England and Notts County forward, Jess Clarke, talks about the key people and influences that have helped her to the top.
The Boot Room is the official magazine of The FA Licensed Coaches’ Club

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Coaches can learn more about the England DNA playing and coaching philosophy through a new open access website aimed at clubs and coaches at all levels of the game.

Structured around the five core elements of the DNA: Who we are; How we play; the future England player; How we coach and How we support, EnglandDNA.com includes over 20 exclusive video interviews with the key figures behind the project including FA Technical Director, Dan Ashworth, England Manager, Roy Hodgson, and Senior Women’s Head coach, Mark Sampson.

Matt Crocker, FA Head of Coaching, hopes the EnglandDNA.com website, launched at December’s FA Licensed Coaches’ Club conference, will help to strengthen relationships with all those involved in player development at all levels.

“One of the aims we set out at the start of the England DNA project was to be open with everyone in the game and provide an insight into our beliefs on young player development and how the England teams operate.

“The site aims to provide an outline of our ways of working and the values and beliefs which underpin the coaches work with the England teams from U15 upwards in both the male and female game.”

“We hope that by releasing detail of the DNA methodology through the EnglandDNA.com website it will continue the communication process and also play a key part in supporting the ongoing education of coaches who will be encouraged to use the site as part of their studies.

“Coaches will be also encouraged to apply the ideas in their own context at the clubs they work at different levels of the game.”

Practical coaching session footage will follow in 2016.

To learn more about the England DNA playing and coaching philosophy visit: EnglandDNA.com
FA to invest £1.4 million to support more aspiring Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic coaches into elite game

The FA will invest more than £1.4 million over the next five seasons to get more aspiring coaches from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities into the licensed coaching system, at the elite level.

This comprises BAME COACH bursaries, funding between 80-90 per cent of the total course costs at UEFA B, UEFA A, Pro licence and Advanced Youth Award levels.

The investment includes three full-time fixed-term BAME appointments each season, to gain experience working within The FA’s Technical Division, including England Development Teams.

Ugo Ehiogu, Chris Powell, Chris Ramsey, Chris Kiwomya and Brian Deane have all recently gained from these opportunities, as have two female coaches, Helen Nkwocha and Coreen Brown who have worked with some of the women’s squads.

This additional investment builds on the successes of the COACH bursary programme, an essential part of The FA’s ongoing commitment to develop greater equality of opportunities as part of English Football’s Inclusion and Anti-Discrimination (IAD) Action Plan.

Dan Ashworth, The FA’s Technical Director, welcomed the initiative.

He said: “We need to give people the confidence that those roles are there and that they are open for everybody. So we say [to all those aspiring coaches], get your qualifications, make sure you are in a position where you can do the role.

From that, we will take a firm stance and a real commitment to try and change the percentages and the numbers to make it more reflective of society and more reflective of people in professional sport and make sure that the coaching, the support positions and influential positions within our game are fully represented.”

John Salako: “I think we need more black players becoming coaches”

Crystal Palace first team coach, John Salako, believes football needs more black players to become coaches and has urged those with coaching aspirations to consider gaining valuable experience working with young players before making the step to senior level.

“I think we need more black players becoming coaches. We are always discussing [black players] doing coaching badges early, getting out on the track and doing the networking and getting a job in an academy.”

Salako’s Premier League coaching opportunity came in part through networking, underlining the importance of a comprehensive contacts list.

A meeting with Crystal Palace manager Alan Pardew led to the former Eagles winger being offered a week-long coaching trial with the Premier League side that concluded with Salako offered the role of first-team coach.

The 46 year-old recognises how fortunate his own recent coaching story is, but cited the time he has spent volunteering with young players earlier in his career as a valuable learning experience and urged others to be willing to find their own route into the industry.

“I would recommend and advise anybody to take a job with the U12s, 13s or 14s because you get to understand yourself and your coaching. You get to learn and understand kids, players and formations and a game environment before going in at the top level,” he said.
Michael Carrick player journey book available as free download

An FA research study looking at the player development journey of Manchester United and England midfielder, Michael Carrick, has been published as a free e-book and is now available to download.

Michael Carrick: Raising a Playmaker was co-produced by The FA’s psychology research manager, Dr Matt Pain, and Michael’s brother, FA regional coach mentor, Graeme Carrick, and includes exclusive interviews with Michael as well as those closest to him.

The resource offers an insight into the experiences both on and off the field that shaped Carrick’s career.

“Michael Carrick has had a fascinating journey from childhood through to the England international team, with strong family support pivotal at every step of the journey,” explained Dr Pain.

“We wanted to tell the story and show how it related to the theory around social support, motivation and talent development.”

Pain added, “we hope it shows the ups and downs that occur along the way to becoming an England international, and the many aspects – motivation, parental support, practice, specialisation, mental resilience - that contribute to successful development.”

New Boot Room Digital Archive launched

A new digital archive housing all 14 issues of The Boot Room magazine has been launched.

The archive, available on both TheFA.com and The FA Licensed Coaches’ Club website, means each edition of the magazine is free to download on laptops and desktops as well as all mobile and tablet devices.

To access the library please visit TheFA.com/SGP or TheFA.com/FALCC and search for The Boot Room archive.

’Maintaining individuality’ the key message at Youth Development Phase conference

More than 130 professional academy managers and coaches attended a new FA conference dedicated to working with players in the youth development phase (12-16).

Over the course of two days at St. George’s Park, The player is the syllabus conference explored the challenges faced by coaches in developing the individual within team environments whilst also managing the unique factors that can impact players aged between 12 and 16.

“Obviously The FA’s interest is for the whole game, but we felt on this occasion that we wanted to focus on those clubs that are providing for our national teams and to help develop our working relationships with them even closer,” explained Dan Micciche, FA technical lead for the 12-16 age group and conference organiser.

“This conference represented an opportunity for the coaches who attended to reflect on the crucial role they all play during this potentially challenging period of a player’s development,” he said.

Micciche added: “As coaches, it is important that we afford players the opportunity to maintain their individuality through this phase while at the same time skilfully identifying what needs adding to their game.

“The programme was designed to reflect that and was packaged to provide coaches with fresh ideas for when they return to their clubs and work with their players.”

Sticking to the plan

England Women’s Head Coach, Mark Sampson, provides an exclusive insight into the planning and preparation that led to World Cup bronze.

England U17 Head Coach, Steve Cooper, delivering at the Youth Development Phase conference
New FA foundation phase conference considers the person before the player

Following the success of the first ever youth development phase conference at St. George’s Park, The FA hosted a second professional game event in September – for coaches working in the foundation phase.

Over 150 representatives from professional club academies and centres of excellence – in both the men’s and women’s game – attended the conference, which had been designed around the theme of Develop the Person, Develop the Player.

“The theme and the focus of the conference was chosen because it reflected our responsibilities as coaches working with 5-11 players to support the individual as well as the footballer,” explained Pete Sturgess, FA technical lead (5-11) and England futsal head coach.

“Our aim over the two days was to underline the link between supporting the social and psychological development of young people and the physical and technical benefits that can come from it,” he said.

“We were delighted to see so many youth coaches join us from across the professional game and from both the men’s and women’s game,” added Sturgess.

Over 200 coaching Masterclass sessions available as resource library grows

Five new coaching sessions have been published as part of The FA’s coaching Masterclass series taking the number of videos available on The FA Licensed Coaches’ Club website to over 200.

The latest content includes an out of possession Masterclass hosted by England U19s head coach, Aidy Boothroyd, who, over the course of five practices, explores three defensive principles outlined in the England DNA - pressing; delay, deny, dictate and emergency defending.

Boothroyd is joined by England U15s head coach, Dan Micciche who delivers an in possession Masterclass which aims to develop creative, imaginative and confident players capable of retaining the ball and building attacks.

Another new addition is Jack Walton’s Masterclass on Behaviour Management, Luis de Barros’ session on using futsal as a development tool and an interview with coach education expert, Dr Lynn Kidman, on the question – why do I think the way I do?

The FA Licensed Coaches’ Club Masterclass series was launched in 2013 to showcase the ongoing coaching work of The FA, highlighting best practice and providing insight into latest coaching research and trends.

