How a creative development programme and the opportunity to play helped Dele Alli reach the top
Contents

Boot Room

The Boot Room is the official magazine of The FA Licensed Coaches’ Club

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Reflecting for expertise

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Tailored to suit

FA Youth Coach Educator, Ben Bartlett, reflects on his recent coach development work aimed at helping coaches connect their values, objectives, behaviours and practice activities.

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Dr Perry Walters PhD, explains why adolescence is the perfect period to develop young players’ decision-making and cognitive skills and talks about the dangers of thinking players aged 16 or 17 are the finished product.

What? So what? Now what?

Steve Lilley, FA County Coach Developer for Gloucestershire, and Dr Jane Rand of York St John University, offer their thoughts on an alternative reflective model and make connections with existing reflective approaches.
Why do we do what we do?
What do we need to do to get better?

These are two questions asked on a daily basis in our work with the England teams across the men’s, women’s and disability game, as well as in our FA education department.

Our belief is that by continually asking – and acting upon – critical questions will help us create a truly elite environment in all that we do. We should all strive to move with the times and adjust to modern ways of learning, the incredible opportunities the digital age brings us and the changes within the game itself.

Prioritising the time to review and reflect on your coaching methods and processes should never be underestimated – it’s what allows you to effectively tweak and change your approach and get better in the future.

This edition of The Boot Room magazine – the third in a series looking at the England DNA Plan, Do, Review model – focuses on the importance of effective reflective practice.

As parents, volunteers and part-time coaches it is fully appreciated that finding time to reflect on your coaching sessions can be challenging – enough time is volunteered already.

As such, we hope the wide variety of articles and reflective frameworks included in this edition will offer at least a couple of quick and easy-to-use ideas you can utilise in your work.

In the words of the famous ice hockey player, Wayne Gretzky “Skate to where the puck is going, not where it has been”.

Enjoy the edition.

Dan Ashworth
FA Technical Director
How does Captured work?

Captured is a free mobile, tablet and online platform that allows you to capture, store and share coaching content that is specific and relevant to you as a coach.

That could be a coaching article or video that has caught your eye online. It could be a picture of a practice design you have taken on your smartphone. Or, it could be a word document or PDF file that you want to store for later. It’s all content that, with one click of a button, can be captured and uploaded into your account.

Storing that content is easy. You can keep it in your ‘Files’ to watch or read later, or you can add it to a ‘Page’ where you can add notes as well as other related content or media.

Or, should you want to create multiple pages around a particular theme or aspect of your coaching practice, you can then store them in dedicated ‘Books’.

What you do with that coaching content is then completely up to you. You can keep it for your own personal reference, or you can choose to share it with other coaches you have connected with on the site.

Unlike other social media sites, you have control over what you share and when you share it.

The FA Coaching Community

Captured isn’t just about being a place for storing your coaching content. It is also a platform where you can interact with coaches from across the game through The FA Coaching Community.

Launched in November 2015, this bespoke community area provides the opportunity to receive as well as share latest coaching best practice, tips, guidance and insight.

With over 5,000 members, it is also an ideal space to interact, network, and engage in discussion with coaches from around the country.

How to join

Joining Captured is really simple and takes only a matter of minutes when you visit: www.capturedhq.com/thefa.

Once you’re signed up, you will also be automatically added to The FA Coaching Community and connected with FA Education, meaning you can begin exploring the fantastic range of articles, tips and insight.

Screen grabs of ‘Captured’ the new online community for coaches to share and receive coaching content.
In 2012, The FA Youth Development review was published and 25 recommendations made to improve Youth football. Four years on, Professor Mark Wilson and Dr Sadie Hollins assess the impact of the review.

Youth leagues have been responsible for organising children’s football for decades and enabling footballing opportunities for millions of young people across the UK. However in 2010, concerned that child development issues were not being explicitly considered, the FA launched an investigation into the structure of youth football. This review sought to challenge the win-at-all-costs mentality that was felt to be stifling development and enjoyment for young people. In 2012, following extensive consultation, discussion and research, the FA’s Youth Development Review (YDR) came to fruition with a total of 25 recommendations for the youth game.

The vision behind these proposals was to ensure that the structure of the youth game is progressive, phased, and underpinned by academic research supporting learning and development. The recommendations, which were phased in from the 2014/15 season (2013/14 for under7s), were grouped into those focused on the player pathway (related to the format of the game) and the competition pathway (related to the structure of formal competition).

BACKGROUND

Youth leagues have been responsible for organising children’s football for decades and enabling footballing opportunities for millions of young people across the UK. However in 2010, concerned that child development issues were not being explicitly considered, the FA launched an investigation into the structure of youth football. This review sought to challenge the win-at-all-costs mentality that was felt to be stifling development and enjoyment for young people. In 2012, following extensive consultation, discussion and research, the FA’s Youth Development Review (YDR) came to fruition with a total of 25 recommendations for the youth game.

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THE CHANGES

- **Player Pathway**: These changes were focused on allowing children to play on appropriately sized pitches with appropriately sized goals, encouraging a greater number of touches of the ball and an increased involvement in the game. It is hoped that these changes will help young players develop better technical and decision-making skills from a younger age.

- **Competition Pathway**: The YDR report identified a disparity between adult and child views when it came to what each found to be important when playing football, highlighting a need for more ‘child-friendly’, flexible competition. Competition should therefore be progressive, child-centred, and take place within an environment that develops proficient, creative and independent players, whilst being free from poor adult touchline behaviour.

This article will focus on attitudes to the changes to the competition pathway: the removal of the publication of League Tables and the introduction of a blend of player development matches and trophy events.
HOW HAVE THESE CHANGES BEEN RECEIVED?

The research team was tasked with assessing the impact of these changes through a ten-month project (between September 2014 and July 2015) that focused specifically on the U8 and U10 age groups. In order to understand the impact of the changes we collected opinions from important stakeholders:

- 10 player focus groups and 7 parent focus groups conducted in 6 counties/areas
- 208 player surveys from 22 counties/areas
- 323 coach online surveys (part I)
- 59 league administrator online surveys
- 101 parent online surveys
- 208 player surveys from 22 counties/areas conducted in 6 counties/areas
- 10 player focus groups and 7 parent focus groups
- 323 coach online surveys (part I)
- 59 league administrator online surveys
- 101 parent online surveys
- 4 'expert' interviews.

Children enjoyed playing development games and trophy events, although they tended to prefer trophy games as they "meant more". Both sorts of games helped them to improve, but some felt there was more pressure to win and less opportunity to play different positions in league games. Adults did not seem to place the same importance on developmental games (many are therefore cancelled), so it may not be surprising that most children did not either.

Parents tended to initially lament the loss of league tables to monitor their child’s team, but could be persuaded to see the benefits of a focus on development. Parents generally want to see their children enjoying their football and recognise that competitive matches can have an inappropriate atmosphere due to some parents' behaviour. Parents also recognized that children are likely to be as competitive during developmental games as in 'formally competitive' games. U10 parents were slightly less supportive of the YDR changes when compared to coaches and U8 parents, which suggests that U10 parents perhaps feel that their children are ready for a more 'competitive' environment.

Coaches tended to be a little more supportive of the YDR than parents, believing that it provided a better learning experience for the children without reducing competitiveness or motivation. Coaches were generally less sure that it would have a positive effect on player retention or attracting new players to the game.

League administrators tended to be less positive about the changes, arguably reflecting some of the implementation issues encountered, which included non-attendance of development fixtures, administration/logistical problems and communication problems.

'Experts' were supportive of the shift towards a more child-centred approach to competition that is less structured, with a primary goal of engagement and fun. They commented that many of the issues identified by other adult stakeholder groups reflected 'adult problems'. Whilst they recognised that the implementation issues of the YDR changes need further addressing, they were generally supportive of The FA's overall vision towards creating child-centred competition.

To summarise, the YDR changes have been praised for:

- Putting less pressure on parents and coaches
- Providing a good mix of focus on 'competition' and 'development'
- And for providing a better learning experience for the children, without reducing competitiveness or motivation

The key criticisms of the YDR changes from an adult perspective were that:

- The benefits of having league structures (i.e. ensuring fair competition, providing a clear season-long structure for coaches, players, parents, and league administrators, etc.) are lost through the implementation of the YDR
- In some leagues there has been an issue with non-attendance for (development) fixtures – children are playing less football

CHALLENGES AHEAD

While most stakeholders recognised the benefits of the changes (e.g., more space to learn, flexible and fun competition), there were a number of issues with the implementation of the YDR. Specifically, the FA has to work to resolve some potential issues with:

- The consistency of implementation (some Leagues had more positive experiences than others)
- Communication of purpose (the rationale for removing season-long leagues was not always made clear to stakeholders)
- Coach education (some coaches were unsure of how to use development fixtures, or how to judge their impact without using league positions)

WHAT NEXT?

