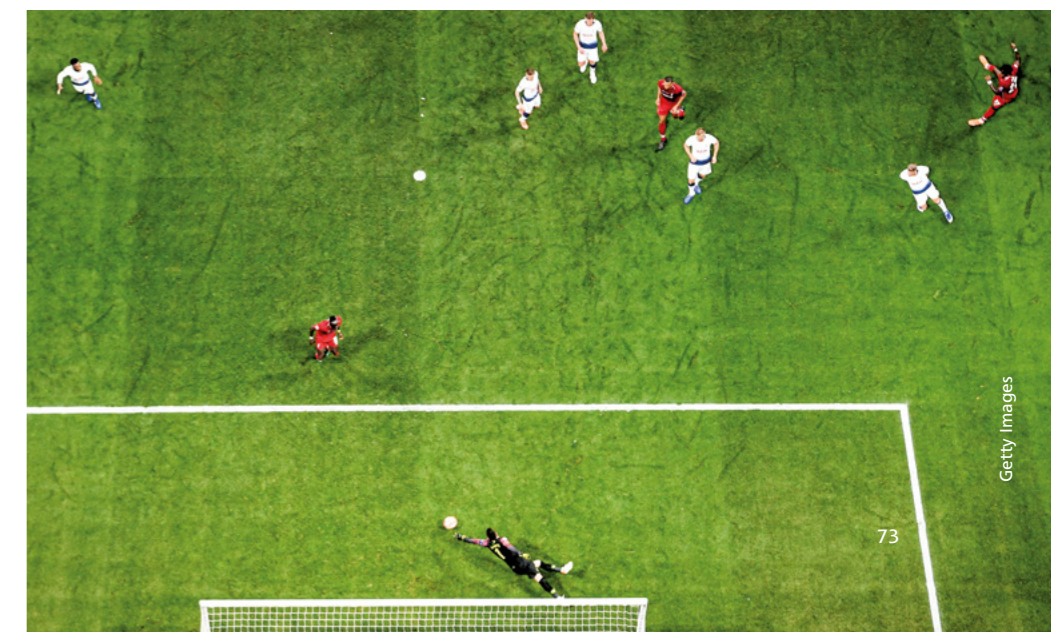
Van Dijk scored with two headed goals from corners in the knockout stage, at Bayern in the round of 16 and Porto in the quarter-finals. With his stature and

physical presence he was an obvious target for Liverpool in the opposition box, and registered six attempts overall. One of them, in the semi-final home leg against Barcelona, highlighted his footballing ability – an impressively inventive effort as he held off Sergio Busquets as a corner dropped inside the five-metre box and, with his back to goal, produced a back-heel flick which drew a save from Marc-André ter Stegen.

It was in that remarkable match that Liverpool underlined the extent of their planning for dead-ball situations.

In the first leg at Camp Nou, Klopp's match analysts had observed how Barcelona players became distracted when a decision went against them and lost their focus momentarily. Consequently, the Anfield ballboys received an instruction prior to the return fixture for them to keep the ball moving swiftly. Thanks to one alert youngster, Alexander-Arnold was able to send over the quick corner that caught Barcelona napping as Origi scored his team's fourth. And, as we well know, it was not his last set-piece goal of the Reds' famous campaign. →

Liverpool's second goal in the final came from Divock Origi from a second-phase strike from a corner.



Getty Images

## PRESS FOR SUCCESS

UEFA's technical observers also underlined the importance of pressing in the UEFA Champions League in 2018/19 – as these examples from two knockout ties illustrate.

When Manchester United hosted Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their round of 16 tie, the home side began brightly, applying high pressure with their three mobile forwards – Jesse Lingard, Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial – leading the way with their energy and movement.

Behind them, Ander Herrera and Paul Pogba pushed up from midfield and stopped the visitors playing forward, and this led to a number of turnovers in Paris's defensive third.

From the midway point of the first half, though, there was a discernible shift, prompted by the experienced Gianluigi Buffon in the visitors' goal. Noting the difficulty United were causing with their high press, the Italian opted to go long in an attempt to bypass the five pressing opposition players.

