



Study visit 2013





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# 1. Historical background and Club heritage





# Bilbao

Bilbao is the 10<sup>th</sup> largest city in Spain with a population of 354,000. The Greater Bilbao area and its municipalities has a population of nearly 900,000, making it Spain's 5<sup>th</sup> most populated conurbation behind Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Sevilla. It is located on the Basque threshold; the range between the Cantabrian Mountains and the Pyrenees, and is also approximately 12 miles from the Bay of Biscay. It is one of the most important ports on the northern coast of Spain as it is the second most industrialised region of Spain, behind Barcelona. Its strongest sectors are construction, commerce, and tourism. Engineering and manufacturing (e.g. automotive / aerospace components, machinery, steel, chemical) is also a top ranking sector, if we consider the province and the Basque Country.





# Basque culture

Bilbao is the largest city of The Basque Country and is capital of the Bizkaia province. The Basque Country occupies a total surface area of 7,234 square kilometres and is home to 2.193 million people. The Basques have lived as a community for thousands of years, and despite a great deal of repression and their culture being persecuted during General Francisco Franco's dictatorship, they have maintained possibly the oldest language on the European continent. In short, it is a small ancient country with a strong identity and its own culture and history. Basques are distinctive people with several characteristics:

- Family and work are the highest ranking values.
- Pride, respect, and identity are also highly important.
- They are hard-working with a strong work ethic.
- They are tough people with a strong determination to preserve their national character.







# Athletic Bilbao:

## A truly unique Club

“We see ourselves as unique in world football and this defines our identity. We do not say that we are better or worse, merely different. We only wish for the sons of our soil to represent our Club, and in so wishing we stand out as a sporting entity, not a business concept. We wish to mould our players into men, not footballers, and each time that a player from the Academy makes his debut we feel we have realised an objective which is in harmony with the ideologies of our founders and forefathers.”

*José María Arrate (former Club President)*





# Club heritage

- Established in 1898, Athletic Bilbao is one of the founding members of La Liga, and has never been relegated from the Primera División since its inception in 1929.
- Furthermore, they are the fourth most successful Club in Spain having won eight league titles and 23 Copa del Rey trophies.
- This despite a 115 year Basque-only recruitment policy meaning only players of Basque heritage have been allowed to play for the Club.
- Athletic is also one of only four professional clubs in Spain's Primera División (the others being Real Madrid, Barcelona and Osasuna) that is not a sports corporation; the Club is owned and operated by its fan-members (socios).





# Athletic Club es un caso único en el fútbol mundial

Whilst FC Barcelona claim to be 'mes que un club' (more than just a club), Athletic Bilbao take it a step further. It is a Club that is more inextricably linked to its region, generating a fervour that is unequalled throughout the whole of Spain.

The Club, for most Biscay and many Basque people is a potent symbol of Basque pride, a symbol of identity and unity. For a country which is so politically fractioned, it is one of the only institutions that has the power to unite all. Historically, it has also been a political symbol; the preservation of 'La Cantera' (the Club's strict and unique Basque only policy), the language, and the region's political aspirations certainly have something to do with this.

People feel the institution has something close to everyone; many followers know the players, managing staff, the President, members of the Board of Administration. They went to school with them, they live in the same villages. They have watched the players play since they were young, many of whom are the sons of friends...

By choosing to nurture their own talent rather than buy an import not only ensures the survival and promotion of the Basque game, it is also a stand against centralisation. It is a voice that yells "we are Basque!".

And whilst the money, media and commercialisation of global football plays against the Club's values and fundamental beliefs, making it increasingly more challenging to compete and restricting the Club's progress, Fernando García Macua (former Club President), announced that "we'd rather go down than change our habits, I know the supporters feel the same." Indeed a survey carried out by Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* revealed that "76% of them said that they would rather see Athletic relegated to the Second Division than allow the Club to give up the tradition of La Cantera."





# Athletic Club es un caso único en el fútbol mundial



“Athletic is for me something more than a football team; a part of the emotional landscape of my Bilbao, My Vizcaya... at root, we Vizcayans love Athletic because we intuit that it has something which belongs to us, because we intuit that within it is a piece of ourselves.

Athletic has an identity as an umbilical cord linking men to the land, a geographical-emotional capacity.”

*Luis De Castresana*



# Estadio San Mamés

Bilbao's stadium, San Mamés has the distinction of being Spain's first major, purpose built stadium having opened in 1913 on the fields at the end of the Gran Vía, next to the Casa de Misericordia (House of Mercy) orphanage. The stadium took its name from the Saint, Saint Mammes. Legend says that Mammes, an orphan and early Christian, was thrown to the lions by the Romans, but the lions did not attack him, instead they remained with him as a companion. As such, Mammes was venerated and Athletic players nicknamed 'Los Leones' (The Lions). Due to its religious heritage, the stadium was nicknamed 'La Catedral de Fútbol' (The Cathedral of Football). As a cauldron of Basque pride it was one of the most iconic stadiums in the world. However, given the transformation of the city over the past 20 years and the increased spectator and commercial demands of the modern game, the Club announced in 2006 plans to build a new stadium on the land between the Rio Nervión and the back of the west stand. Work began in May 2010, and whilst it is predicted that games may be held in the new stadium from September 2013, completion of the build along with full complementary facilities isn't expected to be ready until the start of the 2014/15 season.





# Club crest

Alongside the Club's constant pursuit of modernity and relevance runs a long-standing respect for history and tradition. The Club crest, which has evolved over the years, features the bridge and Church of San Antón, structures that are said to predate the city itself. You can also see the Gernika Arbola (tree of Guernica), the symbol of the freedom of Basque people but also an eternal reminder of their suffering. A small town just outside of Bilbao, Guernica was the site of an intense bombing raid by the Nazis that killed over 1,600 civilians in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War.

*El escudo del Atlétic Club de Bilbao es uno de los más históricos de la liga.*



1901



1903



1910



1912/13



1913 (camiseta)



1917



1922



1922 (camiseta)



1930



1922-1936



1941



1942



1970



1980



Escudo actual





# Los Leones

The Club enjoyed early dominance in the Primera División, winning the title in 1930, 1931, 1934 and 1936 and also coming runners-up in 1932 and 1933. They also won four Copa del Rey titles during what was regarded the Club's "golden age", yet the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939 effectively put an end to their ascendancy. Los Leones, guided by Javier Clemente, would later return and experience relative success in the eighties, winning two league titles and the Copa del Rey. The team featured stars such as Zubizarreta, Goikoetxea, De la Fuente, De Andrés, Liceranzu, Patxi Salinas, Noriega, Argote and Sarabia.