These findings were presented at The FA Youth Leagues Conference at St George’s Park in November and it was interesting to hear from so many people involved at the sharp-end of youth football. Peter Ackerley (Head of Participation at the FA) certainly recognised that more work was needed if the legacy of the YDR changes were to have maximum impact. Some issues that he aims to tackle based on the findings of our report include:

- Implement improved and ongoing communications of YDR to all stakeholders
- Initiate a review of football season construction – options for winter and summer playing to ensure maximum playing and participation opportunities
- Review and develop a Club Philosophy to be implemented across Charter Standard network
- Implementation of recent Football in Schools review
- Embed England DNA into Youth Football playing and coaching philosophy

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is certainly a scientific backdrop to support the changes implemented in the YDR, and the FA are to be commended for taking the difficult first step of driving improvements to the youth game based on children’s developmental needs. The issues outlined in this report may simply reflect the types of teething problems associated with any large-scale change programme. While it is important that the FA continue to work through these issues, it is also important that adults involved in youth football take a step back and consider the big picture: how should children be introduced to football to support their long term development and enjoyment?
“With Dele we would celebrate the way he played. The exciting part of his game would be the bit that we were waiting to see.”

Dan Micciche, FA National Coach U16, speaks to Peter Glynn about the rise of Tottenham and England midfielder Dele Alli.
Dele Alli’s emergence at the top level of the English game has, in many ways, reflected this year’s Premier League campaign: refreshing and reassuring.

The 19 year-old’s fearless attacking performances, spectacular goals and spirit of adventure have been hugely encouraging for English football. After all - according to critics - England don’t produce players like this.

Alli’s rise to fame hasn’t, however, come as a shock for those that have accompanied him along his player development journey.

For those who have helped guide the youngster into the professional game, his level of performance – and the style in which he has played - has come as less of a surprise. Freedom and inventiveness are the product of process.

“When I saw him nutmeg Luka Modric last pre-season when Spurs played Madrid in a friendly and then watch him do it regularly in Premier League games– it reminded me of what I used to see when he was training in the dome at MK Dons,” explained England U16 coach Dan Micciche, who helped oversee Alli’s development at MK Dons academy between the ages of 12-16. “Every kid in the dome would be doing that,” he added.

Micciche explained that ever since Alli arrived at the club as a scrawny, but grounded and level-headed, 11 year-old, he played with a sense of freedom, was willing to excite with the ball and experiment whilst he was playing.

“The way Dele played when he was younger would be described as ‘showboating’ or we would think that it is a player trying to ‘too clever’,”

The club were cautious not to overburden their creative talent with too many learning objectives, instead focusing on making his strengths better rather than focusing solely on weaknesses. There was also accountability for the staff: instead of blaming the player for a mistake the attention turned to what the coaches could have done better.

“Dele didn’t drown in a sea of learning objectives. Often we identify a problem but give the wrong treatment,” explained Micciche.

“If his creativity was an 8 out of 10, his programme was to get that to a 9 rather than ignore it and focus on other things which are less relevant and his creativity then drops to a 6 out of 10.

“Key to this was recognising what he was trying to do and what he showed potential at being good at and developing that even further. So if he lost the ball dribbling we would look at why? It might have been because he didn’t play with enough disguise, didn’t move his feet quickly enough or didn’t play with his eyes. We’d then try and work on this, we wouldn’t straight away tell him to stop dribbling and pass,” added Micciche.

In December last year, The FA launched the England DNA age-phase priorities – a set of guidelines to help coaches in their work with young players. Coaches are encouraged to help young players ‘Stay on the ball, master the ball’, ‘Excite with the ball and seek creative solutions’, and ‘Creatively connect and combine with others’. It could quite easily read as a description of Alli’s playing style.

“Do you need to put this stuff into kids?” asks Micciche. “Or is it more a case of safeguarding against them losing it? Let’s be honest, when the kids are growing up at 6,7 and 8 they don’t share anything. The majority of them don’t pass the ball.
“Most of them like playing football because they’re running with the ball in their garden and they’ve seen something on television that has hooked them into football – which is normally a trick or an exciting goal.”

Micciche added: “If you look at coaching programmes up and down the country for players in the foundation phase, I guarantee that every one of them will emphasise 1v1 domination. My argument is, if you’re emphasising it with the youngest players – where has it gone as they get older?”

There is a feeling that in some instances the creative spirit shown by the very youngest players can be lost in the teenage years as coaching and player development becomes “more serious”.

“We sometimes have a culture where the way Dele played when he was younger would be described as ‘showboating’ or we think that it is a player trying to be ‘too clever’ or we would ask ‘who do they think they are?’ There’s sometimes that type of mentality,” said Micciche.

Instead an academy programme built on variety encouraged the creative skills that England and Spurs are now profiting from at the highest level.

“Dele was exposed to a football driven programme based on elements of street football. So there was varied competition, opposition and challenges provided through varied match formats.

“The U16s would still play 9 v 9 and futsal at U16 and 11v11 on varied pitch sizes. These all combined to develop his ability to outwit more physically stronger opponents and work in tighter spaces.”

In an age of huge investment into immaculate playing and training facilities, helping young players stay hungry for success can be a challenge. Micciche explained that the club cautioned against giving Alli and others too much too soon.

“It’s about providing a variety of game experiences. On Wednesday nights we would play fixtures in all sorts of weathers, on all sorts of different pitches, against men’s teams and amateur teams. It would provide lots of variables for the players to deal with. Dele was exposed to that.

“AT MK Dons we would play everyone – I can’t even remember all the names of the grassroots and amateur teams that we played – we would just go and play them.

“The conditions would be awful but the experience was real and it kept the players’ feet on the ground. They would be going to Cobham to play against Chelsea one minute, then to a non-league ground to play against a team that they’d never heard of – it was a different challenge and experience for them every time.

“Through that programme Dele has been able to hone his abilities and he’s had to adapt to the opposition, different surfaces and different formations. He’s played every formation there is.

“When he was 14/15 and struggling a little physically the key to helping him develop was using flexible formations - 4-3-2-1, 3-4-3 – the overload in midfield meant he didn’t get run over physically.”

Another crucial period in Alli’s player development story was the opportunity afforded by MK Dons Head Coach, Karl Robinson, to play senior games very early in his career.

In November 2012, aged 16, Alli made his MK Dons debut against Cambridge City in an FA Cup tie. Over the next three years the midfielder would go on to become a regular in the Dons’ starting line-up.

By the time he signed for Spurs he had played over 70 league games. Priceless experience compared to some players his age watching on from a substitute bench.

Stepping out at Stadium MK for the first time was made less daunting given he had played there on numerous occasions as part of the academy’s ‘stadium games’ programme.

“When Dele was fourteen he was playing in stadium games in front of 3,000 people against Chelsea and against Ruben Loftus Cheek and teams and players of that quality. I viewed in the context of what that was 5 years ago and at his stage of development, that was probably just as daunting as him playing against some of the best teams in the Premier League,” added Micciche.
A large proportion of coaching knowledge and practice comes from personal interpretations of previous experiences (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). A process found at the heart of all experience-based learning theories is reflective practice (Kolb, 1984). Research has shown that coaches learn through reflective practice (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). Further, reflection could provide a bridge linking knowledge gained from professional practice, observations, coaching theory, and education.

Through engaging in reflective practice coaches can assess their practice in line with their coaching philosophy. This will benefit coaches in the following ways: (1) determining how their practice aligns with their philosophy (i.e., do they live what they believe in?) (2) exploring the appropriateness of their philosophy for coaching their players; and, (3) informing the continued evolution of their philosophy to ensure it represents their own values and beliefs whilst also being conducive to coaching according to the players needs and expectations.

The reflective practice literature emphasises the development of learning from experience (Hanton, Cropley, & Lee, 2009). For example, Kolb (1984) viewed reflection as an integral part of a dynamic spiral or loop of experiential learning. In accord with the suggestions of Cropley, Hanton, Miles, and Niven (2010) and Ghaye & Lillyman (2000), three key principles of reflection can be considered: (1) reflective practice is about learning from experience; (2) reflection can improve practice; and (3) reflection involves respecting and working with evidence.

As it is based on real-life, reflection can generate practice-based knowledge, which adds to evidence concerning ‘how we actually practice’ (Driscoll & Teh, 2001). Indeed, people can use reflection to explore why they acted as they did, what was happening in the situation (and why), what they have learned, and how they can use this knowledge in the future (Jones et al., 2011).

One of the biggest challenges that individuals face when starting to reflect is knowing what to think back on and as a result many can be caught simply ‘mulling things over’ (Knowles et al., 2001). In an effort to reduce the likelihood of coaches doing so, this article will present two simple frameworks that can be used to structure reflection making it easier to link critical thought to future practice. Indeed, when completed thoroughly, reflection can lead to identification of areas to be developed and serve to guide the coach towards adapting their practice accordingly.
Ceri Bowley is an FA Regional Coach Mentor Officer.

### Framework 1 - TPTP

**THUMBS UP**

The session was good because:

1. 
2. 
3. 

