

## From Looking Good to Winning

KNVB's simple teaching methods have led to soccer success

---

*The KNVB and NSCAA teamed up to offer a course for coaches at the KNVB Sports Center at Zeist. The following is a summary prepared by Soccer Journal Editor Jay Martin of the section of the course that dealt with coaching methods and the training session.*

The perspective from Holland is important because the Dutch have always been able to make soccer and the teaching of soccer simple. Although there are some similarities between the U.S. Soccer, NSCAA and KNVB perspectives, the Dutch Vision does have some specific and interesting nuances. The Dutch have long been known for playing wonderful soccer. The emphasis in Holland for many years was "looking good while playing the game." Winning was a secondary concern.

Even after losing the World Cup final in Munich in 1974, the Dutch were satisfied because they played "much better than the Germans." Many in the international soccer community viewed "The Orange" as the quintessential underachievers. That all changed in 1988. The Dutch won the European Championship in Germany and they beat arch-rival Germany in the semifinal. The Dutch discovered that winning was fun. As a result of that win, the KNVB changed the focus of soccer teaching and coaching in Holland. In a 1991 meeting of all KNVB staff at Zeist, the entire curriculum was redefined. The distinction between playing pretty soccer and playing to win became an integral part of the KNVB curriculum. The role of the coach and objectives of coaching at each age level were made very clear to all soccer coaches in Holland.

### Coaching objectives by age

The first step was to determine what should be taught to young players in each age group. Winning became important, but playing the game "the Dutch way" remained a goal. The Dutch wanted to ensure that there was a natural progression to teaching soccer in the whole country. Winning would be emphasized, but not until after the foundation was set. Age group goals were determined:

#### 5- TO 6-YEAR-OLDS

- Ball touch/learn to master the ball
- Skill games in which direction, speed and precision are emphasized

#### 7- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS

- Begin to teach the basic game – start to develop maturity on the ball
- Technical skills and game insight have to be developed by playing in simplified soccer situations – small-sided and small-group games
- Instructions by the coach should be confined to technical matters

#### 12- TO 16-YEAR-OLDS

- Game maturity develops in 11 v. 11 situations
- Team functions are taught for each third of the field through small-sided and full-field games
- Position functions have to be developed through small-sided and full-field games
- Instructions by the coach for both technical and tactical matters

## 17- TO 18-YEAR-OLDS

- Full competition with emphasis on winning — soccer maturity begins to develop
- Game coaching with tactical emphasis
- Stress on efficiency of play and mental aspects of the game

With these overall objectives in mind, it is important to understand that at age 11 the emphasis changes from technical training to the development of tactical considerations. In youth soccer up to the age of 11 the main objective is to learn the technical skills. The starting points for the coach are defined as:

- Technique is not an objective by itself but leads to soccer maturity
- There must always be a relation with soccer as a whole and the aforementioned objectives
- Soccer insight and technical skills should be developed through game-related situations. Small-sided games are best for this.

For juniors (from 11 to 18 years) that means:

- Development of the tactical aspects of the game.
  - This begins with vision, awareness and communication
  - Working together as a team in small groups and the whole team
- Playing soccer with a given and specific task or goal as a team.
  - Players must be aware that the most important thing is winning the game
  - Reading the game:
  - Recognizing and judging the situation with good decision-making

To try to make the distinction between “pretty soccer” and winning, the KNVB asks all coaches to remember the following golden rule:

*Technical activities should not be considered as the be-all and end-all for soccer and for training sessions. The game, playing maturity, playing matches and pleasure in playing should be most important. Technical activities such as heading, turning, feinting, ball control, passing, etc, are too often exercised individually and in a way that is out of context with the game. They are taught as individual “tricks of the trade” and very seldom incorporated into playing the game. All technique must be taught within the context of the game at all times.*

### **Mechanism of coaching**

The best teacher of the game is the game itself. It is the most natural, efficient and loved way to lead the players to the goal of “game maturity.” Therefore, in the total learning process the role of the coach is:

- Simplifying the game to basic forms. That is best done with small-sided games.
- Constructing basic game forms to compensate the negative influence of modern society. The coach must plan for the session to be successful.
- To realize the difference between football “real” and football “strange” training activities. Are all drills realistic? Do they have a goal?
- To use training exercises as a means to reach the coaching goals for the different development levels (age groups).