# Crisis

During the nineties, despite Lezama's promising crop of players, the Club entered a clear period of crisis in terms of results. The 1995/96 season was particularly worrisome as the Club finished 15th in the league, only four points above the relegation places. This posed a real threat to the Club's proud accolade of being one of only three Clubs to have never been relegated. This also marked the first decade in which the Club failed to win either the league or cup. This prompted deep reflection and critical evaluation of the Club's methodology.

		Puntos	PJ	PG	PE	PP	GF	GC		
1	Atlético de Madrid	87	42	26	9	7	75	32	108	10
2	Valencia	83	42	26	5	11	77	51	118	14
3	Barcelona	80	42	22	14	6	72	39	118	8
4	Español	74	42	20	14	8	63	36	100	8
5	Tenerife	72	42	20	12	10	69	54	125	6
6	Real Madrid	70	42	20	10	12	75	51	97	8
7	Real Sociedad	63	42	17	12	13	62	53	104	5
8	Betis	62	42	16	14	12	61	54	119	11
9	Deportivo de La Coruña	61	42	16	13	13	63	44	71	5
10	Compostela	59	42	17	8	17	47	54	99	9
11	Celta de Vigo	52	42	12	16	14	49	51	122	10
12	Sevilla	48	42	11	15	16	43	55	115	12
13	Real Zaragoza	48	42	11	15	16	51	59	127	16
14	Real Oviedo	48	42	12	12	18	48	67	120	11
15	Athletic Club	48	42	11	15	16	44	55	94	5
16	Valladolid	47	42	11	14	17	57	62	118	7
17	Racing de Santander	47	42	11	14	17	47	69	121	13
18	Sporting de Gijón	46	42	13	7	22	51	60	115	9
19	Rayo Vallecano	44	42	12	8	22	47	75	114	17
20	Albacete	42	42	10	12	20	55	81	114	8
21	Mérida	42	42	10	12	20	37	62	113	9
22	Salamanca	33	42	8	9	25	53	82	88	7



## 2. Current Academy philosophy and methodology

[ASOF 1/8/12]

AT BARELY 19 YEARS OLD, **IKER MUNIAIN** IS THE YOUNGEST PLAYER TO PLAY 100 MATCHES FOR A TEAM IN THE TOP FLIGHT OF LA LIGA.





# Crisis response

“Faced with crisis, the man of character falls back on himself. He imposes his own stamp of action, takes responsibility for it, makes it his own”.

*Charles de Gaulle*

“Never let a serious crisis go to waste...it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before”.

*Rahm Emanuel*

“Man is not imprisoned by habit. Great changes in him can be wrought by crisis - once that crisis can be recognised and understood”.

*Norman Cousins*

“Successful people recognise crisis as a time for change - from lesser to greater, smaller to bigger”.

*Edwin Louis Cole*

“Close scrutiny will show that most 'crisis situations' are opportunities to either advance, or stay where you are”.