**POINTING OUT**

As a coach I used the following coaching styles/intervention strategies today:

These worked (explain how you used them and why they were effective):

These didn’t work (explain how you used them and why they were not effective):

**TROUBLES**

I found this difficult today (explain what it is and why it was difficult):

**PROMISE**

I need to improve:

This is how I will do it in my next session:

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### Framework 2 - Plan and Reflect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PLAN</strong></th>
<th><strong>REFLECTION</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intended outcomes:</strong></td>
<td>General thoughts on the session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Physical**

| **Key Coaching Points:** |
| Did you successfully achieve the 4 corner intended outcomes? How? If not, why? |

**Social**

| **Player challenges** |
| Did players understand them? |

**Technical Psychological Physical Social**

| **Challenges for players:** |
| Were they able to achieve success? How? If not, why? |

| **Questions for players:** |
| Were appropriate questions asked? Give examples |

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My experience of framework one:

Framework one was used as part of my own research with grassroots coaches who reported how useful it had been to them. Coaches often explained how reflection was something that happened “in the car on the drive home,” and “wasn’t linked to planning future sessions.” For example, one coach stated:

“That’s probably been the most useful thing just thinking back, because you don’t normally think back on it [last session], you might have a quick think about it but you just get on with your day so if you actually write it down you have a little think for 10 minutes and can use it to help plan future sessions.”

Another coach explained how they used framework two:

“The framework helped me integrate different elements of coaching within my session and it’s nice that I think there’s a section where you have to outline challenges for players and then outline if they met these challenges... and I think that’s a really, really important bit, because you’ve got to set them something, there’s got to be a target for them within the session. So I’ve used that to kind of structure my sessions and say, right, this is your challenge at the beginning of the session, at the end of the session can we see this outcome, or similar outcome to this.”

Following the success of the framework I decided to adopt it for planning and reflecting on my own sessions. Since using it I have been able to become more critical of my delivery and subsequently have developed in a number of ways as a coach. For example, the development of an awareness of myself allowed me to uncover specific weaknesses (e.g., communicating concise messages), which eventually made me stronger, and certain strengths (e.g., football knowledge) that gave me confidence to be innovative in my approach backed by this understanding of what I was particularly good at and the motivation to improve those factors that may have limited my delivery. I believe my own planning and reflection of coaching sessions has become more effective with a clear link between the reflection from the most recent session and the planning for the next session. In addition, these reflections have become more purposeful and now lead to an action that informs my future practice where as previously I had been guilty of drawing conclusions with the influence on practice sporadic.

Please note: this is just one example of a reflective framework for coaches, based on the author’s experience and research.
Lawrence Lok, FA Regional PE & Coaching in Education Coordinator (South East), looks at the importance of using a reflective journal to improve his coaching.

What are the benefits of using a reflective journal?
Reflective practice has been discussed as a strategy that could help practitioners explore their decisions and experiences to increase their understanding and management of themselves and their practice (Anderson et al., 2004). Mills (2008) notes reflective journals provide a path for students to become more engaged and active in their own learning. The process of reflecting has allowed me to develop myself as a practitioner and has been the foundation of my professional learning journey.

My personal experience of using a reflective journal was during my postgraduate degree in Physical Education and Teaching. Within my journal I used Gibbs (1988) Reflection Cycle, focusing on the teaching and coaching principles and the implementation of these to improve my delivery in schools and grassroots football.

Why do we reflect?
As practitioners we are constantly reflecting, although these thoughts are sometimes unconscious, not deepened and not used effectively. These considerations might happen during your drive home from a session, through informal/formal discussions with colleagues or when planning future sessions. This thought process allows us to consider anticipated outcomes and to reveal if they have been met. Through self-evaluation and improved awareness, a coach is able to consciously and purposefully improve their coaching practice (Anderson, et al., 2004).

Why keep a reflective journal?
A reflective journal contains stories about yourself; it allows you to put down your feelings and emotions of what happened during that day/session. You can reflect on the coaching experience and see if your goals have been met (Gray, 2007). It includes any important happenings from that session - positive or otherwise. It allows you to analyse your own practice but also empowers you to look deeper into the context of the session/lesson.

What are the benefits of using a reflective journal?
- **Reflection Focus**
  - Behaviour Management

**An example of a reflective journal template**
(Based on Gibbs 1988)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description – what happened?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some pupils were disrupting the session. After periods of sitting out and being brought back into the session this continued. When I was trying to explain the tasks I lost their attention. I found myself raising my voice and feeling agitated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings – what were you thinking / feeling?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt frustrated and that I was unable to keep the whole class focused. I felt I was concentrating on the negative rather than the positive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation - what was good and bad about the experience?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I had planned differentiated activities and I was excited about the lesson. The behaviour resulted in the lesson being interrupted and I was unable to react accordingly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis - what sense can you make of the situation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I lost focus, went off task and did not achieve the outcomes planned.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion - what else could you have done?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set clear boundaries and praise positive behaviour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Plan - if it arose again, what would you do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would use different teaching strategies to suit the learners and follow the school behaviour policy. I had not read this prior to teaching the class, I should have also gained knowledge of the cohort from the teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through self-evaluation and improved awareness, a coach is able to consciously and purposefully improve their coaching practice.
Lesson 2

Description – what happened?
In the last lesson pupils were misbehaving and distracting the class.
Action plan: to use the school behaviour policy. Focus on good behaviour and use the house point system. Set challenging, differentiated and motivating tasks to engage all pupils and provide a clear learning objective and success criteria.

Feelings – what were you thinking / feeling?
Having read the policy and understood the procedures, I was more confident to implement it. I modelled the same teaching strategy that the class teacher used, which was 'hands up' which was a familiar technique used to gain the children's attention.

Evaluation - what was good and bad about the experience?
A lot smoother than last week. More pupils were engaged as I used house points as an incentive for completing tasks and involvement during discussions. Pupils who were misbehaving last week got positive praise early on for small improvements. I gave individual challenges and the class responded well with the 'hands up' approach, although at times I felt that they took a bit longer than I expected.

Conclusion - what else could you have done?
Try to find the balance between using positive reinforcement and maintaining focus of the learning objectives. I found I was spending more time looking for good behaviour rather than good progress.

Lesson 3

Description – what happened?
My action plan from last week was to focus on progression. Before the start of the lesson I shared the learning objective and success criteria and as a class we discussed what we wanted the learning outcomes to be - this was displayed on a flip chart.

Feelings – what were you thinking / feeling?
I felt that this time allowed pupils to self and peer assess - if they felt they had completed a task they could put their initials down next to the success criteria. Aim: to give pupils ownership of their lesson and learning. Allow opportunities to provide observation and feedback.

Evaluation - what was good and bad about the experience?
Challenges set in the lesson allowed the pupils to achieve the learning outcome at their ability level. Referring to the flipchart throughout the lesson created discussions regarding children's progression.

Conclusion - what else could you have done?
Give pupils more time to reflect and discuss. Behaviour was better this week due to the fact that the pupils got to know me better this week due to the fact that they took a bit longer than I expected.

Action Plan - if it arose again, what would you do?
Continue to use the flipchart with learning objective and success criteria. Try to monitor behaviour thoroughly. Use the school behaviour policy - this could be the same for grassroots clubs. Pupils and players need to have rewards on and off the pitch. Try to reward them for good play, sportsmanship and attitude.
HOLDING A MIRROR TO YOUR WORK

Nick Levett, FA Talent identification manager, looks back over his varied coaching experiences highlighting the key lessons learned so far.

The beauty of holding a mirror, consistently, to the work you do enables you to move forwards and progress. It allows you to shape existing ideas and see the new ones possible. However, this takes bravery to recognise that everything you do is not right or there are improvements to be made. This article is going to look at five mistakes I’ve made within coaching, the lessons I learned and therefore areas you could reflect on in your own practice.

The way you engage with children

One of my early roles was at a girl’s Centre of Excellence and it was a great opportunity for me to coach some talented U12 players. I was a young coach and had the chance to work alongside two very good coaches in Mike Dove, now Academy Manager at MK Dons, and Kevin England, now an FA Regional Mentor. An amazing grounding for me as a young coach.

I vividly remember delivering a session, everything had gone great, the practices had really flowed and in my mind had been a great success. Walking off the pitch at the end one of the players, Sonija, came over to me. As clear as anything I can still remember her saying “Nick, I really enjoyed the games today but you were really sarcastic when you spoke to me and I didn’t like it”. I was devastated and this one line has stayed with me for the last 15 years. The fact that I had made a young person feel this way, and possibly not want to play football again, is a horrendous feeling to have.

LESSON
Consider carefully the words you use, it’s one of the only things you can control in the delivery of a coaching session, and they can have a big impact with young people.

Track down what other options there might be in the coaching world, different ways to deliver and what makes a good learning experience for players.
Helping the players get better

My first coaching job was whilst I was at university, in the summer holidays, delivering on a ‘Gerry Armstrong Soccer School’. I had completed my FA Level 2 as part of my degree course but this was a ‘proper’ coaching job, I was being paid to coach. Amazing! I had been paired with an older guy, way more experienced than me and still a good friend to this day. However, Colin is a dinosaur! We’ve had some great debates about it since and he knows this, so it’s no secret.

But looking back, I didn’t know any different. I just thought it was the way coaching was done. My delivery that summer mimicked him. I copied his coaching style (very command), his way of working with players (incredibly direct) and I followed his lead. I never realised there was another way until several years later. On reflection, I just wanted to fit in and do what others did, to keep my glitzy paid coaching job and it’s known as ‘strategic compliance’.

