

THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL CURRICULUM

“THE ROADMAP TO INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS”

HAN BERGER, NATIONAL TECHNICAL DIRECTOR



AN OFFICIAL FFA PUBLICATION



FOOTBALL
FEDERATION
AUSTRALIA



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Foreword



How should Australians play football? What skills and style best suit our nation and our hundreds of thousands of players? These are fundamental questions that should engage the minds of everyone involved in the game from the professional tier to the grassroots.

The FFA National Football Curriculum not only provides answers, but explains the philosophy behind how we should play and illustrates practical steps that bring the thinking to life in training and matches.

The first version of the National Curriculum in 2009 was a breakthrough in setting out a broad agenda, but this second version is presented in a way that will resonate in schools, clubs, academies and elite development pathways, in fact anywhere football is played.

I'm delighted to formally publish the National Curriculum and I commend the FFA Technical Director Han Berger and his coach education team for the meticulous approach to this work.

Having this Football Curriculum available for all the coaches across the nation is a key part of FFA's Strategic Plan to make football the biggest and most popular game in Australia.

I look forward to seeing the football that will flow as this curriculum influences our next generation of players.

David Gallop
Chief Executive Officer, FFA



David Gallop
Chief Executive Officer, FFA

Preface

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I am proud to present the second edition of the FFA National Football Curriculum (NFC), with the sub-title “The Roadmap to International Success.”

Although there have been many positive developments since the introduction of the first NFC in 2009, the understanding of it in the broader football community can still be much improved especially at grassroots level.

The first edition mainly explained the philosophical starting points but lacked detailed explanation and practical examples.

This new version explains the mental and physical characteristics of children and young adults during the various developmental stages and how these stages are linked. It also contains Model Sessions for every phase and explains how to

organise sessions and plan 6-week training cycles for a season.

The Curriculum is a practical guide for coaches and players of every age, gender or level as well as their parents.

The National Football Curriculum intends to deliver an **Australian** playing and coaching philosophy based on analysis of top football and scientific research, taking the specific circumstances and characteristics of Australian football into consideration.

So, it is not someone’s opinion or a copy of another country’s curriculum.

It is aimed at a **fundamental transformation** of the way football is played and coached in Australia, especially at youth level, in order to develop future generations of players and teams that will enable

Australia to maintain a leading position in world football, particularly within the Asian Football Confederation.

I hope this new version of the National Football Curriculum will create a better understanding of what high quality youth coaching is about and therefore help to dramatically raise the standard of our game at grassroots level.

After all, only a strong and broad foundation will create quality at the top.

Many challenges still lay ahead but if we all work together in the interest of our great game, we can overcome any roadblocks and hurdles and make Australia truly a World Leader of the World Game.

I’d like to especially thank my colleague Kelly Cross for his contribution to the realisation of this Curriculum. My thanks are also due to Ange Postecoglou, Ben Coburn and Dr. Donna O’Connor for their peer reviews of this book.



Han Berger

1. Fundamental Transformation



The preface mentioned the necessity of a Fundamental Transformation, but why is it necessary to change the way we play (and coach) football?

After all, in the not too distant past Australian football produced many great players who played in the top leagues of Europe, while the Socceroos qualified for the World Cups in 2006, 2010 and 2014 and the Matildas were crowned Asian Champions in 2010.

The players and coaches involved have brought football to where we are now in the FIFA Rankings: about 40th in men's football and 10th in women's.

This is a great achievement in a country where historically football has not been the number one sport.

But for some reason Australia has not produced the same number of top players in recent years and fewer Australians are starters at clubs in the European top leagues.

There are many theories and opinions about the cause of this, but what is not in doubt is that top football has developed physically - but especially **technically** - to a breathtaking level over the last 10-15 years.

The modern game at the highest level is a fast, high intensity, possession-based game where 'special' players with match-winning qualities make the difference.

Another reality is that the changing dynamics of the football landscape force us to adjust in order to stay competitive with the rest in the world.

What worked for us 20 years ago, doesn't necessarily work anymore. Today, for example, more players go overseas at ever younger ages. Also, the introduction of the A-League forced us to revise the AIS program where the career of many of the 'golden generation' started.

Since the AIS program is aimed at Australia's best young players, and in order to avoid competition with the A-League clubs for the same players, we had to significantly lower the age of the AIS program from Young Socceroos age (U/19-20) to Joeys age (U/16-17).

The responsibility for the development of the 17-21 year old players rests now with the A-League clubs through the National Youth League teams.

The connection between the programs of State and Territory Member Federations that underpin the National programs also required reviewing and adjustment.

The government-run State Institutes of Sport have in recent years moved away from the football programs to primarily focus on 'Olympic' sports.

In order to safeguard this important layer of the talented player pathway, FFA and the Member Federations have taken over the ownership of these National Training Centre programs.

Every Member Federation now has an identical Football Department structure with a Technical Director and coaches for the male and female National Training Centre (NTC) and Skill Acquisition (SAP) programs.

These programs as well as the National Youth Teams and AIS have already been applying this Curriculum over the last couple of years.

At these levels the positive effect is already becoming visible, especially in the brand of football these teams are playing and the type of players that are being developed.

There have also been encouraging signs in the A-League. Ange Postecoglou, one of Australia's top coaches, has seen evidence of 'footprints in our football landscape' and 'an impact at A-League level', especially reflected in the success of Brisbane Roar's high possession, technical brand of football.

Where the change hasn't yet fully happened and the National Football Curriculum still has to make a real impact is at the level underpinning these elite programs.

The National Football Curriculum is therefore primarily aimed at the thousands of children and youngsters who are playing football at grassroots level as well as their coaches and parents.

It is at this level that a fundamental change in mentality and approach must take place and the National Football Curriculum should have its biggest impact

From 'fightball' to football

What exactly do we mean by a fundamental change in mentality and approach?

Generally in Australian youth football far too much emphasis is placed on results and this hinders the development of skill, creativity and tactical cleverness - characteristics we currently lack compared to the best of the world.

Of course everyone wants to win when playing football, that's the purpose of the game.

But in youth football we should primarily teach young players the proper skills and allow them to play without negative pressure, to express themselves and be allowed to make and learn from mistakes.

In other words, there needs to be a better balance between results and development.

Is this some sort of woolly opinion?

Consider the field research study (2011) by Chris Sulley of Europe's most renowned youth academies (Bayern Munich, Ajax, Barcelona, the French National training centre at Clairefontaine, and others). Sulley states:

“All the organisations focused on development above and beyond winning on match day”

Apparently the best in the world share the same point of view.

Doubters should also read the book 'Coaching Outside the Box' by Mairs and Shaw.

'Winning at all costs', which is often the traditional Australian way, has a number of very negative side effects for youth development.

If winning is made too important in youth football, coaches automatically tend to select physically and mentally more developed children. These so-called early developers are usually children born early in the year, for being 10-11 months older usually makes a big difference at a young age.



1.

Fundamental Transformation



This phenomenon is universally known as the Relative Age Effect (RAE) and results in overlooking large numbers of kids who may potentially be more talented than the early developers.

Another negative factor is that an unhealthy level of psychological pressure at a young age suffocates creativity and initiative. The result is that you develop **reactive** instead of **proactive** behaviour: out of fear of being criticised when making a mistake, children start looking at the coach for solutions instead of trying to solve football problems themselves.

Finally, fitness is made far too important in youth football because many coaches think that is what is going to make their team win. Interestingly, analysis shows that fitness was not a decisive factor at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The fittest teams were not the most successful, but rather the technically best teams containing the 'special' players had the greatest success!

More importantly, by having young players running laps around the park and doing push-ups and sit-ups, we waste a lot of very valuable **football** training time.



By the age of 12-13 the basic skills and right techniques need to already be imprinted. After that age you can only catch up and patch up to mask or modify bad habits and technical deficiencies. So skill and technical development should be our focus, especially given the fact that in Australia we only play football 6 months of the year while in most of the world football is played year round!

This (and much more) is what is meant by a **fundamental transformation** and that's what the National Football Curriculum is essentially about. We have no more time to lose because football does not stop developing to wait for Australia. Not only is the development of the world's best nations accelerating to a breathtaking level, also some Asian countries are catching up with us rapidly.

However, we have to realise that only a consistent and structured **long term** approach will deliver the necessary changes and improvements.

A good example of that approach is Japan which started their football development plan 20 years ago with the results only now starting to become visible.

Sir Trevor Brooking puts it this way in his foreword of the English FA's new Technical Guide for Young Player Development.

“Developing young players who are capable of excelling on the international stage is not an issue which will change in the short-term and it is crucial that a long-term development mindset is adopted”

Vision & Philosophy

FFA's Football Vision and Philosophy is not just one individual's preference or opinion. It is based upon extensive analysis of (top) football and scientific research, taking the Australian circumstances and characteristics into account.

In this chapter we explain the rationale of:

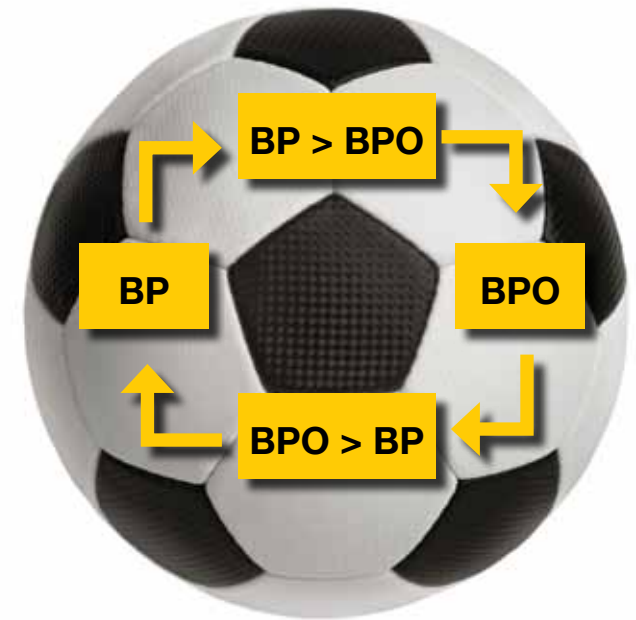
- FFA's playing philosophy
- FFA's coaching philosophy
- FFA's vision on how to bring the theory to life.

FFA's playing philosophy

Although football is a very difficult game for players to master, the essence of the game can be very simply expressed:

'Two teams of 11 players try, within the rules of the game, to win by scoring at least one goal more than the opponent'.

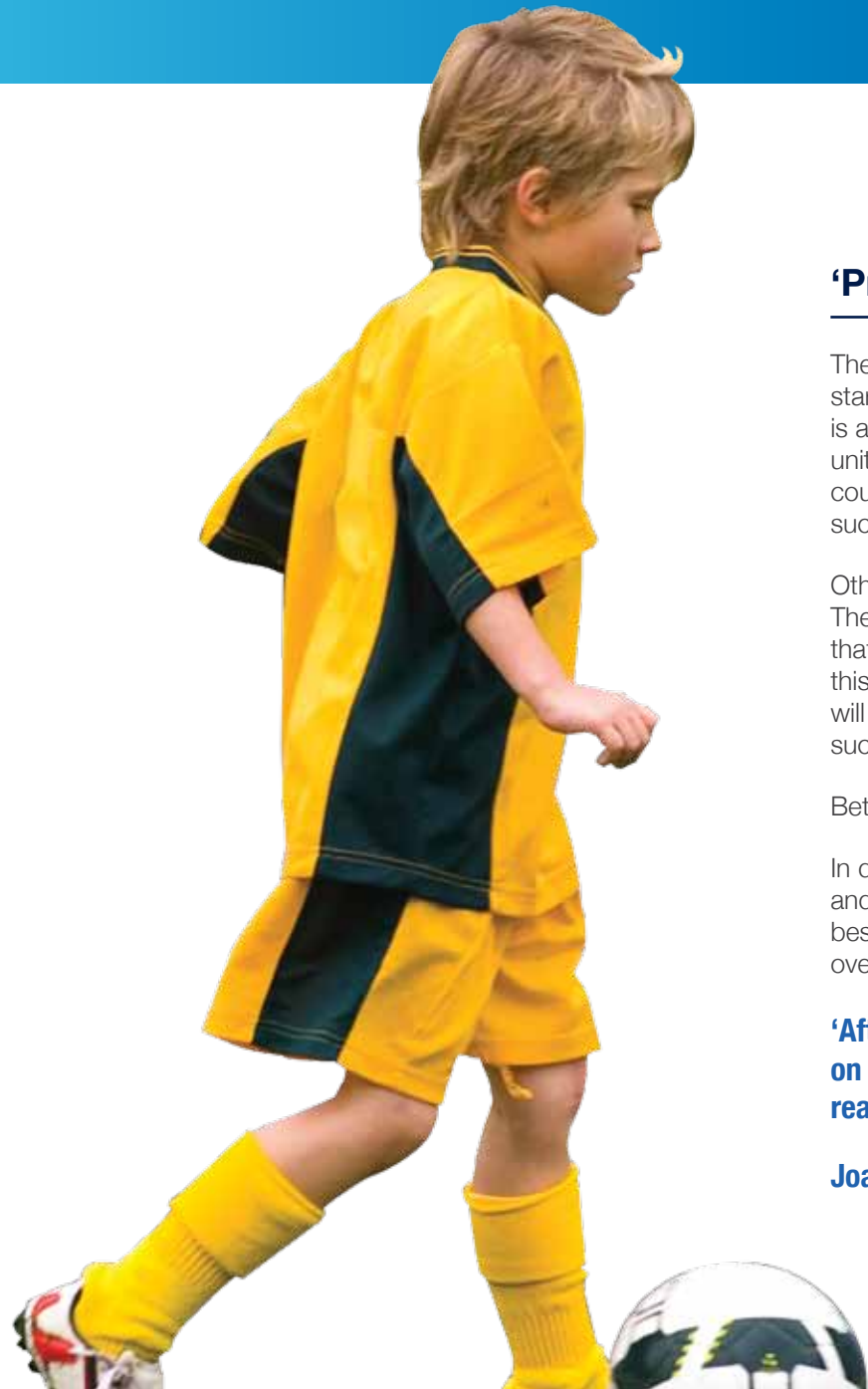
In other words, the purpose of the game is trying to score goals when we have the ball and prevent the opponent from scoring when they have the ball.



Any game of football, regardless of formation or playing style, can be divided into 4 phases:

1. Ball Possession (BP) : this is the phase when our team has the ball and we are attacking;
2. Ball Possession Opponent (BPO) : this is the phase when the opponent has the ball and we are defending;
3. Transition to defence (BP>BPO) : this is the phase when we lose the ball and must switch from attacking to defending;
4. Transition to attack (BPO>BP) this is the phase when we win the ball back and switch from defending to attacking.

We call these phases the 'four main moments'



‘Proactive’ or ‘reactive’?

There are many successful playing styles in world football. Some teams take defending as their starting point. Their first priority is not to concede goals and their playing style and team organisation is attuned to that. They allow the opponent to have a lot of possession and defend as a compact unit in their own half. When the opponent loses the ball in these tight areas, they try to strike on the counter attack. We call this a reactive playing style and some teams have been and still are very successful playing the game this way.

Other teams take attacking as the starting point and their first priority is to score goals. Their playing style and team organisation is attuned to putting the opponent under so much pressure that they will make defensive mistakes and concede goals. These teams take the defensive risks of this playing style for granted, counting on the fact that they will always score more goals than they will concede. This proactive playing style is generally more attractive but also more difficult to apply successfully.

Between these two extremes there exist of course also many successful ‘hybrids’.

In defining FFA’s Football Philosophy and Playing Style we looked closely at the Australian mentality and psyche, both in general life and in sport. It’s obvious that a **proactive** playing style corresponds best with the Australian mentality: the fighting spirit of Australian teams and athletes is renowned all over the world and Australians always want to ‘go for it’.

‘After the World Cup in 2006, we decided to concentrate more on ball possession and on initiating play. We set out to change our footballing culture and to move away from reactive play’

Joachim Löw, National Team Head Coach, Germany

The English FA adopted a 'Direct Play' approach in the 80s and 90s, based on some statistics that showed most goals were scored following moves of 3 passes or less. If that was true, it was argued, then why bother with patient build-up and controlled possession? Why not simply launch continuous long passes towards the strikers, hope for the 'second ball', and then score in 3 passes or less?

This approach led to some short-term success for teams who adopted it (Wimbledon, Norway, Republic of Ireland) but did not lead to any real success for England at international level; in fact, one might suggest that the opposite has occurred.

Many have questioned the validity of the '3-pass rule', as the data didn't distinguish between three-pass moves resulting from long passes and those from winning the ball in the opposition half, set plays, etc. Obviously, many set plays or quick regains that led to 3-pass goals may have been gained after a multi-pass phase of possession.

It was also apparent from the data that at the higher levels of football, moves involving a higher number of passes are more successful.

The English have long since abandoned their 'Direct Play' policy, and those responsible for it have been accused of 'poisoning the well' of English football.

To gain further information on 'possession-based' versus 'direct play', we took a close look at the best in the world, using FIFA's analysis of the 2010 World Cup, and the UEFA Technical Report on the Euro 2012 tournament.

FIFA's expert analysis of the top three teams in South Africa in 2010 (Spain, Holland and Germany) was as follows:

Spain (1st)	Holland (2nd)	Germany (3rd)
Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield	Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield	Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield
Excellent passing game	Excellent passing game	Excellent passing game - Good options for the player in possession
Influential individual players (INIESTA, XAVI, VILLA)	Influential individual players (SNEIJDER, ROBBEN)	Influential individual players (SCHWEINSTEIGER, OEZIL, MUELLER)
Comfortable in possession when under pressure	Disciplined, well-organised defence	Disciplined, well-organised defence
Disciplined, well-organised defence	Dangerous at set pieces	Dangerous at set pieces
Immediate pressure after losing possession	Winning mentality	Winning mentality
Winning mentality	Good links between the team lines	Excellent team spirit
Good links between the team lines	Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good 1 v 1 situations	Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good 1 v 1 situations
Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good 1 v 1 situations	Midfield pressing	Rapid transition from defence to attack
	Immediate pressure after losing possession	Effective use of full-backs

Vision & Philosophy

There are several striking similarities between these three successful teams at the 2010 World Cup, but in terms of answering our questions about 'possession-based' football or 'direct play', the answer is clear. All three employed a 'patient build-up from the back through the midfield' and an 'excellent passing game', and no mention of long forward passing can be found. So direct play does not appear to be the way to gain success.

The UEFA report on Euro 2012 also states that the 'trend towards possession-based football is undeniable', especially in comparison with Euro 2008.