*Maxwell Maltz*



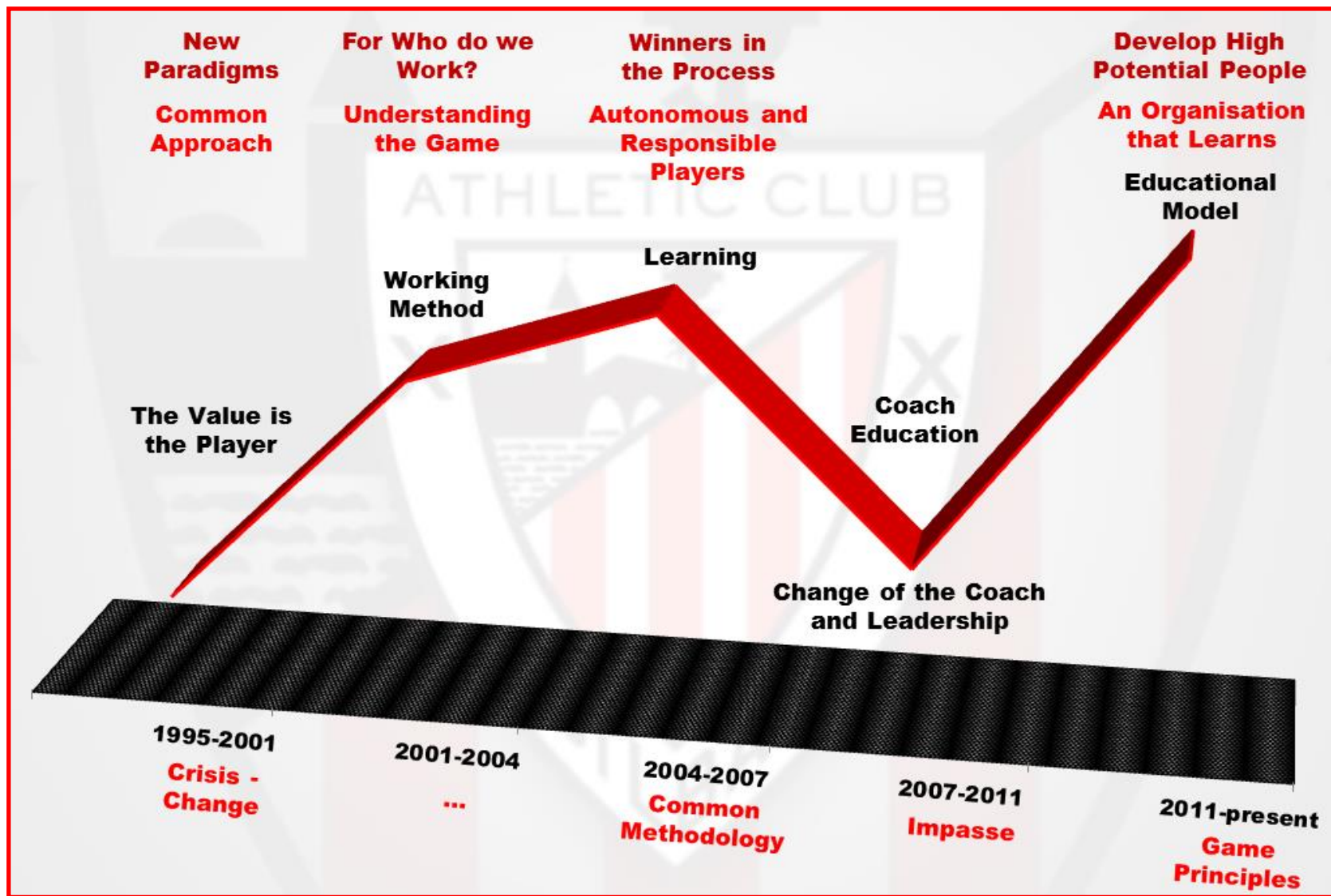
# Crisis response

- In 1995, not only were the Club suffering a crisis of results, but in December of that year, the European Union court of appeals delivered a ground breaking decision. The ratification of the Bosman Ruling determined that transfer fees for players whose contracts had expired were illegal, offering players more freedom to move between clubs. Furthermore, it also outlawed all limitations on the number of EU-nationals playing on a certain team. This, in a fiercely competitive market economy, had the potential to put the Club even further behind due to its self-imposed limitations regarding foreign players. The notion of a player beginning and ending his career at the same club; the type of loyalty on which Athletic Bilbao rely, suddenly became virtually inconceivable. However, the Club took a pragmatic approach and looked inwardly at themselves and how they functioned, which prompted questions that encouraged deeper reflection and insight.
- As a consequence of such self-assessment, the Club endeavored to initiate a common plan to build from the youth upwards. A player-centred development programme was established within a dynamic and caring learning environment which aimed to nurture intelligent, creative players and promote within them values such as loyalty, a willingness to learn and be open-minded, as well as adopting a high work ethic. It also aimed to promote a sense of identity among the players in the Club's youth system, with the vision of one day playing for the first team and proudly representing the Basque ideal. Establishing a strong self-identity was increasingly important within such competitive pressures.
- At several junctures, the philosophy has been tweaked and refined, most notably in 2005 when Txema Noriega, Félix Sarriugarte, Edorta Murua and Kike Liñero reinforced the methodology, analysis, planning and development of training. Together they established the player development programme, recruitment and training methodology currently in use at the Club within their constantly evolving structure.





# Player development programme







# The programme begins to yield results



17 years on from the Club's 'crisis' and the new training methodology of its academic programme that it prompted, Athletic Bilbao outclassed Manchester United in a UEFA Europa League last-16 tie. They won the two legged tie 5-3 on aggregate and went on to reach the Final of the competition. 11 of the 18-man squad that soundly beat Manchester United were products of the Club's youth Academy; La Cantera.



# La Cantera

“Our reason for being is the formation of the player with all its complexity and dynamism, framed in a learning culture that is participatory, self-critical and performance-orientated with a winning attitude”.





# La Cantera methodology

- Speaking recently at a Premier League Leadership Event, the mastermind of Athletic Bilbao's current methodology, Edorta Murua recounted an anecdote in which he organised a trek up a local mountain.
- All players at the Club, junior and senior, embarked upon a mountain hike, but rather than the players being arranged into their age groups, they embarked on the hike in groups according to their positions.
- "So the forwards set off on the journey with other forwards, from Bilbao Athletic down to the mini-Lezemas. The older defenders walked with the younger defenders. They talked about their position. They also discussed what it means to them to belong to this football Club."
- This experience aimed to empower the players, challenge their thinking, step outside the comfort zone of their usual peers and see themselves as individuals within a team, with a responsibility to express themselves.
- The Club, under Murua's influence, places the individual above the team when it comes to developing players, but only so that the team can become stronger. "It's not about the team, or Saturday's game, it's about that player understanding what his role is and where it changes if he steps out as a right-back into midfield for example. The game now changes and the responsibility changes. Tactically, you can see how players in each area would have a very good understanding from a very early age within Lezama."
- Central to this process is empowering the player. Empowerment is a process of risk taking and personal growth, and according to Murua the first challenge is in urging the players to accept risk. "Competing is different to winning. To compete is not just against an opponent, but against ourselves, to recognise our weaknesses and how to improve ourselves. In football, there are many sources of information, but how do we turn information into knowledge? The difference is not only training the player but educating the player."
- "The player is at the core of our process because he is the one who is going to be making the decisions on the field of play - we cannot be shouting out his ideas for him from the touchline. We need him to take control. We need autonomous, self-thinking players who make deliberate and instinctive situation decisions. So the first people who need to understand this are the coaches, who need to ask, 'what are our blockages?' and prepare themselves to transmit the positives to the players."







# Objective

The player development process is framed in different stages.

Training is systematic and programmed for each developmental age.

This is broken down in to planned sequences which are executed and directed towards the formation of the 'complete footballer'.

The stages are:

1<sup>st</sup> Stage - Multilateralism - Basic Patterns

2<sup>nd</sup> Stage - Specificity - Individuality

3<sup>rd</sup> Stage - High Performance

*“El éxito de Lezama se basa en la evolución del jugador.”*





# Objective



The player is a key element, a cornerstone in the formation process, and the game the fundamental means of learning through which he assimilates concepts. Along with the optimisation of the player's sporting performance, the Club strive to embed integral training aspects that develop his personal formation. It is all about obtaining, at the end of the process, a psychological human profile of the Athletic player that is in compliance with the demands of current-day football and that represents, on the other hand, the values and the idiosyncrasy of the Club.