Getting hung up on learning outcomes

More recently I’ve coached for the last six years at a Category 1 Academy in the Foundation Phase with some very talented boys. Working in this environment really accelerated my own learning and being around excellent coaches, both full-time and part-time, really challenged and developed my thinking. You also had to be a lot more detailed and planned with everything that you did.

This particular session had gone great. We had done 90 minutes on ‘counter attacking’, I tried a new game I had made up and it worked brilliantly. The quality of my questions had been good, they had loads of fun and I was really pleased with the outcomes linked to the coaching theme. As we got to the debrief at the end I asked the boys about the different elements on the topic, getting all the right answers I wanted to hear, until one lad, Steven, said “I learned to defend when out-numbered”.

For some reason I thought the kids team winning or losing was a reflection of me as a coach.

The excitement of game day

The U8 grassroots team I used to run were great fun. A really nice group of kids that were keen to play football and have a really good time doing it. The parents were a decent group as well, they just wanted the best for their kids and were never any trouble at training or games.

When I was a younger coach though matchday for me was a different experience. As soon as the game kicked off I would be pacing up and down the touchline, covering more miles than some of my players. I desperately wanted the players to win and the flurry of information I shouted as I moved them around the pitch was like I was playing a live game of FIFA16 was terrible. It was PlayStation for adults. For some reason I thought the kids team winning or losing was a reflection of me as a coach.

Keeping it real

As a novice coach there is one main challenge at that time - having enough games to keep the players interested. However, in this modern age as long as you know how to search online there are millions and as a young coach I did exactly that. I would find new sessions, print these off and try and ‘download’ onto the players.

The start of this U10 session had gone well, we were into a game and the rule was a ‘maximum of two-touches’. Billy received the ball at left back with open space in front of him, had his second touch out of his feet and travelled up the pitch. Still with more space in front of him available he had another touch, but that was his third, so I stopped the game for breaking the rule. Billy simply turned to me and said “well that’s what I would do in a game”. Billy was right.
Rich Cooper, FA County Coach Developer, explains why question cards are a useful tool to help the reflective process.

**Why is it important to get player feedback when reflecting on a session?**

I happened to be visiting a secondary school in Lincolnshire some years ago and on walking past the science classroom I became aware of the teacher using question cards at the end of the science lesson that had just been taught. This got me thinking that this could form part of my coaching sessions going forward, to either focus on what the players are going to do, or in this case, allowing players to review their performance in the session. This process has proved invaluable to me in listening to the players' responses to my questioning to ascertain their understanding, thoughts and ideas prompted through interaction with their peers in small groups (pairs or threes at most). This in turn helps me shape further planning through the review process, based not just on my observations but also what the players say.

**Why are the question cards an important part of framing a session (before/after)?**

I used the question card process for the first time at a session I delivered at a primary school in Bristol and I was amazed at how well the young players enjoyed and were empowered by being given the responsibility and ownership to discuss with each other their thoughts and ideas. The question cards have also been used on several occasions early in the session after the players have had a chance to sample how the session works, so from a future tense perspective the players can discuss their ideas on where the difficulties may lie and how they can work together to problem solve. The players then quickly move on to experience their ideas in practice to see if they gain success. Towards the end, or at the completion of the session, different question cards in past tense can be used to review specific areas of their own and team performance relating to the session aims and outcomes.
The questions you select need to be carefully compiled depending on where the players are in their stage of development and their range and depth of experiences on which they can form an answer. This needs profound consideration and also at what stage of the session you intend to use your question cards and what you want to find out from the players’ thoughts. I have highlighted six areas of the coaching session and example higher (H) and lower (L) level questions:

**Knowledge and Recall**
What the players know already and what they can remember from the previous session, or sessions
Eg. What two things did you do in the last session and why?

**Comprehension**
What the players understand and what areas of the session they are starting to have a grasp of
Eg. I understand how…………because…………?

**Application**
How the players use their understanding or knowledge in practice
Eg. If we……………because this will……………….?

**Synthesis**
How the players can blend and fuse the elements of the session together and create links in learning
Eg. At what times during the session did you find it was difficult?

**Analysis**
How the players can investigate, scrutinise and explore their learning by trying new things
Eg. What will you try to do in the next session and why?

**Evaluation**
How the learning taking place can be assessed and how the players can appraise their own performance or the performance of others
Eg. What have you learnt in today’s session that makes you wonder how to…………because…………?

*The skilled use of question cards can help your players develop better metacognitive skills.

**Top 5 tips for grassroots coaches to implement in their sessions**

1. **Choose your questions carefully.** What do you want to find out and tailor the level of questions to the players’ age, ability and experience.

2. **The coaching world is a busy place to be** but try and review your coaching session as soon as you can whilst reflecting on the responses from the players to inform your decisions on the planning of your next session.

3. **Use the question cards at the start of your next session** which allows the players to reflect on what they did in the previous session, or sessions. This will help them link the learning together like building blocks.

4. **Maximise playing time by using drinks breaks and transition time between session elements to utilise the question cards.** The players want to play and this process shouldn’t diminish playing time but instead make the play more meaningful and productive.

5. **Frequently review your question cards and amend through trial and error.** You can let the players select or offer ‘pot luck’ to discuss.

**How do you use the players’ responses to affect your next session?**
Can you assess from observing a players performance alone whether they are showing understanding or not? By listening carefully to the players’ responses then this can form your planning for your next session, whether that is to regress, revisit or progress on where you consider the players are in their learning.

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*Metacognition refers to awareness of one’s own knowledge – what one does and doesn’t know – and one’s own ability to understand, control and manipulate one’s own cognitive processes (Meichenbaum, 1985)*

**How do you choose what questions to ask?**
The questions you select need to be carefully compiled depending on where the players are in their stage of development and their range and depth of experiences on which they can form an answer. This needs profound consideration and also at what stage of the session you intend to use your question cards and what you want to find out from the players’ thoughts. I have highlighted six areas of the coaching session and example higher (H) and lower (L) level questions:

**“It makes you think more about football than just playing it”**
Josh, U11 Collingham FC

**“It made us focus on what we did in the session”**
Malik, U9 Collingham FC

**“I really enjoyed discussing ideas with my teammates”**
Harry, U9 Collingham FC

**“It helps me remember better what we have been doing so that I can improve next time”**
Ava, U11 Lincoln Girls Centre of Excellence

**“With the use of the question cards it makes it easier to link what I practice to game play. The cards are a visual reference point which makes me think about what I am going to attempt before performing it”**
Imogen, U15 Lincoln Girls Centre of Excellence

Richard Cooper is the FA County Coach Developer in Lincolnshire overseeing the coach development and coach education programme in the county. A former professional player, Richard has worked in the academies at Sheffield United and Scunthorpe United before joining The FA. He is particularly interested in how coaching embraces innovative learning and teaching processes.
Ronnie Reason, FA County Coach Developer, provides a practical guide to filming your coaching sessions without the use of specialist equipment.

Coaching is an on-going cycle of plan, do, review in which a coach is expected to help support the development of the players as well continually improve as an individual. Reflective practice can support a coach to develop critical thinking skills and improve future performance. However, how accurate is a coach’s memory?

In Issue 14 of The Boot Room, FA Coach Mentor, Ceri Bowley, highlighted that 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).

A lack of recall accuracy not only reduces the accuracy of feedback to players but also may impact the accuracy of a coach’s belief of their coaching performance.

Sherin and Van Es (2005) found that, through the use of video, students involved in their research were able to make more evidence based comments about their teaching.

Implementation of technology has been established with coaches undertaking UEFA A and UEFA B coaching courses. Candidates now have regular opportunities to see footage of their coaching sessions in order to support more effective reflection and peer feedback. Coaches are encouraged to examine their own sessions and engage with the tutor in a more collaborative review to clarify learning points.

The Australian Journal of Teacher Education, Volume 39, Issue 9, Anne M. Coffey (2014), found that when asked about the value of watching video footage of their teaching, a cohort of students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma in Education, considered the ‘overall activity to be of assistance to their development as a teacher’ with almost half indicating that they strongly agreed that viewing the video was beneficial. Similarly, the students reported the activity to be ‘motivating and simple.’

In light of this, The FA County Coach Developer Team in the North West set about exploring how they could support grassroots coaches with accessible video analysis to help with:

- Improved ability to evaluate coaching, to support changes made to coaching behaviours and practices (coaches ownership of their coaching journey)
- Identify gaps between coaches’ beliefs about their coaching and actual coaching practice (Perception meets reality)
- Notice aspects of their coaching that they may not have noticed
- Assess strengths and weaknesses of their coaching
- Assess what has been learned within a session
- Have the opportunity to reflect using other coaches’ sessions
What resources may a coach have access to that can be used to film a coaching session with audio?

Unsurprisingly, the proportion of adults who personally own/use a mobile phone in the UK is 93%.

