



Future Visions

A look at what the future of the game holds in store

An educational organization like the NSCAA Academy must continually prepare for the future. The NSCAA Education Committee recognizes the need to review developments in the game, revise the Academy curriculum, train instructors for the long term and look forward. Someone once said, "Soccer is a game of tomorrows, not yesterdays." That has to be the maxim of an educational organization like ours.

There is no one better to see into that future than Dick Bate, Canada's former director of coaching and an English FA instructor. With a reputation as the world's No. 1 coach educator, Bate is a great thinker and student of the game. In demand around the globe for his expertise and communication style, he was the natural choice when the NSCAA Academy asked "What should we be preparing our coaches for in the foreseeable future?"

In a game that is evolving daily, "Reflection and projection are vital ingredients for progress," to quote one of Bate's presentation slides. It should be noted that as a European, Bate uses a database from English Premier League, UEFA Champions League and the EURO 2008 Championships. The following is a summary of the presentation Bate made to the NSCAA instructional staff prior to the 2009 NSCAA Convention in St. Louis.

Physical Demands

Speed and Work Rate: The ever-increasing lightning pace of the game was predicted by Dynamo Kiev's Valeri Lobanovsky in 1996 when he said, "Thinking faster, acting faster, is the future of football." At the highest levels, players cover more than eight miles, including 1.8 miles of high-intensity sprinting, per game. The number of sprints in the English Premiership has doubled since 2002. Bate argues that these distances will increase 20 percent by 2025. Players are moving faster over longer distances and are bigger, stronger and more resistant to injury than even five years ago. Game speed has been enhanced by larger player pools, increased numbers of substitutes and improved recovery and regeneration strategies developed by the small army of sports scientists utilized by top-level clubs.

Genetics and Lifestyle: To accommodate these developments and to identify players able to perform at increasingly faster speeds, Bate predicts that genetic screening will become commonplace in a limited form. Players' lifestyles will be monitored carefully as clubs invest more money into their development.

Tactics

Positional Play: Tactically, the best teams have 11 technical players (including the goalkeepers, who now employ their feet seven times more than their hands). Attacking defenders and anchoring midfielders will become more prevalent as

counterattacking and "countering the counter" become vital aspects. Low-pressure defending and "semi-positions" (i.e. 1-4-1-4-1) will be featured more commonly, and "wrong footers" who will carry the ball laterally across the field (think of Ronaldo) will appear on the flanks.

Possession Soccer: Improvements in playing surfaces, footwear and technical ability will enable teams to keep possession of the ball for longer periods before delivering penetrating passes into the penalty area for forwards making diagonal runs from outside to in. Chelsea had an average of 496 passes per game for the month of November, with an 87.7 percent completion ratio. This was 321 passes more than Stoke, a Premier League team that plays direct football. In the EURO Championships, Spain had 569 passes. Midfielder Senna had 111 passes with a 90 percent completion rate.

One-Touch Possession: Goals are being scored from

counter from their defensive half. In response to the counterattack, coaches are having one or even two holding midfielders in front of the central defender(s). Teams are overloading the middle of the field, which somewhat negates the threat of the counter down the center of the field and means that more attacks are coming from flank positions. As with the French 1998 World Cup championship team, the crosses are provided by the fullbacks. The game is, indeed, being played within the width of the penalty area.

In summary, Bate foresees the following:

Future Game

1. Speed of movement, number of sprints and distances covered by players are increasing. Speed of reaction to the events in the game is increasing.
2. Ability to play one-touch football is improving, more craft and deception before receiving the ball and prior to passing are commonplace. All players are expected



longer passing sequences. Additionally, players are passing the ball with one and two touches. In the Champions League, 48 percent of Manchester United's goals were scored after a series of one-touch passes. One interesting point was the number of entry passes into the penalty box from the mystical "Zone 14," a zone delineated by the way the groundskeepers cut the grass for the EUROs. This zone is just at the top of the "D" and is about six yards deep. In 10 Premier League games, 73 percent of the goals scored came via a possession in Zone 14. In response to lengthy periods of ball possession, teams will need to be prepared to defend for longer periods and concentration will become paramount.

Transitional Play

Counters and Countering the Counter: Counterattacking and preventing counters is becoming prevalent at all levels. In 2005-06, 42 percent of Chelsea's open-play goals came from counterattacks; 71 percent of those goals began with a

to be technically proficient.

3. Shorter passing, a "possession-based" game and the ability to play into, inside and through congested areas are vital. Long pinpoint vertical passes over the "block" also are becoming imperative.
4. Counterattacking is a priority. Development of counter-attack mentality upon winning the ball and upon losing the ball is key.
5. Zonal back four with a holding midfielder is the only constant. Flexibility and interchangeability ahead of these five players is the norm.

Future Player

1. Extended technical range. Ability to control difficult passes at difficult speeds is vital. All players in all positions will need to be technically proficient.
2. Must be multi-positional.

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