Euro 2008		Euro 2012	
Highest no. of passes in one game		Highest no. of passes in one game	
Spain	510	Spain	929 (almost double the record in 2008)
Highest Team average, passes per game, was Spain with 450		Every team except Ireland averaged more than 450 passes per game (which was the tournament high in 2008)	

Detailed data shows also that 'the trend is away from a long-passing game' (a 'long pass' is defined as one of 30 metres or more; a 'medium pass' is between 10 and 30 metres and 'short passes' are those which cover less than 10 metres)

- Long passes by the finalists throughout the tournament: Spain 8%; Italy 11%
- Most long passes: Ukraine (equal bottom of their group) 18%; Republic of Ireland (bottom of group, 0 points) 19%

The only teams that were described in 'direct play' terms were:

- Republic of Ireland (bottom of their group): 'Frequent use of long passes'
- Ukraine (equal bottom of their group): 'Attacks sometimes based on direct passes to Shevchenko'
- Sweden (equal bottom of their group): 'Blend of direct passing and combination play'

(The Czech Republic who lost their quarter-final to Portugal, are described as employing 'regular use of direct, back-to-front passes to lone striker Baroš', however, they were also analysed as having 'a possession game', 'clever combinations' and 'fluent, incisive middle-to-front passing')

The evidence from Euro 2012 seems to add more weight to choosing the 'possession' end rather than the 'direct' one. 'Direct play', based on frequent long forward passes, does not appear to be a policy of the top-performing nations.

The analysis of these major tournaments in 2010 and 2012 clearly shows that with a direct playing style it is very difficult, if not impossible, to be successful in modern top football, and that the most successful nations can be categorised as preferring the 'possession' end of the spectrum.

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Barcelona, one of the world's leading club teams, appear to be the extreme in 'possession-based football', consistently averaging around 68% possession in the Champions League.

Spain, however, averaged 54% when they won Euro 2008, with only 48% in the Final; they averaged 59% at Euro 2012, and in the Final had 47% in the first half but thanks to Italy being a man down finished with a marginal 52%-48% advantage.

What is important to stress here is that we should not start an 'obsession with possession': the crucial point is this:

Possession alone is not the key

It is foolish to believe that all you need to do in order to win football matches is end up with a higher percentage of possession than your opponent. We are all aware of matches in which the winning team's possession statistics are inferior to those of their beaten opponents.

At Euro 2012, Russia and Holland averaged 56% of the possession in their three games, but went home after the Group Stage. England, despite only 36% (25% during extra-time) against Italy, could have won the quarter-final shootout.

Possession is not an end in itself: it is a means to an end. What is the point in keeping possession in your own half for minutes on end, if there is no end product? The only statistic that matters is the scoreline!

What appears to be the difference with the really successful teams is how possession leads to scoring chances.

The Euro 2012 report puts it this way:

'As in the UEFA Champions League, the challenge was to translate possession and inter-passing into a positive attacking game'

Vision & Philosophy

When one looks closely at the statistics from Euro 2012, one finds an interesting point: a key difference between the top teams and those eliminated in the Group Stage is the number of passes made in the attacking third of the pitch (and successful completion of those passes).

Spain, Italy and Germany had 50% more passes in the attacking third on average than those eliminated.

Spain averaged 217 passes in the attacking third (80% successful), Germany 200 (80% successful) and Italy 135 (70% successful).

In comparison, Ireland averaged 90 passes in the attacking third, with around 54% success.

These 'successful passes in the attacking third' figures also translate to the real measure of effective football: shots on goal and shots on target:

Spain, Italy and Germany = >25% more shots on goal on average than those eliminated.

Spain, Italy and Germany = almost 60% more shots on target on average than those eliminated.

Recent data from the English Premier League supports this evidence.

'SUCCESSFUL PENALTY AREA ENTRIES'

- The Top 4 EPL teams were approximately 40% better than the teams placed 9th-20th

'TOTAL TEAM SHOTS'

- The Top 8 EPL teams were approximately 25% better than the teams placed 9th-20th (a reflection of significantly higher 'successful penalty area entries')

'TOTAL TEAM SHOTS ON TARGET'

- The Top 8 EPL teams were approximately 40% better on average than the teams placed 9th-20th (a reflection of the two points above)

The evidence therefore leads us to believe that the 'possession-based' end of the spectrum is the wisest choice.

However, the emphasis must be on EFFECTIVE possession.

Individual Skill and Combination Play

In modern football, more and more teams are able to defend effectively, and most have the ability to form a 'defensive block' of eight or more players in a compact unit. Therefore, successful teams have had to develop exceptional ability in breaking down these defences.

A key factor in defeating the 'block' is creativity. Teams need to have skilful individuals who can 'pick the lock' and find a way through the tight defences. The top four teams at the 2010 World Cup all had more than one of these special 'match winning' players:

Match-winning Players – FIFA World Cup 2010	
Spain	Xavi, Iniesta, Villa
Holland	Sneijder, Robben, Van Persie
Germany	Oezil, Mueller, Schweinsteiger
Uruguay	Forlan, Suarez, Cavani

As well as creative individuals, teams also need quick and clever combination play. This involves two or more players working together to produce unpredictable inter-passing and mobility in order to penetrate the 'block'

These individual and combination qualities are also key points in UEFA's analysis of the top four teams at Euro 2012. They are also mentioned in the reports on Croatia, Czech Republic, England, France, Holland, Russia and Sweden.

Australia must work to develop more players like these in order to improve performance.

Counterattacking

What can also be deduced from World Cup 2010 and Euro 2012, is that top teams need to have the ability to launch quick counterattacks. One can also observe the potent use of counterattacking in successful club teams such as Real Madrid. However, UEFA point out the 'declining effectiveness of the counter': in Euro 2008, 46% of the open play goals were from counters, but in Euro 2012 only 25% of goals from open play were derived from counters. This decline is also observed in the UEFA Champions League, where the percentage steadily fell to 27% in the 2011/12 season.

The evidence suggests that the ability to counterattack quickly and successfully is a 'weapon' that successful teams have at their disposal. Even 'possession-based' teams will look for the opportunity to do so when their opponent is disorganised or slow in transition.

We must ensure that this 'weapon' is also developed. The danger of over-stressing 'possession and more possession' is that players may not look for counterattacking opportunities, and if they do, may not be equipped to exploit them.

Mental Strength

In the UEFA report on Euro 2012, reference is made to a theory that 'teams can be measured by their reactions to adversity.' Asked to name the factors that can make a difference in a contest between evenly-matched teams, Gérard Houllier responded: 'Heart, commitment and mental resilience.'

Croatia's coach, Slaven Bilić, echoed this opinion. 'We are not as strong mentally as teams like Germany or Italy. We need to improve this and we are working hard to do that.'

It is well-documented that Australia has always possessed this 'never-say-die' quality. Indeed, our National Team players themselves, in 'The Way of the Socceroos', singled it out as a major strength of Australian football. Whereas countries like Croatia apparently need to develop this attribute, it seems to be an in-built component in Australia. Therefore, we must ensure that we maintain this valuable asset of our players.

However, it should be stressed that 'mental strength' alone will not make us a world leader. It is a quality that supports good football, but it doesn't replace it. Houllier's words above define this 'X Factor' as something that will give an extra edge to one team, not as the only ingredient required for success.

UEFA's analysis of the teams at Euro 2012 gives special mention of mental strengths when describing Poland and The Republic of Ireland.

POLAND: 'Strong team ethic, fighting spirit and character'

IRELAND: 'Energetic and highly competitive; mentally strong; never-say-die attitude'

Both these teams, however, finished at the bottom of their respective groups, highlighting the fact that these qualities alone are not sufficient to bring success.



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Here, it is interesting to look at some of the main points of the analysis of Ireland at Euro 2012.

Ireland Euro 2012 (last place)

- Defence well equipped to deal with long balls and high crosses
- Frequent use of long passes
- Good 'second ball' mentality
- Emphasis on quick deliveries to classic twin strikers
- Heroic defending: blocks, interceptions, tackles
- Energetic and highly competitive; mentally strong; never-say-die attitude

Now consider the fact that Ireland played three matches, lost all three, scored one and conceded nine! What use is all that heroism and competitiveness when you finish bottom of your group? What use are all those long passes and a 'well-equipped' defence, if you rank 15th or 16th in all the key attacking statistics?

FIFA's analysis of Australia at the 2010 World Cup consisted solely of the following points:

Australia FIFA World Cup, 2010 (21st place)

- Deep defensive block
- Attacks using the width
- Immediate pressure after losing possession
- Strong, hard-working players
- Determination

Clearly, we too are noted for our physical and mental qualities and must never lose this strength. It is also clear, however, that we must work to ensure that future analysis of Australia at major tournaments also includes more prominent mention of technical strengths and that our key statistics reveal a more successful attacking threat.

Approach to Defending

FFA's philosophy is that it is preferable to be in possession of the ball as that will allow us to dictate what happens in the game. Obviously, if we have the ball then the opponent cannot score.

Logically, therefore, when we lose possession our objective is to get it back as soon as possible. This does not necessarily mean that we must continuously press the opponent high up the field and close to their goal. However, it does mean that we should defend in an intelligent manner, finding the best way to win the ball back according to the situation.

At Euro 2012, UEFA's Technical Report states that the priority for most of the teams was to transition quickly into defensive positions. At the same time, though, their intention was to put pressure on the ball carrier.

It was noted, however, that whenever it was possible many teams would engage in collective high pressing, based not only on pressurising the ball carrier, but by using additional players to cut off the short-passing options. In this way, they were able to restrict the game within small areas, with the players on the far side pushing across towards the ball to complete a back-to-front and side-to-side squeezing operation.

This ability to high press was closely linked to an attacking philosophy: those teams who were prepared to push a larger number of players forward to join in the attack were the ones who had players in place to immediately exert high pressure and win the ball back quickly. By contrast, teams with a more 'direct play' approach, using long passes from back third to front third, were less able to utilize a high-pressing game.

Spain, the Champions, often used the high-pressing practices of FC Barcelona, but like many of the teams at UEFA EURO 2012 did not attempt to sustain this high-intensity pressure for long periods.

The FIFA Technical Report from the 2010 World Cup also identified a trend towards 'early pressing'. A link was suggested between this quick pressure and limiting opponents' ability to counterattack.

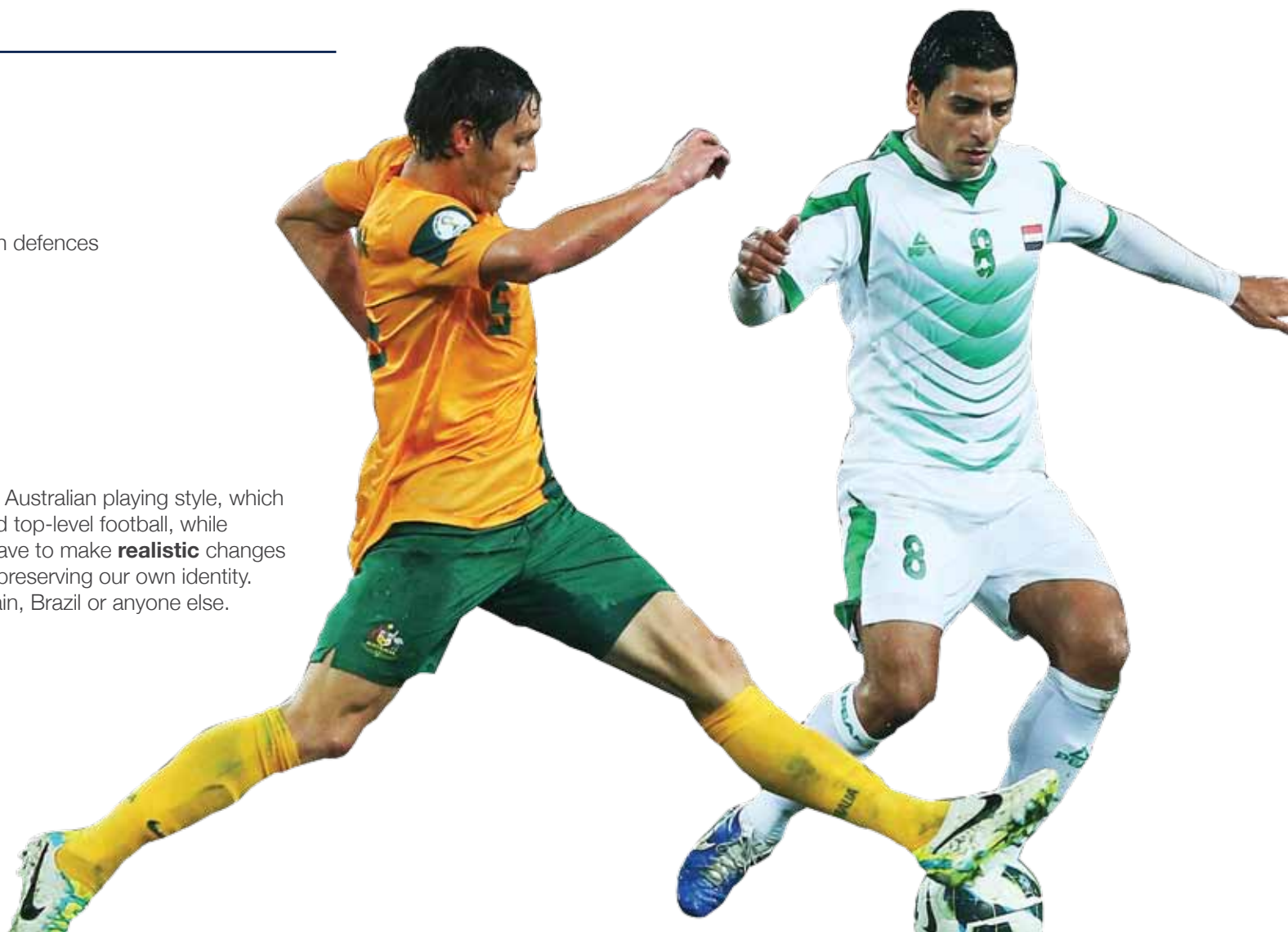
There is no evidence from the last World Cup and most recent European Championship that 'retreat defence' is a tool used by leading football nations. In other words, top teams do not seem to react to loss of possession by ignoring the ball carrier and immediately retreating to defensive positions deep in their own half to wait for the opponent.

FFA's philosophical preference, then, for a 'proactive' style of defending seems to be matched by trends at the top level of the game, while also fitting perfectly with Australia's traditional competitiveness and winning mentality.

Summary of key points:

- 'Proactive' rather than 'reactive'
- 'Possession-based' rather than 'direct play'
- 'Effective possession' is the key
- Creative combination play is required to break down defences
- Unpredictable individuals are the match winners
- Ability to counterattack quickly
- Commitment and mental resilience
- Proactive defending

The challenge now is to define a successful 'modern' Australian playing style, which incorporates the analysis of the world's top teams and top-level football, while maintaining Australia's unique strengths. We clearly have to make **realistic** changes and adjustments to our traditional playing style while preserving our own identity. It's not realistic to try and make Australia play like Spain, Brazil or anyone else.



National Playing Style Statement

FFA's Football Philosophy can therefore be summarised in the following statement of a national playing style:

A proactive brand of football, based on effective possession with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals.

Defensively the key components are quick transition and intelligent collective pressing.

The Playing Style is underpinned by a strong 'team mentality', capitalising on Australia's traditional strengths.

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This means we must focus on developing teams and players that are able to execute this playing style and we therefore looked at the main prerequisites.

Key Elements	Prerequisites
Dominate and control the game through effective possession	Quality positioning play
Get the ball and our players into goalscoring positions in a structured manner	High technical level (all players must be comfortable on the ball)
Break down compact defences through individual skill and creative combination play	Special players
Strive to possess the ball (the more we have the ball, the less we have to defend)	A suitable playing formation
Win the ball back through quick transition and intelligent collective pressing	Willingness and ability of all players to immediately transition from BP>BPO and BPO>BP for 90 minutes (high-intensity football)
	High level of football-specific fitness (the essence of the Football Conditioning methodology)

To explain further, a characteristic of possession-based football is to dominate and therefore control a game by retaining the ball. **Effective** possession means that keeping possession should not become an aim in itself but that it should be a means to getting the ball and our players into goalscoring positions in a controlled manner (as opposed to 'trust to luck'). Effective possession should also lead to a higher number of successful entries into the attacking third, more shots on goal and more shots on target.

To be able to do that **all players**, including the goalkeeper, must be technically proficient and **all players** must understand and be able to execute quality positioning play.

What is also important in breaking down compact defences, as well as combination play and individual skill, is stretching the opponent's defence and using the width of the pitch. The FIFA analysis mentions this as a characteristic of all of the top 3 teams of the 2010 World Cup. All three had creative and fast wingers, which is one reason why we have a preference for a 1-4-3-3 formation. Another reason is that pressing an opponent's defence is easier with three attackers who are spread across the width of the pitch rather than with two.

A high-intensity playing style like this is only possible if all players are able and willing to consistently execute the team and individual tasks during the whole game. Whether players are able to do that depends on their **football-specific** fitness while their willingness to do that depends on discipline and perseverance: traditional Australian characteristics.

In Chapter 3 we will explain when and how to develop the main elements of our preferred playing style through the Building Blocks methodology.

Vision & Philosophy

Further lessons from the 2010 World Cup

Clear Attacking Strategy

FIFA reports that 'the most successful teams had a clear attacking strategy'. We believe that the processes that have been put in place in Australia as a result of the National Football Curriculum will provide our National Teams with this attribute. A 'clear attacking strategy' is much easier to achieve when you have a clear philosophy on football and the vision to make it happen. We look forward to the day when football experts look at our teams and easily recognise the 'Australian style' and our specific brand of attacking football.

Solid Youth Development Work

A link was observed between those countries who have been very proactive and successful in Youth Development, and the countries who performed well in South Africa.

Australia aims to enhance and extend its Youth Development programs and educate more Youth coaches in order to achieve similar success at senior national team level. One can already see how Japan have demonstrated the value of such a policy.

What does the future look like?

'The football of the past we must respect; the football of today we must study; the football of the future we must anticipate'

In projects such as this National Football Curriculum, the first two of the above should not pose too many problems. However, the third one is not so easy.

We have used an evidence-based approach to identify trends and patterns in current top-class football. But where is the evidence of the future? Of course, it doesn't exist.

Therefore, FFA plans to constantly monitor world football, regularly review the journey we have set out upon, and where necessary re-adjust the compass.

We feel, though, that football in the future will always require technical players who make clever and creative decisions quickly, which is our stated focus in Youth Development.

We also feel that the Australian culture will not shift away from the proactive, never-say-die, winners mentality, and therefore the fundamental philosophy is well-positioned.