By their own admission, Paris had struggled to cope but, as the pressure maps show, United were unable to sustain this as the match progressed. Buffon's change of strategy was a factor and so too injuries before half-time to both Lingard and Martial, which meant the introductions of Alexis Sánchez and Juan Mata, two players who were not able to press with the same intensity. The second period was a different story, with Paris running out 2-0 winners.

### The power of the press

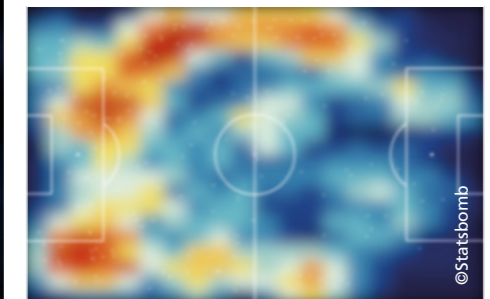
If the scoreboard at Camp Nou read 3-0 at the end of Barcelona's semi-final first leg against Liverpool, it was a deceptive guide to the flow of a game in which Jürgen Klopp's side pressed high and ended up with more possession than their hosts (a 52% share) as well as creating a number of clear-cut chances.

The pressure maps offer a different perspective. This was a contest in which both sides applied quick, high pressure –



Getty Images

PSG's Kylian Mbappé came under pressure from Manchester United in the round of 16.



Barcelona pressure v Liverpool 1st leg\*

and both tried to play through their opponents' pressure. In the case of Liverpool, they applied most pressure to their hosts' left side, where Jordi Alba was providing a threat going forward.

Either side of Barcelona's front three of Philippe Coutinho, Luis Suárez and Lionel Messi, the full-backs Sergi Roberto and Jordi Alba brought width. This pair were often picked out by long diagonal passes, and then immediately pressured, by the Liverpool full-backs. One such occasion led to Barcelona's first goal, when a diagonal ball to Coutinho was cut back for Alba to deliver a cross into the box for Suárez to score.

As for Liverpool, they looked to exploit wide areas in possession in a 4-3-3 formation, with Sadio Mané making diagonal runs from the left which created space for Robertson to run into. On the right side, Jordan Henderson took up a wide position when he was introduced to replace Naby Keïta. As is evident from the pressure map, Barcelona pressured Liverpool's full-backs, often deep inside their own half, as they sought to defend crosses.

It would be Liverpool's pressing – the speed and intensity of it – that overpowered Barcelona in the extraordinary second-leg comeback that followed a week later, when as one UEFA technical observer suggested, the Blaugrana were not helped by the limited defensive contributions of Messi and Suárez. To cope with pressing that intense takes an 11-man effort.

The 2018/19 UEFA Champions League Technical Report will be published at the beginning of September. 📄

Grzegorz Kowalski and his Dolny Śląsk players celebrate victory in the Regions' Cup on 26 June in Bavaria.



## GRZEGORZ KOWALSKI

# “TO THESE GUYS THE REGIONS’ CUP IS LIKE THEIR CHAMPIONS LEAGUE”

Grzegorz Kowalski is the coach of amateur Polish club Śląza Wrocław and also of Dolny Śląsk, the Lower Silesian representative team that won the latest UEFA Regions’ Cup in Bavaria in June and the second side from the region Kowalski has won the competition with. Held every two years, the Regions’ Cup is a unique opportunity for amateur players to take part in a European competition.

### Grzegorz Kowalski, how did you become a coach?

I decided to become a coach from very early on. It was a risk because I had never had a proper job before. Some of my colleagues had worked as teachers, others had done something completely different to football before training as coaches. I took a different path. Coaching has always been my main profession.

So how did I become a coach? When I was 19, I started studying at the Physical Education Academy at the same time as playing for Śląza Wrocław. Even as a player, I was already observing my coaches. People usually have two or three coaches who heavily influenced their football career. For example, one might have been a very charismatic leader that players naturally followed. Another might have been great tactically... When I teach coaches, I first tell them to look inside of themselves and ask if they have leadership qualities. Supposedly, like an actor, you can play any role in life. In football, if you want people to follow you, be authentic. Your players need to believe you, to trust you. In their eyes you must be a leader. Often this quality is apparent as early as primary school. If you were not already used to being the ‘boss’, it might be harder for you to

thrive in the world of coaching.

