

CLEATBEAT.

The Magazine

THE MOTHER OF THE GAME.

The game of Futsal has produced some of the most exciting and technically skilled players in the world of football. The tight spaces and close quarters force players to play quicker, but without hampering accuracy.

So what is it that teams need to survive in this [Five-on-Five Futsal Format](#)? In this issue, we look at the importance of picking the right team for Futsal and excelling at the shorter form of the game.

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FROM THE EDITOR.

One week into the new website and things are finally stabilizing here at Cleat Beat.

There is always something that gets missed out and in the end, you need to try and rush it in, which never works out because you are trying to rush something that needs time and patience.

That said, we are finally in a position to start our recording sessions in earnest and with that, kick off the Cleat Beat Network.

The important thing is to constantly fine-tune what you are doing and that has been the essence of the other launch we had last week, the Cleat Beat Coaching Program – **Coach – 2 – Coach!**

For two years, we have just been trying to fine-tune the process of creating a program that actually addresses the need to produce coaches who are trained to coach children to enjoy the game.

I remember when we were kids, there were fewer distractions and if you wanted to enjoy the game, you had to be good at it.

If you were poor or average, people would scream at you, abuse you and even hit you at times, irrespective of the age-difference between them and you.

It didn't matter how you felt or what you thought because everything was about playing at a bare minimum level and when you did manage to reach that level, the joy of achieving something was incredible enough to keep us going in the sport.

Too bad I never looked at academics in the same way but there was something about creating that base-instinct in sport that allowed us to level the playing field, no matter how old or young a player might be.

Overcoming the age-barrier was the least of our worries although it would have something to do with increasing our enjoyment of the game.

Today, the increase in organized sport has taken over basic concepts that we took for granted.

For us, it was about getting back home in time, from wherever we were, to make sure that, rain or shine, we were there on the field at 5pm sharp.

It was a privilege, and for me a bonus, to get to take the match-ball home because it meant just one thing – I will be there tomorrow, for sure!

Also, it meant that while parents thought I was studying in my room, I would just be knocking the ball around, trying to keep it under control and not make any noise to alert them of my doings.

It's that kind of spirit that we are trying to create with our coaching program, but the battle is long and hard!

Sportingly Yours,

Asit Ganguli

Chief Editor

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QUIET PASS AND MOVE GAME.

It is vital to build good habits from a young age, within your players, and sometimes, the way to build these habits is to enforce certain rules that force them to think.

There are a certain set of abilities they all possess but when you take away one or two of those abilities and forbid them from using it, players are forced to use their remaining abilities to make up for that loss.

It is for this very reason that we look at something like this **Technical Training Game** where the players are forced to use two-fewer abilities and make the most of their other skills to continue playing in an effective manner.

Most importantly, this game forces your players to look up and look for team-mates all the time. Now that's one habit that's extremely vital to survive at any level of the game.

Passing and movement are crucial aspects of the game but more important than the actual process of passing and movement is knowing the “when’s and where’s”.

When and where do you need to pass the ball to get it to the right player?

When and where do you need to move to get into the right position?

All these are aspects that require players to be on the same page with each other and for that, one of the most important aspects is communication.

Communication, on the football pitch, happens in two ways – verbal and non-verbal.

This is a game where you remove all forms of communication and force players to look up and play.

THE OBJECTIVE

The idea of the game is to encourage your players to raise their heads and look around while they are playing.

No matter where they are on the pitch, every single player needs to look up and take stock of where they are and how they need to move around to help their team-

mates.

This process is the same – the more often they look up, the more often they know about what’s happening on the pitch and how they fit into the entire picture.

So, what happens when you put a restriction on communication?

You force your players to look up and see more often – look for where their teammates are and position themselves to give & receive passes and create scoring chances.