Perhaps one could say that a true 'proactive' nation will be one of those that actually shapes the future rather than react to what others are doing: because if you are always trying to copy others, you will always be at least one step behind.

FFA's Coaching Philosophy

So, we've outlined FFA's specific philosophy on how football should be **played**, but FFA also has a specific philosophy on how football should be **coached**. In Chapter 4 (Coach Education) FFA's coaching philosophy is explained in detail, but the essence of **FFA's coaching philosophy** is this:

Traditionally, it has been accepted that football has four main components (Technical, Tactical, Physical and Mental). Based on this, coaches and coach educators have tended to distinguish these four elements and develop them separately. We call this the '**isolated approach**'.

However in doing this, the holistic process of **perceiving** (a football situation), **deciding** (how to act) and **executing** (the acting itself) is being separated. Football is a game of constantly quick-changing situations. Not one situation is the same as the one before or after. The complexity of football situations is determined by what we call the 'football-specific resistances'.

This means that I have to do 'something' with the ball (which requires 'technique') but that 'something' depends on football-specific resistances such as: how much time do I have; how much space do I have; in what direction must I go; where are my team-mates; where are the opponents and what do they do; etc. The football-specific resistances activate the holistic PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION chain. In the traditional isolated approach, the focus is often only on the EXECUTION link of the chain.



2.

Vision & Philosophy

ISOLATED APPROACH

Here is a visual to explain this point:



In this example dribbling/running with the ball is being practised but there is no real football context since most of the game specific resistances (space; time; direction; team-mates; opponents) are missing. From the chain PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION only the execution part is being practised.

This player will probably get very skilful at 'dribbling through cones' but the question we have to ask ourselves is:

“How much does this drill help the player to get better at running with the ball in a real game, or are there better ways to achieve that goal?”

Scientific research shows that the most **educationally effective** way to develop football players is to leave the PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION chain as much as possible intact. This is FFA's philosophy on coaching football and we call this the **holistic approach**. The rationale and detail of FFA's coaching philosophy is further explained in chapter 4.

Another important aspect of the holistic approach is that we believe it's not only the most educationally effective way, but also the most **time effective** way. This fact is very important since we play football only 6 months of the year in Australia! In most of the world football is played year round. In many cases also the quality and frequency of practice is higher. This means that we have to be very conscious in deciding what we do with our precious practice time. We cannot afford to waste one minute of valuable training time on non-football-specific practice.

How else will we ever be able to become good enough to challenge the best in the world?



2.

Vision & Philosophy

Holistic vs Isolated approach



In Australia there is an especially strong tendency to regard fitness training as something exclusive and therefore separate ('isolate') it from football training. But by doing that we again lose valuable time of which we are short as it is!

Of course you need to be fit to be able to perform optimally but it is perfectly possible to get fit for football by **playing football**. Football-specific fitness and conditioning are therefore also a part of FFA's holistic coaching philosophy.

All the generally accepted physiological training principles are being applied through the Football Conditioning Methodology that is part of this Curriculum: the players acquire high **football-specific** fitness levels without wasting valuable football training time!

Bringing the curriculum to life

So, we have now outlined and explained FFA's football and coaching philosophies. The next question is: "how can we bring the theory to life?" In the vision of FFA, **Coach Education** and **Youth Development** are the primary strategic spearheads to realise the Curriculum's objectives.

Why Youth Development?

Well, youth development in Australia is presently inconsistent in both quality and approach due

to factors such as the diversity and self interest of clubs; coaches; agents; private academies; schools; etc. The quality of youth coaching is generally still very poor and the competition structures are of insufficient duration and quality. If we are serious about one day challenging the best of the world, we have to make considerable changes and improvements in our approach to youth development. What specifically needs to be done, and how, is explained in Chapter 3: The Building Blocks.

Why Coach Education?

The reason why Coach Education is the other strategic spearhead in bringing the Curriculum to life is obvious. The only way to really bring about change and improvement is to better educate coaches, especially the ones that work with youth players. Better coaching will inevitably lead to better football.

That's why we have developed the FFA Coaching Expertise Model and re-structured all of the FFA coaching courses. However, it is important to understand that this is a long term process and will take a couple of generations of coaches going through the new coach education pathways before the effect will become visible. The FFA coaching philosophy and the Coaching Expertise Model are explained in detail in Chapter 4.



3.

The Building Blocks



The National Football Curriculum distinguishes 6 Building Blocks: 4 training Building Blocks and 2 playing Building Blocks.

The FFA Building Blocks Methodology is the framework that provides practical guidelines for coaches working at all levels of youth development in order to help them in answering questions such as:

- What are the mental and physical characteristics of players in the various development stages?
- What type of practices are best suited for specific age groups and why?
- How long should a session go for and how often should I train?
- How do I plan and design my sessions?
- What are points of interest when I coach my team during games?

With the aim to:

- Develop technically proficient players
- Develop tactically aware, proactive players
- Transform the physical and direct style of youth football in Australia to a successful style based upon technique and creativity

- To instil a lifelong passion and love for football in young players
- To create a real 'football culture' in Australia

The result of this approach must be future generations of players with the skills and habits to make Australia a successful contender on the World stage, both in men's and women's football. Does the Building Blocks methodology guarantee we will develop the next Lionel Messi in Australia? Unfortunately the answer is no, but this structured approach will certainly increase the chance.

There is no magic formula for developing special players but recent scientific research (Coyle; Ericsson, Gladwell; Syed et al) does provide some very interesting insights:

- 1. Talent is not 'innate'**. Messi (or any other outstanding performer in sports, science or art) didn't receive or inherit special 'genes' from birth
- 2. Every world class performer has a history of many years of deep practice** that started at a young age
- 3. A condition for many years of deep practice is intrinsic and sustained motivation**, a characteristic all top performers share.

No top performer has ever circumvented these rules! This doesn't mean however that geniuses do not exist. The top teachers and coaches Daniel Coyle interviewed for his book "The Talent Code" pegged the genius rate (Messi!) at about one per decade. Let us take a closer look at these insights.

If talent is not innate and excellence is the result of many years of sustained deep practice does that mean that anyone can become a top level player? Theoretically yes, although it's not that simple.

Many people may have heard of the so-called "Rule of 10,000 hours". This rule, introduced by the Swedish scientist Anders Ericsson, basically states that it takes 10,000 hours (or 10 years) of practice to reach a level of excellence in sports, science, art or any other field.

It is apparent that the **quality** of that practice is vital although, interestingly, research conducted by UK professor Mark Williams shows that time invested in **non-organised** practice, such as playing with mates in the park or juggling a ball in the back yard, is at least as important.

3.

The Building Blocks

Coaching

Quality of practice is clearly contingent on the importance of **good coaching**. Good coaching means **purposeful** practice and quality **feedback**.

Purposeful practice is always aimed at progress: after all, only by working at what you can't do will you turn into the expert you want to become. And quality feedback is the rocket fuel that propels learning. Without it, no amount of practice is going to get you there because "if you don't know what you are doing wrong you can never know what you are doing right". Good coaches are therefore able to design practice so that feedback is embedded in the exercise, leading to automatic adjustment.

A good way of visualising what 'purposeful practice' means is to picture something 'just beyond the player's reach' or 'just outside someone's comfort zone', so there is a challenge but not one that is too difficult.

Motivation

Intrinsic motivation means that the player has developed a true passion for football and the motivation to become the best they can be comes from deep inside. The chance of developing a passion for football is of course greater when you grow up in an environment with a real football culture, where you have role models and more and better opportunities. That is why developing a real football culture is so crucial for Australia.

It's also important to realise that it is impossible to 'impose' motivation. Pushy parents or coaches will achieve nothing (or the opposite of what they are looking for) if it isn't the player's own choice.

However if the motivation is intrinsic, the effect is very powerful. One of the differences between good performers and the very best is that top performers are able to "push themselves harder for longer" because their motivation level is higher.

Intrinsic motivation by itself however is still not enough, for only **sustained** motivation leads to excellence.

A prerequisite for sustained motivation is what Professor Carol Dweck calls a 'growth mindset', which basically means that mistakes are embraced and deficiencies confronted ("I can master this, I just have to practice harder") This mindset sees a setback as a motivational factor.

The opposite is called a 'fixed mindset'; for those people, failure is a de-motivator ("I will never be able to do this, I just don't have the talent")

Here, it is also worthwhile highlighting the fact that coaches also have fixed or growth mindsets, which can affect their own development as well as that of their players.

A growth mindset is a characteristic shared by most top performers

How can a coach or parent stimulate the development of a growth mindset in players?

- Praise effort, not 'talent'
- Emphasise that abilities can be transformed through application
- Emphasise that challenges are learning opportunities instead of threats

“Failure is a great opportunity for improvement”

To bring all of the above to life, FFA has developed the Building Blocks Methodology, outlining the logical and progressive steps necessary to achieve our long term goals.

Key points:

- Football is a very complex game and takes at least ten years to master
- A step-by-step, phased approach is required, taking into account the age of the player
- The logical approach we have adopted in the Building Blocks can be summarised like this:
 - simplified situations before complex ones
 - individual skills before team tactics
 - football development before physical preparation
- The age groups stated are guidelines not absolute rules; girls and boys develop at different rates, and players of the same age may be at different developmental stages
- Each Building Block has a clear, distinguishable focus, but the player's development should be viewed as a gradual, ongoing process towards game mastery
- It is an holistic approach, rather than a series of four isolated stages/concepts.

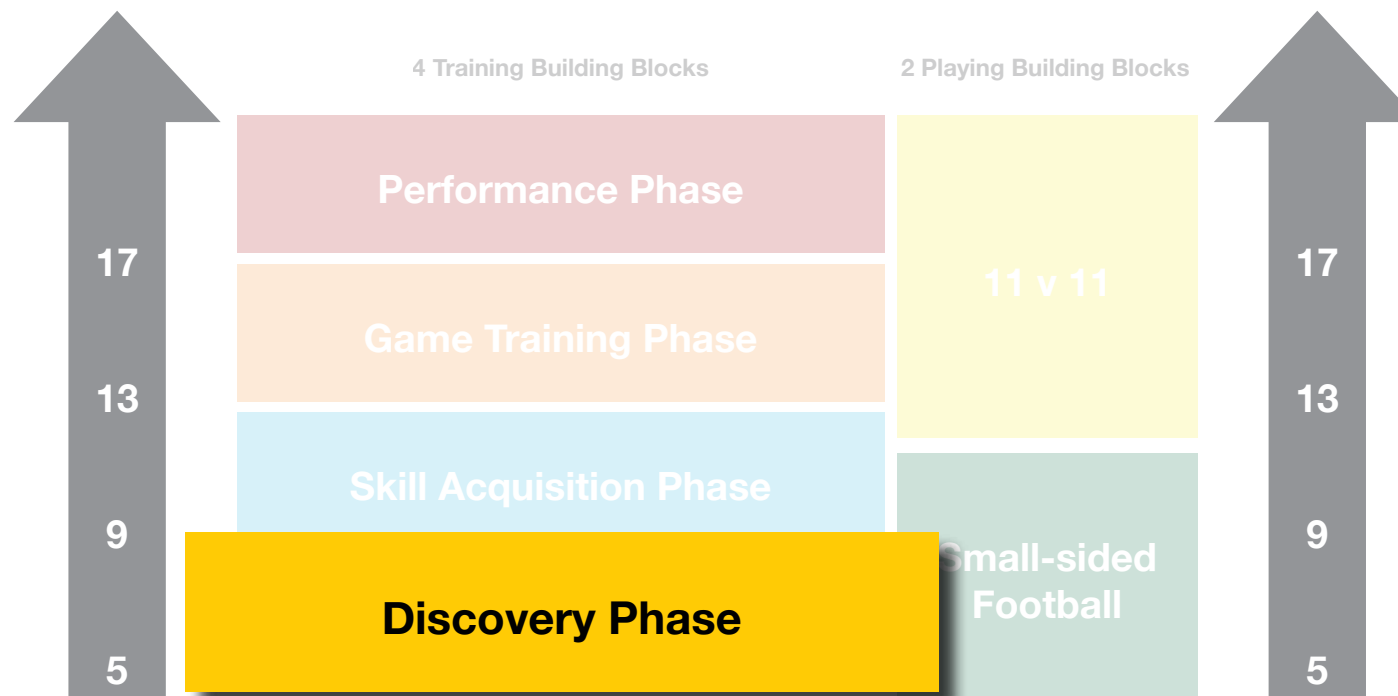
For example, although the focus in the Skill Acquisition Phase is on individual skill development, the player's tactical insight is being developed at the same time, but using the 'hidden learning' approach. The coach uses training exercises which involve as many of the game-specific resistances (team-mates, opponents, direction, goals, etc) as possible, so that game awareness is automatically developed, rather than trying to 'coach tactics'. Equally, technical development doesn't stop at the end of the Skill Acquisition Phase; it continues throughout the Game Training and Performance Phases, although it is now not the main focus.

Development of tactical insight doesn't suddenly begin in the Game Training phase; it is developed during the Skill Acquisition phase in smaller, simpler situations. Here, the players are introduced to the fundamental individual and team tasks that form the foundation of decision-making in the 11 v 11 game.

Let's now have a closer look at each individual Building Block.

3.

The Discovery Phase



- Discovering one's (im)possibilities through trial & error
- Natural development: 'learn FOOTBALL by playing football'
- No 'coaching' but organising fun football exercises
- Replicating the 'street/park football' environment of the past
- Emphasis on building a love of the game

The Discovery Phase (U/6-U/9)

Regarding the first Building Block, the points made earlier concerning the development of excellence don't really apply yet and fortunately things are still quite simple.

What are the characteristics of children in this age bracket?

- They are still 'clumsy' (lack fine motor skills), because they are still developing their coordination
- They have a short span of attention and are quickly and easily distracted
- They are 'self-centred' and not yet able to really work together (so do not ask them to perform team play, it is impossible for them!)
- They play or participate for fun with short bursts of energy and enthusiasm
- They are unable to handle a lot of information (instructions; feedback)

What does this mean for training sessions with children this age?

Just let them play a lot of varied fun football related games!

In the 'good old days' as a kid you learned to play football in the street or the park. There were no coaches involved who made you run laps or do stretches and push-ups. When you were with just one mate you played a 1 v 1 game, when there were 8 of you, you played 4 v 4. There were no referees either, you made your own rules and every problem got solved. You just played, every free minute of the day. Funny as it may seem, this was (and still is) the best possible way to develop a basic skill level, understanding and passion for football.

In third World countries the old saying "the game is the teacher" still applies and is one of the reasons why we find so many creative and technically good players from Africa and South America in the European top leagues. But in our developed society children do not play sports in the streets

and parks that much anymore. They watch television, surf the internet, play computer games, chat on Twitter and Facebook as well as having to study.

As parents we now send our children to a club or academy to learn to play football and, despite all good intentions, here we make the mistake of 'coaching' children this age.

The first and most important step when 'coaching' the youngest kids is to take the word 'coach' out of your mind. Your most important job is to recreate that street football environment, be an organiser of fun football-related practices and..... let them play! This approach, where they can 'discover' how the game works in a natural way, is the right one for the Discovery Phase.

**You'll find the
Discovery Phase
Model Sessions on
page 85.**



3.

Skill Acquisition Phase



- In the Skill Acquisition Phase the coach must focus exclusively on providing a solid foundation of **technical skill**
- If the player does not gain this **skill foundation** during this phase it will be very difficult to make it up later
- No amount of fitness or competitive spirit will ever compensate for deficiencies in **functional game skills**

The Skill Acquisition Phase (U/10-U/13)

The characteristics of children this age are:

- They are highly motivated and enthusiastic
- They are competitive, like challenges and want to show they're the best
- They are well balanced and coordinated
- They are very adaptive to learning motor skills
- Although still self-centred, they start to learn how to work together
- They are sensitive to criticism and failure (praise is important)
- They are physically and mentally ready for a more structured approach to training

As mentioned above, in the period before entering the growth spurt that goes hand in hand with puberty, children are well balanced and coordinated. This makes them very adaptive to developing motor skills (techniques) especially since this is one of the brain's key development periods.

The Japanese call this phase of 'turbo charged' technical development the 'Golden Age of motor learning'. In no other development phase in life will motor learning happen faster than here. As a logical consequence of the above, it makes sense that we make optimal use of this period to lay a sustainable technical foundation.

TECHNICAL SKILLS MUST BE DEVELOPED NOW

(if we miss out here it will hamper us for the rest of our playing career).

Hopefully it now makes perfect sense why we call this phase the 'Skill Acquisition Phase'. The focus during this period is on the development of the 'functional game skills'.

These are the technical skills you need to perform effectively during a game.

The word 'functional' emphasises the difference to 'un-functional' tricks, which may be fun to see and do but useless during the game.

The 4 Core Skills:

The FFA Skill Acquisition training program focuses upon developing four core skills when in possession of the ball.

1. Striking the ball

This includes all forms of striking the ball such as short/long passing; shooting and crossing

2. First touch

Controlling the ball with all allowed body parts

3. 1 v 1

All moves, feints and accelerations to get past and away from an opponent

4. Running with the ball

At speed (with a lot of space) or 'dribbling' (in tight areas), this includes techniques for protecting the ball and changing direction.

These four core skills cover 95% of the actions of any outfield player when in possession of the ball during a game of football. The other 5% consists of actions such as heading and throw-ins.

3.

Skill Acquisition Phase

Of course we can also distinguish defensive skills such as various tackling techniques and it goes without saying that the defensive 1 v 1 skills are equally important and must be properly developed too.

We made the practical choice to develop the defensive skills as part of the 1 v 1 practices. Although the emphasis is on the attacking skills, we are not ignoring the defensive ones. So, in the 1 v 1 Model Sessions, coaches will find the box below with coaching tips for the defender as well the attacker.

1 v 1 Coaching Tips	
ATTACKER	DEFENDER
“Go at the defender with speed”	“Show the attacker one way/force them away from goal”
“Use a feint to put the defender off balance”	“Bend your knees and stand on your toes so you’re able to change direction quickly”
“Threaten to go to one side then suddenly attack the other”	“The best moment to commit is when the attacker takes a heavy touch or slows down”

As far as heading is concerned, the advice is to start developing this specific skill at the start of the Game Training Phase. At younger ages heading is a ‘scary’ activity and not much heading takes place anyway since most players lack the power to play aerial balls.

If heading is practised during the Skill Acquisition Phase we advise the use of so-called super light balls (specially devised for youth football).

As we’ve explained earlier it takes many hours of practicing and lots of repetition to properly develop the four core skills with both feet and ‘automate’ the techniques. Automate means that we’ve practised the techniques so often that we can execute them without having to consciously concentrate on the execution.