## 3a. Staff







# Staff structure

Technical Director	Academy Coordinator	Heads of department	Stages	Teams	Coaches	Fitness Coaches	Goalkeeper Coaches	Physios	Analyst
J. M. Amorroutu	Aitor Larrazabal	Maria R. Oña (learning innovation)  Edorta Murua (Methodology)  J. M. Sevillano (Fitness)  Peio Agirreoa (Goalkeeping)	Beginners	Alevines C-D	Joseba Bikandi Andoni Bombín	Igor Goikoetxea	Peio Agirreoa Armando Ribeiro Josu Anuzita	Imanol Martín Erika Vázquez	Markos Amado
			Multilateral	Infantil B Alevines A-B	Iñaki González Iban Fuentes Oskar Alkorta				
Multilateral			Cadete B Infantil A	Gorka Bidaurreazaga Unai Melgosa	Markos Amado				
General Manager			Specificity 1	Juvenil Nacional Cadete A	Joseba Etxeberria J. Cabanelas	Iker Egaña Iban Urkiza	Armando Ribeiro Peio Agirreoa		
			Specificity 2	Baskonia Juvenil Honor	Vicen Gómez Gontzal Suances				
			Jon Berasategi	High performance	Bilbao Athletic	Kuko Ziganda Iñigo Lizarralde	Iban Urkiza	I. Etxeberria	



# Coaches

- The Club consider the most important attributes for a coach to possess are the ability to learn and the capacity to explore and adapt to change, whilst being creative and open minded towards alternative possibilities. Above all, coaches must demonstrate that they are expert, or have the potential to become an expert, in the learning process. There is a belief that it takes 10 years to become an expert coach within the Club's unique methodology and philosophy.
- As such, some of the coaches that are employed have some form of affinity to the Club; they are former players, know the grassroots work of the Club, they have direct experience of the unique identity, processes and philosophy of the Club. Edorta Murua for example was a product of the Club's Academy and made two first team appearances. After his playing career, he returned to the Club as a coach and is now Head of Methodology having been a member of the coaching Academy staff for 18 years. Other former players (among others) include José María Amorrortu, Aitor Larrazabal, Iñigo Lizarralde, Eduardo Estíbariz, Kuko Ziganda and Imanol Etxeberria.
- Experiences that are gained outside of the Club and Lezama are also valued within their constantly evolving structure. Such experiences assist in developing fresh ideas for improving the existing processes. This not only applies to coaching, but also areas such as fitness, medical and psychology; all of which collaborate in the holistic development of the players. José Manuel Sevillano for example joined the Club having worked previously within Atlético Madrid's Academy.
- All age groups have a minimum of two coaches working with them during training sessions. This not only provides an enhanced and sustained level of support for the players, it also creates a learning environment and mentoring system for the coaches. The training sessions are organised in 'shifts' whereby the lead coach in the first session is supported by an assistant coach, and in the second session, the roles are reversed. This enables the coaches to observe how other coaches work and discuss different aspects, not only the drills and the players, but the way in which the session is run, the information that is conveyed, the forms of communication and intervention methods used etc. This not only helps to improve the Club's goals, but helps the coaches to support and evaluate themselves and each other. This support network aims to recognise their weaknesses and identify ways of overcoming them, giving the coaches the enthusiasm and motivation to improve and get to the top of their field.



# Guidelines

“The day is what we should differentiate.”

“Adapt new dynamic work orientations, content and specific objectives of what you want to view.”

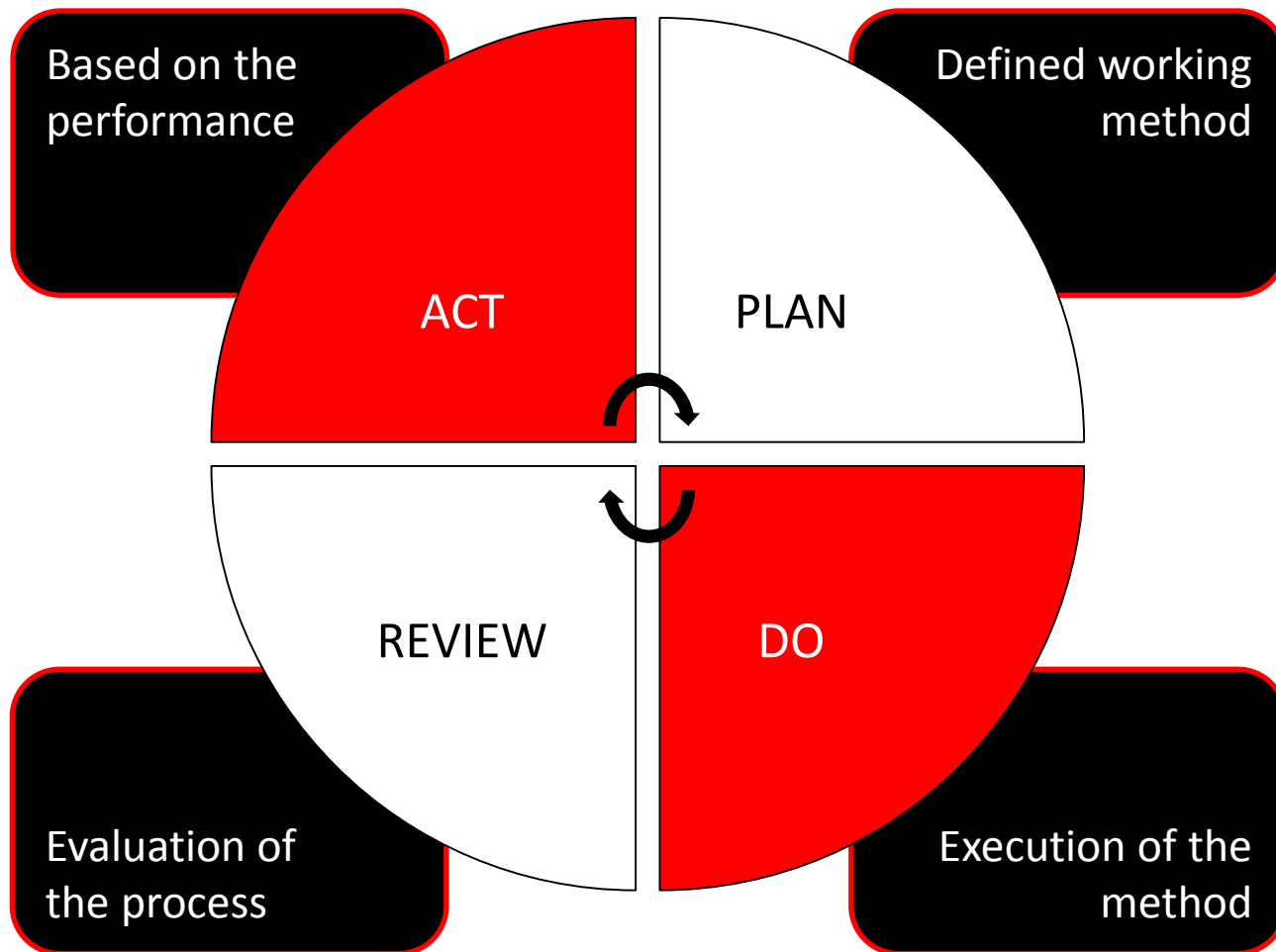
“Develop a learning culture that is expressed in a game-related approach, which reflects the characteristics that are identified as contributing to success in football.”

