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Requirements Needed for the Development of More Creative Football Players

By Horst Wein

Horst Wein is a leading figure in youth football development, and has worked with many leading professional clubs and National federations. He has written dozens of books on youth football development, and his methods have been advocated by top international managers such as Arsene Wenger. Ministry of Football shares his passion for allowing children more freedom to discover themselves and their potential.

We have all had the potential for creativity since we were born. We only differ in how well we exhibit this creativity and in the areas in which each person is able to become creative. Most of us are more creative as an infant than as an adolescent or adult, because there are more opportunities and possibilities to play at the pre-school stage than later on in school. The development of the creative capacity is not obstructed in kids up to 6 years old, as during these years creative expression is considered as being normal and healthy.

However, when the child starts school the evolutionary process can cease. This is due in many cases to the negative effect of teaching methods with intentional orientation and very strict norms. Suddenly the available time to play is reduced, and the result is that school frequently suffocates the natural development of creativity.

Once young children enter school the left hemisphere of their brain, where logical thinking, calculation with numbers and verbal expression are located, is the main focus of stimulation. Pupils are generally expected to solve "closed", defined tasks along the lines indicated by the teacher without being allowed to contribute something of their own to the solution of the task or to be creative.

The development of creative potential needs systematic stimulation of the right hemisphere of the brain. That is why in school, like in football training, "open" tasks are needed. These "open" tasks require young people to be creative to find the best solution to the given problem.

As long as the left hemisphere of the brain prevails in the school classroom and in football training sessions, less creative players will arise in the world of football. Learning in football must be extended, more frequently offering the possibility to think and to learn incidentally and in divergent ways. The coach does not have to impose everything! It is not a doctor-patient relationship with set prescriptions.

When playing football, children face problems in developing their creativity because of traditional coaching practices. Many of the methods that for decades have been essential components of the learning-teaching process in the football world, are now-a-days obstacles that inhibit the expression of the creative potential within each child.

We should give children the opportunity to explore and to discover through playing; to infect them with the creativity shown by their teammates and opponents and without having the coach interceding frequently. By correcting from the start we expose the young player to an intensive pressure. Being stressed is a contradiction to the development of creativity.

Practising should happen in a game context. Statements like 'you only learn to play football by playing it' must be re-discovered and be considered in the planning of all training sessions in which drills are still dominant and excessive. Children should be exposed to more game plays and less analytical practice.

Each training session should include a great variety of games. When the children play, they should have fun and be keen. If the young player does not identify himself with the coach's proposed game, the creative capability will remain asleep. The more the players are enjoying the game and the ball, the more it stimulates the development of creativity within the young football player.

The coach should not only make sure that the objectives of a simplified game are mastered by most of his players, but should frequently encourage the children to create different games through modifying the rules proposed by the teacher. Frequent rule changes, introduced by surprise during the practise of the game, force the players who want to win to adapt to the rule changes, using their creativity.

The young players, especially those of 7 to 12 years, should not be pressured by their coach to quickly pass the ball in order to allow for better team-play and winning. They should frequently have the opportunity to be in love with the ball, to dare to improvise their play and take risks, without fearing the possible consequences of having committed a mistake or to have lost the possession of the ball. Unfortunately this no longer exists, because winning has become too important, even at the lowest levels!

Young players who treat the ball as their best friend and often do their own thing are frequently more creative than those who are coach-orientated and accept what the coach demands. To progress in their creative development in football, children should exhibit a certain degree of independence from their coaches! This is why young players should practice and play as often as possible without the presence of their coach (i.e. in the street, in the park, in the court yard etc.) because their absence allows them to feel more comfortable to explore their innate potential without the fear of getting criticized when making mistakes.

Instead of the coach being the main character in the teaching and learning process, he should often transfer responsibility to his young pupils and ask them, through systematic questioning, to solve most of the situations that he presents. A true master in teaching never gives the answers to the problems, but helps his pupils to find and discover them on their own, guiding them to correct results. The game of football itself must become the teacher.

In most football fields, the young players are dominated by instructors, who allow relatively little freedom of movement and decision-making to the young players whose opinions are practically not taken into account. For the coach it is important

to always have everything under his control. When a player departs from his norms, he is often chastised and told to respect the coach's directions.

Often instructions are given to the players about what to do and how to solve the problem – for example, where a player has to position himself on the field. Many coaches think for their players, instead of stimulating them to think for themselves. If during a competition, the coach does not direct his players, many parents may think that the coach is not motivated nor is qualified for his work. Many coaches value compliance very highly. If a player begins to show signals of autonomy and self awareness, he will receive a call from the coach to get in line. This way, over the years, the young football player gets used to following the coaches' instructions and plays according to the information received but without putting in his own thoughts and his personal flair.

When these young players arrive at the age of 14-15 years, it is obvious that they are going to face serious problems if they are requested to make their own decisions, because for many years they have been trained to execute only what adults have told them. It is logical that at this point it is very difficult for them to become a composer and creator instead of a simple executor, as for many years they have not been allowed to play in a creative way.

To summarize, most of our young talent grows in an atmosphere which is noticeably hostile towards creativity. Their familiar school surroundings, especially between the ages of 7 and 14 years, are characterized generally by a intentional direction of learning (with strict norms), which limits personal initiative, independence, originality and the value of trying to do things in different ways. On the football field, this produces players who are not capable of enriching the football game and their teams' performance with their creativity, fantasy and imagination.

For more info on Horst Wein's range of football coaching manuals:

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