I tell aspiring coaches to think about this because there are many other jobs in football. You can be a physical preparation coach or work with kids. Not everyone is cut out to be head coach. If you don’t have the right skills and you just wade in, you are bound to fail.

### How else did you prepare for your role as a coach?

First of all, by studying, but I also spent a lot of time collecting any available information. The market for football books used to be very limited in Poland, but my time in Germany and Malaysia worked to my advantage and I grabbed whatever I could there. I also watched countless videos of matches. But the learning process never stops. If you want to work in football, at any level, you need to keep up to date.

### Did you have any coaching role models when you were younger?

Only locally, although less so for tactics. My first coach at Śląza Wrocław, Stanisław Świerk, may not have been the best technical coach, but he definitely had charisma. He was someone that

people would follow.

Śleşa Wrocław used to be sponsored by the local public transport company and the director was a very important person, inside and outside the club. I recall that at one match, after the team had played a poor first-half, the director came into the dressing room. He started saying something, believing it was his right, but Świerk interrupted him, saying “I don’t interfere with your trams.” This was an important moment for all of us; a clear signal from the coach that he alone ruled the dressing room. For me, as a future coach, this was an important lesson to never allow other people to interfere in the dressing room. You immediately lose authority in front of the team. Świerk always held this authority.

He also had an interesting trait that I will explain using another anecdote. His wife was something of a fortune teller. One time, we were preparing for Świerk’s verdict on a training camp that we had attended in [former] East Germany. We thought it would be like, “this person trained well, that person needs to improve.” But the coach’s wife was seated next to him. She looked at our dates of birth and used the zodiac to tell whether her husband could rely on each player. Another funny story involves a team-mate →

who knew Świerk was very superstitious. During a game, when he was a substitute, this player told the coach that he'd dreamt about coming off the bench and scoring two goals. As soon as Świerk heard this, he asked the player to start warming up. Of course, he didn't score any goals.

It was never boring with Świerk. Once, on a long coach journey for an away match, he suddenly started searching for his hat. He believed it brought good luck. He couldn't find it, so what happened? Although we had already gone quite a way, the driver had to turn round and go back to Wrocław for his hat. Świerk had something about him that made people want to follow him.

The second coach who heavily influenced me was Józef Majdura. He was a completely different character to Świerk. A very cultured person who we found intimidating in many ways. A man who trusted people, a man of principle who believed that rules should not be broken. You learn a lot from people, even if they have very different personalities.

#### As coach of an amateur team do you draw inspiration from coaches of professional teams, for example in the Champions League?

Amateur and professional players share a common motivation. Whatever the level, anyone who steps on the pitch wants to win. I believe that everyone wants to give their all. For these guys, the Regions' Cup is their Champions League. So yes, even through I am the coach of an amateur team, I can take inspiration from coaches of Champions League teams.

#### How do you select players for a squad?

Lower Silesia is made up of four regions. Our club has people in each region keeping an eye on the lower leagues – it's our own scouting network. However, at the level of the third and fourth leagues we work closely with the club coaches. We organise a consultation and we assess individual players. I watch many of them myself. I live football 24 hours a day. I'll even go to four matches on a Saturday!

We take selection very seriously. Personally, I'm looking for two things. First, mentality. When we played a Spanish team in the Regions' Cup we scored in the last minute. It was a very important goal because it kept us in the tournament.

“In football, if you want people to follow you, be authentic. Your players need to believe you, to trust you. In their eyes you must be a leader.”



Artur Hojny

Coincidence? A surprise? Not for me! Because at the end of the previous season my club team Śląza Wrocław had scored injury-time winners in four out of five matches. Eight players from Śląza were with us at the Regions' Cup. I like players who fight and keep believing until the final whistle.

Second, the Regions' Cup is a tough and demanding tournament with games played every two days. So we try to select players with excellent physical stamina. It also turned out that the key matches were played in very high temperatures.