The Club aim to ensure that all players develop as much as they possibly can each day. Coaches strive to ensure that no two days are alike; not only does this excite players to learn, but also requires the coaches to transform themselves and their practice, avoiding any stagnation which may cause them to remain much the same coaches they were when they began.





“Quality is a concept, a philosophy, a course...”





# The big five game principles

Progressive  
and creative  
in attacking  
play,  
exploiting  
passing lines.

Always aim  
to finish off  
attacking  
plays  
through  
purposeful  
and  
deliberate  
possession.

Defending  
begins as  
soon as the  
ball is lost.

A positive,  
aggressive  
but  
controlled  
attitude  
when  
defending –  
press, don't  
always drop  
and get  
compact.

Make quick  
and effective  
transitions  
that require  
super-fast  
and effective  
thought and  
movement.



## 3b. Recruitment and talent identification







# Recruitment



There are currently three Primera sides and two Segunda División outfits from the Basque Country playing in La Liga. Competition for players is therefore fierce.



# Recruitment



Andrés Garai  
Tomás Balbás  
Edu Garcia

Estanis Argote  
Mikel Busto  
Goio Palacios  
Alvaro Pérez

Kike Mayayo  
J.C. Segura  
Félix Burgui  
Javier Pozueta

There are seven provinces of the Basque Country.

- There is one scout for each province for the U10's.
- There is one scout for the U12 and U14 age groups, both of whom cover all seven provinces.
- For the U16's there are two scouts who cover all seven provinces.
- For the U18's there are three scouts who cover all seven provinces.