As such, the North West Coach Developers have used the previous five months to experiment filming a variety of coaching sessions and courses with the combination of two mobile devices: one mobile device and an ipad and one mobile device and a digital camera. Footage has been used to reflect on our own delivery, learner/peer reflection on Youth Module 3 courses as well as for self-reflection. Coaches on courses have responded well to the use of filming using their mobile phones, providing a collaborative approach to post session debriefs.

‘The use of video has proved a powerful tool for reflection for both my players and myself. Having the luxury of watching back sessions has supported my development, allowing for small adaptations and corrections that have maximum impact on players and my own self-development.’ (James Roberts, Youth Module 3 learner, Manchester FA course)

How to film and audio your coaching sessions without specialist equipment

**Equipment required:**

**Hardware**
• One recording device for audio (mobile phone with free voice memo app)
• One recording device for video (either mobile phone, iPad, camera)
• Mobile phone headphones with speaker and a clip
• Tri-pod (helps steady the footage; however willing volunteer/parent will suffice)

**Software**
• Movie editor (most systems have a free application)
• Free voice memo app for phone
• Free compressor app

You can view a video of this process at: youtube.com/watch?v=KUME_rXL3rk

**Process**

**PLAN**

**Step 1: Topic/area of focus**
Decide on a focus for reflection and the duration of the video. Areas of focus may concentrate on: communication skills, interventions, the learning cycle, game related understanding, organisation, motivation of players or session management. Keep the video specific and concise - once you have identified a focus, identify what period of the session you want to film (15-20 minutes is a good time to maintain your focus when watching back). This can link to types of practices learnt on FA Courses, a welcome activity or whole or part practices.

**Step 2: Resources**
Identify a volunteer who may assist you. Gain consent from parents to film for training purposes.

**DO**

**Step 3:**
Coach wears headphones connected to audio recording device. Clap hands in view of camera to assist synchronising audio and video later.

**Step 4:**
Volunteer/parent records session with video recording device (adopt a position to observe the coach and players in immediate location to the coach). Please note - the volunteer records the video using the coach’s phone with the audio recorded on the volunteer’s phone. Transfer the recording by airdrop or dropbox after session.

**Step 5:**
Compress video using compressor app and save audio files. Save audio to drop box or airdrop (if using apple products) and to the phone used to record the video.

**Step 6:**
Using a phone or laptop, import audio and video into movie maker cut and align audio and video.

**REVIEW**

It may be an uncomfortable feeling watching yourself coach, however the benefits vastly outweigh the temporary uncomfortable feeling.

The first task is to focus. Avoid being too critical of yourself; it is important to focus on the specific area(s) that you identified in the planning stage. If you try to focus on everything you may become overly critical.

Example:
Area of focus - communication skills
• How quickly do I gain players attention?
• Am I clear?
• Do I provide time for players to respond to questions?
• What type of questions do I ask, what is the impact on the session?
• How loud do I speak?
• What are the players doing whilst I speak?
• How much time do I spend talking?

When watching the film identify three aspects in which you did well against the area you highlighted and then identify one or two aspects you could improve upon within the area.

Make the process count. Plan to work on the improvement areas, as well as planning to continue to develop your areas of strength. Highlight goals/targets to help you develop along your coaching journey - remember it’s not a race, give yourself time to experiment and reflect. After a period of time, film yourself again and review the progress you have made.

Ronnie Reason is an FA County Coach Developer supporting grassroots coaches in Staffordshire. Ronnie has been an FA Coach Educator since 2005 and previously held roles as a County FA Football Development Officer and Further Education Lecturer prior to joining The FA in August 2015.
What is our club DNA?
Are we sticking to our key principles?

Ian Bateman, FA Youth Coach Educator and Warrington Town Youth Team Head of Coaching, looks at the importance of taking time to reflect on your team’s playing performance linked to stated playing style.

In the last edition of The Boot Room we looked at how, back in May 2015, we started to develop a DNA for the Warrington Town Youth Team so that we could deliver clear messages to the coaches, players and parents about: Who we were; How we would play; How we could coach and ultimately what we were trying to achieve in the long term.

This was a huge part of our planning process for the season and beyond.

As the season progresses it is important to keep reflecting on the DNA and check that as a group we stick to our key principles. Part of this process is to log and capture information from games so that we build up a picture of the season to help individuals and the group.

The game is seen as the optimal learning experience for the players, it is the part of the week that we have most time with the players, and is generally well supported by the parents. The games are filmed and put on YouTube so the players can view their own performance and we can build from one week to the next on the things that we are learning individually as well as a group.

After each game we look to capture the following information which are included on five power point slides:

1. Formation and playing time
2. Opposition strengths and weaknesses
3. Team strengths
4. Team areas to work on
5. Individual player strengths and weaknesses
**Formation and Playing time**

**What formation did we play.**

We have tried to limit this to two formations or really one variation on 4-3-3. This will normally be dictated by the size of the pitch, the personnel that are available and the score / game strategy.

**Which players played in which positions and for what periods of the game.**

Game time is a key aspect since all of the players want to have as much game time as possible and ideally this is shared amongst the group. We consider which players start or see out the end of the game - these are key periods which will help development and this helps us avoid the psychological challenges for players who consistently start on the bench, as well as the reduced technical exposure this gives them.

Most players also have at least a couple of positions in which they are comfortable, some have played in all areas of the pitch. This can be monitored and used to aid technical development - by playing the left back in a left wing role has really developed his understanding around movement to receive the ball and finding space.

**Opposition strengths and weaknesses**

This represents only 20% of the reflection and will link into how we have played. For example, if we pressed how did they react: if we dropped deep what was their strategy to get through our defence? We will also identify strengths and weaknesses so that when we play teams later in the year we can be better prepared for the next game.

We are more concerned with our own performance since this is what we can affect the most and where possible we must stay consistent with our DNA. The thoughts that get documented both as a team and individually need to relate to the pre-game discussions and ideally will also be something that has been dealt with at training or has occurred in a previous game.

**Team strengths**

**What key things did the team carry out as a group that were particularly impressive and that linked to the DNA and had been part of our pre-game discussion.**

In the previous game we had conceded a number of free-kicks in our own half which through more disciplined defending could have been avoided. Some of this linked to team shape and the attitude to transition from attack to defence and in some cases this was due to an individual’s poor choice of when to tackle.

Finishing and scoring had also been an issue so it was excellent to score so many goals and may have been helped by the number of finishing practices in the run up to the game.

**Team areas to work on**

The game provides many clues for what we need to work on next.

We need to continually link to the DNA of how we play and not start bouncing from one thing to the next.

A key part of our in and out of possession work was being good at defending set plays and also being effective at attacking set plays. Having spent time working on this through the season it became important for the players to organise themselves quickly and as the players gained a better understanding we could fine tune from game to game and build on our knowledge. The filming of the games is a great tool for pinpointing areas for development with the set plays.

**Individual player strengths and weaknesses**

This is probably the key area where players get most benefit, and ensures that individuals develop and improve and the reflection allows the coaches to keep a check on how the players are getting better.

Quite often the message for the player is given through a quiet word at training or pre-game and it is important that there is feedback either during or after the game or at the next training session. This allows the players to focus on something specific to them. For example: we could have three full backs who play in the game but all three have different attributes: one may need to get forward more, one might need to get tighter when defending and prevent turning, whilst another is too eager to tackle. Same position, very different needs.

Some of these thoughts will repeat from week to week but over time we would expect progression and of course they need to link into the team plan and DNA.

Ian Bateman

is an FA Youth Coach Educator specialising in futsal.
FA County Coach Developer, Matt Jones, discusses the benefits of including player feedback within the reflective process.

It may be fairly obvious why you would want feedback from the players whom you coach, but how often do we actually take the opportunity to ask and record such feedback? In many ways, this is the most crucial piece of feedback a coach could have. It is the equivalent of a hotel asking their guests if they have enjoyed their stay or asking a restaurant goer if they have been satisfied with the meal and table service. As football coaches, we are in the business of helping players fall in love with the game and remain in love with the game. Part of this process has to involve the feedback from the players - after all it is their game.

Players, especially children, will quite often be honest and to the point when asked what they think. As coaches we just have to be brave enough to ask and to listen to the feedback - especially if it is somewhat critical. In some respects the comments from the players may confirm what you already know or it may have the opposite effect and surprise you. Either way, it is priceless information that will assist you on your coaching journey.

In the past I have asked players “what did you like about the session?” and “have you learnt anything, if so, what?”. Additionally, I have asked, “do you have any advice for me?” The players, some of whom I have only worked with once, have provided a healthy number of positive comments to the first two questions. Equally, they have also been forthcoming with their advice, commenting on everything from the size of the pitch to the number of times the session was stopped. And on occasion, following reflection, I concluded that they were right.

This is a process I have shared with other coaches. The use of questions on a whiteboard can be very effective. Not every player is comfortable in vocalising their response, so the whiteboard offers a useful alternative. Also, some players - like adults - can appreciate ‘thinking time’ when responding to a question. Plus, the terminology the players use can often prove insightful.
YOUR FRIENDS AND SQUAD-MATES

1. How many of your squad-mates have you listened and spoken to today?
2. Who have you helped on and off the football pitch? How?
3. What have you learnt about your squad-mates today that can help on match day?