To access the Masterclass Library, please visit the-fa.com/Masterclasses
A connected PATHWAY

England and Notts County forward, Jess Clarke, talks about the key people and influences that have helped her to the top.
When I went into primary school, I just played with the lads. It was odd because at that point I didn’t even know there were any women’s teams or anything like that. Because I didn’t know girls played football, I just thought I would go all the way through playing with the lads – my plans were to play for Manchester United with Ruud van Nistelrooy. High school was a more difficult time for me – especially after I got picked for England. I don’t think some of the boys liked that I could play at their standard. Some of the boys would be a nightmare with me. They would say: “You’re that girl that plays for England aren’t you? I bet you couldn’t take me on.”

I just took on all the challenges. Some of them were really competitive, but I think it just probably made me a better player.

“Mum was a grafter”

I come from a single parent background – it was just me and my mum. My mum was a grafter, she did lots of cleaning jobs and always had the philosophy that you should work hard for what you want and if you work hard you’ll get the rewards.

As soon as I set eyes on a football, that was it. I just took it upon myself to start kicking around. As soon as I did, I knew that’s what I wanted my career path to be. Even at such a young age.

As far as I know, nobody pointed me in the direction of football. Maybe my mum bought me a ball for Christmas or a birthday present. I was never really interested in dolls or anything like that. If you bought me a football or a bow and arrow I was happy.

“Just 10 more minutes”

Every night after school, I used to be on the field, practising my tricks, passing, dribbling and shooting. I’d be on my own. My mum would go mad at me sometimes. It would get to 9 or 10 o’clock and I knew I had school the next morning and my mum would be shouting out of the window. I’d say “yes mum, just give me ten more minutes.” I just knew that’s what I wanted to do.

I really feel like football has put me on the right path. I don’t come from the best area in Leeds and I grew up on some of the roughest estates. At school, I wouldn’t say I was a nightmare but I wasn’t motivated to do my work. All I thought was football, football, all the time.

“A fly-away ball and a wall”

I was probably six or seven when I was starting to kick a ball around – I think my first ball was one of those plastic fly-away balls. I mostly played on my own. I used to live in a block of flats and I was always outside just kicking the ball against the wall. I would get in trouble all the time. I used to play in the corridors inside and the sound of the ball would echo the building. People would be always coming out and shouting.

They would say: “You’re that girl that plays for England aren’t you? I bet you couldn’t take me on.”

“Playground with the boys”

When I went into primary school, I just played with the lads. It was odd because at that point I didn’t even know there were any women’s teams or anything like that. Because I didn’t know girls played football, I just thought I would go all the way through playing with the lads. My plans were to play for Manchester United with Ruud van Nistelrooy. High school was a more difficult time for me – especially after I got picked for England.

I don’t think some of the boys liked that I could play at their standard. Some of the boys would be a nightmare with me.

They would say: “You’re that girl that plays for England aren’t you? I bet you couldn’t take me on.” I’d just take on all the challenges. Some of them were really competitive, but I think it just probably made me a better player.

“I want to see you on TV playing for England one day”

It was my PE teacher at high school, Lindsay Monroe, who pushed me to the next step of my career. I’ve still not had chance to thank her for everything that she did.

When I first started high school, I was still kicking around with the boys and I had no idea as to how I was going to progress in women’s football or even have a career. My teacher was the one who said: “I’m going to get you trials at Leeds United and I want you to be there at this time at this place.”

At that time it was difficult because I had no funds and my Mum didn’t drive and sometimes didn’t have enough money to get me to places – so my teacher actually drove me to the trials for the first few sessions.

Before she left, my teacher said to me: “I want to see you on TV playing for England one day.” At that point I was still trialling at Leeds. If my teacher hadn’t put me on that track, I definitely don’t feel like I’d be where I am today.

“I want to see you on TV playing for England one day”
I was fourteen when I went to the Centre of Excellence at Leeds United. I got in on the second week of the trial. Before the centre of excellence I had no formal coaching. The girls that I play with now say they started being coached at 9 or 10 and playing for a girls’ team. I only started when I was 15, which looking back is quite late. I think you could tell I hadn’t had any coaching. All I used to do was dribble with the ball and never pass to anyone. Then when I started to have coaching I began to understand how to work with others and build an attack. Before that I used to just run with it on my own.

One minute I was in year nine at school and not playing for a team and then a year later I was in the first-team for Leeds.

When talent meets opportunity

When I was 14 everything happened quite quickly for me. One minute I was in year nine at school and not playing for anyone and then a year later I was in the first-team for Leeds, offered a scholarship at Loughborough university and scouted for England. So my life changed very quickly. I was only in the U14/U15s at the centre of excellence for a year and then I went to the development squad for a couple of games and then I was straight into Leeds United ladies senior team. I think I made my debut at 15/16. Julie Chipchase was the coach and she gave me the opportunities to progress my game.

The endless pursuit of excellence

I still go out on the field – with my boyfriend – and put up the nets. I stick him in the goal and kick balls at him. Repetition helps me and it helps with preparation. It is about going out onto the pitch knowing that you’ve been finishing consistently and that you are prepared. The more I practised, the more my finishing became second nature in the game.

Colin Walker, the Notts County forwards coach, has been my backbone over the last year. It’s not really what he does but it’s what he says to me that makes the penny drop. I don’t think he even realises how much he’s helped me. In football everyone has opinions but Colin said: “It’s not about how other people perceive you, it’s about how you perceive yourself and if you can get up in the morning and look yourself in the mirror.” He gave me the mindset not to let anybody else affect my game. You’ve got to know you are a good player and you’ve got to finish your career knowing that you’ve done everything right.

I feel like I can be honest with him and he will be brutally honest with me. I think at the top level you need that honesty.

Colin Walker, the Notts County forwards coach, has been my backbone over the last year.
Fa Regional Coach Development Manager and former Leeds United ladies manager, Julie Chipchase, reflects on Jess’s progress during her time with the Yorkshire club.

What were your first impressions of Jess as a player and as a person?

I was immediately impressed by Jess on the pitch and her desire to be positive in 1 v 1 situations. Her attacking play and pace were strengths even in those early days of her career and it is great to see she still has those traits now. Off the pitch, Jess was very quiet but dealt with playing in the Leeds United first team with great maturity.

Was it clear that Jess had potential to go on to be an international player?

I guess I saw enough in Jess to put her straight into the Leeds United first team at a young age because I felt she could cope with it and she needed the challenge to develop further. She showed great strength in character which I knew would take her a long way in the game, which it has.

What development work did you do with her? What aspects of the game did you work on?

We continued to build upon her attacking strengths and no matter how many times she was unsuccessful in 1 v 1 situations we always encouraged her to try again. We built upon this work and looked to get her to see other options that could be just as effective – such as combining with strikers. We also looked at developing her crossing ability which sometimes would let down the great work she had done to beat the defender. Obviously defensive duties came into play however the focus with Jess would centre around her attacking strengths.

How did she develop during her time at Leeds?

Jess’s character started to show and her inner strength to succeed became apparent. She was always positive on the pitch, no matter how many knocks she took she would always dust herself down and have another go. She started to build herself a reputation in the game, became an established first team player, generally playing as a wide attacking player, but became a good front player too.

I would hope Jess feels the club played their little part in her development.

“No matter how many times she was unsuccessful in 1 v 1 situations we always encouraged her to try again”

Julie Chipchase, former Leeds United ladies manager
Wrestling, dodgeball, and handstands are probably not the first activities you would expect to see in the coaching syllabus of a professional football academy. However, for Sheffield United and their academy manager, Nick Cox, a child-centred approach to development is crucial to the League One club’s coaching approach, particularly at the foundation phase and players aged 5-11.

“What we’ve tried to do is devise a movement skills programme which is multi-sports and play-like and creative,” explained Cox, who joined the Yorkshire club three years ago after a 12 year stint at Watford where he held a variety of roles before becoming academy manager in 2010.