Appropriate Age Group: o8- to 16-years

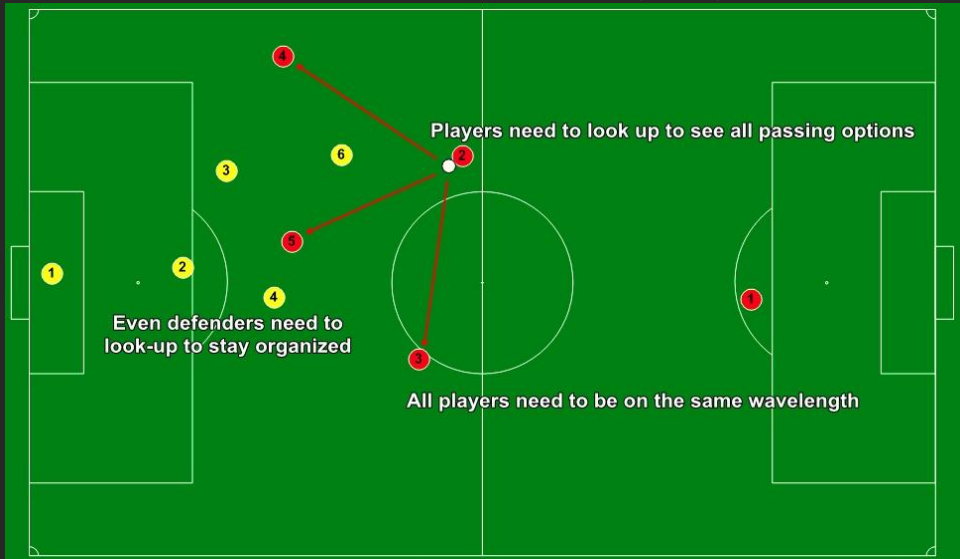
THE SETUP FOR THE GAME

The playing area setup is as follows:

- The playing area is about 30 x 45 yards
- Two teams of five-players each (A and B)
- A set of balls to keep the game going
- Two small goals on either side of the playing area

THE RULES OF THE GAME

- One team starts the game with possession of the ball
- They need to try and build up play and creating scoring chances



- The main idea of the game is that players cannot use their voices to shout/demand passes or communicate with each other
- They cannot use their hands or eyes to make any gestures and demand passes or movement
- There are no goalkeepers and players can rotate to play in any position as per the demands of the moment
- If players communicate – verbally or non-verbally – they need to pass the ball to the last player on the opposition team or hit it out of touch to turn-over possession

Total time: 10- to 15-minutes

PROGRESSIONS FOR THE GAME

- Make things harder by getting players to play one-touch or two-touch football
- Give both teams the same colours to wear so that they have to be even more careful when they look up to find passing options and space on the pitch

KEY COACHING POINTS

- Players need to constantly look up, every second, to know their positioning on the pitch with respect to other players and their position on the pitch
- Passing quality and accuracy
- Correct body-shape – players need to be open at all times, facing the pitch to see as much of the playing area as possible
- Intelligence in movement on the pitch
- Attacking sides need to create space and move the opposition around with their passing and movement



- Defending sides need to stay organized by constantly looking up to see where their teammates are

Communication is the most important part of a football game and if you remove that component from the game, the entire process changes for the player.

This situation forces the player to start thinking about a lot more things than they are used to.

The moment you get your players to think about the game rather than simply do what they are accustomed to, which is overcome obstacles by talking to each other or controlling the play.

While that aspect is important, removing it ensures that they have no choice but to create the kind of understanding they need to pass and move intelligently, removing this major linking-bridge is important too.

However, make sure your players can communicate well and are aware of good passing and moving practices before you remove this privilege from their game.

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PICK YOUR WEAPON.

Every coach prepares for the game with a wide range of tactics, plans and strategies. Every minute of training is spent on creating the perfect response for every problem the opposition poses; every second is devoted to finding ways of tearing them to shreds.

However, all that planning and strategy will go to waste if the team is incapable of executing the strategy as per the coach's instructions. Once out on the pitch, a coach has little control over what the players choose to do and therefore, ensuring that the right players are picked for the team is vital.

Player Identification and Evaluation is all about finding the best personnel for the job and most coaches who get it wrong at this point are left wondering when things started heading south and what was wrong with their planning.

Keith Scarlett looks at how efficacy of your planning is important and why your team selection needs to be spot-on no matter what your strategy might be, if you want to pull it off on the pitch!

