

Develop the Person – Develop the Player

Decisions Decisions Decisions

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How easy it is to criticise from the sidelines? Instructions are easy to give but not always that easy to follow, especially if the person giving out the instructions is 35 years plus and the person receiving them is 11 years or under. Views of the world and frames of reference are totally different – a complete mismatch. What is vitally important to one person may not even have occurred to the other.

In football great emphasis is placed on the result as a measure of success. Certainly for First Teams and First Team Managers at every club it is the points and the result that is paramount. But is this still true in development football, where the greater emphasis should be, and so often is not, focussed on learning.

In development football some coaches 'play the game' for the players by constantly shouting instructions from the sideline and never letting the players make the decisions or solve the

problems the match presents. There can only be one 'real' reason for this – the coaches' desire to cut down on players' mistakes so that their team will win the match.

Some parents too can fall into this trap. It is sometimes said that parents may try to live out their past career or lack of one or even present insecurities through their children. Football in particular seems to lend itself to this kind of behaviour, and could be especially true if parents were under-achievers but now find that they are parenting a child with the 'potential' to make the grade. How often do we see parental over involvement in the child's activities, almost to the point where the child rarely seems to have an opportunity to make a decision either on or off the pitch?

'Player development' is all about problem solving and decision making because 'player development' is about learning and learning is a

long term, some would say 'life long' process where decisions, mistakes and consequences are vital if things are to truly stick. A football match is a short-term event and simply part of this process – a test where the youngster can experiment and find out what he or she currently knows and can do.

By constantly trying to make the decisions and solve the problems for the players those coaches and parents are in fact dis-empowering them in favour of short-term solutions with short-term rewards --- a win! Through dis-empowerment the players never learn to become self-reliant or trust themselves – because the coaches and parents obviously do not trust them. Therefore they find it more difficult to make the right decisions and solve their own problems both on and off the field. This is a major issue for 'player development' as football from the grass roots up to the world cup final is a decision-making, problem solving game.





How can coaches and parents help and support player development more effectively?

The answer for the coach may lie in the qualities required to be an effective player developer some of which are outlined below.

- Personal Resourcefulness – The ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances in a learning and development context. Remain positive and capable as you do so.
- Assessing Learning Environments – The ability to make judgements about the learning environment you have created, consider what good practice is within it and how these will impact, influence and support the needs of the young players [ie Are you really catering for the unique individual learning styles, and giving young players ownership, responsibility and choices?]
- Presentation Skills – The ability to strike up a positive rapport with, communicate information effectively to young players using the most appropriate strategies and mediums.
- Identifying Development Needs – The ability to identify the development needs of individuals and groups and plan appropriate activities and practice to challenge and meet those needs.
- Designing Learning Activities – The ability to design appropriate learning activities and creative practice as part of a wider, long-term development programme [Taking into consideration the principles of the game and ensuring strategies are in place so that these principles can be practiced effectively – ie creative use of space, overloads, conditions, rules etc.]
- Facilitate Learning – The ability to manage groups of different sizes and help and support their learning effectively.

- Supporting Individuals – The ability to use a range of strategies to support individuals and help them towards greater understanding and improved technical performance.

- Add your own ideas.

And let us look at the parent's role through the eyes of the young player.

So – PLEASE Mum and Dad

- Give me the time and opportunity to make my own decisions both on and off the field – I need to learn the consequences of getting it right and wrong.
- Try not to tell me off or shout at me from the sideline when I do get things wrong. Give me the chance to relax and play – I need the mistakes to help me learn.
- Try not to keep offering me advice going to games or coming home again. Let me unwind and reflect – it helps me learn.
- Listen to me if I come to you with a problem – Sometimes I just need someone to talk to – It helps me learn.
- Remember I am a young person not a small adult – sometimes I don't see things like you do or understand what you are saying.
- Come and enjoy the game – I'll always try my best.
- Please love me for being me – not just for the things I can do.
- Add your own.

All children need to learn that life is an on-going journey with no pre-determined destination and that the only place that success comes before work is in the dictionary. It is helpful, with coach and parent support, for young players to set

'small bite' goals for themselves with a development focus on trying to improve performance gradually and in small increments. If, at times, progress is swift – accept it, reassess the goals and move on to the next challenge.

Many young players give up hope when they think they have failed. Failure is often linked to a final result or to unrealistic coach or parent expectation. Players, coaches and parents should understand that performance moves in upward and downward cycles. During difficult periods players need support from parents and coaches. Players also need patience and resolve, [‘when the going gets tough the tough get going’- Knute Rockne], and should not expect instant success or unjustified praise.

Young players need to learn how to organise themselves – easy tasks like packing their kit bag and making sure equipment is clean and in working order before training and matches. At training they need to be included in the decision making process – sometimes coaches should let the players decide what size of area they should be working in for a particular activity or what the make up of teams in training or practice should be to achieve a particular outcome. All this provides young players with a framework in which they are given respect, trust and responsibility.

With respect, trust and responsibility to the fore young players may begin to understand that the game owes them nothing but a wonderful chance to go out and express themselves in a challenging and creative way – then they may have a better chance of ‘developing’ and ‘evolving’ as players and people.

If you have any comments regarding this article please forward them to John Allpress at john.allpress@TheFA.com