“We encourage playground activities like wrestling, play fighting and chasing. It is built around everything that helps kids learn how to use their body. It doesn’t look like a sports science programme; it looks like play,” he explains.
Play is a recurring theme as Cox discusses methodology. The Blades’ academy manager is wary of the negative impact that too much adult influence may have on the youngest children in the club’s care.

“I sometimes think that at the youngest ages, being in an academy environment is a disadvantage rather than an advantage. In an academy a lot of your childhood is dominated by coach–led activity and you do things on the coaches’ terms. If you weren’t in our environment you might be doing things on your terms and we have to consider that,” explained Cox.

With academies increasing their contact time with players and day release programmes becoming more common at the foundation phase, Cox feels that coaching activities should offer a wide range of experiences of the game.

“Across the game we’ve increased the amount of time we spend with the boys, but we’re just doing more of the same stuff. If we have more time we should be doing a greater variety of stuff.

“We have to guard against the boys having a one dimensional experience of football. In most of their downtime we’ve given them a lot of coach-led, adult driven stuff, whereas left alone they might have been messing about, experimenting with the game and playing with their mates to get a real variety of experiences. I think kids need variety,” he added.

The club’s answer: game based coaching, using constraints and competition to encourage problem solving and decision-making. There is also street-football type sessions in the club car park and a host of trips and tournaments aimed at helping players develop their psychological and social skills.

Serving up age-appropriate content is key. Cox describes himself as “the architect of the player journey” with each of his staff offering expertise in a small piece along the way. Decisions on the academy syllabus are based around the questions: “What cannot wait? What has to happen now?”

“At the start of the journey we looked at what are all the things you might need to know as a footballer by the age of 12.” Cox explains.

“If we miss a window of opportunity at a certain age, we could be in big trouble later along the journey – for example, at age 9, things like ball mastery and physical literacy need to happen. We can’t pump that into kids at 16, so we better deal with that now.

“Likewise, we conclude that some things definitely cannot wait: tactics and formations? Can that wait? We may be able to shove that along the journey a bit and make sure that arrives at 14/15/16.

“So it’s a process of looking at what are the priorities at each age group and what things can wait and what things need to be the focus. Then as a group of staff we work hard to design a seamless journey that is both age-specific and player specific from beginning to end.”

The discussion with Cox mostly focuses on the club’s approach to work at the foundation phase, however United’s academy manager believes that player development should be discussed without blocks or barriers.

“Without sounding too controversial, I think we need to unpick everything. Youth development and professional development because it helps to group age-groups and players and it helps to ensure the coaches get the right kind of coach education. But I’m trying to do away with too much talk of phases because you can end up with silos,” he explains.

“For a player joining the academy at U8/U9, it is a 12 year journey to become a senior player and each group of coaches have the responsibility to add the layer that they need to add at a particular age group. The coaches then pass them onto the next coach who will add the layer that they need.

“We want to create a collective approach where every coach knows how their contribution fits into the bigger picture. It helps to prevent that difficult transitional period where you are jumping from one phase to another and the work looks really different.

“It should be a consistent and seamless journey – not a big jump like it is from primary to secondary school – instead we want to move them slowly towards the end goal rather than abrupt jumps from one environment to another.”

Although Cox wants coaches to understand the whole journey, he recognises that there are different coaching skills and characteristics needed along the way. He admits that the start-point is one of the most difficult tasks.

“At the foundation phase you absolutely have to understand the game in the same way as the U18s coach has to understand the game.

“But you’ve actually got a harder job because you’ve got to unravel the game and hand it to the kids in a 9 year-old version, which is a really difficult thing to do. Personality is one of the biggest ingredients for coaches at that age,” he explains.

“Every time the kids walk through the door can you be inspirational and can you enthuse and ignite a passion for learning and football and send the boys off loving the game.

Cox adds: “I think one of our duties is to ensure that the boys are still playing the game as an adult. Regardless of how successful they are on their academy journey, the only way kids will still be playing the game as an adult is if their first experience of the game is an enjoyable life-changing experience.”
Tottenham Hotspur assistant head of development 11-16, Justin Cochrane, talks to the Boot Room editor, Peter Glynn, about the key ingredients for working with players in the Youth Development phase.

For Tottenham Hotspur coach, Justin Cochrane, patience is a virtue. In his seventh season with the Premier league club, the 33 year-old is responsible for overseeing the development of players in the 11-16 age category. Understanding the various issues linked to growth and maturation during this phase is key.

"Nobody has a crystal ball, but John McDermott [Spurs’ Head of player development] has had a lot of experience dealing with late maturing players and has helped to educate all the coaches here not just to ‘look at now’. You’ve got to know what’s below the surface and what is likely to come, especially with players aged 11-16,” explains Cochrane.

"Right now, it might be difficult for some of the late maturing players but in four or five years time it will work to their advantage. Just because there’s a big player bulldozing their way through games now doesn’t mean they will be the player in the future,” he says.

It is a methodology which has reaped its rewards. First team players Harry Kane, Ryan Mason, Tom Carroll and Alex Pritchard have all benefitted from a patient approach.

"We’ve got some talented player developers working at Tottenham and some excellent people who have worked here in the past - people who have seen the whole journey of player development. "Chris Ramsey [former QPR manager] Perry Suckling [QPR Academy Manager] and Alex Inglethorpe [Liverpool FC Academy manager] are three of those. I worked closely with Chris and learnt so much from him, he was a major influence on me.

"There has been a lot of patience with Tom Carroll and there currently is with Alex Pritchard. Ryan Mason was under maturated as a 15/16 year old and now he’s an England international,” he explains.
The senior players Cochrane references are exceptional technicians afforded time for their physicality to catch up. The Spurs academy coach stresses that young players with potential will have opportunities at the north London club regardless of their size or stature.

“It’s not just about the coaches being brave enough to play a smaller player. The players themselves have to be brave as well. Being small can’t be an excuse for them. The have got to be brave and get on the ball and work out ways of being effective or showing potential to be effective,” he explains.

“You can’t be small and a pessimist in the way we play. We’re always telling our smaller players that they’ve got to be optimistic and have a buzz about their game.”

However, Cochrane stresses that working with late maturing players is not the only focus.

“We also recognise that the early matures need specific work too. It is not just about waiting for the late matures to come through. There are early matures who start out ahead and stay ahead to go through and be successful. They can still succeed. Our job as youth developers is to cater for everyone: the boy who is way out in front now, but also the boy who will come from the back of the pack - the player who has experienced and dealt with difficulty and adversity,” he says.

Playing with positivity and creativity is a key part of the club’s playing style and a focus of the work underway at the club’s state-of-the-art training facility in Enfield.

Cochrane explains that the playing style is based on an attacking, creative and expressive form of football, one which the coaches try to link to the history and traditions of the club.

“When you look at the club’s philosophy and the types of player the club has produced in the past and the great players the Tottenham fans have enjoyed watching and want to see again – they want to see attacking football and players playing on the front foot. So we want that type of player to come through the academy,” he explains.

Clockwise from top: John McDermott, Justin Cochrane, Alex Pritchard, Tom Carroll and Chris Ramsey.

Having progressed through the youth ranks at QPR before going on to play for twelve clubs including Rotherham, Yeovil and Crewe – where Cochrane cites the influence of Dario Gradi and Steve Holland – the former midfielder has his own player development story to draw from. Coaching has been a consideration from early in the journey.

“When I was 17, me and another coach, Tim Zobbo, who now works at QPR, coached a team called Westerham boys based in Edmonton where we lived. I coached the 10s and 11s whilst I was apprentice. We had them for three seasons and they did really well.

“It was my first experience of coaching young players. None of the players had played in teams before and the teams formed through groups of friends, so I got a real experience from coaching grassroots football.

“Learning how to build relationships with players so they trust you, buy into what you’re saying and believe that you’re going to help them. That’s where I got my grounding in coaching and it really helped me when I came to Tottenham,” explains Cochrane.

There has been a lot of patience with Tom Carroll and there currently is with Alex Pritchard. Ryan Mason was under maturated as a 15/16 year old and now he’s an England international

On joining the Premier League club there was a clear introduction to the ‘Spurs way’. A concise strap-line has stayed with him since his first day.

“We want to develop players who can score goals, create goals or stop goals. That was something that John McDermott said and something that he got from Dario Gradi.