Selecting the wrong players can be prevented by taking a few simple steps – important ones!

Improper Player Identification and Evaluation are two of the primary killers of coaches' careers.

Even talented coaches with promising futures in the game can get hung-up by not identifying their players correctly.

Proven coaches with successful track-records can also find their success in jeopardy if they don't take the time to evaluate players correctly.

Regardless of your experience in this game, Player Identification and Evaluation is an elite skill that has to be learned.

You have to try & fail and then try & succeed!

It may appear simple in concept, but, you may be surprised at exactly how much must go into ID'ing and evaluating players properly.

I think that being a former college coach in both a Head and Assistant Coach capacity,

as well as being a member of the US Soccer National Staff, has helped develop what many consider to be one of my primary strengths as a coach; my ability to properly identify and evaluate players.

This skill was one of the key pieces to my resume that helped me secure a position as a professional coach.

Besides players, I also evaluate other coaches at times, and in speaking from that capacity, I am not sure most coaches understand the necessary components that they should be looking for.

So, let's approach this from a coaching angle and try to really get into the nitty-gritty of what proper Player Identification and Evaluation is.

SO, WHERE DO WE START?

The concrete-foundation, which establishes parameters of how players are identified & evaluated, starts with the four pillars – technical, tactical, physical and psychological!

Allow me to break this down:

Technique: This is the first of the four



PLAYER IDENTIFICATION + PLAYER EVALUATION = PLAYER DEVELOPEMENT

pillars – the basic piece of technique that I always look for is “Can a player play out of pressure with a purpose?”

A tangent to this question is how a player deals with the ball when under pressure from opponents, when time is limited and space is restricted.

I also look at what their first-touch is like when under pressure.

Is it intelligent?

Is it efficient?

Can they play forward from it?

The final piece to the technical puzzle is a player’s technique in functional training (as it relates to their position).

Tactical: The second of the four pillars pertains to how a player processes things: the underlying question that encompasses this whole pillar is does the player have a good soccer “brain?”

Now, we can break down this question even further and take a look at how they perform in Functional training?

I look at whether or not they understand the requirements of the position they play.

For example: if the player is playing up high, do they understand how to move off the ball or how to play with their back to the goal?

Physical: The third pillar is the physical

element of a player’s game.

This one is fairly straightforward – I simply look at whether a player has any one single, physical attribute that pops out when using what many call the “eye-test.”

The “eye-test” is exactly what it says – if you were to sit-down and watch a match blindly (i.e., without any players to watch or any pre-information), are there any players who pop out and grab your attention and how are they doing so?

Specifically, I always look for whether a player has good size, speed, quickness, etc.

However, the main things I look for in this area are size, speed, athleticism and work ethic.

Psychological: The third pillar and one that too many coaches don’t take into consideration, but one that I believe is the most important of the four pillars, is the pillar of psychology.

I want to see what a player’s attitude is like both on and off the field.

There are quite a few times where I am the only person in the entire stadium that is not watching the ball.

This ties-in with the tactical pillar, as well, because I want to see how a player handles themselves away from the ball.

I want to know what their mentality is like!





How strong is their mental fortitude?

Is the player coachable?

When they come off the field, how do they interact with teammates and coaches?

What are they doing at half-time?

Or in pre-game?

How does the player handle mistakes; both ones they make, as well as ones teammates make?

Most of this can also be placed under the umbrella of "mental toughness."

I have come to the point where I am able to take all of the above information and place it into four much smaller, concise categories.

Thus, these are the four things that I always look for when evaluating or identifying players.

Can they play out of pressure with a purpose?

Is their first-touch intelligent?

What is their pace like?

Intangibles: This is a very broad area and one that involves this "gut feeling" that I get regarding players as to whether I feel they have the "intangibles" to succeed at the level.

It's not something that I can really explain, but rather something that you develop the more time you spend ID'ing and evaluating players.

These are four things that I don't believe a coach can really develop in a player.

They either have it or they don't.

Player Development is directly related to **Player Identification** and even more in-line with **Player Evaluation**.