We can compare this process with learning to drive a car: in the beginning we have to consciously think of every act in the process, we even tend to look where the pedals are. But after some time we drive from A to B while having a conversation, thinking deeply about something or making a (hands free) phone call. We arrive at our destination totally unaware of the driving acts we have executed on the way: driving a car has become an automatism.

The same principle applies for mastering the core skills: many hours of purposeful practice will eventually lead to automatism and we execute the skill ‘unconsciously’. When this happens we will, as a consequence, have more time for scanning our options and making decisions. With top level players the ball is ‘glued’ to their feet while they look around and check the options.

The principle of thousands of hours of practice leading to automatism applies to everything, from playing a violin to playing golf or football. Football however differs from golf because the technical skills must be executed under constant pressure of football-specific resistances (opponents; space; time; direction), in ever-changing situations.

Scientific research (Daniel Coyle, ‘The Talent Code’; et al.) shows that in football the most educationally effective way is to develop technical skills (execution) and perception skills (decision-making) **simultaneously**.

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This 'holistic approach' is one of the essences of the FFA Coaching Philosophy which is explained in depth in chapter 4.

So, herein lies the huge challenge for anyone working with players in this important age bracket: your primary role is that of a 'skills teacher' focused on individual technical development as opposed to being a 'team coach'.

Your mission is to 'automate' the core skills through lots of repetition, but at the same time avoid 'drill' practices, where there may be repetition but no decision-making.

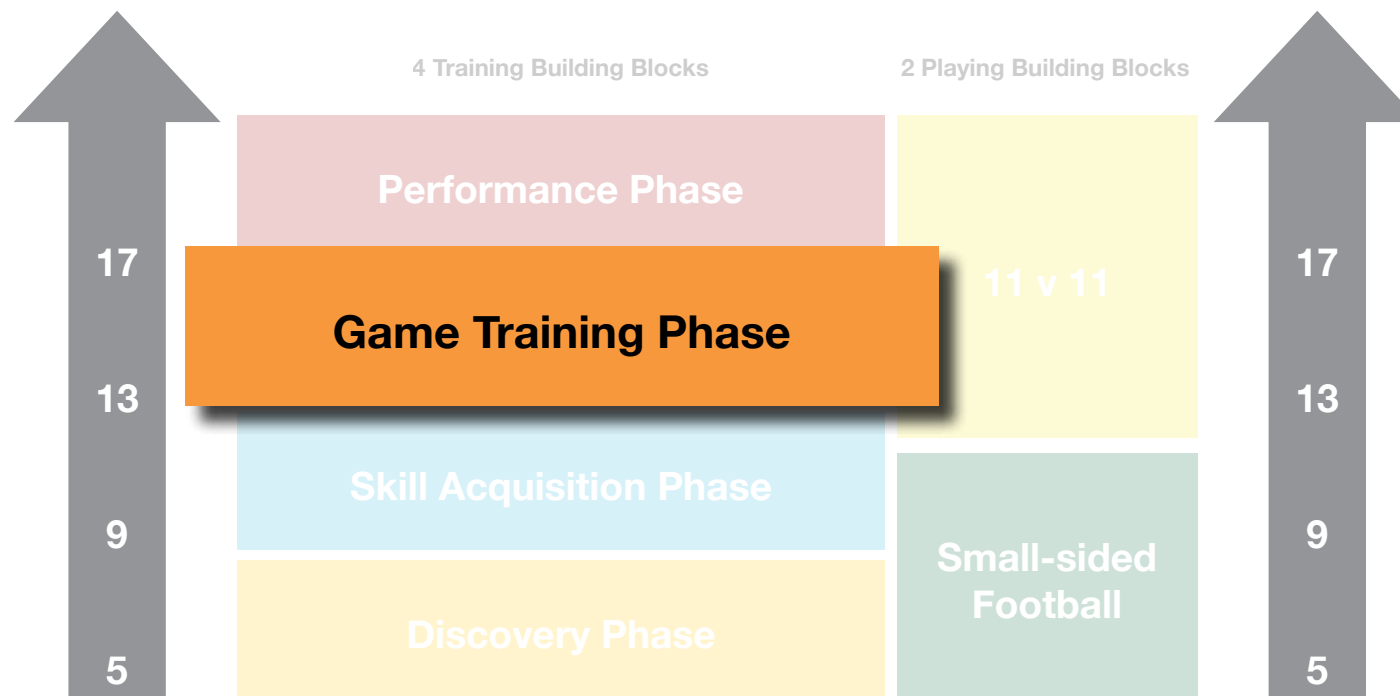
It's not easy to get this right!

You'll find the Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions on page 127.



3.

Game Training Phase



- Preparing players for senior football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting using 1-4-3-3 as the preferred formation
- Developing tactical awareness, perception and decision-making through a game-related approach to training

The Game Training Phase (U/14-U/17)

The most important aspect of this age bracket is the fact that these players are in (or entering into) the **puberty** phase which is a phase of radical mental and physical changes.

Huge changes in the hormonal system cause confusion while the physical changes can also unsettle the youngsters. Physically they may sometimes suddenly look like adults but mentally they often are still children, something that may also confuse coaches. Another aspect for coaches to consider is that in general, girls enter the puberty phase slightly earlier than boys.

The main **mental** characteristics of the puberty phase are:

- Sudden mood changes
- Resistance against authority
- Impulsiveness (first acting then thinking)
- Accelerated intellectual development
- Identity search which leads to a desire to be part of a group

The main physical characteristic of the puberty phase is a sudden acceleration in growth. One of the consequences of this **growth spurt** may be a temporary decrease of coordination and strength.

Because suddenly the bones start growing fast and the muscles and ligaments as well as the nervous system need time to adjust to the new proportions, players may look 'clumsy'. Players are also prone to overuse **injuries** like Osgood-Schlatter disease during this phase.

It goes without saying that it's of the ultimate importance that coaches working with players this age have knowledge and understanding of all these aspects to be able to guide youngsters through this critical development phase in a well-considered way.

While during the puberty phase players' physical and technical development temporarily stagnates or loses ground, their intellectual development accelerates as does their understanding of and appreciation for teamwork. This makes the Game Training Phase exceptionally suited for developing tactical awareness and insight.

Whereas the purpose of the Skill Acquisition Phase is to **acquire** the core skills, the Game Training Phase is about learning how to **apply** them in a functional way. In the Game Training Phase the focus shifts towards learning to play as a team and developing an understanding of the team tasks during the main moments (attacking; defending; transitioning), as well as the specific tasks that go with the individual team positions.

To be able to properly develop the team tasks and the individual player tasks we need the context of a playing formation. After all, team tasks and player tasks may differ depending on the playing formation.

The 1-4-3-3 formation

It is important to realise that we did not just take 1-4-3-3 as a starting point! Unfortunately this has been and continues to be widely misunderstood and far too much attention has been devoted to discussions about playing formations.

Of course there are many successful styles and formations in football but FFA considers 1-4-3-3 the most appropriate formation to develop an understanding of **team play** in young players.

Our opinion is supported by another very interesting quote from the Chris Sulley research on Europe's most successful academies:

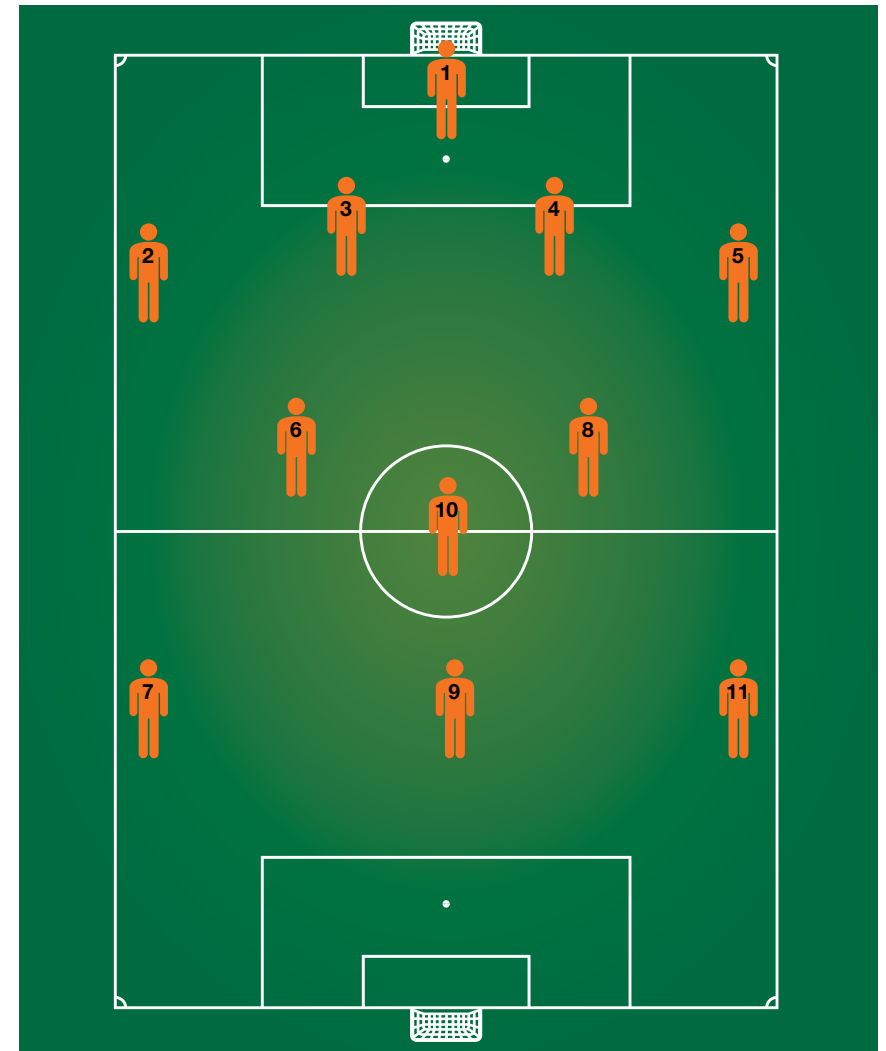
“There was a clear emphasis on a possession based philosophy and most employed a 4-3-3 model with an explicit attempt to pass the ball through the units. There was a tangible difference in the type of work delivered to the players from what is typically delivered at EPL academies. Early age players typically participated in random and variable practices that involved decision-making tactically. The consistent Talent ID criteria was centred around the player's ability to handle the ball, make good decisions and speed, as opposed to the notions of power, size and strength that still dominate the English youth system”.

3.

Game Training Phase

Why?

- In the 1-4-3-3 formation there are 3 lines with a balanced spread of players over the pitch ('triangles' of players). As explained earlier, this is one of the basic conditions for successful positioning play or to put it more simply: this creates a range of other, more 'logical', options for youth players. Instead of just kicking the ball forward, players almost 'automatically' start making combinations;
- The 1-4-3-3 formation stimulates the development of creative attacking players; more specifically the 3 attackers and the attacking midfielder(s)
- Defensively 1-4-3-3 also has an advantage since pressurising an opponent's defence line (proactive defending!) is easier to do with 3 attackers as it requires less running and is tactically less complicated
- For youth players, the positions and the attached player tasks are logical, recognizable and easy to comprehend. Moreover, every position has a specific number which makes learning to play as a team easier.

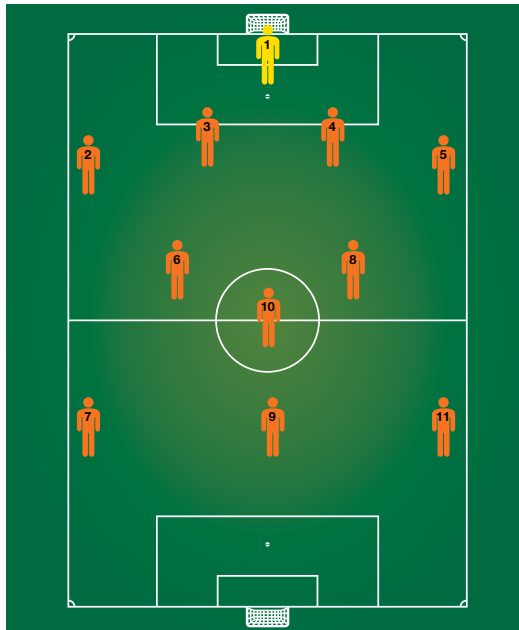


Competence profile - Goalkeeper #1

The goalkeeper is of course a special position in any playing system or formation. First and foremost it's the goalkeeper's task to keep the opponent from scoring in any possible way within the rules of the game. Some goalkeepers do that by making spectacular saves, others are great at organizing their defence and anticipating situations. Top keepers possess all these qualities as well as the physical and mental characteristics required.

A condition for our preferred playing style is that goalkeepers must be able to play with their feet as a prerequisite for possession-based football and the goalkeeper is an indispensable link for that.

As a consequence of defending high up the park, there will regularly be a big space behind our defence. This requires a goalkeeper to be able to play as a 'sweeper' which is another characteristic specific to the playing style.



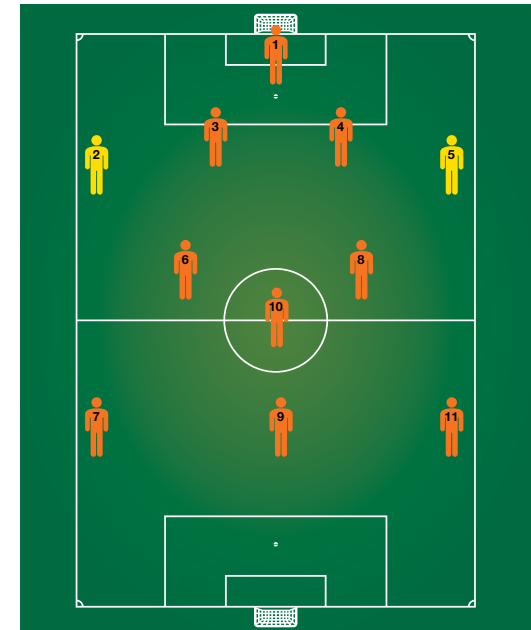
Competence profile - Full-backs #2 & #5

Full-backs in modern high-level football must be very versatile.

Defensively sometimes they have a direct opponent (winger) which requires strong defensive 1 v 1 skills. Sometimes they have no direct opponent so they have to defend 'positionally' which requires awareness and tactical insight. The role of modern full-backs in playing out and especially in attacking wing play has become vitally important.

When playing out, it's often the full-backs that can receive the ball from the goalkeeper because they do not have a direct opponent and are therefore unmarked.

In attack, more often than not it's the overlapping full-backs that provide the decisive crosses and assists. Especially in possession of the ball it's favourable if #2 is right footed and #5 is left footed.



3.

Game Training Phase

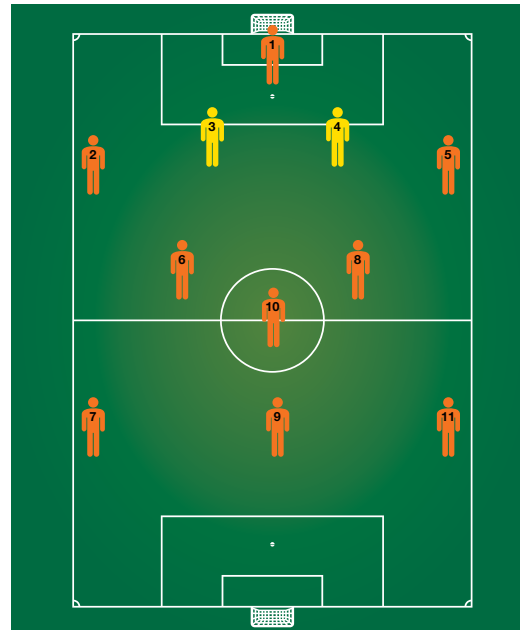
Competence profile - Centre-backs #3 & #4

Just like the full-backs, modern centre-backs also need to be more versatile than before.

Of course a centre-back still needs to be defensively strong and good in the air. But today's centre-backs also need to be tactically aware and know what to do when the opponent plays with one striker or with two, when to close down and mark an opponent and when to drop off and give cover.

In ball possession, a good cross-field pass to the wingers is still an important asset for any centre-back. But modern centre-backs should also be able to move into the midfield with the ball at their feet and create a numerical advantage. It's also important for a centre-back to have leadership skills and to coach and organise the team. Centre-backs usually have all the other outfield players in front of them which gives them an ideal view of the game.

Playing out is much easier if #3 is right-footed and #4 left-footed.



Competence profile - Midfielders #6 & #8

The right (#6) and left (#8) midfielders are the 'engine room' of the team.

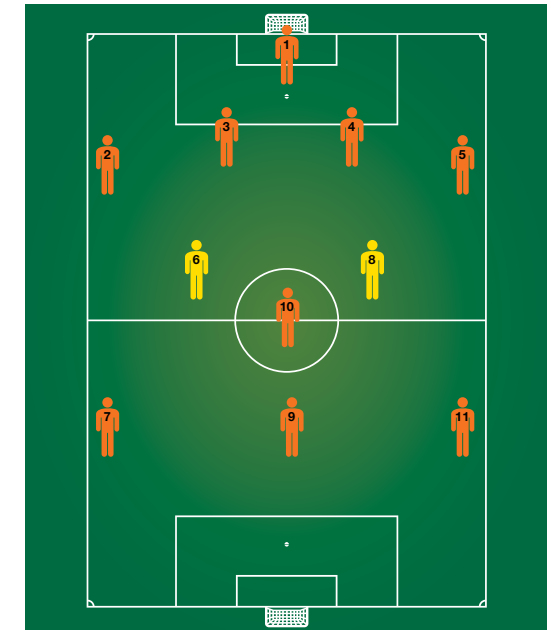
Their task is to stay centrally and support the back four during BPO as well as feed and support the attack in BP.

It's important they can 'read' the game (meaning they are tactically aware) and have a good passing range.

Defensively they must assist the defence by creating a block with the centre-backs and screen the passing lines to the opponent's central striker(s).

In BP they must be the link players that receive the ball from the defenders and deliver it to the attackers without turning it over unnecessarily.

One of the two should always join in to support the attack while the other one stays behind the ball to keep the defensive balance. If #6 is right footed and #8 left footed it's easier to quickly change the point of attack which increases the chance of successful attacking play.



Competence profile - Attacking Midfielder #10

In the 1-4-3-3 formation the role of the #10 is of vital importance for successful attacking play.