“The game is all about stopping, making or scoring goals – and as a player you’ve got to fall into one of those three. It is how we look at players at Tottenham.

“I remember my first meeting it was clear that the approach at Spurs was player centred not team centred. I remember John saying it is not just about winning, it is about playing and trying to win in our style. We want outstanding individuals who can play in a team collective.

“After that first meeting, I was clear my job was to improve individuals and matches were just an extension of training. We want our players to win games and enjoy winning, but it isn’t win at all costs and we’re not going to move away from the style of play,” he says.

Cochrane hopes that anybody watching a Tottenham academy session would see practices that are linked to the ‘actual game’. Realism is central to the coaching methodology.

“Brian Klug [former Tottenham coach now at Ipswich], used to say: ‘be careful that the players don’t just become good at the practice or the drill. If they just keep doing the drill they just get good at doing the drill’ - and that message really stayed with me.

“We might have a clear idea as coaches as to how the drill or practice links to the game, but the players might not be able to make the links.

“We work a lot with John Allpress [former FA player development coach and now player development consultant at Tottenham] and he constantly challenges the way I think.

“We do a lot of game based sessions where the players can relate what they’re doing to the game. We vary the shapes and sizes of the pitch - we’ve got some really creative coaches - but we don’t go too far from the core strands of what we want sessions to be like,” added Cochrane.
The journey to winning

Chelsea U18 coach, Joe Edwards, tells Peter Glynn that winning games of football can be the focus in the professional development phase if all previous elements of player development have been age-appropriate and connected.
Chelsea U18 coach, Joe Edwards, is comfortable talking about winning. After all, the former Chelsea academy player last year led the Londoners to FA Youth Cup success, defeating Man City 5-2 on aggregate in the Final and claiming the trophy for the second year in succession. Success is a prerequisite when working at one of the biggest football clubs in the world.

“It’s important to state that we do go to win at U18 football. Whether it is our Saturday morning league games or the FA Youth Cup, we are there to win,” explains Edwards.

“People often talk about winning and development as though they are two different things and that they can’t go hand in hand.”

It’s a claim Edwards contests. The Premier League champions’ U18 coach believes focusing on winning in the professional development phase is the result of a development programme with appropriate content at appropriate stages.

“When you look at the FA Youth Cup Final team from last year, nine of the boys are from London and had been at the club from U11 or younger onwards.

“When you have had kids from that age and for that long and who have been doing the technical work and understanding the club’s football philosophy and understanding how we play, they are so familiar with the style that as they get older we can start applying it to winning.

“It’s important that we go out and win games, within a certain style and philosophy, within a certain way of playing,” explains Edwards.

Preparing players who can cope with the pressures of competitive senior football is a long-term project that is meticulously planned.

“Like at most clubs we sit down as a group of staff and we breakdown the player journey and look at what we want the players to be competent with at different ages and what the syllabus should look like at different stages,” he explains.

“The foundation phase is very much about technique – we put a big emphasis on developing players who can use both feet – and players expressing themselves. There are no set formations at those ages. We also have a real focus on the fundamentals of movement, co-ordination and balance.

“At the youth development phase we start to look at how we believe the game should be played with a focus on our football objectives and how we want our teams to play. If you went to watch our U12s, 14s and 16s and they were playing side by side we would expect it to look a similar way.

“The boys are then coming to me at 16, 17, 18 years old and we are expecting them to have all that work and development in the locker. That’s where we are saying lets mould this into competitive football.”

Edwards explains that there is a close working link between the club’s U18, U21s and the senior team.

“It is a seamless way of working designed to help players move through the age-groups. The club’s philosophy can be broken into two parts: one part football, one part a way of working.

“There’s the football philosophy which is basically how we want to play and what our teams look like. A lot of clubs are going down similar routes at the moment with the principles of playing out from the back and through the thirds.

“There’s also the working philosophy – which looks at how we plan our training sessions, the way we plan our syllabus every four weeks to make sure we’re accounting for the matches and opponents that we’ve got that month in combination with whatever football objectives we need to be honing in on.

“Realistic practice is really important to us. If players of certain positions need to be making box-to-box runs over 40 yards and then making strong recovery runs, then we won’t achieve that by putting them in the gym or on a treadmill. We achieve that through real football related practices,” explains Edwards.

“Within all of this we’re conscious not to lose sight of the importance of the individual development of the players. Just because we are in league and cup competitions we still ensure that the individuals are developing.”

For a professional development phase coach working at one of biggest Premier League clubs, the job also demands an in-depth understanding of the loan-market and the role it plays in player development. Chelsea currently have a wealth of academy players and young professionals gaining experience on loan.

“People often talk about winning and development as though they are two different things and that they can’t go hand in hand.”

Edwards admits it is difficult for young players to progress directly through into the club’s first-team and stresses the importance of the loan system to help prepare for the step up.

“If you are sending players out on loan at 18 and 19 years old, players who will be playing in, or getting close to a senior first team, then you have to help them prepare for that. If only six weeks prior to that you have started talking about the pressures of winning and losing a football match then it is too late.

“It’s something we’re putting a lot of consideration into when we’re planning our sessions. Working in a certain way, trying to win games, playing creative and attacking football but making sure our programme is preparing the boys for everything they might face on their next step – which, when they are at Chelsea, is commonly a loan.”

Edwards repeatedly stresses both the opportunity and challenge that comes with employment at Chelsea’s academy, describing the environment as a “culture of excellence”.

“Culture is really important at the club. If, as a coach, you are preaching something it is really important that you lead by example yourself.

“If we are continually asking the players to be the best that they can be, to give 100% every day and continue to learn and develop – then we have to lead by example as coaches.

“If you’ve got members of staff who have that mindset – who are always looking to learn, improve and reflect – it develops a certain way of working for everyone and you are in the best place to do it because you’re surrounded by excellence,” added Edwards.
Connecting the game:
The 2015 FA National Coaching Conference will look at the importance of creating a clear journey for players to develop in the game. Here, youngsters take part in an FA Skills coaching session for players aged 5-11 at the launch of the The FA National Game Strategy for Participation and Development.
THE ART OF NOTICING

FA Regional Coach Mentor officer, Ceri Bowley, asks coaches to consider what they are looking for.
The coaching process is an ongoing cycle of performance and practice, within which a coach is required to evaluate, intervene, and feedback information to players with the aim of promoting learning and improving performance. In order for a coach to effectively evaluate, intervene, and feedback they must first be able to competently observe in order to understand what is happening in training or a match. Accurate observation informs the decision-making process leading to the selection of the appropriate action or intervention. In other words, what you see dictates how you act.

Research suggests that experienced football coaches have been shown to be able to recall just 59.2% of the critical events occurring during 45 minutes of football performance (Laird and Waters, 2008). This lack of recall accuracy will no doubt reduce the accuracy of coaching feedback and decision-making and inhibit player learning and development.

The complex nature of coaching demands that each player’s differentiated learning style is addressed. This means that coaches need to be able to observe what ignites a player’s interest and maintains their engagement with the task.

It would seem then that developing observation skills are of paramount importance to a coach, so how can they be developed?

**THE ART OF NOTICING**

Noticing can be seen as a natural act, something we do automatically everyday through using all of the five senses. As coaches we are exposed to a vast amount of stimuli and it would be impossible to notice all of it. Instead we get drawn towards certain stimuli that we think have the most relevance and these become what we notice. Although we feel sensitive to what is going on around us, there will be much more that we have failed to give attention to. Therefore, how can we be sure that we notice the right things to inform our action?

**DEVELOPING OBSERVATION AND NOTICING**

**1. Purposeful Observation**

One of the main challenges with observation is knowing what to look for. The danger is that we try and see everything in a session or match and we end up seeing nothing. What you see depends upon what you look for. Therefore, it is important that a coach’s observation is purposeful to ensure that what they see will ultimately inform feedback that will enhance their players learning. This can be achieved through looking for specific actions to observe.