**Iparralde**

Mikel Busto  
Alvaro Pérez



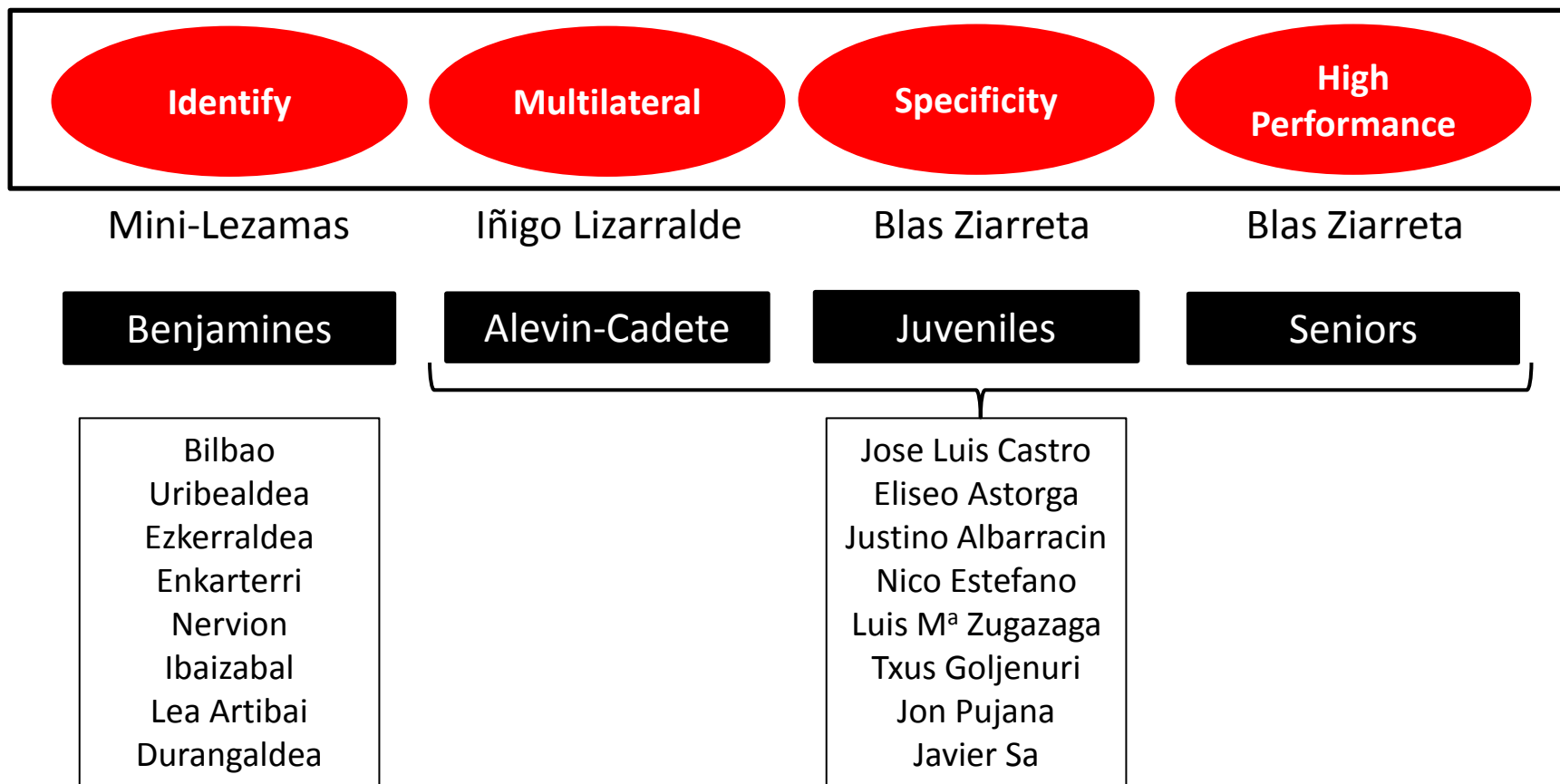
# Identifying players

Reports

Players / Parents / Club relationships

Testing

Centralised information







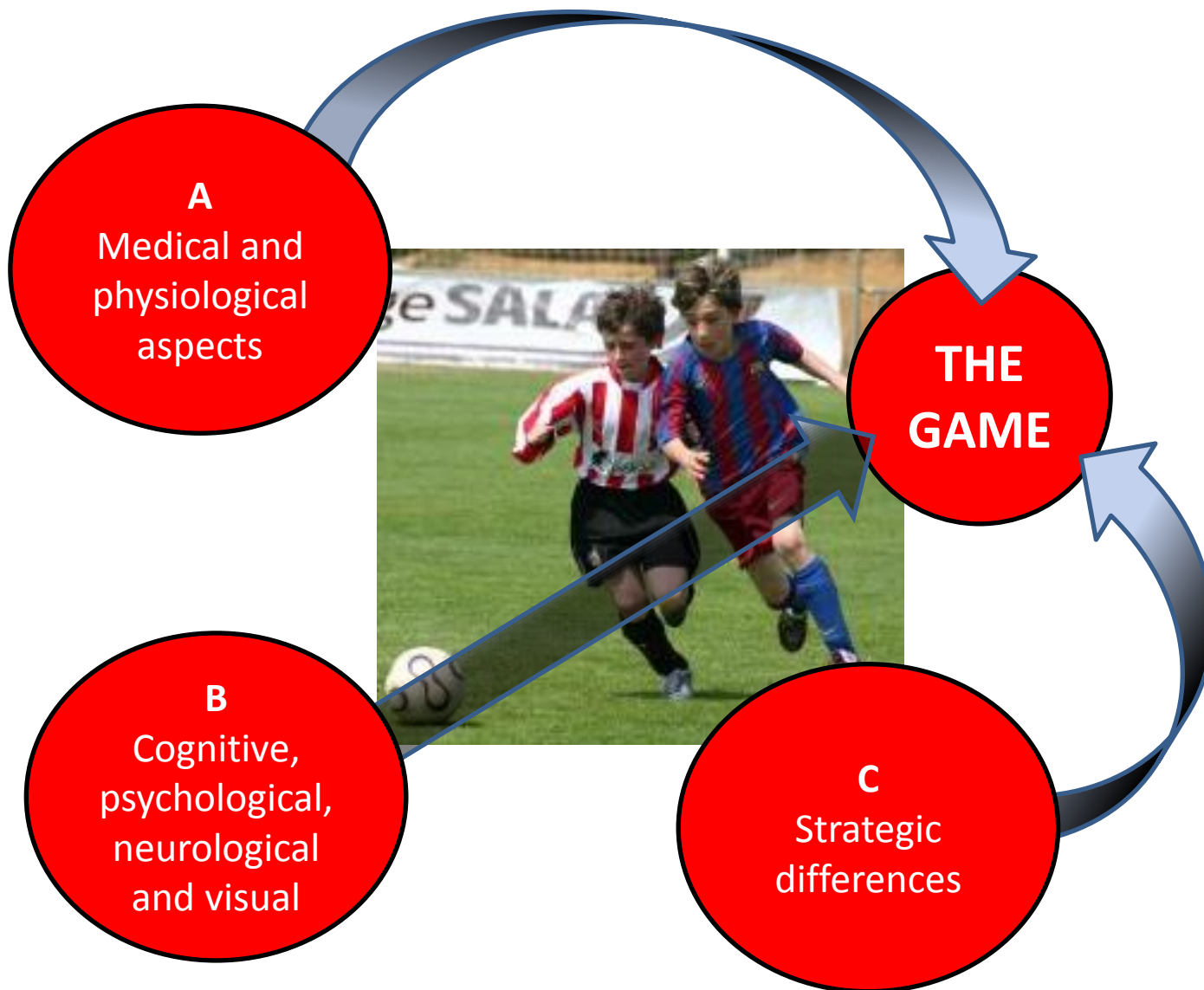
# Identifying players

- The idea of Lezama extends beyond the facilities. Athletic Bilbao supervises the work of a number of partnership clubs (circa 170) that comprise the rojiblanca structure. These clubs act as an extension of Athletic Bilbao, receiving pedagogical, administrative and welfare support. They are also afforded the Club's expert experience and the tools of their current development programme and training methodology. In exchange, the youngsters that prevail in these teams are invited to develop through specific training in any of the development centres that the Club has throughout the Basque Country. Similarly, if Athletic Bilbao release a player from the Academy, they may place him at one of these partnership clubs within his own environment and continue to monitor his progress. It is a very ambitious project as it is difficult to unite clubs, but if they fully participate, it has the potential to be mutually beneficial to all parties involved.
- The Club has also established mini-centers which enable hundreds of U9 school children (the youngest age group within Lezama is U10) to be monitored within their home villages, and also benefit from Athletic Bilbao's youth experts. This network is referred to as "mini-Lezamas" which are located in various areas within the province of Biscay.
- Within each mini-Lezama, there are approximately 20 players. The players train two days a week between October and June and each mini-Lezama also play competitive games against one another and participate in tournaments. Around Easter, the continuous observations and assessments of each player that have been carried out over the past eight months are accumulated, and players are selected to be part of next season's Alevins in Lezama.





# Identification and development of talent





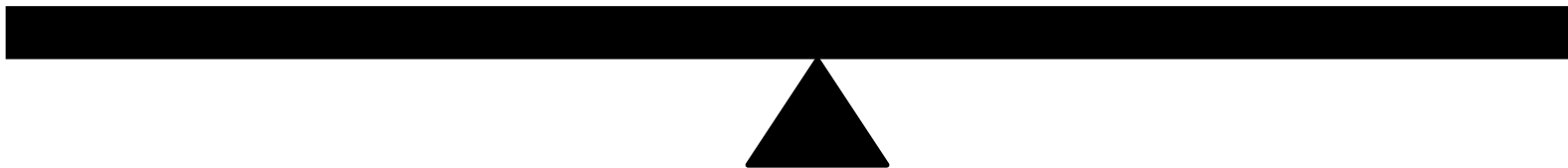
# Identifying players

**Game understanding**  
**Tactical awareness**  
**Decision making**

**Physical aspects**  
**Speed**  
**Assess the level of physical**  
**development**  
**Project future development**  
**potential**

**Behaviour**  
**Attitude on the**  
**pitch**  
**Personality**  
**Understanding**  
**the environment**

**Technical solutions**





# What is required from the players

They understand the game and make appropriate decisions



They are strong, fast and resilient

They are able to provide solutions to technical problems within the game

They are autonomous and learn to value performance objectives

They are responsible and self-critical, reflecting on their improvement as a basis of evaluation





## 3c. Lezama







# Training environment

Lezama was opened in 1971, allowing the players of Athletic to train in a more serene environment than the industrial Bilbao, as it was then.

