



Neglecting Football Intelligence

Setting up cones and sending players off to perform drills is relatively easy for any soccer enthusiast, but running sessions that give young players the chance to use their brains as well as their feet is much more difficult.



Many youth soccer coaches make the same mistake: they pursue short-term goals over long term development. Too often the focus is on physical conditioning rather than on developing the soccer intelligence players need to achieve their potential. Whilst players may emerge from the foundation stage of their training physically fit and with good ball skills (technique), they often lack the intelligence they need to solve problems, anticipate the flow of the game and make the right decisions on where and when to play the ball. The result is players with adequate ball

control but without the intelligence to use the ball wisely.

Horst Wein, a world-renowned soccer coach educator, was once quoted 'An ounce of intelligence is worth more than a pound of muscle' when describing the outcome coaches should be achieving with their players. Physical conditioning changes will fluctuate as players mature physically, whereas long term training focusing on soccer intelligence will remain even as children are going through changes in their maturation.

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ESPZEN Soccer School, since inception, has focused on soccer intelligence by coaching players to develop technical and decision making skills which affect both their feet and



their head. Helping young players to develop soccer intelligence is one of the hardest challenges coaches, soccer schools and academies face. For that reason it is overlooked by many, particularly by those coaches who have not been through the relevant training courses and gained industry recognized qualifications.



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A lack of intelligence can however be clouded by youth coaches focusing on short term results at the junior level by engaging and recruiting the most athletic children who have some technical ability. This strategy will ensure more games are won than lost, but youth coaches must look deeper than the

result alone, ideally by watching back a video replay, or reviewing performance fundamentals such as:- number of completed passes, number of combination passes, time in possession, did all the individual team members contribute to the performance equally, how effective was the off the ball movement ? Were the goals a result of opposition mistakes, individual brilliance or intelligent team play? Has the team been taught “how to win football, before the players have been taught how to play football?”

A leading indicator of an intelligent team / players is the ability to keep the ball, how many junior / youth teams are able to keep the ball for more than 5 – 10 seconds? Keeping possession is all about coordinated team movement and positioning, without intelligent positioning keeping the ball would be impossible. Furthermore intelligent movement also needs to be coupled with intelligent passing (decision making), not only passing to the correct player given the situation but also passing to the correct foot.

The difference between retaining possession and losing possession could be as simple as passing to your team mates back foot. Similarly if a player is not positioned correctly to receive the ball, he may spend an extra half a second to move the ball from under his feet, which can be the difference between losing or retaining possession. Ultimately teams / players who are able to keep possession will have more tools and options to break down their opponents than those who can't. Coaching possession is about teaching decision making, and guiding players to become problem solvers.



Coaches focused on short term results by choosing the most athletic players and focusing on technique and physique only love to say, we are developing winners, but they are not. They are actually developing losers because they are not giving their players the tools to compete and win later at higher levels of sport. The obsession for short term success destroys the long term possibilities for players.

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Two decades ago, children with a love of the game would play soccer for hours in parks or in the streets. But in the age of video games, the internet and other distractions, children will inevitably spend more time looking at a screen than playing with a ball at their feet. This means that today’s young players often arrive at training soccer school’s without the fundamental foundations of ball control or any soccer intelligence displayed by previous generations.

This problem is exasperated when coaches focus too much on stamina and technique alone. But a team is unlikely to be successful in the long term, if players are not able to make quick and accurate decisions on the pitch. Including how to solve problems presented in

front of them, their positional role and responsibilities, and what they need to do with the ball.



For this reason, it’s vital that coaches find ways of developing their young players’ soccer brains to match their technical skills.

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As football coaches we also recommend to parents to watch your young player’s teams and watch how they play. Are they encouraged to play out of from the back, pass to the keeper, play the ball on the ground and take chances? Mistakes will surely happen and games will be lost. Does the coach encourage the team kick the ball as far as they can so the striker can score a lot of goals? Mistakes will be minimized and the team will undoubtedly



win some trophies.... However in the latter scenario development is sacrificed. Trust in the team that plays the right way and learns from their mistakes, but don't take our advice for it, we prefer Laureano Ruiz's explanation, the man who many claim to be the reason behind Barcelona's playing style:

"Let us say that you and I coach two teams with kids that are 10, 11, and 12 years old and all are about equally good. You try to teach them to play good football, a passing game and with tactical basics while I tell mind to only play long balls and try to shoot. I can assure you that at first, I will always win against you, by using your mistakes. Break a bad pass and goal. If we however continue with the same training methods during a three year period, you will most likely win every game against us. Your players will have learned how to play while mine haven't. That's how easy it is"

ESPZEN Soccer School defines soccer intelligence as the ability for players to solve soccer-specific challenges all over the pitch. Intelligence is explicitly focused upon via our carefully designed practices and small sided games which challenge the players technically, physically, psychologically/socially and tactically.