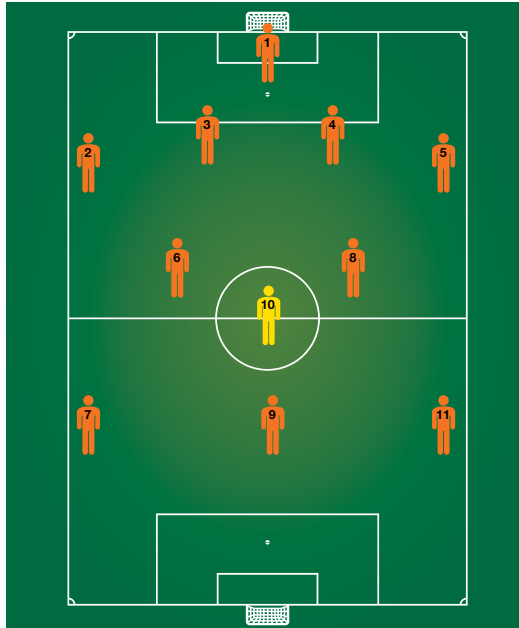
The #10 must be a versatile, creative player that can combine, dribble and take on opponents.

A good #10 recognises the right moments to play a killer pass and has the ability to score goals.

The #10 tries to get on the ball in the space between the opponent's back four and midfield ('playing between the lines').

Although the attacking contribution of #10 is vitally important, it's a **midfield** position (not a 2nd striker).

Defensively the attacking midfielder should therefore connect with #6 and #8 to form a compact unit that presses the opponent in the central midfield area.



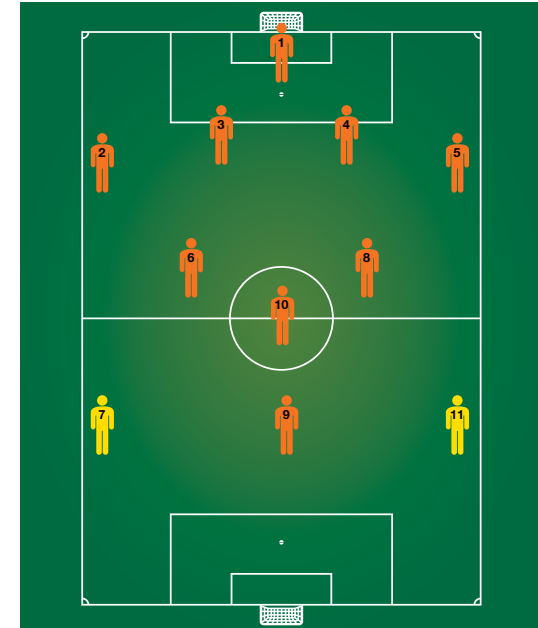
Competence profile - Wingers #7 & #11

The task of the right winger (#7) and left winger (#11) is to stretch the opponent's defence and, together with the full-backs, create openings in the wide areas. Although wingers can (should) also cut inside, it's important to do this at the right moment which means not too early and not all the time.

Their starting position should always be **high** and **wide**.

A moment when they should **always** come inside is when a cross is delivered into the penalty area from the opposite wing. Wingers must have good attacking 1 v 1 skills, be able to run with the ball at speed and to deliver good crosses. Creative combination skills as well as goalscoring abilities are also important attributes.

Defensively the wingers play an important role in pressuring the opponent's back four and, together with the full-back, protect and defend their designated wing.



3.

Game Training Phase

Competence profile - Central Striker #9

Traditionally the central striker or centre forward is the ‘target man’ that plays as high as possible. This is still the most common interpretation although there are also variations.

Of course the primary task of the central striker is to score goals. That means #9 must have a good shot with both feet and be a good header of the ball.

The #9 must also have a keen spatial awareness and excellent timing. Other important skills are creative combination play, the ability to keep the ball under pressure from an opponent and the ability to take on defenders.

Defending in modern football starts with the attackers. The central striker in particular has an important role in determining when and where to start pressuring the opponent’s back four.



You'll find the Game Training Phase Model Sessions on page 189.

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3.

Performance Phase



- Preparing teams for a competition environment where winning becomes the main aim
- Training to focus on solving football problems, based on match analysis
- FOOTBALL CONDITIONING becomes a key part of the program

The Performance Phase (17 years and older)

The Performance Phase starts when the puberty phase has ended and the growth spurt has come to a standstill. Generally this happens around the age of 16, but differs from individual to individual and, as stated before, girls generally reach this point earlier than boys.

Girls and boys diverge in their physical abilities as they enter puberty and move through adolescence. Higher levels of the hormone **Testosterone** allow boys to add muscle and even without much effort on their part, get stronger. In turn, they become less flexible.

Girls, as their levels of the hormone **Estrogen** increase, tend to add fat rather than muscle. They must train rigorously to get significantly stronger. Estrogen also makes girls' ligaments lax which makes them more flexible than boys but also more prone to certain injuries such as ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament) rupture.

Core Stability strength training is therefore an important training element in the Performance phase, especially for girls. However, it's unnecessary to do that in a gym since Core Stability programs can perfectly be done on the pitch as part of the warm-up. This way we avoid losing valuable **football** training time.

At this stage of development, the young adults are ready for high performance training. Coordination is back, the mental balance has been restored and the energy systems of the body are now effectively 'trainable'.

This is the moment that **football-specific conditioning** can start. At an earlier age so-called 'conditioning' is mostly pointless and generally a waste of time (or even dangerous if conducted inexpertly).

This is also the moment that winning really starts to matter. That's why the purpose of the Performance Phase is:

Learning how to perform/win as a team

So in the Performance Phase, the coach is very much focused on getting results. Training, therefore, is centred on fixing specific problems with the team's tactical performance.

**You'll find the Performance Phase Model
Sessions on page 267.**

3.

Performance Phase



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3.

Small Sided Football

The last two Building Blocks are the Playing Building Blocks, **Small Sided Football** and **11 v 11**.



- U/6-U/7 : 4 v 4 (no goalkeepers)
- U/8-U/9 : 7 v 7 (6 outfield players and a goalkeeper)
- U/10-U/11 : 9 v 9 (8 outfield players and a goalkeeper)
- From U/12 : 11 v 11
- Emphasis on fun, freedom of expression and 'learning by playing' instead of 'winning at all costs'
- The game is for the players, the role of coaches and parents is to help, teach, stimulate and praise them so they enjoy playing.

Small Sided Football

A former colleague of mine once came up with this perfect analogy while discussing the rationale of Small Sided Football with someone who disagreed with the concept:

“So then, would you also throw your 3 year old daughter into the deep end of an Olympic Pool to teach her how to swim?”

The motives behind the concept of Small Sided Football (SSF) are numerous and make perfect sense for any right-thinking person:

- For kids aged 5-12 the distances they have to cover on a full pitch are way too big. They are unable to run or pass over big distances and they will be exhausted in no time
- An 11 v 11 game is far too complex for young kids: there are too many rules, options and choices to be made and as a result the success rate will be very low
- The number of ball contacts in a game involving 22 kids and one ball on a big pitch will be very limited so they do not develop and it's not much fun

As a result of the above mentioned points the motivation to play our beautiful game will soon be gone and the kids will turn their interests to other activities! The biggest mistake you can make as a coach is to consider children to be little adults. We have hopefully made this clear by describing the mental and physical development stages throughout the various Building Blocks.

By gradually increasing the number of players as well as the pitch sizes the children learn to play the game in a progressive, logical and stimulating way.

In his book “The Talent Code”, researcher Daniel Coyle describes why **futsal** (which is **Small Sided Football!**) is the secret behind the success of Brazilian football. In futsal players touch the ball on average 6 times per minute more often than in 11 v 11. In addition to this, because of the limited space, quickness of decision-making as well as accuracy improves dramatically. Coyle calls futsal ‘turbo charged football learning’.

This is once again an example of what we call the holistic approach. Brazilian kids do not separately learn how to pass the ball first; then to dribble and then to receive the ball, etc. They develop those technical skills as well as the decision-making skills while playing futsal.

Currently the rationale of Small Sided Football is understood and adopted all over the football world as the best way to make the youngest players familiar with our game.

On the next pages you will find the Small Sided Football formats used by FFA with an explanation of how 7 v 7 and 9 v 9 lead up to the 1-4-3-3 formation in a logical and methodical manner as well as a number of coaching tips.

3.

Small Sided Football



Small Sided Football Formats

Playing Format	Under 6 & 7	Under 8 & 9	Under 10 & 11
NUMBERS	4 v 4	7 v 7	9 v 9
FIELD SIZE	Length: 30m Width: 20m	¼ Full Size Pitch Length: 40m - 50m Width: 30m - 40m	½ Full Size Pitch Length: 60m - 70m Width: 40m - 50m
FIELD MARKINGS	Markers or line markings	Markers or line markings	Markers or line markings
PENALTY AREA	Nil	5m depth x 12m width	5m depth x 12m width
GOAL SIZE	Width: 1.5m - 2.0m Height: 0.9m - 1.0m	Width: 2.5m - 3.0m Height: 1.8m - 2.0m	Width: 4.5m - 5.0m Height: 1.8m - 2.0m
GOAL TYPE	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals
BALL SIZE	Size 3	Size 3	Size 4
GOALKEEPER	No	Yes	Yes
PLAYING TIME	2 x 15 minutes	2 x 20 minutes	2 x 25 minutes
HALF TIME BREAK	5 minutes	5 minutes	7.5 minutes
REFEREE	Game Leader	Instructing Referee	Instructing Referee

U/6-7

Teams of 4 players (no goalkeepers).

Coaching tips:

No 'coaching' only stimulating and praising

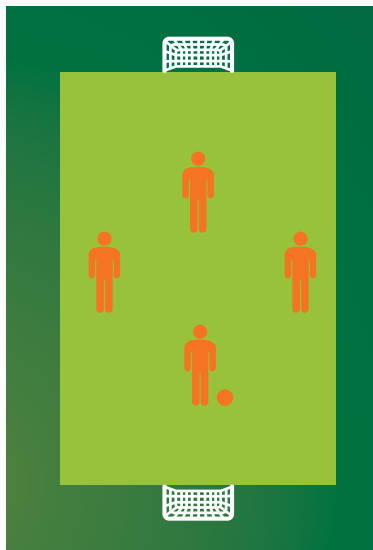
'Natural' development through just playing and discovering one's (im)possibilities through trial & error.

Emphasis on fun and building a love of the game.

The best coach is not the one who shouts instructions the whole game, however unfortunately many parents seem to feel that's what good coaches are supposed to do.

- In 4 v 4 football, the 'coach' should not worry about 'tactics' other than encouraging the kids to try and score when they have the ball and win it back when the other team has the ball in order to prevent them from scoring

- Aim for equal playing time.



How NOT to coach Small Sided Football



3.

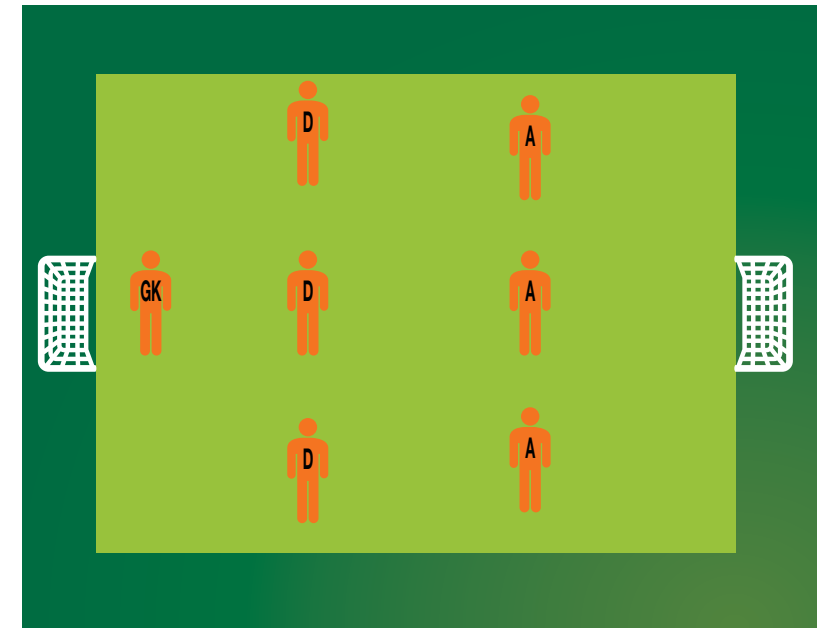
Small Sided Football

U/8-9

Teams of 7 players (one goalkeeper and 6 outfield players)

Coaching tips:

- The players now begin to understand what the game's purpose is (winning by scoring more goals than the opponent)
- There will still be a lot of individual play but the players start to understand that they have to work together in order to be successful
- A basic 'feeling' for team play, direction and dealing with an opponent starts to develop
- Preference and talent for a specific position starts to show: you can start working on a basic organisation (1 in goal; 3 at the back; 3 up front) and a basic understanding of some team tasks (how to defend and attack as a team)
- The coach should still let every player play in every position regularly. One week they want to be goalie, next time the centre forward. Let them!
- Bigger goals with goalkeepers automatically appeal to aiming and shooting: give them all plenty of opportunities to shoot (or be the goalkeeper).
- In 7 v 7 football, the coach should still not be too concerned with 'tactics'. The focus in training is on the individual player, so in the weekend game the players should have the opportunity to apply their skills in a game setting. The coach organises the players into two lines of three with a Goalkeeper behind. The players just need simple tasks so they do not become confused or overwhelmed with information (Examples: 'You three try to defend more than you attack' 'you three try to attack more than you defend' 'let's see if we can always have one of our players pushed right up in the middle of the pitch' 'when the opponent has the ball, can we get one of our team near every one of their players on the goal side', etc)

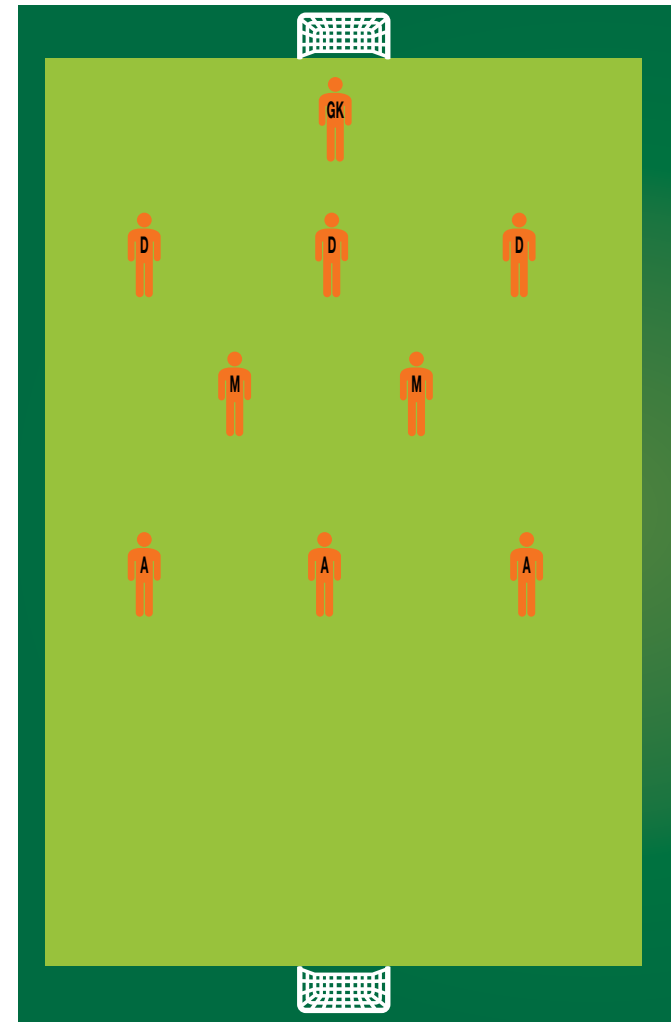


- At half-time, the coach should rotate players around to experience different aspects of the game (e.g. the three defenders become the three attackers)
- Aim for equal playing time

U/10-11

Coaching tips:

- The understanding of working together as a team develops more and more
- The awareness of the individual roles in relation to teamwork is also developing as well as the understanding for acting without the ball both in defence and attack
- With 8 outfield players a tighter and more strict task allocation and use of space is required
- Preference/ability for specific positions becomes more and more clear
- At this age the kids are very competitive and clever and very quickly develop their motor skills
- All the above means that the coach can raise the bar on all these aspects but:
 - Avoid an information 'overkill'
 - Keep it simple (speak their language)
 - It's their game, it's not about the coach
- In 9 v 9, the coach organises the players into three lines with a goalkeeper behind, preferably in a 1-3-2-3 formation as a guide for team shape
- The coach is still not too concerned with tactics or obsessed with results
- The players still just need simple tasks on match day
- The players should still be regularly rotated, either at half-time or from game to game
- Avoid playing the best players in central positions, and 'hiding' the weaker players out wide
- Aim for equal playing time

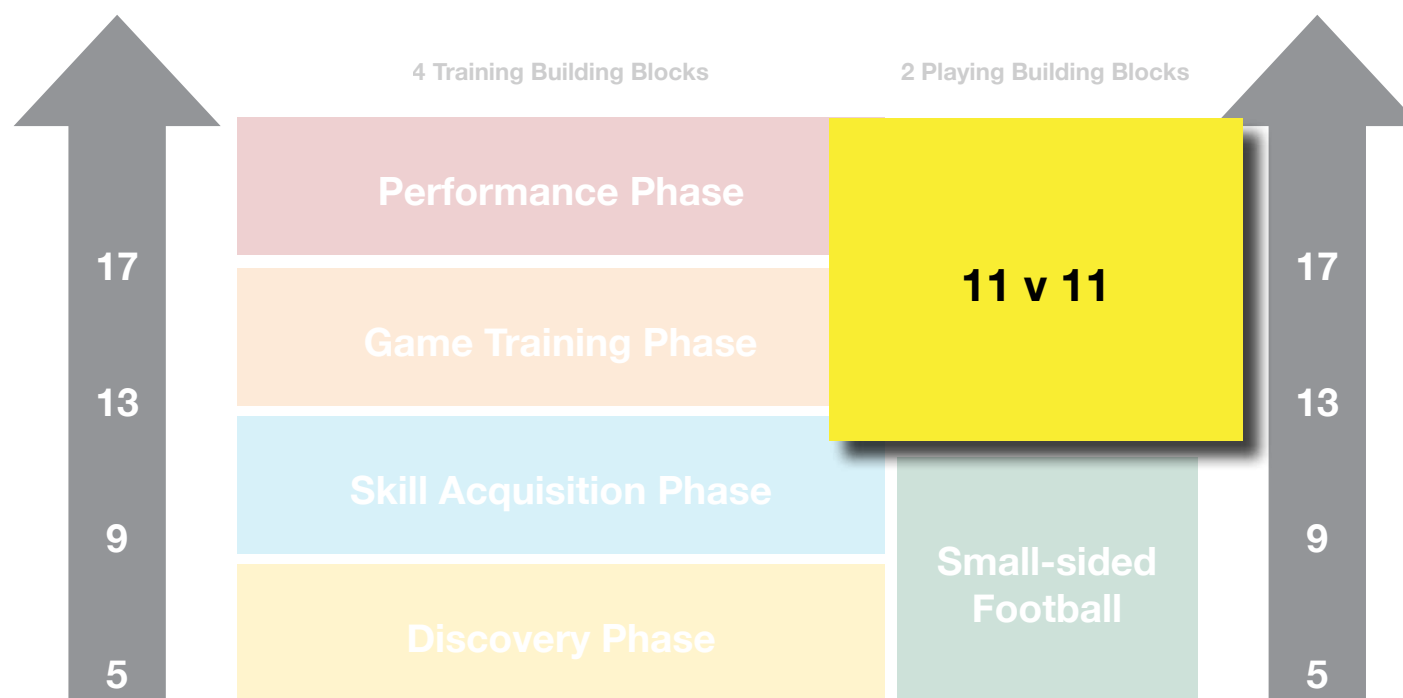


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3.