To do so, decide what are the three most important actions that your players require feedback about? In Issue 33 of The Boot Room, my article titled Matchday for Players offered some guidance on setting team and player challenges. These challenges can be a good start point for coaches for making their observation more purposeful. That is, when observing training or matches look for moments that directly relate to your players’ challenges. More specific observation will lead to more specific and relevant feedback.

**2. Marking**

Noticing is made easier when coaches are able to draw upon past experience and knowledge. For example, having previous experience of doing or observing successful application of a skill generates a frame of reference for the coach. This will help the coach to identify similarities/differences to determine how best to feedback and support the player.

Reflective practice can enhance the process of drawing upon past experience and knowledge. Making notes of what you notice during a session or match is a form of ‘marking’ which demonstrates the importance of what we noticed, and makes it available for further reflection which can draw attention to not only what the coach noticed but significant moments that were missed leading to a greater awareness of these things when observing again.

According to Mason (2002) ‘marking’ is different to ‘ordinary noticing’ because it gives more significance to what we see and initiates mention of it. Marking or note taking allows the coach to make sense of what they have noticed before discussing it with others (e.g., when giving feedback to players).

The danger is that we try and see everything in a session or match and we end up seeing nothing.

**Understanding and Accuracy**

Making sense of what you notice and ensuring that you see it accurately is very important as misconceptions will likely lead to giving inaccurate feedback to players and/or less effective intervention selection. Whilst ‘marking’ will aid understanding, the following are also advised:

**Adopting a variety of coaching positions**

Observing the practice from different positions will give you a more thorough insight into the whole session and enhance the opportunity to ‘notice’ key happenings as you will see a range of views. Taking up a position behind the play can be valuable as it allows you to see the same picture(s) as the players and will allow more specific feedback to be given, increasing the chances of players being able to relate to and thus understand the information you provide.

**Seeking multiple perspectives**

Take the opportunity to discuss what you notice with others that are present (e.g., other coaches). This will validate what you notice through observation. Seeking another perspective may also expose other things that you hadn’t noticed. This may serve to draw your attention to these things in the future. Be careful not to allow your discussions to divert your attention completely away from what you have noticed but use it to add value to your observations.

Prior to intervening or giving feedback, clarify the situation with the players. You can do this through asking questions (e.g., How did that pass feel? What led you to make that pass?) to provoke thought. The players’ responses will allow you to assess the situation more accurately and better understand the reason behind their actions. For example, a certain pass may have been attempted because that was the only one that the player saw.

This detail is crucial to how a coach provides feedback as there would be little value in telling the player that he should have played a different pass. A better approach in this case would be to help the player see the different available passing options.

Ceri Bowley is an FA Regional Coach Mentor Officer.
FA Regional Coach Development Manager, Keith Webb, discusses the importance of pursuing objective observation.

Quite often it is in the chance meetings that you learn the most. One such meeting occurred early in my coaching career following a derby game between Norwich City and Ipswich Town.

As is still tradition at many professional grounds across the country, once the on-pitch matters were out of the way managers and coaches would meet up in a little room under the stand at Norwich and discuss the game and football in general.

As an aspiring young coach trying to make it in the professional game, I took it upon myself to attend as many of these football discussions as possible. Simply being around and listening to some of the best coaches and managers in the country represented a great development opportunity for me.

One particular night, Ipswich Town manager, John Lyall, popped his head around the door to see me sitting there on my own. After I invited him in and offered him a drink a chance masterclass in coaching followed. The impromptu chat lasted almost thirty-five minutes and proved to have a lasting impression on me.
John was manager of West Ham for 15 years between 1974 and 1989, leading the east London club to FA Cup Final glory over Arsenal in 1980 and was widely recognised as one of the most innovative and forward-thinking coaches of his era.

One of the last things John stressed to me that night was the importance of working on my observational skills. At the time I didn’t appreciate what he meant as I thought it was an area of coaching that I was good at. However, when reading John’s book a few years later, it again highlighted the need for good observational skills and it got me thinking about its importance a lot and it is something I have been hugely interested in ever since.

Expert observation and high-level scanning and prediction skills have long been associated with the attributes of the world’s best players. Elite players need to observe what is going on around them in order to make decisions that we perceive as correct and creative. In recent years, we have seen clips of Frank Lampard, Steven Gerrard, Paul Scholes and Xavi continually checking their shoulders and scanning the field of play before they receive the ball. In comparison, the observational skills of the coach are afforded less prominence. It is easy to fall into the trap of rarely practising or improving observation skills as there is a tendency to think – incorrectly – that observation ‘just comes naturally’.

Accurate observational skills are fundamental to providing relevant and specific feedback which details what has actually happened in the game and not what we think might have happened. Just like with players, it is a skill that can be improved through focused practice.

With so many coaches accustomed to watching football on television, it is easy to fall into the trap of watching the ball during a game. It is a dangerous move. If the ball becomes the sole focus, there is a lack of appreciation for what is happening around the game. It is a tendency to think – incorrectly – that observation ‘just comes naturally’.

Objectivity can prove elusive. In The FA Youth Award Module 2 course, Developing the Practice, there is a workshop on observation. The course discusses the concept of “before, during and after” a player has the ball. To support the quest for objectivity, coaches should utilise all those involved in the coaching process in order to provide feedback that is both relevant and true to what is happening within the game.

This can be achieved by empowering an assistant coach to focus on a player or unit for a 5–10 minute period and then providing accurate feedback. This in itself requires a lot of discipline as it easy to fall into the trap of becoming emotionally involved in the game.

Also, where you can, try and use the players’ parents. Unlike the coach, a parent will watch their son or daughter with greater focus than any other on the field – admittedly, they may see it through rose tinted glasses too. With a bit of support and guidance however, you can task the parents with collating the number of touches or successful passes their child has. It will give the parents something to focus on whilst watching and gives you the opportunity to collect the information at half-time and full-time to form a better idea of what has happened.

Keith Webb is The FA Regional Coach Development Manager for the East region.

Observation is made easier if you use a systematic framework which will allow you to focus your observations on specifics.
Skill. Just five letters, but an enormous word – especially in the world of football. But what is it precisely? According to the Oxford dictionary it is “the ability to do something well; expertise”. Collins says it is “special ability in a task, sport, etc, especially ability acquired by training”.

It was a group discussion of skill development – on day two of my FA youth module two course in Hertfordshire a couple of years ago – that heralded Eureka Moment Two for me as a grassroots youth coach.

The subjects of player technique and skill were couched in the context of the practice spectrum (constant, variable, random). And, of course, decision-making was widely agreed to be key to transforming technique into well-executed skill in the ultimate random environment: a match. Doing something well required good, effective decisions (perception-action coupling), which in turn needed a player to utilise perceptual skills: to search, recognise, assess, adapt, predict and plan. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes and yes, I nodded. “And for coaches too!” I screamed, inwardly. A “lightbulb” moment.

It was exactly the same. Of course it was. Skilful coaches require all these perceptual abilities (and more) to help the people who matter most (the children under your tutelage) grow as people and players. Football memory? Yes, and coaching memory too. The power and freedom of deliberate practice, managing your own mistakes (plenty of these), maintaining your self-esteem, motivation - all Youth Module touchstones with regard to players. All equally applicable to coaches.

It chimed nicely with Eureka Moment One for me, which came 15 years earlier (in 1998) while doing the FA coaching licence (UEFA B) course in Liverpool. Days of intensive practical instruction in “stop, stand still” phases of play, functions and small-sided games were interspersed with classroom sessions on football fitness, nutrition, physiology and child maturation issues. The study pack flagged up the benefits of interleaved and random practice (all thought-provoking stuff) but a new phrase leapt out at me when covering coaching styles: “guided discovery”. It wasn’t all my way or the highway, we were told. And I loved it.

I lapped up the UEFA B principles of play, match analysis techniques and acute emphasis on developing observation skills. The “what to coach”, if you like. But the “how to coach” conundrum was what truly grabbed my attention. It wasn’t all just knowledge and technique; the emphasis on asking effective (low-order and high-order) questions, at the right time, with the right tone, got me. The seed was sown: skilful, flexible coaching was the goal.
After a break from coaching for a few years due to work commitments I re-started in 2007 by enrolling on the all-new FA Level Two course. My instincts of wanting to prioritise the long-term interests of young footballers chimed nicely with the FA’s new emphasis on long-term player development using the “four-corner approach”: technical, social, physical, and psychological skills. In hindsight, this was a natural stepping stone to the yet-to-be-launched youth modules.