It is home to:

- Athletic Club First Team (Primera División)
- Bilbao Athletic (B / reserve team; Segunda División B)
- CD Basconia (feeder club; Tercera División)
- Juvenil A, Juvenil B (U16, U17 & U18)
- Cadete A, Cadete B (U14 & U15)
- Infantil A, Infantil B (U12 & U13)
- Alevin A, Alevin B (U10 & U11)
- Athletic Club EFT (Women's)
- Women's B Team

All teams, from the youngest to the seniors train in the same environment. This not only creates a collective identity which helps create bonds between individuals and teams, it also symbolises where the players have come from, and where they are striving to get to.

*“un Club, una identidad”*





# Lezama training facilities



Staff offices

Reserve Team  
Grandstand Grass  
Pitch

Full size grass  
training pitch

Full size 3G

Full size grass  
training pitch

Full size 3G

Indoor 3G, Gym,  
Medical facilities,  
Analysis,  
Hydrotherapy,  
Education

1<sup>st</sup> Team Grass  
Training Pitch

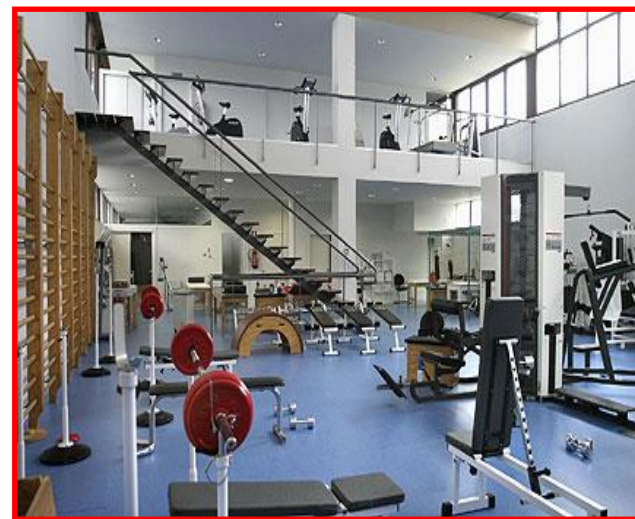
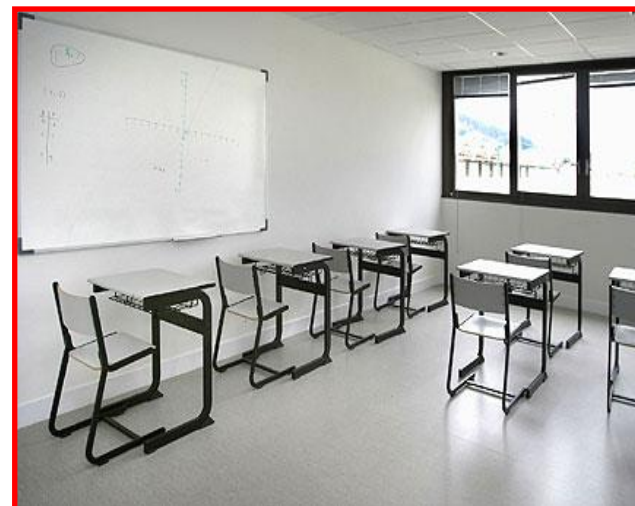
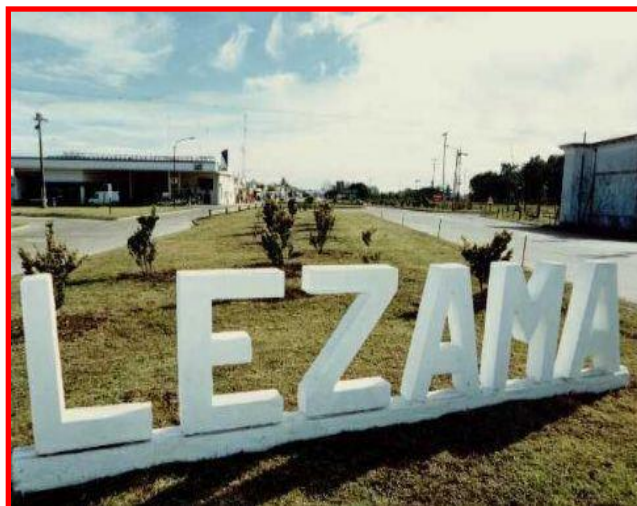
New running  
track

New full size  
3G and 7v7  
pitch





# Lezama training facilities







## 3d. Products of the Academy





# Products of the Academy



In over forty years, Lezama, on average, has produced two players per season for the first team.

Of the current 1<sup>st</sup> team squad, 17 players have come through the Club's Youth Academy.



# Recent Academy products

Spain senior internationals:



Fernando Llorente



Markel Susaeta



Beñat Etxebarria



Iker Muniain

Age group internationals:



Ager Aketxe



Óscar Gil



Unai López



Alejandro Remiro





# Recent Academy products



Asier Villalibre



Xiker Ozerinjauregi Mendikoetxea  
Iñigo Córdoba Kerejeta



Unai Simón Mendibil







## 4. Training and games programme





# Sample weekly programme

Initiation Peak Performance	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>U10</b>	19:00-20:30 Training	19:00-20:30 Training		19:00-20:30 Training		Match (7v7) Two teams	
<b>U11 - U12</b>	19:00-20:30 Training	19:00-20:30 Training	19:00-20:30 Training	19:00-20:30 Training		U11 Match (11v11) Two teams  U12 Match (11v11)	
<b>U13 - U14</b>	19:00-20:30 Training	19:00-20:30 Training	19:00-20:30 Training	19:00-20:30 Training		Match (11v11) Training*	Match (11v11)*
<b>Specificity 1</b>							
<b>U15 - U16</b>	19:00-20:30 Training	19:00-20:30 Training	17:00-19:00 Training	19:00-20:30 Training		Match (11v11) Training*	Match (11v11)*
<b>Specificity 2</b>							
<b>U17 - CD Basconia (3<sup>rd</sup> Team)</b>	17:00-19:00 Training	17:00-19:00 Training	17:00-19:00 Training	17:00-19:00 Training		Match (11v11) Training*	Match (11v11)*

Bilbao Athletic (2<sup>nd</sup> Team) work as a professional team, therefore each week can vary dependant upon a number of factors.