"Trust in the team that plays the right way and learns from their mistakes"

Our training sessions and match day coaching allows players to learn through guided discovery, as we believe the solutions to these challenges are more valuable and long lasting when a player learns them for themselves rather than being told the answer.

Intelligent players pick up more complicated information quicker, learn how to play as a team more cohesively, understand how to keep possession, where and when to play the ball, and how to adopt various styles of play.

"Football is a simple game, but playing football simply requires individual and team intelligence"



Facilitating a player's learning is core to our philosophy - ESPZEN Soccer School is the only soccer academy in Singapore that utilizes elevated video recording of matches / training from our UK imported 7.5 meter high Tower Cam. The footage is extremely valuable to facilitate a young player's development as it enables players to reflect upon their



performance and see opportunities for alternative movements / passes that perhaps were missed in the midst of the game. Our Video Analysis is supplemented with statistical analysis which further provides Coaches quantitative information on a player's performance

ESPZEN Soccer School firmly believes that the game is not played with just the feet, it is played with the brain as well. If a young player's training program does not focus on developing a player's brain in conjunction with their technical ability, their true potential will not be met.



Football is a simple game, but playing football simply requires individual and team intelligence.

Article written by English FA Registered and ESPZEN Soccer School Coach, Founder and Director Lee Taylor 2015



"Football should be played with an efficient, economical, measured, possession based approach, where pass quality combined with intelligent and timely support and movement lead to progress and penetration through the thirds of the field to provide goal-scoring opportunities IF counter attacking possibilities are denied."



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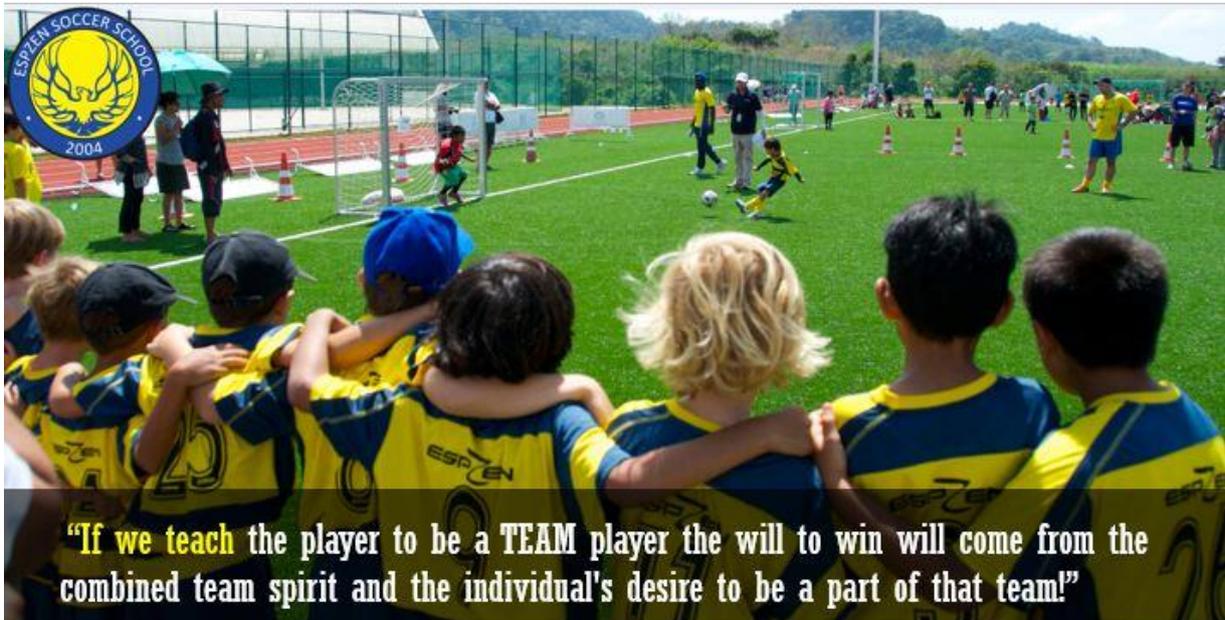
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"If we teach the player to be a TEAM player the will to win will come from the combined team spirit and the individual's desire to be a part of that team!"

ESPZEN SOCCER SCHOOL

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"Developing Technique & Football Intelligence"