In the Charter Standard Club – Whitknights FC – where I coached children aged 6-10, prior to starting the youth modules, I tried to put my ideas into practice. I sought to create an environment where players take ownership, engage in self-learning, maintain motivation and self-esteem and learn how to build a growth mindset. All while having a ball, literally and metaphorically. Naturally, with ABC’s, ball manipulation and small-sided games to the fore, futbal was – and still is – an essential part of the mix.

Matchday learning was emphasised by encouraging players to lead the half-time discussion. Matchday learning emphasised by encouraging players to lead the half-time discussion. Matchday learning emphasised by encouraging players to lead the half-time discussion.

This was all well and good. But what I didn’t know three or four years ago – and what I’ve learned plenty about during completion of the youth award – is how much more there was to learn.

The award has taken me on a (sometimes roller-coaster-like) journey out of my darkly blissful terrain of “unconscious incompetence” into, and beyond, a dimly lit world of “conscious incompetence” before arriving at a much brighter but daunting place: “conscious competence”. Who knows what the promised land of “unconscious competence” will look like?

Youth Module 3, where the real challenge of the course truly hits home, offers a platform – the “whole, part, whole” session (the benefits of which, incidentally, merited a section in the UEFA B study pack back in 1998) for coaches to hone the skills needed to seriously advance the learning, enjoyment and skills of young players.

Although it certainly feels more tailored towards academy environments than grassroots (the insistence on the definition of “whole” as even-sided teams with no conditions other than offside implies a guaranteed turnout grassroots coaches can rarely take for granted) it offers plenty to adapt and use to great effect.

It also brought Eureka Moment Three for me: the realisation (on day three) that the individual, unit and group challenges must be planned meticulously in accordance with the principles of play covered on Level Two and UEFA B. After the days of careful prodding and questioning (classic guided discovery!) by the excellent coach educators, Keith Webb and Steve Pritchard, the sound of a massive penny dropping was deafening. It all suddenly fitted together. The main strand of courses and the youth modules were not competing; they were complementary – all essential tools in the skilful coach’s kit.

In summary, the big youth module-inspired shift in my own perceptual skills as a grassroots coach – in all three of the “plan”, “do” and “review” stages – can, therefore, be condensed into the same categories talked about with regard to skill development in players:

**Recognising**

Know your players; their strengths and weaknesses. Set up practices with narrow, specific learning outcomes based on the principles of play. Ask yourself what you’re doing in a session, for whom and why? Explain to the players the precise relevance to a match. Recognise when they need to find it out for themselves. Spot the moment when they need to be asked: “How can you improve your chances of success?”

**Searching**

In a session or a match, don’t just follow the ball. The youth-module approach of focusing on “before, during and after” possession (as opposed to the UEFA B “primary, secondary and tertiary” player approach) massively helps foster the observational skills needed to develop the individual player. Spot the moment to coach. Public, pointed praise (“The red defenders – Conor, Davis, Harjot and Dominic – are getting the hang of this cover and support now. Great effort! Keep it up guys.”) works wonders. For those praised, and the other team incentivised to work at it.

**Predicting**

Predict the likely errors players might make. I always prepare for three. How will I intervene? “Stop, stand still” followed by an open question? “Show me how you can solve the problem. Play...?” Or a quiet word with an individual at pitchside? I try to rehearse in threes: three likely opportunities to coach; three moments to praise; three challenges for each individual/unit/group prioritised.

**Planning**

I’ve learned the hard way that challenges must be planned – to the letter (“Can you try?” is not “Go and do”) – and with a clear hierarchy: what is the most important learning point? In a practice on counter-attacking from deep, challenges linked to penetration and dispersal must come first (eg: “Try to get the ball to the furthest player forward as quickly as you can!”) Experiment with command, guided discovery, trial and error, observation and feedback and Q&A. Mix and match. Let players discuss in huddles but don’t forget to demonstrate. Did I mention the need to link to the principles of play? Time yourself on interventions. Get in, get out. Do you need to stop the whole group? 70-30 ball-rolling time? Why not aim for 80-20? Especially with U7s. The players just want to play. When things go wrong, don’t be too harsh on yourself. Remember the growth mindset. And the final part of the plan? That’s not changed. It’s still got to be fun, of course, for the players and coaches alike.

**Assessing**

Feedback from and to my co-coaches – particularly Stephen Moody and Simon Griffiths (both doing the youth modules) – has been invaluable after sessions and matches with teams I’ve coached at Whitknights FC, in Reading for the past seven years. (Incidentally, we all agree that the “skills corridor” is youth module one “gold”, a simple yet limitless flexibile practice we wish we’d thought of many years ago.)

**Adapting**

Alter the practice/challenges if necessary. The first “whole” is the time to assess how the players are doing. Do you need to let it flow and adapt – upwards or downwards – the “part” practice to take account of their stage of learning (or the stage of the mentally challenging school term?) When is it appropriate to restrict, relate and reward players?

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In the previous edition of The Boot Room we provided some ideas for how psychological development can be planned for and developed in an integrated and systematic way alongside technical work. In this article we show an example of using the 5Cs on the pitch, highlighting the area of concentration - which links closely to the broader issue themes of decision-making and game realistic practices.

Concentration plays a key role in regulating the quality of a player’s performance. It reflects a player’s ability to sustain and switch attention effectively during play. The quality of concentration is determined by two factors:

1. **Attentional Scan** (i.e., where their focus of attention is placed. Is where he/she looks, what he/she thinks, or says to himself/herself relevant to the task?)

2. **Attention Span** (i.e., the ability to remain focused and/or hold attention on certain objects, people, thoughts or feelings for a required length of time without being distracted)

**Developing the most focused player**

The grid on the next page is a simple way to explain where a players’ attention could be placed at any given time, and could be useful in helping to target concentration coaching in training.

As players mature they should be comfortable working in each of the four channels, and be able to switch very quickly from one channel to another even when under severe pressure (e.g. from ball to teammates).

**Focus on the right thing, at the right time**

Those players with great attentional skills develop a very clear understanding of what is happening in the game around them (pictures), as well as how they can make a difference. This game intelligence is a hallmark of the elite modern professional.

Nevertheless, players can suffer from a poor attentional focus, focussing on things that are essentially irrelevant to their immediate performance, such as arguing with the referee or simply lacking vision for what is around them. Concentration coaching therefore will train the players’ focus of decision-making so that performance is consistently optimised.

**Coaching Summary**

Commitment to practicing and rehearsing the ability to focus and sustain focus on the right things in training will help a player to maximise the robustness of his/her concentration in a match. There is no doubt that concentration is a skill most tested under pressure and, therefore, it needs to be conditioned to hold up against pressure in training and matches.

**Concentration**

Describes a player’s ability to focus their attention on the right thing at the right time.

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**Maintaining FOCUS**

*Dr Matt Pain* explains that good decision-making starts with good concentration.

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**Player Challenges**

Try these challenges to help develop your players’ concentration skills:

1. What are your key distractions (internal and external). How can you block these out?
2. Identify and maintain your ‘right focus’ when the team is in possession, out of possession, and at set plays.
3. During matches, when your team wins the ball, or loses the ball, how quickly can you scan all around you to put yourself in the best position?

Four coaching strategies for developing concentration were highlighted in the previous issue, these centred on using game-realistic practices, and helping players to become more aware of task-relevant cues and triggers. Praise and reinforcement from the coach should then focus on highlighting and rewarding attention to these cues.
A player with excellent concentration
- Adopts the right positions in open play and refocusses quickly after a break in play
- Is very aware of the movements of teammates and use of space
- Helps others to stay focussed
- Is able to vary the intensity of concentration in response to transitions on the pitch

A player with poor concentration
- Will be easily distracted
- Drifts out of position
- Fails to refocus quickly after a mistake or break in play

“What people don’t realise is that it’s obviously a physical game, but after the game, mentally, you’re tired as well. Your mind has been through so much. There’s so many decisions you have to make. And then you’re trying to calculate other people’s decisions as well. It’s probably more mentally tiring than physically, to be honest.”