11 v 11



- From U/12 at the earliest
- The weekly game is a vital developmental element for young players
- The game is the frame of reference that tells us if we are improving
- Only in a regular, year-round competition environment can game cleverness, game hardness and game experience be developed
- The game is for players (not for the coach)

11 v 11

In the opinion of FFA, the full 11 v 11 game should be played from U/12 at the earliest. Worldwide, many experts are of the opinion that even this is too early and it's better to wait till after the growth spurt.

There is general consensus though on the fact that a weekly game is a vital element for the development of young players because the game is the frame of reference that tells us if we are improving. Only in a regular, year-round competition environment can players develop game cleverness, game hardness and game experience.

In youth football the development of the INDIVIDUAL should come first NOT the team result, something many coaches (and parents) often seem to forget.

In order to develop players to the maximum of their potential, they need to continuously be challenged to raise their individual bar.

Therefore each player should train and play at a level that is most appropriate for his/her actual development stage. If the level of resistance is too low and it's too easy, players do not develop. If the level of resistance is too high and it's too difficult, they do not develop either.

This is why the best must train with the best and play against the best.

This also explains why quality competitions are such a vital element of the development pathway.

In order to improve the competition structures as well as the structure and quality of club youth academies in Australia, FFA has introduced the Talented Player Pathway **Three Pillar Structure**.

The Three Pillar Structure is aimed at drastically raising the quality, accessibility and clarity of the Talented Player Pathway in Australia. The Three Pillar Structure is a work in progress though and still contains gaps.

Therefore FFA together with the Member Federations have taken ownership of parts of the National Talented Player Pathway whereas in most countries in the world youth development is undertaken by the (professional) clubs.

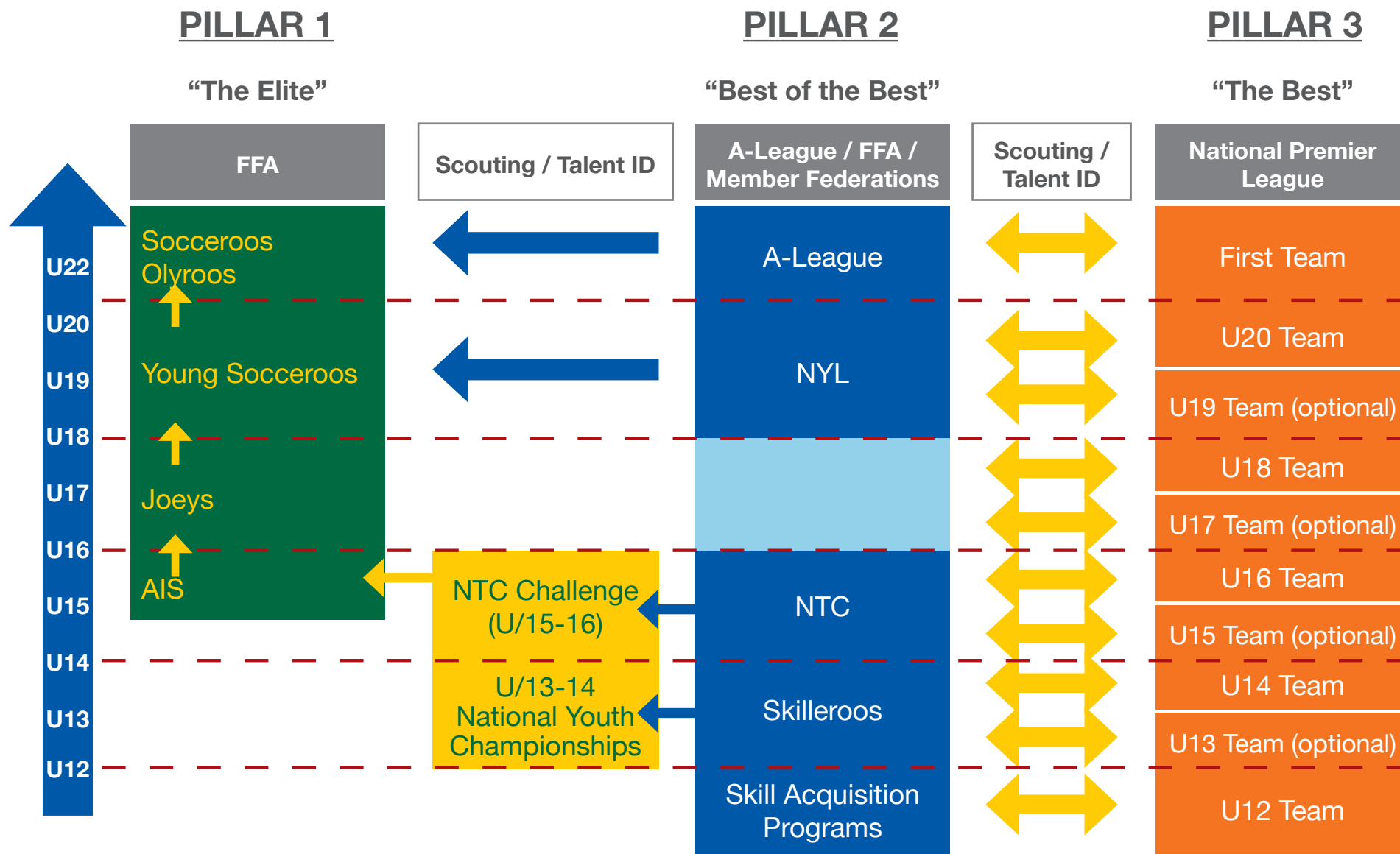
On the next pages you will find an explanation of the Three Pillar Structure of the male Elite Player Pathway.

The Female Elite Player Pathway Re-Structure together with the National Competitions Review for Women's Football is still in progress and accordingly is not available for inclusion in this publication. Although the starting points are identical, there will be certain differences in the pathway structure for girls and women.



3.

The Three Pillar Structure



Pillar 1: The Elite

The first pillar consists of the men's National Team programs which are the specific responsibility of FFA (AIS/Joey's, Young Socceroos, Olyroos and Socceroos).

The male national team pathway starts with the AIS program.

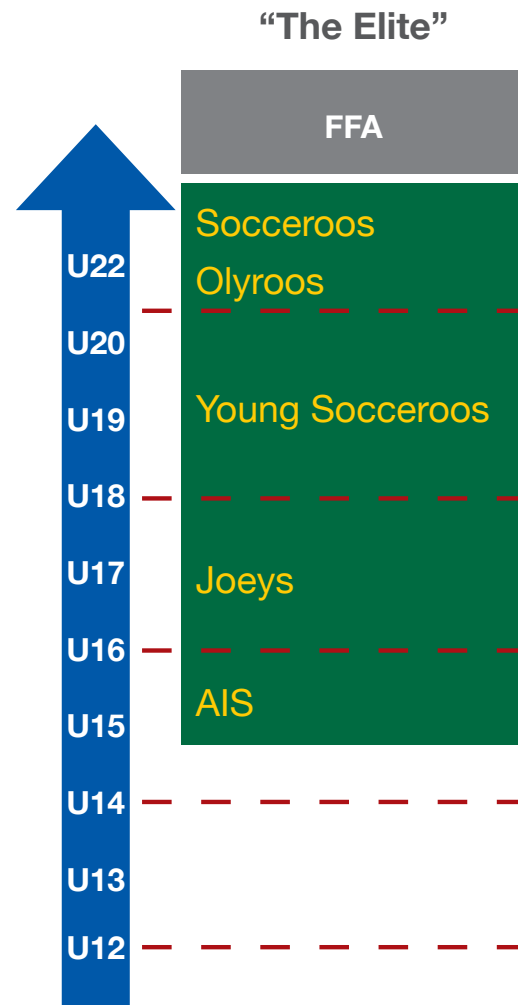
This is a 2 year full time program at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in Canberra for the best Australian U/16-17 boys.

The players for this top level program of international standards are primarily recruited from the underpinning State and Territory National Training Centre (NTC) programs.

The AIS team participates in the National Youth League (NYL) and ideally the AIS squad is the same group of players that form the Australian U/17 team (the 'Joey's').

This program prepares the players for the AFC U/16 Championships and the U/17 World Cup (subject to qualification) that are held every 2 years.

Graduates from the AIS program generally continue their playing career with National Youth League (NYL) or A-League clubs or are being contracted by overseas clubs.



The next national representative team are the Young Socceroos for U/19-20 year old players. The Young Socceroos program is a 'camp based' program, since the majority of players are contracted NYL or A-League players or playing for overseas clubs. It is a 2 year program comprising of the U/19 AFC Qualifiers and Championships, the latter being the qualification tournament for the U/20 World Cup held every 2 years.

The Olyroos program is for U/22-23 year old players. Every two years they participate in the U/22 AFC Qualifiers and Championships, and every 4 years these Championships are the qualification tournament for the Olympic Games.

The last and most important step in the pathway is of course the Socceroos. The majority of Australia's top senior players are playing for overseas clubs, several of them in European top leagues. But recently more players from the A-League are being selected for the Socceroos which underlines the increasing quality of our domestic competition.

Every 4 years the Socceroos must qualify for the FIFA World Cup. Every 4 years the AFC also organises the Asian Championships (usually the year after the World Cup).

For both events there is a staged qualification process for countries that are members of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

3.

The Three Pillar Structure

Pillar 2: The Best of the Best

The second pillar consists of the combined FFA/ Member Federations programs, the National Youth League (NYL) teams and the A-League clubs.

The Skill Acquisition Programs (SAP) are programs aiming for talented boys aged U/14 and under, with the emphasis on developing the functional game skills as explained earlier in this chapter (the Skill Acquisition Phase).

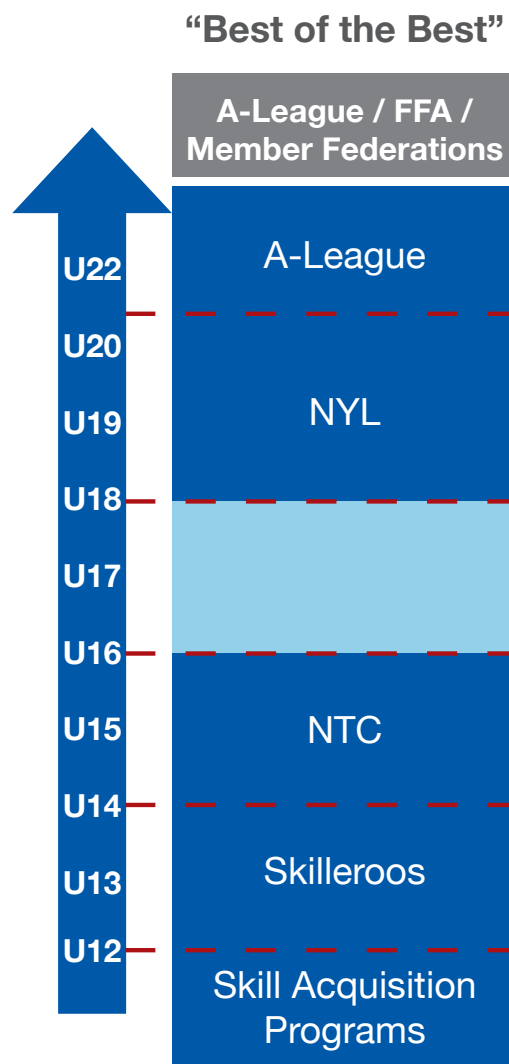
There is at least one SAP program in every State and Territory and the so-called 'Skilleroos' squads (U/13-14) form the pinnacle of these programs.

There are yearly U/13 and 14 National Youth Championships to identify the most talented players in these age brackets.

The SAP is the first level of the National Talented Player Pathway for every boy that dreams of one day wearing the 'Green and Gold'.

Graduates from the SAP programs enter the National Training Centre (NTC) programs aimed at talented U/15-16 boys in every State and Territory.

The focus of these programs is on developing an understanding of the team tasks and individual player tasks as explained earlier in this chapter (the Game Training Phase).



There is a yearly 'NTC challenge' to identify the most talented U/15-16 year old players for the AIS program that leads into the National U/17 team, the 'Joeys'.

The National Youth League (NYL) teams of the A-League clubs should form the next step for NTC graduates to continue their playing career at elite level.

Reality, however, shows that this step is often too big since many NYL teams are made up of 18-21 year olds and senior first team players.

Ideally we should bridge the current U16-U18 gap in Pillar 2 (light blue box in the diagram). FFA, together with the Member Federations and the A-League clubs are currently discussing possible solutions.

FFA's preferred solution is the so-called 'integrated pathway'. This means fusing together the FFA/ Member Federation programs with the local A-League clubs. Pillar 2 will then consist of the A-League and NYL teams underpinned by U/12-18 'academies' thus creating another important building block in Australia's Talented Player Pathway.

The current SAP and NTC program structure would then need revising and restructuring and appropriate solutions need to be in place for States and Territories that do not have an A-League club. It's worth mentioning that some A-League clubs, such as Newcastle Jets, in conjunction with FFA and their Member Federation, have already established academies in line with this philosophy.

Pillar 3: The Best

The third pillar is being created as a result of the National Competitions Review (NCR) and will create a competition for Elite Clubs at the highest level below the A-League in every State and Territory across Australia.

The name of these competitions is ‘The National Premier League’ (NPL). These ‘Elite’ clubs are selected and identified through an Elite Club Licensing Program that is being phased in from 2013 onwards. The purpose is to drastically raise the quality and quantity of youth development by improving and standardising the structure of these clubs. To obtain a license for the National Premier League, clubs must (amongst many others) meet criteria regarding:

- **Teams:** NPL clubs must have teams in all age groups from first grade to U/12’s;
- **Youth development:** NPL clubs must have a long-term youth development mindset. Through

the introduction of a points system an NPL club can only raise a competitive first team by filling it predominantly with young, self developed players;

- **Coaching:** To guarantee the quality of coaching all NPL clubs must appoint a Technical Director and appropriately accredited coaches for all age group teams. The Technical Director must ensure that the National Football Curriculum is implemented;
- **Finance:** It will be mandatory for NPL clubs to publicise their registration fee structure in order to put a halt to the culture of using youth players and their parents as the source of income to fund the first grade.

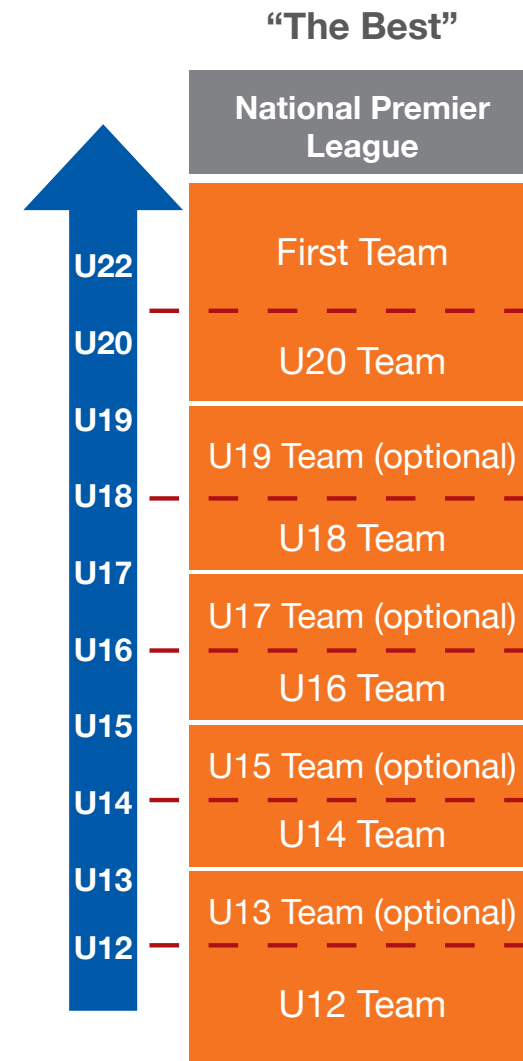
Other criteria will focus on governance, facilities, organisational structure, membership protection, medical provisions, reporting structure and so on.

A final important objective of the National Competitions Review will be a gradual extension of the youth season to 10 months (including

competitions and training), which will bring Australia more into line with world’s best practice. Whilst access to facilities outside of the winter period will be an obstacle, FFA will work with Member Federations to establish strategies which will provide greater access to football facilities.

The three pillar structure will not only drastically increase the quality of youth development but at the same time create far more opportunities for talented players. The expectation is justifiable that the majority of Australia’s talented players will be gathered in these three pillars with the opportunity to switch from one pillar to another at any stage of their development. A late developer can be identified in the third pillar at any stage of his development and be transferred to Pillar Two (or even One).

If on the other hand the pathway for a player in Pillar Two stops, the player has the opportunity to continue his playing career on a quality level in Pillar Three. Through this three pillar structure the pathways will be much clearer for both players and their parents.



3.

The Three Pillar Structure



FFA recognises that State and Territory based clubs have long played an important role in developing talented young players, and that they will play an increasingly important role in youth development in the future.

Assessing current Soccerroos and A-League club squads, the vast majority of players are known to have risen through these clubs. With the implementation of the Elite Club Licensing program it is expected that many more young players of an even higher technical quality will be produced by the NPL club system. For this reason, FFA will officially recognise these accredited elite clubs as part of the Elite Player Pathway.

In the new three pillars pathway structure, the “best of the best” will continue to be selected for State/Territory or National programs (e.g. Skilleroos; NTC; AIS), where players will be exposed to year-round football in an elite or professional environment, ideally at no cost.