THE BALL AND YOUR GAME

1. What skills have you used today?
2. How many different playing positions did you try?
3. What areas of the pitch did you play in?
4. Did you learn anything about playing football today?

YOUR BODY AND MOVEMENT

1. How many different ways have you moved with and without the ball today?
2. Did you change direction when moving? Why?
3. How fast did you travel? Did your speed change for any reason?

YOUR MIND AND THINKING

1. How did you feel when playing today? What made you feel that way?
2. What decisions did you make on and off the pitch?
3. Have you tried anything new today? Why?

Matt Jones is an FA County Coach Developer in Shropshire. After graduating from the University of Worcester with a Sports Studies Degree, Matt started a career in football development where he has worked in a variety of roles with both youth and adult players over the past 10 years. Matt has worked as Football Development Officer for the Worcestershire FA as well as a Regional Youth Development Officer in the West Midlands for The FA.

Q. Is there anything you thought you did well in the last match?
I believed my positioning in goal was pretty good and my kicks to the outfield players. I helped score a goal.

Q. What did you use in your last game that you did in training?
Spacial awareness when trying to stop the attacker getting in behind. I used turning away from players and using speed (Cruyff turn).

Q. What did you like?
Improves what we did wrong in the matches on the weekend.

Q. What did you like about the session? ...why?
What did you like about the session? ...why?

Good drills
Show us new tactics.
Encourage us
Push us to our limit.

Progression...

Q. Anything you could have done better?
I should of got back more on the counter attack.

Q. How do you encourage players to become more reflective?
Selling the reflective process can be challenging. Firstly you have to decide who the feedback is for: is it feedback for you as a coach or would you like the players to reflect on their performance.

Once you have decided this you can look at the specifics: what you would like to know. Planning your questions beforehand can help, although don’t be afraid to add follow-up questions if you feel it adds value.

For younger players (5-11) you may have to strip the questions back to help them understand (see four corner model).

When working with slightly older players you may want to use more detail and/or combine it with observations and match analysis.

In summary, seeking and obtaining the thoughts of the players can provide you with information that may help you shape your future sessions in terms of content, but more importantly assist you to develop an environment that keeps the players coming back for more.

It will also give you an insight into their thoughts and feelings around the game, as well as the bigger picture stuff in the psychological and social corners.

Remember the good things (the ‘what went well’) but be sure to take on board any advice (the ‘even better if’s’) to keep progressing. Encourage their personal reflection and be sure to praise them at every meaningful opportunity whilst they do so - helping to embed the process as a habit.

Example of player responses to whiteboard questions set by the coach.

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Reflecting for Expertise: What does it look like, how can it be done and how can a mentor help?

FA Coach Mentor and tutor, Cliff Olsson, and research colleagues explore the issue of coaching ‘expertise’ underlining the important role an effective mentor programme can help play in achieving it.

What expert coaching involves and how it can be developed has long been a focus for coach educators and researchers. More recently, reflective practice has been pushed as a means to develop this expertise (Trudel and Gilbert 2006). While being good at reflection is not enough to develop expertise on its own, it can play a crucial role in helping coaches to get and stay better at what they do. Unfortunately however, doing reflection well is much easier said than done.

Accordingly, the aim of this short article is to highlight some principles that can help to make reflective practice as efficient and effective as possible. Based on our recent publication (Olsson, Cruickshank and Collins, 2016), our ideas are presented in three sections.

Firstly, we define ‘expertise’ - what reflective practice is trying to achieve. In the second section, we consider some factors that can help coaches to become better at reflective practice. Finally, and given their increasing role in coach education, we outline how mentors may help to develop reflective practice skills in coaches.

USING REFLECTION: What are we trying to achieve?

For reflective practice to deliver the best return, it is clearly important that coaches know what they can get out of it and, therefore, why they should do it. For most, if not all of those who take part in coach education, the goal is to become better – or more of an expert – at what they do. However, what does being an expert actually involve? On one hand, some consider that expertise comes from having the ‘right’ behaviors (e.g., communication skills), the ‘right’ competencies (e.g., arrives before the start of each session to plan content), and the ‘right’ drills. In contrast, however, Nash, Martindale, Collins, and Martindale (2012) recently identified a set of cognitive (or thinking) based criteria to define coaching expertise more accurately. Indeed, while behaviors, competencies and drills show us what expert coaches can do, being an expert involves doing the best thing at the best time for the best purpose; something that is very difficult to do without thinking. Specifically, Nash et al. argued that expertise is made up of a number of essential cognitive components:

- Use of a large ‘declarative’ knowledge base to solve problems and make decisions (i.e., knowing why and why not to use particular solutions to solve particular problems)
- Use of perceptual skills, mental models, and routines (e.g. running through scenarios that might occur in a training session in advance)
- Ability to work independently and develop innovative solutions
- Experimenting with different options (i.e., not looking to copy what had worked before and trying out new, evidence-based approaches)
- Lifelong learning mindset (i.e., continually learning and broadening horizons on how things might be improved)
- Awareness of personal strengths and shortcomings
- Management of complex planning processes
- Last but not least, use of effective reflection

Importantly, these criteria relate to expertise in all coaching contexts, covering the full participation-to-performance spectrum. Additionally, these criteria also reflect the view that coaching is not a simple activity with ‘black and white’ challenges and answers but rather, a complicated role with ‘shades of grey’ and an ‘it depends’ rule. We would bet that no coach at any level has ever delivered the exact same drill, in the exact same way, with the exact same group and got the exact same outcomes. While having a base of competencies and drills is of course necessary to coach well, it is the thinking behind their use and how they are reflected on that is crucial for developing expertise.
Coaching is not a simple activity with ‘black and white’ challenges and answers but rather, a complicated role with ‘shades of grey’ and an ‘it depends’ rule.

**Beyond thinking about the ‘what went well’s’ and ‘what could have gone better’s’, it is the coach’s ability to reflect critically that leads to greatest return; in other words, their ability to ask why and consider the pros and cons of what they do. Importantly, this skill can help coaches to see the ‘shades of grey’ over the ‘black and white’ that is often presented in formal coach education in sport and across the media. Unfortunately, many formal coaching courses in sport still train ‘black and white’ competencies and thinking. While novice coaches may initially benefit from ‘do it like this’, using this approach in higher-level awards tends to generate coaches who are more rigid and less creative than required. In short, the more that coaches believe that coaching knowledge is owned by higher authorities, never changes and is measured by isolated competencies, then the less chance they will reflect critically on the why of their actions, what alternatives were available and what would have made things different - all the things that they need to become expert.

Alternatively, the more that a coach works with the idea that coaching knowledge is complex, not ‘owned’ by authorities, undergoes constant upgrading and is developed over a long period of time, then the more chance that they will commit to the essential ‘shades of grey’ in their reflections.

**But what is effective reflection?**

**GETTING BETTER AT REFLECTION: What can help?**

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**GETTING BETTER AT REFLECTION: Who can help?**

Of course, trying to develop a more ‘it depends’ perspective is not a quick or easy process. It also might not be desired by some coaches. For those who do want to work toward being an expert however, many coach education programmes have turned to mentors as a vehicle for change. Given that mentors should (hopefully) have a more advanced understanding of coaching – and an appreciation of expertise – this approach is logical; especially as most coaches prefer to learn through personal interaction. However, this relationship will often fail if the mentor tries to get the mentee to reflect from day one. The ‘shades of grey’ mentor and the usually ‘black and white’ mentee will effectively be talking two different languages. For reflection to work best for the mentee at this stage, mentors need to help their coach to start RP by seeing slightly less black and slightly less white. Usually, this will be done through lots of questioning and discussion, with the mentor teasing out the ‘why’ behind the mentee coach’s views, decisions and actions, as well as helping them to reflect on the ‘pros and cons’ of their decisions. Of course, how mentors can help coaches to reflect and work towards expertise is much more complicated than this; we hope to report back on this later. In the meantime, we hope to have highlighted that being an expert coach with expert reflection relies on much more than lots of competencies, drills and ‘cred’. Specifically, we encourage coaches to reflect on the whys and why nots of what they do and against the greyness of the coaching world. So remember – IT DEPENDS.
Historical processes of developing and educating coaches can often find it challenging to take account of the individual characteristics of the coaches it supports and the context specific idiosyncrasies of the players that those coaches are working to develop. This is evident in standardised assessment protocols, the central prescribing of assessment themes and the biases of coach educators who can perceive greater value in coaches who model the behaviours that closely align with theirs.

Seeking to understand the things that a coach (or club) values or believes to be true, how those values align with their objective(s) and the subsequent behaviours and activities that they strategically employ to achieve their objective, whilst living their values, could form an alternative way of thinking about coach development.

Beginning by asking coaches to think about the things that they value generates an opportunity to delve deep into aspects that are fundamentally important to them and consider why they believe them to be important.

The last three years has seen an individual commitment to understand the collective and individual qualities that clubs and coaches value and then working with them to bring them to life in their coaching practice. This combines coaches achieving formal FA coaching qualifications whilst developing a deeper understanding of themselves, their players and the environment they collectively populate and enabling me to stay true to the things that both I and The FA value to be important.