Wayne Rooney
**MAIN SESSION EXERCISE – TRIGGER WORD SMALL SIDED GAME**

**Practice Set Up**
- Set up a playing area of 40x25 yards with goals at each end and a halfway line marked
- Amend the size of the area as necessary according to the age and ability of the players in the group
- Two teams of four players, each with a goalkeeper

**Practice Organisation**
- Play a normal match
  - One player per team is designated as the team captain
  - When a team loses possession of the ball, the team captain must decide whether the team is to defend in the attacking half, or drop and defend in the defending half
  - If the team captain decides to defend in the attacking half, the team captain shouts “Press!”
  - The whole team then must defend in the attacking half
  - If the team captain decides to defend in the defensive half, the team captain shouts “Drop!”
  - The whole team then must defend in the defending half
  - Goals count double if the defending team occupy both halves of the pitch

**To Add Concentration**
- Develop the use of the trigger words “Press” and “Drop” making sure the players use them at the appropriate moments
- Practice without verbal communication
- The players now have to react to the actions of the first defender and read the cues as to whether they can pressurise the ball or not

**To Add Concentration**
- “STOP! Close your eyes”. Where are your teammates? Where’s the opposition?
- Ask the switching players to pause, scan pitch through visual triggers only
- Establish winning pair on knock out basis

**GAME RELATED PRACTICE – QUICK REACTIONS WORLD-CUP**

**Practice Set Up**
- Practice takes place in a 20x18 area – width of the 6-yard box and the distance from the goal line to the edge of the penalty area. 7 players - GK and 3 pairs. Server in the D with a supply of balls

**Practice Organisation**
- Work as a pair to shoot and score
  - Pairs can combine so that there are always 4 defenders v 2 attackers
  - Ball dead when it goes out of playing area or goal is scored
  - Restart from server – varied angle and pace of serve. Allow players to recover between service
  - Competition between the players for 2-min.
  - Use 6 fielders and rotate players off (and GK). Establish winning pair on knock out basis

**To Add Concentration**
- This practice works concentration at 100% intensity and tests GK reactions in tight situations in the penalty area where they are called upon to make saves from short distances and react to the unexpected. This intensity can’t be maintained for a whole 90 mins of a game
  - Encourage GK to drop intensity (like a simmer switch) during breaks, and turn up again for restarts
  - Read posture, movements and advanced cues to anticipate shots, direction, power etc
Applying the England DNA to your own club

Last December the framework for the England DNA playing and coaching philosophy was launched. Here, Ian Bateman, provides an insight into how Warrington Town’s Youth Team have used the DNA framework to create their own unique identity.
**How we play**

**In possession**
- We look to dominate possession and play with a purpose
- We want players who are comfortable on the ball and who make good decisions
- We create scoring opportunities from set pieces

**Out of possession**
- Where possible we look to press and win the ball back quickly
- We have the tactical ability to defend deep when required
- We are organised and resolute at set pieces

**Transition**
- We react instinctively when losing possession
- Counter attack is our immediate thought when regaining possession
- We keep a defensive “Lock down” when attacking using players 1, 4, 5, 6
- We look to exploit attacking situations when defending set pieces

As we operate two sides within the Youth Department where players may move between squads to participate in separate Under 17 and 18 competitions there needs to be a consistency with how the teams play.

**CASE STUDY:** Warrington Town FC Youth Team DNA

**Who we are**
- A club with aspirations to play in the football league
- Northern Premier League Cup Winners 2015
- FA Cup Second round 2015
- Play-off semi-finalists 2014
- FA Vase Runners Up 1987

It is important for the coaches, players and parents to understand where the club has come from but most importantly where we are going and what we are trying to achieve.

It needed to be clear to all parties that there is a pathway for players from the youth team to the first team if players show the correct behaviours on and off the field and had the necessary technical skills.

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**Some players have played together for over six years so for those players this was an extension to how they had played, but with 40 players and six coaches involved we needed to have a clear idea on how we would be trying to play in and out of possession.**

**A clear playing philosophy then had significant effects on how we would coach and what training sessions would look like. The key messages for how we play form the key concepts for any team talks pre game and also how we review the game post match:**

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The future Warrington Town player will be an asset to those around him, putting others first and representing himself and his team with excellence in the wider community

How we coach

- The player is at the centre of everything that we do
- Training can be on the grass, in the gym, in the classroom and through conversations with each other and the coaches
- On the grass the ball will be rolling 70% of the time
- Practices will be directional, opposed and where possible include goalkeepers
- Players will take responsibility for own warm-up, pre-activation work and cool down
- Possession, pressing and quality finishing are our Brilliant Basics

Since dominating possession was a key element to our playing philosophy coaches were locked in to delivering sessions that were opposed (generally matched up in numbers) and directional, normally in areas of the pitch that are relevant to the game.

Another brilliant basic is around quality finishing, so without the luxury of a specialised goalkeeper coach most sessions are also designed so that a finish on goal against a goalkeeper takes place.

11 v 11 games are also a key part of training on a variety of sized pitches to highlight specific areas of play that need developing. With only 2 x 1 hour sessions available then maximising ball rolling time is key.

How we support

- Players will take responsibility for their own learning
- Individual learning plans
- Video support
- Time on the grass
- Support across all corners of long-term player development: technical/tactical, physical, psychological, social

All of the players are individuals and have very different weeks away from the club. Some players will be on BTEC coaching programmes receiving over six hours of coaching per week, whilst others are apprentices holding down full-time jobs. Some will play for college so have to manage two games programmes, whilst some will be pushing towards the reserve team. Some of the players play futsal, whilst for others the club is their only football hit per week.

The players are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning but with constant reminders and support around their individual targets and goals.

We try and have three coaches working with each squad to help and shape this support and are working hard to embed a culture where a quiet word after the game can be as effective as an hours training session out on the grass.

How we review

- The opponents: strengths and weaknesses, mainly for future reference
- Log of playing time and player positions
- What we did well: relating to our brilliant basics
- What we need to improve on: again relating to how we play
- Stand-out individual performances, good and bad linked to the individual performance plans
- It is important to link matches to training both collectively and individually
- A written review takes place at the end of each game covering 5 areas

We also have a facility to film and record matches so this will become a key tool to chat through the games with players and links to the post game report.

It is important that all discussions link into our brilliant basics and that the players and coaches start to see the links between: How we play (matches), how we coach (training), and how we support (individual discussions and review process). That way, the planning, doing and reviewing all have a clear focus that ultimately is “Hardwired” into our Warrington DNA.

(Hard wired is an interesting concept currently being used by Warrington Wolves to build on the heritage of the town as hard working people with a history of producing wire in the town).

Ian Bateman is an FA Youth Coach Educator specialising in futsal.
Ben Bartlett, FA Youth Coach Educator, looks at how the England DNA coaching fundamentals offer coaches a platform for empowerment and creativity rather than a single coaching route to follow.

**Ingredients**

- Use a positive and enthusiastic manner with players at all times.
- Deliver realistic game-related practices.
- Use games whenever possible in training.
- Connect with the group before the session outlining the aims and objectives.
- Connect, activate, demonstrate and consolidate in every session.
- Value and work equally across the FA four corner model.
- Include elements of transition in all practices and sessions where possible.
- Use a carousel approach to practice design maximising playing time.
- Use varied coaching styles based on the needs of the group.
- Connect, activate, demonstrate and consolidate in every session.
- Develop practices that enable the players to make lots of decisions.
- Spend equal time delivering, planning and reviewing.
- Aim for a minimum of 70% ball rolling time in all sessions.
- Use varying coaching styles based on the needs of the group.
- Include elements of transition in all practices and sessions where possible.

**not a recipe**
The England DNA coaching fundamentals outline twelve key principles which underpin the How we Coach element of the coaching philosophy for England teams. The content included provides guidance for the FA’s vision to “Inspire, empower and support coaches to become excellent developers of creative players, teams and the game”.