#### How did you prepare for the Regions' Cup?

In the winter, we held a training camp in Wałbrzych. We were considering up to 10 Śląza players for inclusion in the Regions' Cup squad, so we decided to take the whole Śląza team to the camp, as well as the candidates from other teams. We met up again for a few days before the finals in Bavaria. How often do I have contact with members of my squad? As I mentioned, a lot play for my team so I see them every day. Outside of the training camps, I keep an eye on the others as often as possible.

#### What was a typical day like during the Regions' Cup finals?

It's a very intense tournament. The games take place every two days, so you

must devote a lot of time to recovery and regaining strength. We tried to plan everything so the players were ready to play the next match and the one after that. Of course, there were various ways to relax. We played a bit of mini-golf and took a trip to Bayern Munich's stadium to visit their museum. But, as I said, if it wasn't a matchday the most important thing was to ensure proper recovery.

#### What is your coaching philosophy? What is your game plan?

I'm a coach who likes his team to be dominant, to run the match, have a lot of possession. These days, everyone knows how to defend, and every team has two fast players to counter. This makes my preferred style of football much more challenging for a coach. The pressure for results and the fear of being sacked and losing income do not help to encourage positive play. Everyone looks for a way to win. This does not always mean building a

strong team or developing good players. Another problem for me as a coach in the fourth league, where in theory I can look for players for the Regions' Cup squad, is that there aren't so many young players. Many are well over 30. They love football as they have always known it. They are not candidates for my team.

#### And how often do you need to adapt your philosophy and tactics to your players' abilities?

It happens. Like the previous edition of the Regions' Cup finals played in Ireland, where my plan to dominate received a reality check. Instead our opponents took the ball and dominated possession themselves. Possession football is not always possible, because the opponent doesn't allow it. Another practical issue is that Śląza is not a rich club. We don't have money, and the quality of our pitch is what you see. To be honest, it's not easy to control the ball on this surface, making our efforts to dominate play even harder. →

“I'm a coach who likes his team to be dominant, to run the game, have a lot of possession. These days everyone knows how to defend and every team has two fast players to counter. Working on how to dominate and play possession football is much more challenging for a coach.”



Normally, Grzegorz Kowalski coaches Polish fourth-division club Śląza Wrocław.

Artur Hojny





Artur Hojny

“What is often difficult about this job for coaches is remembering that our players are not fully professional. We demand a lot, but these boys rarely come to training rested. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. They are tired after coming straight from work or college.”

Despite this, we always set ourselves high standards. Sometimes I wonder, looking at these conditions, whether we should really demand so much of ourselves? If we did not dominate an opponent, does it really mean that we played poorly? Perhaps we should be praising the other team for making things difficult for us.

**Tactics is one thing. Figuring out your opponents is another. What did you know about your opponents in the Regions’ Cup finals?**

When it comes to in-depth knowledge, this was indeed a problem. Regions’ Cup squads are generally assembled at the last minute so there is no way to take a ‘sneak peek’ at the opposition. And even if the team has played before, so much will have changed since their last match that there is no point watching them. They will have completely different players.

Our first match, against the Russians, was a great unknown for us. But we already knew a bit about our second and



Bavaria's Michael Kraus up against Dolny Śląsk's Dawid Pozarycki in the Regions' Cup final in Burghausen in June.

Sportsfile

third opponents as we had the benefit of watching their first outings in the Regions’ Cup. We used this opportunity to work out what to expect. We try to take a professional approach to every aspect of what we do. If it is possible to find out about an opponent’s style of play, we will take advantage. I have an inquisitive mind; I like to know any information that might affect my work and how my team performs. I never turn down the chance to watch rivals.

**All five of the goals scored in the final were from penalties. Is there any explanation for this? It doesn’t often happen that there are five penalties in one match.**

As a coach, I’ve been involved in thousands of matches, but I don’t remember anything like that. Five penalties in a single match? No, I’ve never experienced this. It’s hard to explain, but one thing I can say is that before the final we made our players work on set pieces. When the players are tired

from a tournament played in very high temperatures, set pieces become very important. That’s how it turned out in the final. Winning that match had special significance for Lower Silesia. In the history of the Regions’ Cup, just two teams have won the tournament twice, of which only Lower Silesia triumphed away from home, on both occasions.