“By asking coaches to think about the things that they value generates an opportunity to delve deep into aspects that are fundamentally important to them and consider why they believe them to be important.”

FA Youth Coach Educator, Ben Bartlett, reflects on his recent coach development work aimed at helping coaches connect their values, objectives, behaviours and activities.
Here are three examples of values and beliefs that have been stated by Professional Football Clubs, National Federations and Individual Coaches and the behaviours employed by a variety of people to seek to bring them to life:

1. **COLLABORATION**
   Working with others to complete a task and achieve shared goals

   I have recently been doing some coach development work with two coaches working through their FA Advanced Youth Award from different clubs. They work in the same age phase and are both bright, curious characters with open minds. They wanted to challenge their players to be able to adapt to different problems that the game presented and asked if we could look at some work around problem solving. The initial thought was to do a workshop on problem solving, with explicit content about what problem solving is and ‘how we do it’.

   Collectively, we agreed that it may be more effective if we looked at some tactical problems that the players and their coaches could tackle together so that football was the ‘workshop’ and problem solving the, more implicit, ‘teaching approach’. This provided a framework to guide instead of a prescribed situation that can chain a coach’s creativity. These problems could be built individually by the coaches (and their players) using the problem solving framework below:

   ![Problem Solving Framework](image)

   - **Select a ‘Moment In The Game’**
     a. In Possession
     b. Out Of Possession
     c. In transition

   - **Select A ‘System’**
     a. 4-4-2
     b. 3-5-2
     c. 4-3-3
     d. 4-Diamond -2
     Etc.

   - **Identify Individual Player Characteristic(s)**
     e.g. Forward who comes short or Full Back who struggles defending against wrong footed wide players

   The first coach selected a 4-4-2, out of possession and two central midfielders who he wanted to practice defending against opponents who play three centrally. His coaching opponent then set her team up to challenge this – she selected a 3-5-2 (her only requirement being to ensure she had three central midfielders). They then had a game and helped their players to solve the problems that the game presented using a range of individual, unit and team coaching behaviours.

2. **SOCIAL COURAGE**
   The state or quality of mind enabling a person to face danger, fear, or vicissitudes with self-possession, confidence, and resolution

   This coach was completing their A Licence and coaches one of the older age groups in a large, well respected Professional Club’s Academy programme. He aspired for the young men to develop the capacity to ‘call each other out’ if they weren’t committed and in unity to doing their best (this sounds trite, but when you think about, doing your best is incredibly hard). The coach, quite powerfully, believed that social courage went much deeper than shaking hands and looking each other in the eye.

   He cleverly combined small-sided games which had a tactical focus around when and where to press with the players being bold enough to call each other out if they fell below the expected standards (an example of a session with multiple learning outcomes across more than one of the four corners).

   16 players paired themselves up - in the first two ten minute games they paired with a team-mate they were close to, in the third and fourth games it was with a different team-mate. Eight players played and eight observed their partners. If one of the observing players saw an example of the player working or playing below the standard they knew they could uphold, they called them out and replaced them on the pitch.

   Fascinatingly, different players responded to this in varying ways – some nodded acceptance, some visibly disagreed but relented and changed whilst others ignored their partner and carried on playing (which generated its own challenges). From this, the coach tailored his interventions to support the players if they were disrespectful to their partner (‘call them out and maintain mutual respect’) and to help them to consider positive responses to being called out.

   The observing coach doing the peer assessment noted that if he’d done that with his players then a war would have started; the response was – “Yes, if that’s the case then the environment isn’t right”. His belief was that if challenging each other to be better is part of developing high level performers the group should employ behaviours to cultivate this and then consciously work at it – an example of a coach aligning his behaviour to the values believed to be important.

3. **CREATIVITY**
   The ability to transcend traditional ideas to create meaningful new ones

   The coach development work referenced in the two examples here were elements of ‘assessment’ as part of formal coaching qualifications and, as alternative approaches to the traditional approach to assessment, can be frowned upon as breaking the rules.

   If we value creativity and hope to develop creative players and coaches to continue the evolution of our game then it may be helpful to recognise that we need to break the rules sometimes and that it may not receive universal agreement. If we ask for permission, we’re unlikely to get it. However, once we break the rules, it works and others see that it makes sense - it becomes part of the new rules, which can’t be broken. If we wait for someone to give us the green light we’ll never get into trouble; we won’t be ‘wrong’ but we’ll never do anything exciting either.

   Those interested in the importance of aligning and living values for success may wish to look at the work of Pernilla Ingelsson, John Kotter and James Heskett.

   “We agreed that it may be more effective if we looked at some tactical problems that the players and their coaches could tackle together so that football was the ‘workshop’ and problem solving the, more implicit, ‘teaching approach’.”

   Ben Bartlett is an FA Youth Coach Educator working with professional clubs and coaches.
Adolescence: a time to sculpt the football brain

Dr Perry Walters PhD, explains why adolescence is the perfect period to develop young players’ decision-making and cognitive skills and the dangers of thinking players aged 16 or 17 are the finished product.

When we talk about the elite football player who has a great ‘football brain’ we think of the likes of Eden Hazard, Lionel Messi and Andres Iniesta. These players have vision, ‘read’ the game well, anticipate play and are creative, composed and intelligent decision makers. We now know that the networks that are associated with such abilities are some of the last brain networks to mature and still malleable beyond the teenage years.

Scientists used to think that the brain was more or less developed by late childhood and that the adolescent brain was simply an adult brain with less ‘miles on the clock’, less experience. However, we now know that the brain does not mature by getting bigger, rather it matures by rewiring, making more connections and coordination between brain regions (Giedd, 2015). In the last ten years new brain imaging technology has shown us that the networks in the frontal region that underpin judgement and decision making, abstract and strategic thinking and the control of emotions and behaviour are still developing well into the mid-20s.

Scientists believe that this delayed maturation is deliberate and, evolutionarily wise, linked to the individual’s need to be able to adapt to their environment during the transition process from child to adult. In this regard, because of the ‘plasticity’ (malleability) of the adolescent brain, the teenage years and early 20s are an optimal time to forge higher order cognitions, such as decision-making, consequential thinking, mentalising (taking others’ perspectives) and cognitive control. In the author’s opinion, a ripe time for stamping in football cognitive capabilities.

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Neuroscience is uncovering why this might be so. The pre-frontal cortex is one of the last regions of the brain to mature and judgement capabilities associated with this brain network are still being sculpted and refined in response to the individual’s environment. We now know it is a period of unique sensitivity to learning. The frontal networks in the adolescent brain are going through a process of simultaneously pruning excess connections and strengthening those that are already used, resulting in a more efficient, coordinated brain. For frontal capacities, the cement is still wet; the plasticine at its most pliable. An opportune time to strengthen pre-frontal judgment networks that contribute toward the ‘elite football brain’.

Are these capacities to be left to chance, to mature on their own or are they to be guided by the coach - moulded, through carefully devised interventions that take into account recent findings from developmental neuroscience? From a football perspective, it might be an optimal time to help forge attributes associated with a ‘football brain’, including: decision making, anticipation, reading the game, composure (managing emotions), motivation, creativity and self-awareness.

All of these dispositions are ‘coming on line’ during the adolescent period. It is also a developmental period when good learning dispositions can be nurtured such as developing a tolerance for ambiguity (mental toughness), practice and taking on responsibility (Allpress and Claxton, 2008).

So football educators need to be aware that the footballer at 16/17 is not the finished product. The cement is still wet in the frontal part of his/her brain to be moulded. These abilities are not yet crystallised and, with guidance, can be nurtured. There will be individual differences with some needing more time and understanding than others. If a player is not the best decision maker, finds it difficult to control emotions, not the best reader of the game, then there is still time to develop those higher cognitive skills through informed coaching instruction.

The best coaches can interpret and adapt this information helping to build a more holistic understanding of player development. It might be that they show a more patient approach with certain players, mindful that these ‘higher cognitive’ capacities are still rewiring and developing. The latest neuroscience suggests that these judgement and decision-making networks are a ‘work in progress’ until well into the third decade of life and are improvable.

Even the very best teenage footballers in the English game are prone to adolescent-typical behaviours. Ross Barkley, for example, was a teenager at the time of the World Cup, aged nineteen. He was described in the press as ‘too impulsive’, ‘too reckless’, and likely to ‘take risks in the wrong areas of the field’. This is perhaps an understandable analysis. However, as we have seen, research from the field of cognitive neuroscience suggests that this type of decision-making is normative for teenagers and to be expected during the transition period of adolescence. Research suggests that teenagers’ decision-making is qualitatively different from that of children and adults and particularly prone to impulsive, reckless and ‘risky’ decision making in contexts of heightened emotion (such as football matches in the World Cup).

What are the implications for football coaches?

Coaches need to be mindful that there might be an ‘emotional bias’ in decision-making as the frontal networks aren’t sufficiently developed and interconnected to manage the fully established emotional/ reward centres. This might be especially the case in aroused contexts or in the presence of peers. As such be prepared for inconsistent and sometimes reckless behaviours.