Rationalisation is at the heart of this vision. Our aim is to develop coaches who can rationalise why they choose certain environmental conditions and design practice and game experiences in the way they do. Helping coaches understand more fully the decision-making process they go through to challenge and work with individual players and the team in the ways they do, continues to be a key aim of coach education.

The England DNA coaching fundamentals act as the supporting guide for coaches to check their decisions against and forms an important part of the Plan, Do, Review process.

This supporting guide provides a map of considerations for coaches from which coach education and development can empower coaches to initiate coaching practice that blends with their own values and beliefs or those of the club they represent.

My personal approach is to establish and operate an ecological model of coaching, which considers:

a. The game and players as complex evolving systems
b. An understanding that change in one aspect will create ripple effects elsewhere
c. Addressing these consciously and effectively
d. Positive contributions of adjustment to the environment through external intervention

The diagrams below provide three practical examples from recent sessions, which is a commitment to blending my personal belief around an ecological model of coaching with the England DNA coaching fundamentals.

### 1. Attacking Quickly

**8v8** 1-2-3-2 vs. 1-3-2-2

**Narrow pitch**  **Even numbers**  **Halved**

Coaching tactics: decision-making focus linked to playing philosophy on playing forward – recognise when to play quickly and when to stay on it for longer (Game 1 – as a team; Game 2 – as an individual)

Consider these Interventions:

- Watch the player – say nothing – note your observations
- Link one players task with another
- Establish a problem to solve (not an answer)

**Game 1**

Run ball over end line – GK serves a new ball in at the point that they score

**Decision:** play quick as a team or stay on it for longer (relate)

1 touch or 4+ touches (free kick if use 2 or 3 touches)

**Game 2**

### 2. Tactical Defending

**8v9** 1-3-3-1 vs. 1-2-4-2

**Big pitch**  **Odd numbers**  **Horizontal thirds**

Coaching Tactics:

1. 6 x 7 minute games (playing each ‘game’ twice).
2. 2 minute intervals using questions to support the teams to construct and commit to a strategy

Consider these Interventions:

a. Win ball back in final third and score = 3 goals (reward)
b. Devise a tactic to stop a team playing through midfield (mid-press) (relate)
c. Set up a counter-attacking strategy when you are a player down (relate)

### 3. Scoring Goals

**6v6**

**Wide pitch**  **Even numbers**  **Vertical thirds**

Coaching Tactics:

Adapt Pitch (As Illustrated) to constrain the ways the players are likely to create and score chances

Consider these Interventions:

- 15 seconds to tell someone what to do
- Help players whilst the practice runs (coach within the 70% ball rolling time)
In Issue 10 of The Boot Room, a framework for practice design was proposed which incorporated three elements:

**Key Principles in Practice Design**

The core aspects of all practices to include:

a. **Direction**: a ‘goal’ that a team or player attacks
b. **Definition**: basing the practice in the area of the pitch that it occurs most frequently
c. **Decisions**: the practice challenges the players with some kind of game-related decision
d. **Difference**: that the decisions present themselves in a nuanced way

**Practice design to consider three main ingredients, from which coaches can choose:**

a. **The pitch type and size**: choose from narrow, wide, big or small
b. **The deployment of the players**: choose from even number, uneven numbers and how, if relevant, to incorporate goalkeepers
c. **The pitch markings or parameters utilised**: choose from horizontal thirds, vertical thirds, halved pitch or a central circle

**The demands placed on the players and/or team:**

a. **Restricting**: You must do this...
b. **Rewarding**: If you do this, you’ll be rewarded with this...
c. **Relating**: Relate the task the player is working on with the situation...

The three sessions detailed incorporate the three practice design elements (see left) and the coaching tactics employed align with The Fa’s DNA Coaching Fundamentals, examples of which are highlighted below:

**The three sessions**

**The three sessions**

1. **Aim for a minimum of 70% ball rolling time in all sessions**

The tactical defending game was delivered as a 60 minute session, consisting of 6 x 7 minute games. These were interspersed with 6 x 2 minute intervals for interventions. That’s 54 minutes, leaving six minutes for setting up the session and contingency time. The players had eight minutes of active arrival activity before the session started to support their readiness.

This method provided 70% ball rolling time, ensured the players had significant uninterrupted periods of play to support them to practise applying the strategies they committed to and encouraged the time for the players to discuss and review how they had got on applying the strategies they selected.

Coaches blocking their work in this way can support them to manage ‘the clock’.

2. **Use an approach to practice design that maximises playing time**

The 6 v 6 finishing game utilises a single pitch set-up. The players play the same game in different parts of the pitch.

**Game 1**: uses the central strip of the area  
**Game 2**: in the full width  
**Game 3**: in two thirds of the width

The approach constrains the players to consider creating and scoring chances in different ways. For example, Game 1 tended to generate more quick reaction, instinctive shots as the area was tight. Whereas in Game 2, which used a wide pitch, led to greater crossing and finishing. Working in this way supports the core principles of the practice to remain the same, providing sustained practice time and challenging the players to adapt to different space. It also limits the amount of movement from practice to practice, which can be time consuming.

3. **Use varied coaching styles based on observing the needs of the individual and group**

Each of the sessions highlighted particular methodologies that I intended to use, including:

a. 15 seconds to tell someone what to do  
b. 2 minutes to discuss using questions – have the player talking more than you  
c. Help the players whilst the practice runs - coach within the 70% ball rolling time  
d. Watch the player and say nothing – note your observations  
e. Link with another player – if the right back is working on overlaps, how can the right midfielder help?  
f. Establish a problem to solve, not an answer

Having a framework of principles to help our work with players provides a backdrop for developing our understanding of the idiosyncrasies of the players we are trying to help.

Additionally, the use of Restrict, Relate, Reward method acts as framework for challenging players. In certain games, for example Playing Quickly, the use of restricted tasks (for example, play one touch or four touches or more. A free kick is awarded for using 2 or 3 touches) constrained the players to decide when to play quickly as an individual and when to stay on it for longer. This worked effectively to support quick decision-making and to promote creativity in quick play and in staying on the ball.

**The type of player and team that we are trying to develop can inform the way we work practically with the players.** For example, the tactical defending session took place with a club who aspire to develop responsible and accountable young players. As such, the coaching approach was to provide related tasks. For example: devise a tactic to prevent a team playing through midfield. The relate approach promotes decision-making and choice and we asked the players to agree and commit to a team plan that was then worked at within the 7 minute game. The review process was led by the group with the players discussing what things had gone well and what things they would change before game 2.

Utilising different defensive challenges in this session also blended the psychological and social expectations with the club’s vision for tactically adaptable players, with work completed on recognising when to press early, apply a mid-press and defend later.

These are some examples of how a coach could coach using an underpinning rationale such as the England DNA coaching fundamentals. This is an alternative view to the suggestion of clubs and federations establishing core practices that all coaches utilise.

My personal belief is that core practices that coaches follow can erode coaching expertise. This belief is grounded in the idea that recipes are good for simple tasks (like cooking a meal); complex tasks like player development, coaching and the game of football are less suited by a specific set of instructions to follow which don’t take account of the nuances associated with each session, game and player.

Core principles - such as direction, definition, decisions, difference - and some consistent ingredients that coaches can choose from aligned with a vision of the types of players you want to develop can provide a platform and greater opportunity for empowerment and creativity. It is a way of working which aims to produce the type of coach that can continue to change our landscape.

Previous issues of The Boot Room may be referenced along with John Read’s work on Ecological Coaching.

Bent Bartlett is an FA Youth Coach Educator working with professional clubs and coaches.
**Read *The Boot Room* and help complete your CPD**

1. In the *A connected pathway* article on page 12, how did Jess Clarke benefit from an informal introduction to football?

2. How do Sheffield United create a child-centred coaching environment for their players aged 5-11? What is the benefit of this approach? (page 20)

3. What reasoning does Chelsea U18 coach, Joe Edwards, give for stressing the importance of winning in the professional development phase? What is your own approach to helping your team ‘win’? (page 28)

4. On page 42, grassroots coach, Jamie Fahey, describes the ‘eureka moments’ in his own coaching journey. How do these compare with your own development as a coach?
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Notes