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Coach Education

For too long, there was no clear direction for football in Australia and the result was an obvious lack of progress towards a defined objective. This applied equally to both **Youth Development and Coach Education**, which have now been identified as the two strategic spearheads to drive this country to its long-term goal.

The National Football Curriculum has set the road map and one of the major benefits of the Curriculum and its philosophy is that we now have clarity on the way forward. We have realised that football isn't 'just football'; there are many styles and brands of football but we now know how **we** want to play. We can now talk about 'our football', which can be defined and visualized, and not settle for 'any football'. We are now able to say 'any old football isn't good enough'.

That provides a solid platform for **Youth Development**, because we can logically define the types of players required to play the way we want to play. It has also provided the platform for **Coach Education** because, since we now know the football we want to play and we know the players required, we can logically define the kind of coaches we need to produce these players and playing style. As a consequence, we can now define 'The Australian way of Coaching'. We are able to say 'any old coaching isn't good enough'; there are many methods of coaching football, but we now know how we need to coach.

The **Football** We Want to Play
(in Order for Australia to Be a World Leader)

A Philosophy on
playing Football
(National Football
Curriculum)

The **Players** We Need
(in Order to Play That Way)

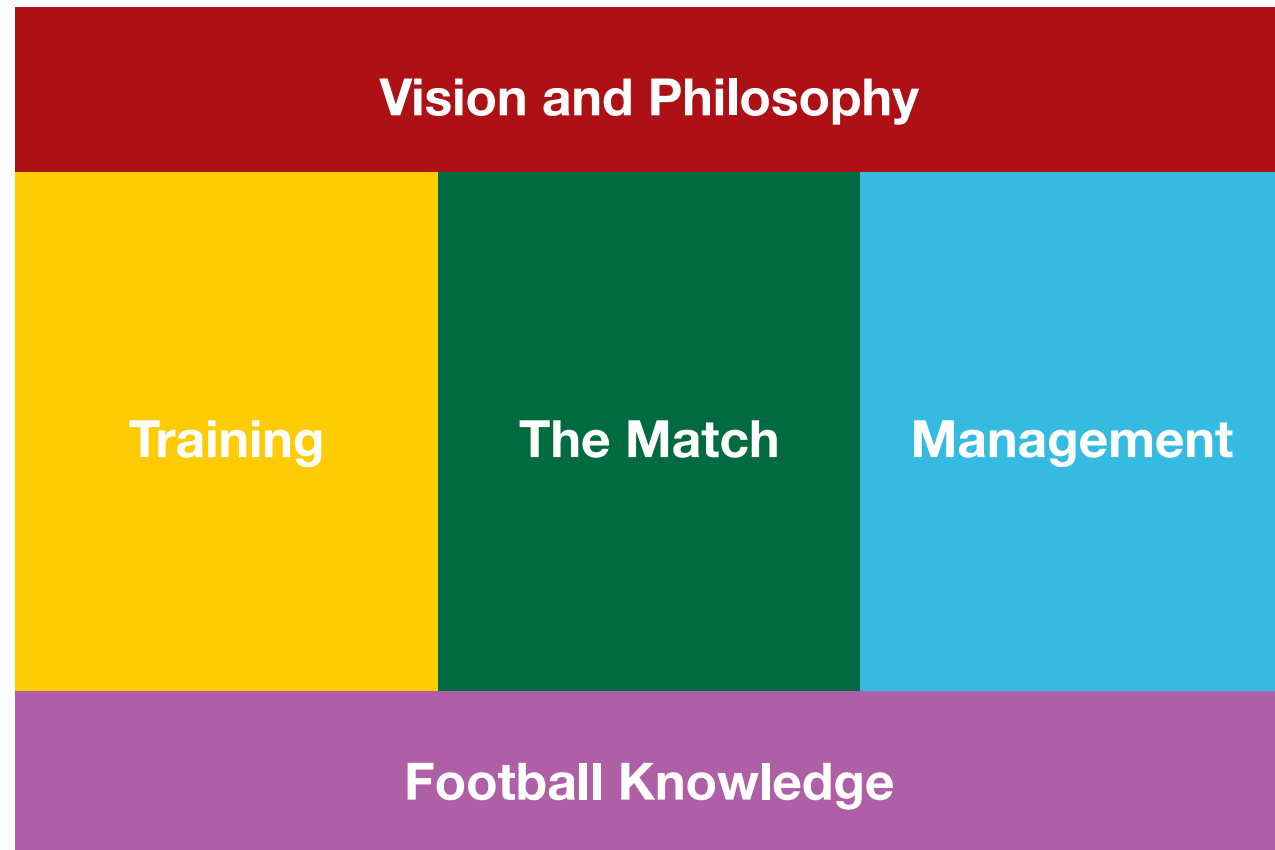
A Philosophy on
playing Football
(National Football
Curriculum)

The **Coaches** We Need
(in Order to Produce Those Players
and Develop the Teams They Play In)

A Philosophy on
coaching Football
(Coaching Expertise
Model)

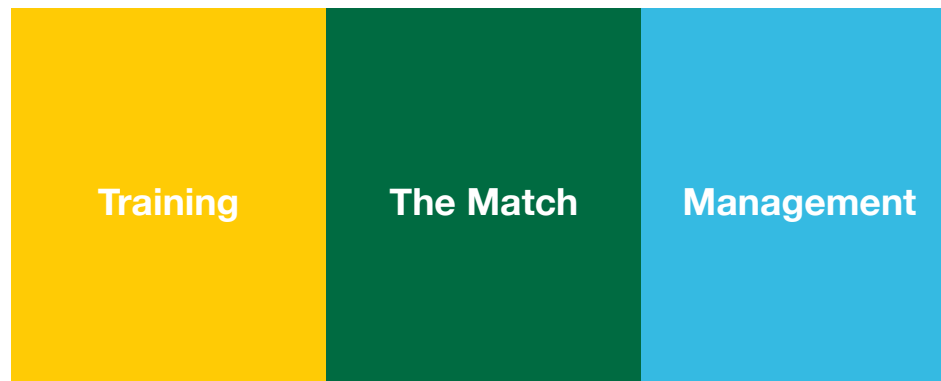
The FFA Coaching Expertise Model

This has been developed, as is outlined in the diagram, to fill the final step in the logical process of developing football teams and football players. The National Football Curriculum answers the questions 'What is Football?' and 'What should Football in Australia look like?' The Coaching Expertise Model answers the questions 'What is Football Coaching?' and 'What should Football Coaching in Australia look like?'



Coach Education

The Construction of the FFA Coaching Expertise Model:



In the middle are the three main areas of competency (the 'pillars') the coach must develop. 'The Match' is at the centre of the whole model in line with FFA's philosophical direction, as it is the focus of everything a coach does: it all begins and ends with the game of football. That also explains why the central pillar is green and looks like a football field. Match-day competencies are a vital part of the coach's 'toolbox'.

To the left is 'Training'. There are specific competencies required to be an effective coach on the training field, and they all relate to the whole context of the model. Put simply, the coach's work on the training field is only effective if it leads to improved performance on the field when The Match is played.

At the right-hand side of the model is 'Management'. Since the coach, regardless of the level at which he/she works, is constantly interacting with others (communicating, leading, etc), he/she needs to develop competencies which will improve the success of these processes.

Football Knowledge

The bottom of the model contains the foundation supporting the three pillars:

A broad knowledge of the game of football is absolutely essential for the professional coach and, of course, desirable for those working at community level. Football Knowledge can be developed in many ways, including playing, coaching, analysing and discussing football. The process of gaining Football Knowledge is never-ending.

Vision and Philosophy

At the top is the overarching 'compass' that guides the coach. The almost infinite breadth of football knowledge available can lead to a lack of clear direction; there are so many different ways of playing football, such a huge variety of training exercises and so many examples of coaching methods. That is why 'Vision and Philosophy' overarches the whole model; the coach is aware of all the football that is 'out there', but based on their own experience and preference, must develop a strong personal Philosophy on Football and a clear Vision on how they want their team to play.

As a solid Vision and Philosophy is best developed after many years of experience, FFA's C and B Licence courses are conducted with FFA's Vision and Philosophy as the cornerstone.

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We believe that the model is a strong one as it has sturdy pillars supported by a firm base, and is securely held together at the top.

These qualities are also intended to give the model a timeless structure that, we believe, might only ever need adjustments in the details that define the elements: we firmly believe that the elements themselves are constants.

‘It is a good model if it is elegant and there are few arbitrary or adjustable elements.’

Stephen Hawking

Overview of the five elements

FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE	COURSE-DRIVEN	1. WHAT IS FOOTBALL?
	SELF-DRIVEN	1. FOOTBALL EXPERIENCE
		2. FOOTBALL STUDY
VISION AND PHILOSOPHY	PHILISOPHY	1. OPINIONS ON FOOTBALL
		2. BELIEFS ON FOOTBALL
	VISION	1. TEAM MODEL (VERBAL)
		2. TEAM MODEL (VISUAL)
	3. TEAMBUILDING	
THE MATCH	FOCUS	1. POST-TRAINING
		2. PRE-MATCH
	PERFORMANCE	1. FIRST HALF
		2. HALF-TIME
		3. SECOND HALF
	REFOCUS	1. POST-MATCH
2. PRE-TRAINING		

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TRAINING	PLAN	1. DEFINE
		2. DESIGN
	PREPARE	1. PEOPLE
		2. EQUIPMENT
		3. ENVIRONMENT
	CONDUCT	1. FOUNDATION
		2. ANIMATION
		3. CONCLUSION
	EVALUATE	1. OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED?
		2. PROBLEM SOLVED?
		3. NEXT STEPS

MANAGEMENT	MANAGE SELF	1. KNOW YOURSELF
		2. DEVELOP YOURSELF
	MANAGE OTHERS	1. KNOW OTHERS
		2. DEVELOP OTHERS

Coach Education

As outlined on the previous pages, the Coaching Expertise Model provides a framework for visualising the role of the coach and therefore provides an answer to our first question:

'What is Football Coaching?'

We now need to answer the second question:

'What should Football Coaching in Australia look like?'

In other words, how is the National Football Curriculum implemented via the Coaching Expertise Model? How will we address the identified weaknesses of coaching in Australia (planning sessions properly, conducting sessions effectively)?

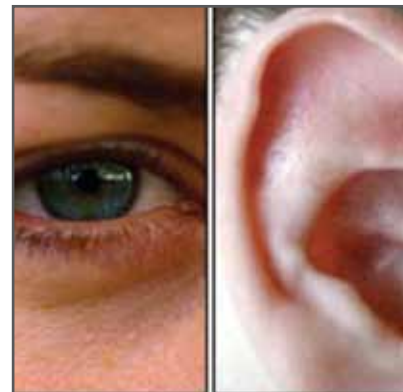
The Curriculum clearly states our philosophy: that we believe a 'Holistic' approach to coaching football is the best choice. Our belief is supported by analysis and scientific research.

Analysis of Football leads to the following conclusions:

- Football is a team game in which two teams try to win the game by scoring one more goal than the other
- Therefore, scoring and preventing goals are the main objectives for the team

- The team has a number of main Team Tasks in attacking, defending and transitioning to achieve these objectives
- The player has a range of general and position-specific tasks to perform in order to assist the team in the accomplishment of the team tasks
- The player executes a range of individual 'Player Actions' to successfully perform his/her tasks

Therefore, at its most basic level, football is all about 'Player Actions' – the things a player does. A player's actions are easy to see (and hear, in the case of communication) and analyse, but we must also look at what makes a player do what he/she does. The answer lies in the brain.



Perception



Decision



Execution

Perception – Decision - Execution

Based on the Objectives and Tasks of football outlined above, the player **Perceives** what is happening in the game, processes the information, **Decides** what should be done, and then **Executes** the action.

The three stages of Perception, Decision and Execution can be quite clearly distinguished, but are so closely inter-dependent that they cannot be separated.

The 'Holistic' v 'Isolated' debate

Just like there are many different philosophies on how to play football, there are also different philosophies on what is the most effective way to coach football. Many coaches, and indeed countries, still hold the belief that football must be broken down into its many small components and that these components should then be practised in isolation until the techniques are deeply ingrained: we call this the '**Isolated**' approach.

Supporters of the isolated approach believe that the best way of improving a player's ability in, for example, 'passing with the inside of the foot' is to take 'passing with the inside of the foot' out of its natural game context and practice it in pairs or in lines; their reasoning is that this isolated training provides the opportunity for 'repetition'. However, this type of practice removes the realism required for proper learning, as there are no longer 'game-specific resistances' such as opponents: it may look a bit like football, but it isn't really football. In terms of Perception-Decision-Execution, isolated training only touches on the Execution; by removing the Perception and Decision, it is Execution without relevance.

Research has shown that this type of 'drills-based' practice (i.e. repetition without decision-making) is not the most educationally effective way to teach football. Players may learn to 'perform' the techniques, but do not learn how to 'apply' them in the game.

This makes sense if you think about this a little longer:

A player who looks great performing a prescribed technique on the training pitch but does not recognise when to use it during the game has the same problem as the player who sees the right moment to use it but lacks the technique to execute it.

In order to reach a level of excellence in football, one needs thousands of hours of purposeful practice.

Purposeful practice for football is practice that develops the players' technical and perception/decision-making skills, as well as the required football fitness, in conjunction with each other instead of developing the individual components in isolation.

We call this the **Holistic approach** to coaching.

The isolated approach is successful, and perhaps necessary, for specific sports, such as golf and gymnastics. However football demands the holistic approach as by its very nature, it is an incredibly complex game, with unpredictable situations where the player is regularly required to rapidly select from a wide range of possible options and execute them under pressure.

Daniel Coyle, in his much-acclaimed book 'The Talent Code', explains the difference in the brain processes involved in, on the one hand, activities like golf and violin-playing, compared to activities like football.

'Skills like football are flexible-circuit skills, meaning they require us to grow vast ivy-vine circuits that we can flick through to navigate an ever-changing set of obstacles. Playing violin, golf, gymnastics and figure-skating, on the other hand, are consistent-circuit skills, depending utterly on a solid foundation of technique that enables us to reliably re-create the fundamentals of an ideal performance.'

Example - Two ways of teaching a child to solve a 60-piece jigsaw puzzle

Method One (Isolated Approach):

Lesson 1: Take one piece out of the box, close the lid, and then take that piece to the child. Ask her to keep looking at the piece until she is totally familiar with it. Then take that piece away and put it back in the box.

Lesson 2: Take another jigsaw piece out, close the lid, and take the second piece to the child. Again, ask her to keep looking at the piece until she is totally familiar with it.

Lessons 3-60: Repeat the process until she is familiar with all the separate jigsaw pieces.

Lesson 61: Finally, empty the whole box of pieces on the child's desk, and take the box away. Ask the child to arrange all the pieces into a rectangular picture.

Method Two (Holistic Approach):

Lesson 1: Put the jigsaw pieces together according to the picture on the front of the box. Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture.

Lesson 2: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on one quarter of it.

Lesson 3: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on a second quarter of it.

Lesson 4: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on a third quarter of it.

Lesson 5: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on the final quarter of it.

Lesson 6: Take the jigsaw apart, put the pieces on the child's desk and ask her to put it back together.

Which child do you think would finish the jigsaw quickest? It is feasible that the 6 lessons of the 'holistic' approach would be more successful than 60 lessons of 'isolated' because the child has always been presented with the 'big picture'. Therefore the child can see the links and make the connections between the pieces much more quickly and efficiently.

Here lies another problem with the 'isolated' approach: there are so many elements to the game of football, that the coach can end up with a list of, say, 60 separate elements to work on. If the coach then proceeds to address them all individually in an isolated way, the whole training program becomes totally removed from the real context of football. To compound the problem, by the time you work on the 60th 'jigsaw piece', the players have forgotten what the first piece looks like!

Repetition is of course important in developing players, but we must strive for:

repetition of football-specific situations with a focus on a particular aspect.

The players must always be playing football by **'perceiving-deciding-executing'**, and the relevance to the 'big picture' must always be apparent. The coach makes this happen by designing training exercises with game-specific resistances, by manipulating things like:

- The number of opponents
- The number of team-mates
- The size and position of the goals/targets
- The size of the space to work in
- The objective of the exercise

These are all usually absent in isolated training.

However, this is not to say that there is absolutely no place for isolated training. In specific circumstances, for a specific player, when the coach has exhausted all holistic means to improve the player, the only remaining solution is to work individually on 'technique'. Isolated exercises should be the last resort for certain players, when necessary, not the fundamental basis of training for all players.

It is FFA's belief that this kind of isolated, remedial work is best utilised as 'homework': in fact, all players should clock up a large number of hours mastering the ball at home, for example, using a wall to help develop passing and receiving technique, or trying out 1 v 1 moves in the back yard.

So, how is the National Football Curriculum's 'holistic' approach implemented via the Coaching Expertise Model? In short, we holistically teach coaches to holistically teach players.

In the same way that some countries prefer to break football up into little pieces and teach the isolated way, many countries choose to do the same with coach education. The Coach's role is broken up into a large number of distinct elements and these are covered in isolation. The same problem occurs: the true context is lost and the relevance is not always apparent.

Teaching separate, isolated parts of the coach's role may look a bit like Coach Education, but it isn't really Coach Education.

Every element and module of FFA's Advanced Pathway courses is put into context, in relation to the Coaching Expertise Model. The Model itself is a holistic representation of the competencies and knowledge required to become an expert coach. We adopt the same approach to teaching coaches as we do to teaching players – they both need to see the whole picture, giving everything a clear context and relevance.

In terms of teaching players, there are two main ways in which the holistic approach is implemented:

- 1. Training Session Content:** Clear guidelines are provided to assist coaches to design game-related and football-specific exercises which maximize learning and lead to the development of the kind of players we need
- 2. Coach Intervention:** FFA has developed a clear process by which the coach can plan and conduct training sessions that use a task-based approach to give players real learning opportunities; fundamentally, we believe that if the players are challenged to solve problems at training, there is a greater likelihood that they will be able to solve problems in the game.

Our approach also aims to drastically reduce the amount of time players have traditionally spent standing still in training, while coaches give one long-winded speech after another. When conducting training sessions, it is important for the coach to remember 'it's all about the players'. The focus should be on helping the players to improve. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, the most common method employed by coaches in Australia is to constantly stop the training session to give long-winded speeches to the players. We have even observed this happening in the warm-up stage and in the 'training game' at the end of a training session.

4.