In order for the coach to do this or to do the job well, it will help:

- If the coach has a lot of soccer experience
- If the coach knows as much as possible about the game at all levels
- If, with the know-how, the coach has the qualities to bring the training exercises to life, i.e. to demonstrate them
- If the coach can read the game and transfer this game intelligence to his or her pupils.

The Dutch understand that the game is the best teacher and that the players play the game. However, the coach can influence the players. How can the coach influence the players? It is not a simple process. Here is a step by step presentation:

- Structure soccer in the three main moments that occur in a soccer game
    - Possession by your team
    - Possession by the opponents
    - Changing possession
  - Observe and listen to improve insight into the game
    - Learn to read the game
  - Concentration
    - Is there close attention by the players?
    - Is there an atmosphere to perform and to learn?
  - Technique
- 
- The players must learn to master the ball in relation to the game
  - The players must have an insight into the game
  - Do the players know the team intention
  - Do the players recognize the situation?
  - How is the organization, the formation and field occupation?
  - Is the space used optimally?
  - Are the players positioned well in relation to each other?
  - Communication
    - Do the players understand each other?
    - Are the players working together?
    - Are all the players alert?

In a major difference between the Dutch objectives or goals and the contemporary goals of teaching in this country, the Dutch know that insight into the game, technique and communication can be distinguished from each other, but they can't be separated. They influence one another and are dependent on each other. The best players have competency in all three areas.

### **Preliminary stage**

The first developmental period is defined as the preliminary stage that takes place from 5 years old to 11 years old. The preliminary stage leads to what the Dutch call basic game maturity. This must be accomplished before the players can move into the second phase, where winning becomes important.

The main goal is defined as an attempt to lead the player toward development of the basic individual qualities necessary to cope with the game and game situations. If done well, the player

moves toward simplified game maturity and is ready for stage two. The KNVB realizes that the best, most natural and most efficient means to this end is playing daily on the street, on the beaches or in the park with other players where space and time are reduced naturally. The players work hard to survive in these situations. The Dutch try to replicate this play environment in training.

The KNVB works together with professional clubs, amateur clubs, regional and local federations to ensure a common curriculum. The United States has not been able to do this. It is essential in this age group to find a balance between playing games (usually small-sided) and training activities that can be fragmented. The Dutch are adamant that the best teacher is the game.

### **The second stage**

The second developmental period is from ages 12 to 18. The coach must begin to combine match related maturity and competitive maturity.

The main goal at this level is team building. The Dutch connotation of team building is not quite the same as our understanding of team building. The coach must build on the simplified maturity attained in the preliminary stage and begin the 11 v. 11 process. Team building the Dutch way is a complex process and entails a number of factors:

#### **Team organization**

To perfect the team, organization is probably the main task of a coach. To have 11 players on the same page is difficult. Team organization includes defining the three functional lines, understanding the evolution of the game, the selected style of play, the quality of players, the team tactics, the course of the game and the quality of the opposing players.

#### **Team mobility**

Players must understand the three moments of the game and understand their roles in positions to master mobility.

#### **Team efficiency**

Team efficiency suggests that players must continue to perfect the activities with a ball. This technical ability combined with an understanding of player roles, team style and team tactics will lead to team efficiency

#### **Winning the duels**

The team that wins the highest number of individual duels within the context of the team will win. This takes perfect technique and an understanding of the team style and tactics. Winning is important.

In order to accomplish this, the KNVB maintains that each training session must have four different characteristics or requirements.

#### **Soccer-related objectives**

- To score goals
- To build up
- Possession
- Defending
- Etc.

**Many repetitions**

This takes planning and making sure the coach has all the right equipment.

- Many turns
- Many passes
- Many shots

**Understanding of the group**

- Age
- Skill level

**Correct coaching**

- Influence the players
- Intervene
- Give instruction
- Demonstrate
- Ask players questions
- Become engaged

The Dutch want the game to be the teacher, but they know that the role of the coach as a person of influence or as a facilitator is important. They understand that a progression is important, that creating a foundation is important, but there is a time when winning is also important.