

Observations from the 2007 NSCAA Convention

The NSCAA Convention annually brings together some of the finest coaches from around the world to provide lectures and on field demonstrations to thousands of US coaches. Here are some of the observations and conclusions I drew from three of the presentations I attended.

Horst Wein: Developing Game Intelligence

Horst Wein currently works for the Portuguese Football Federation and has held similar posts in 32 countries and professional youth development clubs.

1. Soccer starts in the Head
2. Descends to the Heart
3. Finishes with the Legs

Wein is a firm believer that coaches need to do offer less instruction and provide more exercise that allows for players to learn to “read the game”. The phrase Wein uses is “Stimulate rather than Instruct”. Instead of giving solutions to the problems the game demands, the coach should present problems for players to resolve!

The player on the ball has 3 Phases he/she must process and execute each time he is in possession.

1. Perception- What is happening? Your eyes need to observe everything.
2. Decision Making- What to do? Plan, judge, decide.
3. Execution- How to do it? (Technical ability becomes important)

Wein provided data that shows that the 2v1 situation occurs over 300 times in a 90 minute soccer match. He concluded that it is much more important to teach players through small sided soccer situations where they are faced with the 2v1 situation than to play over a larger field where they get less repetition and fewer opportunities to master the 2v1 confrontations that the game presents. It is just as important, if not more important, to teach a player when to pass as it is to teach the technical ability of how to pass. “The pass is born out of necessity.”

Bill Beswick: 10 Best ways to get the Best from your Team

Bill Beswick is the team psychologist for the English National Team

Beswick believes that “performance follows attitude”. A coach must teach persistence through challenging practices that promote player accountability while holding them to high standards. The coach shapes the attitude, but the players are responsible for their attitude. The following is a brief synopsis of a 10 step plan for a coach to use as a model for maximizing player performance.

1. Define Winning- Coach needs to have perspective. Don't lose sight of the process. Don't over coach. Have perspective!
2. Lead and Show the Way- Create a vision. This is our journey, and this is how we are going to get there.
3. Build a Positive Attitude- Coach must be resilient to negativity.
4. Inspire and Engage- Inspire positives, and deal with the negatives. "Do No Harm."
5. Plan and Prepare- Take care of the details. Create a no excuse environment.
6. Teach the Game- Share your knowledge through well prepared, enjoyable practice sessions.
7. Use Technology- (not applicable for many coaches) Chart shots on goal, entries into the final third, crosses into the box.
8. Create Cohesion- Team must know how you want them to play, but also must have social cohesion. Believe and respect one another.
9. Manage the Setbacks- Coach must be a panic free zone. Control your emotions and observe the game differently than a fan would.
10. Create a Happiness Centered Club- Never let the pressure of soccer, defeat the pleasure.

"Pleasure in the job, puts perfection in the work."
- Aristotle

Frans Hoek: Creating an Elite Staff

Frans Hoek is currently an assistant for the Polish national team. He has had assistant coaching stints at some of the largest clubs in the world including Ajax and Barcelona among others.

Although Hoek works for professional clubs the same principles are applicable for any coaching staff.

The first thing a head coach must do before forming his staff and defining their roles is to assess his/ her own qualities. It is important to know not only your strong points, but also you weak points. Once you honestly assess your own qualities and abilities you should create a profile of an ideal assistant.

Most strong assistants will excel in one of these two areas:

1. Strong knowledge of the game
2. Strong ability to deal with people

If the head coach has a strong knowledge of the game it may be more useful to surround yourself with a person who is more adept with handling people even if their knowledge of the game is limited.

The coach must have a vision of how he/she wants the team to play! The staff needs to support this vision and help reinforce it with the players. However, it is important that the head coach allow for assistants to openly share differing opinions, but this must be

done so away from the players. Once a decision is made, it imperative that the staff speak with one voice to limit confusion amongst the players.

Define game day roles of the staff.

- Who runs the warm-up?
- Who deals with logistics? Ex. Field set-up, halftime snack, etc.
- Do you observe how your team is playing?
- Do you observe how the opponent is playing?

One final thought Hoek shared with the audience was regarding coaching demeanor. It is crucial at both the professional level and youth level that the coach keeps his/her emotions in check. When you get emotional you lose the ability to analyze properly. A coach must view the game differently than a player, parent or fan. The coach is the person players' turn to when the game is in question, with this being so, it is important that the coach keep a calm demeanor and offer a stable presence for others to regain their composure.