Coach Education

All coaches are well-meaning, keen to help their players, but the fact is that this approach is misguided and simply doesn't work. Players learn by 'doing' and the coach must guide and facilitate this learning process. Coaches have to learn when to stop the players, how long for and how often. They must also learn what to say and how to say it in order to achieve the best possible outcome. Stopping the players too often, and talking for too long are not only non-educational, but they also frustrate the players and take away their enjoyment of training. Perhaps more worryingly, they take away valuable training time, compounding the problems caused by too much isolated training.

In terms of educating coaches, the Coaching Expertise Model provides the framework, which is clearly visualised and easily articulated

'The Coach uses the competencies of TRAINING, MATCH and MANAGEMENT to develop players and teams according to a clear VISION AND PHILOSOPHY, and the whole process is supported by a broad FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE'

So, we have defined what coaches need to learn and how best to educate them.



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Coaching Courses

One of the identified weaknesses of Coach Education in the past was that there was only one stream of courses available, whether you were coaching a social team of amateurs once a week or Head Coach of a State Premier League team. The courses were also far too short to deliver enough long-term learning or produce enough elite Australian coaches.

It was clear that two pathways were required, especially when one accepts that players can generally be divided into two streams: those that play for **Participation**, and those considered **Performance** players.

Therefore, the Two Pathway system was introduced in 2007:

1. The Community Pathway
2. The Advanced Pathway

Community Pathway courses are specifically designed for the coaches who look after **Participation** players: the courses are short, easily-accessible and low-cost. Because of the nature of the coach and the player in the Community context, these courses focus almost exclusively on the 'Training' pillar of the Coaching Expertise Model.

Advanced Pathway courses are specifically designed for the coaches who work with **Performance** players: the courses are longer and much more intensive. The course fees reflect the length and quality of the training program delivered. Because of the nature of the coach and the player in the Advanced context, these courses progressively develop all the elements of the Coaching Expertise Model. Graduates from the Advanced Pathway are the pool of coaches that are to be considered for full and part-time employment as football coaches.

A key culture shift has had to occur as the Advanced Pathway has been introduced: we have had to accept that, in the same way that it takes a long time and a lot of effort to become a professional football player, it also takes a long time and a lot of effort to become a professional football coach.

The Two Pathways and their relationship to the Building Blocks:

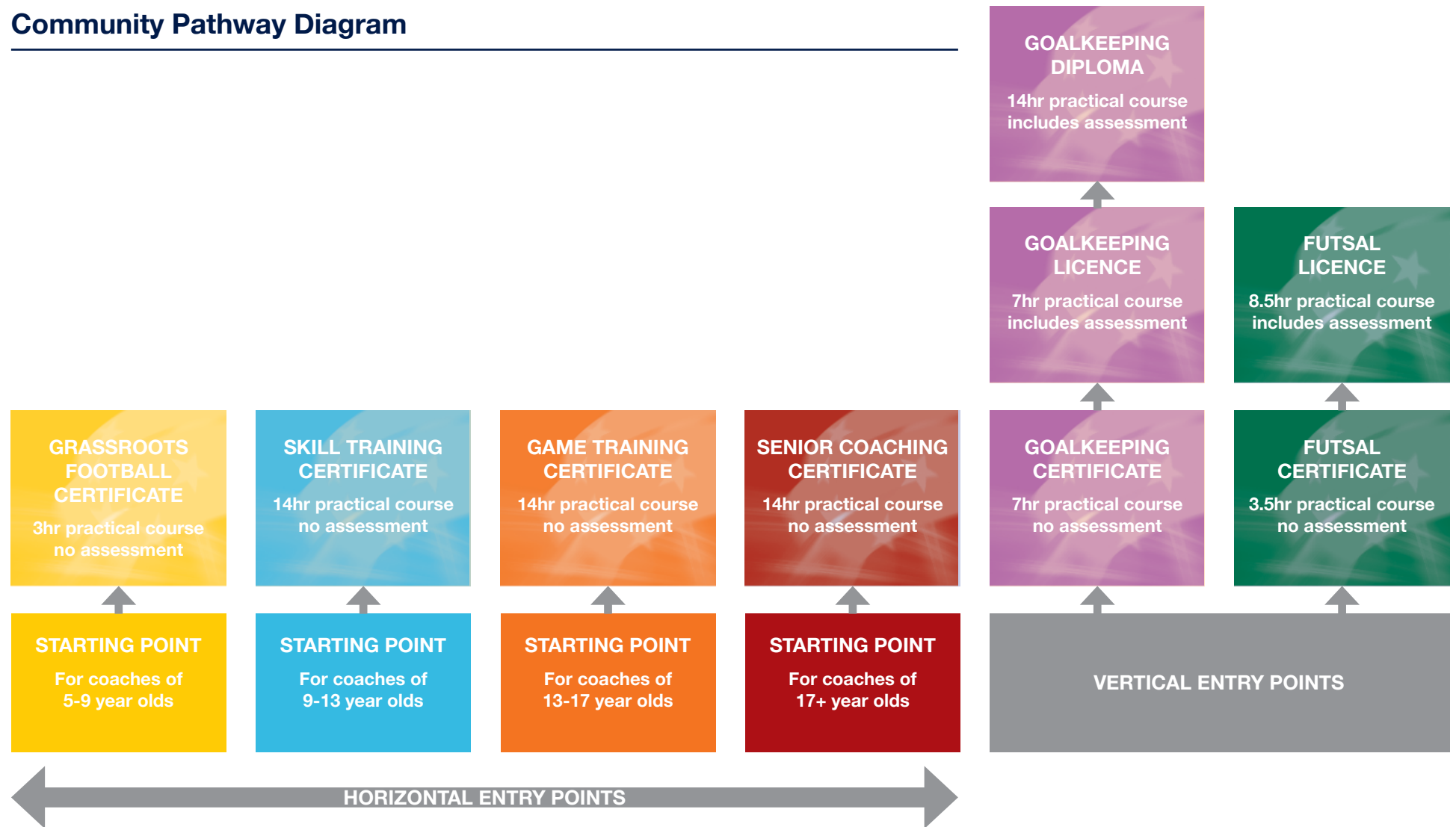
Community Courses	Building Block	Advanced Courses
SENIOR CERTIFICATE	PERFORMANCE PHASE	SENIOR C, B, A AND PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMA
GAME TRAINING CERTIFICATE	GAME TRAINING PHASE	YOUTH C LICENCE
SKILL TRAINING CERTIFICATE	SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE	
GRASSROOTS CERTIFICATE	DISCOVERY PHASE	N/A

Note:

- The Youth C Licence was introduced in 2013
- The Community Pathway is being revised as above and will also be rolled out in early 2014.

Coach Education

Community Pathway Diagram

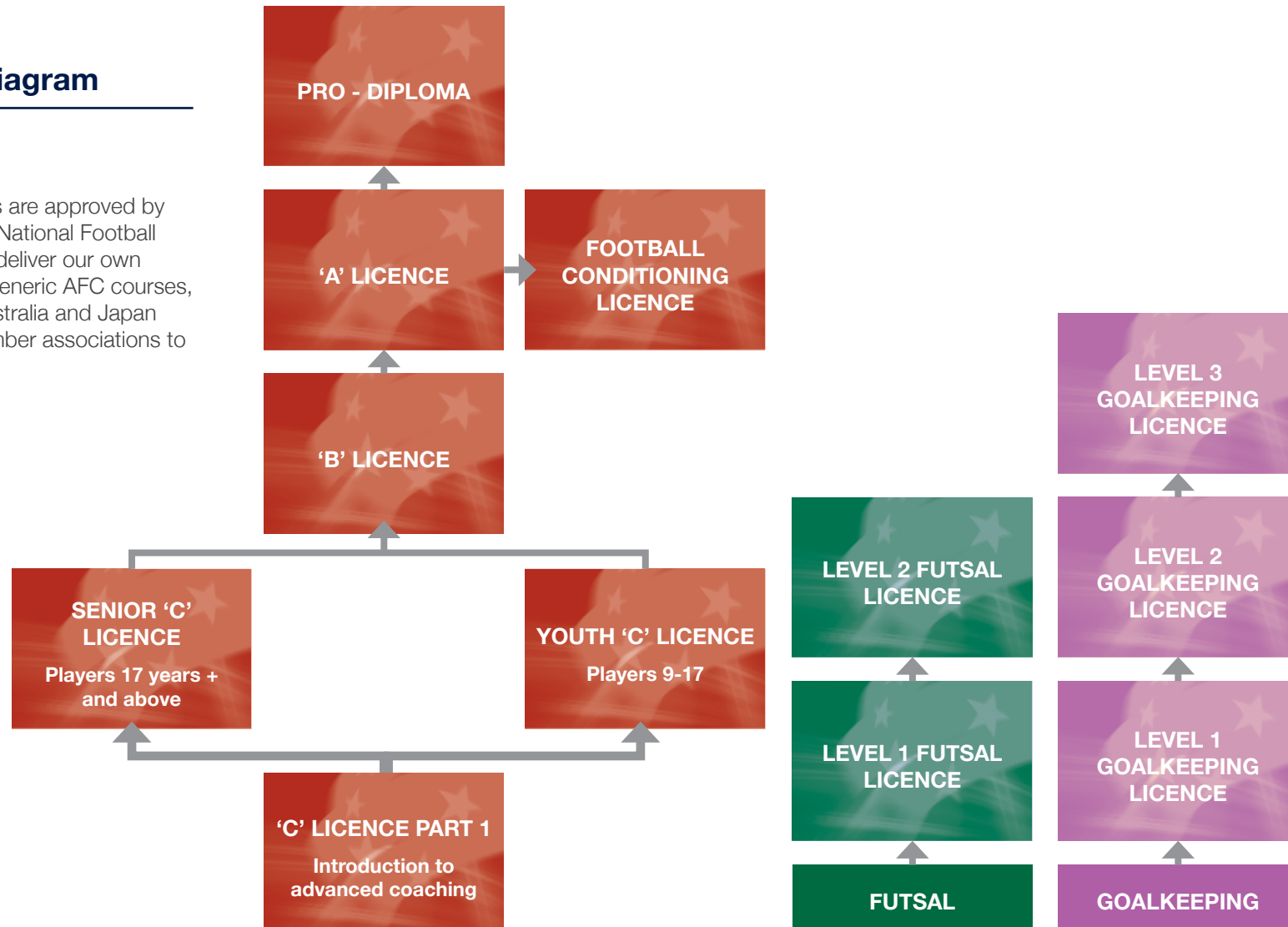


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Advanced Pathway Diagram

AFC and FFA

FFA's Advanced Pathway courses are approved by AFC. Since Australia has its own National Football Curriculum, we naturally need to deliver our own specific courses rather than the generic AFC courses, and AFC has recognised this (Australia and Japan are the only two of AFC's 46 member associations to have this right).



Coach Education

Minimum Coach Accreditation Requirements

FFA has established a set of guidelines outlining the preferred level of accreditation required to hold certain coaching positions. This is necessary to ensure quality control and to reinforce the key messages that must continue to be delivered if we are to achieve our long-term goals.

The A-League, W-League, National Teams and key coaching positions in the state federations have been our major concern to date.

Team / Program	Position	Minimum Accreditation
SOCCEROOS	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	Professional Diploma
	GK Coach	Level 2 GK Licence (Level 3 by January 1, 2015)
OLYROOS U23	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
YOUNG SOCCEROOS U20	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
JOEYS U17	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
MATILDAS	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)

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Team / Program	Position	Minimum Accreditation
YOUNG MATILDAS	Head Coach	A Licence
	Assistant Coach	Male coaches: A Licence. Female coaches: B Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
WOMEN'S U17	Head Coach	A Licence
	Assistant Coach	Male coaches: B Licence. Female coaches: C Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
A-LEAGUE	Head Coach	A Licence (Professional Diploma by start of 2015/16 season)
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by start of 2014/15 season; Level 3 by start of 2015/16 season)
	Conditioning Coach	FFA Football Conditioning Licence by start of 2015/16 season
W-LEAGUE	Head Coach	Male coaches: A Licence. Female coaches: B Licence (A Licence by start of 2015/16 season)
	Assistant Coach	Male coaches: B Licence. Female coaches: C Licence (B Licence by start of 2015/16 season)
	GK Coach	Must hold at least a Community GK accreditation (Level 1 GK Licence by 2014/15 season)
NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE	Head Coach	A Licence
	Assistant Coach	B Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by start of 2014/15 season)
AIIS PROGRAM	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	B Licence (A Licence by January 1, 2014)
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015; Level 3 by January 1, 2017)

4.

Coach Education

Team / Program	Position	Minimum Accreditation
NTC PROGRAM (MALE)	Head Coach	A Licence
	Assistant Coach	B Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence by January 1, 2015 (Level 2 by January 1, 2017)
NTC PROGRAM (FEMALE)	Head Coach	Male coaches: A Licence. Female coaches: B Licence (A Licence by January 1, 2016)
	Assistant Coach	Male coaches: B Licence. Female coaches: C Licence (B Licence by January 1, 2016)
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence by January 1, 2015 (Level 2 by January 1, 2017)
STATE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR		A Licence
STATE TEAMS (U13/14 NATIONALS)		B Licence or Youth C Licence (Youth C Licence only from January 1, 2015)
AFC FUTSAL COMPETITIONS	Head Coach	Level 1 Futsal Licence
	Assistant Coach	Level 1 Futsal Licence

(NB: FFA Accreditation is preferred to equivalent accreditation from other National associations for all the above positions)

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Overseas Coaches (those who do not hold Australian citizenship or residency)	
ALL NATIONAL TEAM HEAD COACH POSITIONS (MALE AND FEMALE TEAMS)	Professional Diploma
ALL NATIONAL TEAM ASSISTANT COACH POSITIONS (MALE TEAMS)	Professional Diploma
A-LEAGUE HEAD COACH AND ASSISTANT COACHES	Professional Diploma
W-LEAGUE HEAD COACH	Professional Diploma (male), A Licence (female)
ALL AIS POSITIONS	Professional Diploma
NYL HEAD COACH	Professional Diploma
NTC HEAD COACH (MALE AND FEMALE PROGRAMS)	Professional Diploma (male), A Licence (female)
GOALKEEPER COACH POSITIONS	Equivalent accreditation to that outlined above for Australian coaches
CONDITIONING COACH POSITIONS	CV and proof of accreditation must be submitted to FFA for prior approval
ALL OTHER POSITIONS	A Licence

Coach Education

NPL Coach Accreditation

All NPL clubs are expected to work towards the following guidelines to further spread the effect of the National Football Curriculum message and bring quality control several steps further.

All references are to Advanced Pathway Accreditation unless prefixed with 'Community'. 'New' Licences are those commenced in 2010 or later.

Requirement	Mandatory / Flexible	2013	2014	2015	2016
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR	Mandatory	B Licence AND must have attended a State Coaching Conference during the previous 12 months.			'New' A Licence (or an 'old' A Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate) AND must have attended a Youth C Licence
FIRST TEAM HEAD COACH	Mandatory	B Licence AND must have attended a State Coaching Conference during the previous 12 months.			'New' A Licence (or an 'old' A-Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)
FIRST TEAM ASSISTANT COACH	Mandatory	C Licence AND must have attended a State Coaching Conference during the previous 12 months.			'New' B Licence (or an 'old' B Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)
U20, U19 COACH	Mandatory		C Licence		'New' B Licence (or an 'old' B Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)
U20, U19 ASSISTANT COACH	Mandatory		Community Senior Certificate		Senior C Licence (or an 'old' C Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)
U18, U17 COACH	Mandatory		Community Senior Certificate		Senior C Licence (or an 'old' C Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)
U18, U17 ASSISTANT COACH	Flexible		Community Youth Certificate or Community Senior Certificate		Community Senior Certificate
U16, U15, U14 COACH	Mandatory		Community Youth Certificate		Youth C Licence

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NPL Coach Accreditation

Requirement	Mandatory / Flexible	2013	2014	2015	2016
U16, U15, U14 ASSISTANT COACH	Flexible	Community Youth Certificate		Community Game Training Certificate	
U13, U12 COACH	Mandatory	Community Youth Certificate		Youth C Licence	
U13, U12 ASSISTANT COACH	Flexible	Community Youth Certificate		Community Skill Training Certificate	
FIRST TEAM GK COACH	Mandatory	Community Goalkeeper Certificate	Community Goalkeeper License	Community Goalkeeper Diploma	Level 1 Goalkeeping Licence
ALL OTHER GK COACHES	Flexible	Community Goalkeeper Certificate		Community Goalkeeper License	Community Goalkeeper Diploma

5.

Model Sessions



Discovery Phase Model Sessions	85
Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions	127
Game Training Phase Model Sessions	189
Performance Phase Model Sessions.....	267

Introduction to the Model Sessions

Training pitches in Australia are unfortunately often full of hurdles and ladders instead of balls and goals during youth training sessions. This isn't really helpful if we want to develop better FOOTBALL players. The Model Sessions contained in this Curriculum elaborate our national philosophy and are designed to help you train your players the right way. Please note that a 'one session fits all' approach obviously doesn't work; the exercises in these sessions should be modified/extended/simplified according to the needs of your players.

We have also developed a useful checklist for evaluating your training sessions:

'The youth training checklist'

1. Is **football** being played?
2. Is **football** being learned (and therefore taught)?
3. Is **football** being experienced (and enjoyed)?
4. Do the players understand the **football** purpose of the exercise?
5. Do the players recognise the relation to the real game of **football**?
6. Are the players challenged to improve as a **football** player?

Coaches should avoid:

- Too long waiting in lines
- Non-stimulating or over-complicated exercises
- Intensity too high or too low
- Coach intervening too much and talking for too long

Number of players in the Model Sessions

Since coaches are faced with a range of squad sizes, and different numbers of players at training, it was decided that it would not be suitable for us to decide on a fixed number of players for the Model Sessions. Instead, a variety of exercises with differing numbers of players have been presented, allowing coaches to modify and adjust them as they see fit, depending on how many players they are working with. The main purpose of the sessions presented is to convey FFA's basic coaching philosophy.

Numbering System used

In Game Training Phase and Performance Phase Model Sessions, players are given shirt numbers to reflect the 1-4-3-3 positions and their corresponding numbers.

Sometimes 'shadow' numbers are used, to indicate 2 players of the same position within an exercise (e.g. #10 and #20 who both play the number 10 position).

The following table explains the shadow numbers:

Team numbers	Shadow numbers
1	22
2	12
3	13
4	14
5	15
6	16
7	17
8	18
9	19
10	20
11	21

Key for diagrams:



References

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- EPL statistics – Data of 2012/13 season, as at February, 2013 (Prozone)
- Paul S.A. Mairs & Richard E. Shaw – 'Coaching Outside the Box: Changing the Mindset in Youth Soccer'

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