**At amateur level, do you control the players’ diets and nutrition?**

We try to pay attention to these matters as much as possible. From time to time we organise training sessions specifically dedicated to diet and nutrition. When we are at a training camp, we also provide guidelines for our hotel’s kitchen. Obviously, it’s not at the same level of detail as professional football, but we don’t completely ignore it. Our masseur actually knows quite a bit about this topic, so we usually leave everything to him. It’s also helpful that our camps take place at centres that specialise in hosting sports’ teams. They are familiar with what food to prepare for footballers.

**What did you find most difficult about the Regions’ Cup finals? The fact that some of the players have other jobs, the level of football, or something else?**

In terms of players’ jobs, it wasn’t a problem. A lot of them are students although some have other jobs. When it comes to the quality of football, I can tell you that at the press conference before the finals, representatives of every team, apart from maybe the Russians, were saying they had come to win. When it was our turn, we joked that we had come to visit Bavaria. Seriously though, the level of some of the teams was extremely high. Take the Spanish team, for example. They did not hide the fact they wanted to take the cup home and were doing everything possible to make that happen. In the end, though, it was us who qualified from the group and won the final.

Speaking more generally however, what is often difficult about this job for coaches is remembering that our players are not fully professional. We demand a lot, but these boys rarely come to training rested. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. They are tired after coming straight from work or college.

**Did you feel the support of the fans during the finals?**

Yes. Admittedly, during the group matches there were only a few people in the stands, but lots of Poles came for the final. The players’ families were brought in a special coach from Wrocław. This meant that Polish fans were in the stands and, in this respect, we did ourselves proud.

**Did you get on well with the other teams?**

From what I could see, the players were more focused on themselves. It was a competition and there was rivalry, so nobody sought contact with the other teams. I should point out though that the organisers had the great idea of organising a dinner after the group phase. This was a fantastic occasion which allowed the teams to mingle wonderfully. I remember a nice moment when somebody, probably the French, sang a song in their own language. Then, others joined in. There was of course the Russian ‘kalinka’, known all over the world. Us Poles also sang something. It was truly a very nice atmosphere. I also remember another

special moment. When the Russians entered the room, they received a standing ovation. Why? For fair play. They had nothing to play for in their group match with the Spanish team, as they had no chance of qualifying. Yet they still played with total commitment, won the match and demonstrated the importance of fair play. I will remember that for a long time.

**The rules do not allow it, but out of curiosity, if you could put one player from the Polish national team in your squad, considering your philosophy, style of play, and maybe weaknesses in the team, who would you choose?**

I think Robert Lewandowski. Not only because he is currently considered the best Polish player but, above all, because we are missing this type of classic number 9 in our team. Such a player is very useful. So if I could, I would go for Lewandowski.

**What do you see as your greatest coaching success?**

It’s sometimes hard to define success. I’ve developed a few players who are well known today in Poland. One former player of mine once told me that “whenever

I speak to any player who has worked with you, they always name you among their top three coaches.” Nice words but, ultimately, when it comes to success with a team, the victory in the Regions’ Cup obviously deserves a mention. As I said before, most of the participating teams wanted to win but, in the end, we did. I arrived with memories of the previous finals in Ireland. I thought we had a better team there, and yet we lost every game. In Bavaria, it was different. We won the first match against the Russians and then we drew with a very strong Spanish team despite trailing until late in the match. We managed to compete with Spain in terms of possession, determination and intensity. Then, when we really needed it, we equalised in the last minute to stay in the tournament. Then there was the match with the Czechs where we played well but weren’t clinical enough in front of goal. And then there was the final which we have already talked about. Yes, I definitely count the Regions’ Cup as a coaching success. Regardless of the level, a coach must treat every player and every game seriously. And for amateurs, the Regions’ Cup is as important as the Champions League is to professionals. 🍀

“I definitely count the Regions’ Cup as a coaching success. Regardless of the level, a coach must treat every player and every game seriously.”



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