Risk taking and pushing boundaries is normal for this age. In football contexts the emotional climate impacts decision-making and behaviour for the adolescent more than the child or adult. Too much pressure and a fear of making mistakes might impact the adolescent more. The coach can assume the role of the pre-frontal cortex - that is, dampen down the emotional intensity of coaching or match environments. This might be done through emphasising process rather than outcome goals; emphasise a sense of belonging for players where they are valued over and above their performance; dedicate specific ‘experimental periods’ during training where there are only ‘interesting mistakes’ that can be learned from (Claxton, 2008).

In the pathway toward independence there is a natural breaking away from family and possibly an anti-authority disposition. It is a time, from an evolutionary perspective, of increased novelty seeking, exploration and risk-taking, where friendships are very important, as is what others think of you. This has been suggested as emotional drivers to help leave the nest. So, as a coach, be prepared for contesting authority. Research has linked peer relationships and adults understand the teen brain, communicate calmly and repeat preferred behaviours (go through consequences of actions) this proves an effective method of interaction (Bostic, 2014). Repeating information is important because the frontal networks are still developing and the pruning of grey matter means processing speed may be slower.

Self-regulation is still developing in adolescence. Help self-regulation through - goal setting, planning, monitoring. This helps adolescents’ develop their own sense of self-control. It helps them to connect and strengthen their own neural networks around planning and self-monitoring. It is a period where the connections between frontal and emotional systems are starting to be forged. Helping teenagers help themselves will help scaffold the development of these connections. Also help adolescents understand the motivations of others. Perspective taking is still developing so talk through some important decisions (coach drops you. It doesn’t necessarily mean he/she doesn’t like or rate you. It might be that he/she has to include other players).

Communicate and relate: ‘keep dialogue with your teenager’ (Jensen, 2015). Explain and talk about their decisions. Clubs can emphasise that this is a very important learning period and that the brain is, at its most plastic (improvable). Players can be educated on the plasticity of the brain and the fact that abilities - including footballing abilities - are improvable through increased effort and better strategies (Dweck). Also that the adolescent brain is uniquely sensitive to certain risks and impulsive behaviours (Blakemore, 2010). A knowledge of their own brain and psychology might be beneficial for elite players.

Dr Perry Walters PhD, is a visiting research fellow at Bristol University and Psychology consultant on The FA Advanced Youth Award. Perry has worked as an academy coach at Bristol City FC and as a PE teacher.
Steve Lilley, FA County Coach Developer for Gloucestershire, and Dr Jane Rand of York St John University offer their thoughts on an alternative reflective model making connections with existing reflective approaches.

Plan/Do/Review

The aim of this article is to look at the links between teaching and coaching, with a specific focus on the Review stage of the Plan, Do, Review process. We hope to introduce a new reflective model to coaches, bring theory to life through some practical examples and demonstrate its ‘fit’ with established models familiar to coaches. We hope that introducing a new, overarching model will enable coaches on the grass to improve their own and their players’ practice.

The Review stage of the Plan/Do/Review process is one of reflection - and there are no end of theoretical models of reflection, just try a search for them on Google. In a crowded market-place of reflective models, it is important to find a model which you are comfortable using. Here we would like to present a simple, yet powerful, three-stage reflective model which coaches may want to consider: What? So What? Now What? (Table 1).

We suggest this can be considered as an over-arching model that draws together models that coaches are already familiar with such as What Went Well, Even Better If and Changes for next time.

What? So What? Now What? is most readily associated with Rolfe, Freshwater & Jasper’s (2001) work in nurse education, and is widely used in initial teacher education. Its origins are in the work of Terry Borton in the 1970s, and for coaches the model is one that can be used both to reflect on their own coaching sessions, and one that can be used as tool to support the teaching and development of players.

In its most basic form, the three stages of What? So What? Now What? can be considered as:

1. Description
2. Theory-building (or ‘understanding’)
3. Defining or identifying actions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>What?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What went well? What didn’t go well?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What actions did I take? What were the consequences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What feelings or behaviours resulted?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory-building</th>
<th>So what?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So what does this tell me about the way I handled the session?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So what do I understand differently after this session?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So what other issues arise as a result of this session?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining Action(s)</th>
<th>Now what?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now what do I need to keep doing/stop doing in future sessions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now what might be the consequence of this action?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now what else do I need to consider if this action is to work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now what do I need to feed into the plan for my next session/to improve things next time?</td>
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Table 1: What? So What? Now What? (after Rolfe et al., 2001)

The advantage of this model is its capacity to flex; it can be used:

- Quickly as a mental review at the end of a session (or even more quickly, within a session)
- In more detail as a formal reflection:
  i. In notes, at the end of a session
  ii. As part of the coursework for professional qualifications
  iii. As a structure for a critical incident review

The Boot Room Issue 15
April 2016
Frameworks to help grassroots coaches review/reflect on their coaching sessions:

Models that are familiar to grassroots coaches include:

- What Went Well (WWW)
- Even Better If (EBI)
- Changes For Next Time (CFNT)

These can align neatly with the What? So What? Now What? model (Figure 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Went Well (WWW)</th>
<th>What? [Description]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Even Better If (EBI)</td>
<td>So What? [Theory-building]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes for Next Time (CFNT)</td>
<td>Now What? [Defining Actions]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The full potential of this approach can be realised when each stage informs the next, and when the stages themselves become an active cycle (Figure 2):

- What?
- So what?
- Now what?

Figure 1: Coaching models and What?, So What? Now What?

Figure 2: What?, So What?, Now What? cycle

Practical examples

Two practical examples follow. These demonstrate how resources that are already familiar to coaches can be used in a different way to support reflection: The FA Four Corner Model can be enhanced by What? So What?

The FA Four Corner Model: What? So what? Now what?

- What technical, physical, psychological and social outcomes were there within my session?
  - What were the opportunities for players to improve and develop in all four corners?
  - What considerations were made to support those players striving to keep up, coping, and forging ahead?

- So what? Could I have done differently?
  - What, upon reflection, was effective, and what maybe wasn’t?


Technical
- Did the session give players the opportunity to practice the specific techniques/skills that you are focusing on? e.g. receiving, dribbling, passing, shooting, crossing, heading etc.

Psychological
- Did the session allow players to make decisions about space, team-mates and their opponent as well as making their own decisions before, during and after receiving the ball?

Physical
- Did the session encourage the players carrying out FUNdamental movements (ABCs) as well as more game-related movements?

Social
- Did the session encourage players to interact with others, problem-solve, compete, work as a team and develop self-confidence?

Now what? do I need to stop/keep doing in future sessions?
England DNA Coaching Fundamentals

Use a positive and enthusiastic manner with players at all times
Deliver realistic game-related practices
Use games wherever possible in training

Develop practices that enable the players to make lots of decisions
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
Spend equal time delivering, planning and reviewing
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
Aim for a minimum of 70% ball rolling time in all sessions

Use games whenever possible in training
So what does this tell me about working with this group/individual?
• What research do I need to do before the session in order to support this group’s/individual’s needs?
• So what types of activities are likely to enable me to connect effectively in this session?

Now what do I need to consider when planning this session?
• Now what resources do I need?
• Now what activities should I include to get feedback from the players on the effectiveness of the session?

...so what is the appeal of this model to coaches in the context of the crowded market-place, and the range of existing models coaches are already familiar with? We think there are three reasons:
• It’s a straightforward three-step process
• It’s easy to remember
• It links clearly to familiar coaching models: What Went Well (WWW), Even Better If (EBI), Changes for Next Time (CFNT) but it also enhances them. Used as a cycle (Figure 2), this model can help coaches both to connect their reflection with future planning, and maintain an action-focus in their own practice and in their players’ development
Read *The Boot Room* and help complete your CPD

As part of The FA Licensed Coaches’ Club’s commitment to providing a range and variety of different CPD options, coaches of all levels can gain one hour of CPD by completing the reflective questionnaires in issues 13, 14 and 15 of The Boot Room.

All you have to do is complete the self-reflection questions below and return the page (and any additional notes you make) to:

The Boot Room CPD,
The FA Licensed Coaches’ Club,
St. George’s Park,
Newborough Road,
Needwood,
Burton-upon-Trent,
Staffordshire, DE13 9PD.

Alternatively email a copy of your answers to FALicenseQuery@TheFA.com (Add The Boot Room CPD to the email subject header and number your responses according to the question numbers) and we will register your CPD hours.

It is important to stress that an hour’s CPD will only be recorded if all three reflective questionnaires (from the August, December and April editions) are completed.

1. *p.12-17* - How did a varied games programme help Dele Alli’s development as a young player? What is your own approach to using games in your own programme? How could you add further variety for your players?

2. *p.22-25* - What are the benefits of using a reflective journal? Is this a tool you already use? If so, is there anything you can add to your journal after reading Lawrence Lok’s article? If not, how might you begin to utilise this approach in your work?

3. *p.26-29* - Nick Levett looks back at the five biggest lessons he has learned from coaching. What are yours?
The Boot Room, the official magazine of The FA Licensed Coaches' Club, includes interviews with top coaches and managers, a variety of the latest coaching articles and features, as well as coaching practices, technical content and study visit reports.

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