# Sample weekly programme

Initiation Peak Performance	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>U10</b>	The Whole (two drills) Tecnification	The Part (two drills) Tecnification		The Whole (two drills)		Match (7v7) Two teams	
<b>U11 - U12</b>	The Whole (two drills) Tecnification	The Part (two drills) Tecnification	The Part (two drills) Tecnification	The Whole (two drills)		U11 Match (11v11) Two teams  U12 Match (11v11)	
<b>U13 - U14</b>	The Whole (two drills) Balanced- Core	The Part (two drills) Strength	Tecnification The Part (two drills) Endurance	Speed The Whole (two drills)		Match (11v11) Training*	Match (11v11)*
<b>Specificity 1</b>							
<b>U15 - U16</b>	Warm up The Whole (two drills) Balanced- Core	Strength The Part (two drills)	Warm up The Part (two drills) Endurance	Speed The Whole (two drills)		Match (11v11) Training*	Match (11v11)*
<b>Specificity 2</b>							
<b>U17 - CD Basconia (3<sup>rd</sup> Team)</b>	Warm up The Whole (two drills) Balanced- Core	Warm up The Part (two drills) Endurance	Strength The Part (two drills)	Speed The Whole (two drills)		Match (11v11) Training*	Match (11v11)*

Tecnification is related to agility, balance and coordination, with the ball and without the ball.



# A typical session

- Training is organised and planned in blocks or cycles of workloads that last for a calendar month. The plan however is flexible as its content can be modified to meet the players' rate of progress, their level of understanding and their learning needs.
- Sessions are not broken down into coaching topics such as defending, attacking and counter-attacking etc., as such compartmentalising is not a true reflection of the game. Instead broad topics such as 'width' or 'depth' are planned with players working in and out of possession, attacking and defending within their roles and responsibilities around the topic.
- Before each session, the session plan is posted on the board inside the changing rooms so that it is on display when the players arrive. They interpret the session and discuss amongst themselves how the session will work, how it relates to their position, how it may relate to situations within the game etc. Prior to the session, the coach then goes into the changing room and asks the players questions to prompt a two-way discussion before giving them an overview of the session. They then go out onto the pitches to implement the session.
- The session is largely player-led, giving the players autonomy for decision making with the clear intention of empowering them to make choices, develop higher levels of motivation and learn how to develop solutions designed to enhance their performance. The coach facilitates and manages the session predominantly using interventions such as trial and error and Q&A.
- On conclusion of the session, the players are tasked with evaluating their performance and feeding back the following day, where they will also be given feedback from the coach.





# Games format

Alevin B	U10	7v7	3 x 17 minutes
Alevin A	U11	7v7	3 x 20 minutes
Infantil	U12 & U13	11v11	2 x 35 minutes
Cadete	U14 & U15	11v11	2 x 40 minutes
Juvenil	U16, U17 & U18	11v11	2 x 45 minutes



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There are no Academy leagues, instead all Academy teams play in the regional regular leagues, with weekly games every weekend.

Up to Cadete Category, leagues and competitions are controlled by Federación Vasca de Fútbol: Euskadiko Futbol Federakundea (The Basque Federation of Football).

Juvenil leagues and competitions are controlled by Real Federación Española de Fútbol (The Royal Spanish Football Federation).

During specific periods (e.g. preseason, Christmas, Easter), the Academy teams take part in weekend tournaments (short games of 20 minutes), in which very often they face overseas or other Primera División clubs' Academies. These tournaments are played all over the country.



# The system

The current systems employed within the 11v11 format are 1-4-3-3 or 1-3-4-3. Within the 7v7 format the teams play 1-3-3.



**1-4-3-3**



**1-3-4-3**

These systems are used because the Club deem them to be very demanding; not only do they require enormous physical stamina from all players, but they also need to think and make an effort to develop a problem-solving mentality on the field. Rather than giving the players specific roles and responsibilities during different phases of play, both in and out of possession, the coaches only ask the players to accommodate the new information, assimilate it and have the ability to adapt themselves to changing circumstances within the game. If one player acts, the others have to act accordingly to create an autonomous structure that enables progression and finishing in attack, and also recovering the ball in defensive transitions.

It is a belief within the Club that “the right way, the correct way, and the only way, does not exist; there is always more than one way in football”. It is therefore of great importance for players to understand the game and be divergent thinkers, generating creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions in “real situations”. This will not only aid their learning, but assist them throughout their professional career, as they will be required to fulfill different roles and responsibilities by different coaches who may demand different styles and systems of play.



# Conclusion

At intervals throughout this study, some comparisons have been made and can be drawn between Athletic Bilbao and Barcelona. It is true that many aspects of the two clubs are similar: both represent a large city in the heart of a region seeking independence (Catalonia in the case of Barcelona), both are among Spain's first football clubs, both have never been relegated, and both have an avid crowd that is happy to mix politics with sport, expressing support for separation through the team. Yet they are also polar opposites, Barcelona being one of the leading clubs in the world (both in terms of performance and their commercial marketability) with absolutely no limitations on player purchases. One thing however that is unequivocal about these two clubs, is that, each with their own La Cantera policies, they are among the leaders of youth development within Europe. This, a position that was recently affirmed by research carried out by *FourFourTwo* magazine (the results of which can be seen on the right). In a time when youth development in English football is under increased scrutiny, the long-standing and successful youth development programme of Athletic Bilbao is an example of the power of long-term beliefs, policies, perseverance and conviction in youth development over the temptation of short-successes, from which many valuable lessons could be learnt.

Top eight clubs to have produced home-grown players that are currently starring in their first team squad	
1. Athletic Bilbao	16
2. Barcelona	14
3. Real Sociedad	14
4. Montpellier	12
5. Sochaux-Montpelliard	12
6. Lyon	10
7. Bordeaux	9
8. Manchester United	9



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