Most coaches are able to identify and evaluate players to a certain degree and probably one out of every 3,500 get "lucky" and find that "diamond-in-the-ruff."

However, the goal is to always be able to identify and then evaluate players who are those 'diamonds-in-the ruff' by design and choice, rather than striking it rich by winning the lottery.



Even a conservative coach with good Player Identification and Evaluation skills can find those diamonds in one sitting, if they even exist, that is.

Unless coaches make the conscious effort to self-evaluate their own skills in ID'ing and evaluating players, their teams will always been no-luckier than a Powerball Ticket.

Dr. Jay Martin, the Head Men's Soccer Coach at Ohio Wesleyan University where he has won two National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III National Titles and is the "Winningest" Coach in All Divisions of Collegiate Men's Soccer, said that one of the things that strikes him about even the best players that he recruits is how few know anything about the game.

They don't know their roles based on their positions when on either attack or defence.

This is not just an American phenomenon as this is true in other nations, as well.

Germany is one example where even the youth teams in the German development system don't know their respective roles well-enough.

At least as striking is my discovery that not a lot is being taught by some excellent coaches at the college and professional level.

It's not enough to be able to motivate your players; not enough to know all of the "X's" and "O's"; not enough to be able to demonstrate technique; you *must* make your players learn and have them prove to you that they know what their roles are in the team based on what you teach them.

If we are going to elevate our players, then it isn't just teaching techniques that we have to master.

We have to be teaching the players to better understand the game!

In most cases, gaining this skill is a slow process.

Our coaching psyche is designed to tightly balance the chaos consumed with the unpredictable expended in experience.

A coach who increases their player ID'ing and evaluating activity will inevitably learn to increase their efficiency and effectiveness, which will in turn, increase their success.

On the other hand, when a coach decides to not take the time to perfect this

important part of their craft, he or she will find their success is limited.

The balance *must* be kept almost perfectly.

ARE THEY READING THE GAME?

Why is the player's ability to "read the game" so important?

First, the better a player can read the game around them; the more they will improve the overall team's performance during the match.

Second, the better a player is able to 'read the game,' the easier it is for their coach to evaluate individual performance, as well as the team's overall performance during the match.

Third, the better a player understands and can read what is going on around them, the better everyone can prepare for the next opponent.

Lastly, the better a player can analyze a match, the more they will help improve the quality of playing and coaching, as well as evaluation skills.

In a sense, a coach needs their players to better-read the game, in order for them to better analyze the match, and vice-versa.

Somewhat ironic, huh?!

The coach's mind will naturally err ever so slightly on the side of what is comfortable and has worked in the past.

According to research from the University of New Hampshire, coaches who rely on what they are comfortable with run the risk of being passed by the nature of the game at a rate of 31% compared to coaches who spend time improving their ID'ing and evaluation skills.



READING AND SEEING ARE NOT THE SAME

When a player is reading the game, what exactly is it that they are reading?

What aspect of the match are they keyed in on?

Do they have tunnel-vision or can they read the game out of both corners of both eyes?

What is the player evaluating in their mind and what is it within the match that is stimulating this evaluation?

To begin to teach players how to separate "READING a match" and "SEEING a match," we must understand the differences ourselves.

Reading a match is the process of a player, coach, fan, etc., taking in what they are "seeing" around them within the match, processing it in their mind, making decisions and the acting upon those decisions.

Seeing a match is different than Reading a match in some minute ways, but rather important details they are.

Anyone can "see" a soccer match being played, but that's where it stops for most.

Just “seeing” the game will limit one’s ability to absorb any stimuli that the match produces, allow the stimuli to imprint on their minds and then will also limit their ability to recall it, so they can make decisions based upon it and then be able to act upon it.

So, the key question at this point is: How do your players respond to whatever they saw?

Well, there are several different additional stimuli that bear on the answer to this question that must be understood.

Besides what is happening in the actual match, in order to better and more efficiently read the game, players have to consider what they take in at half-time; what they take in after the match; how they analyze their own performance; their own ability to read the game, and how will this analysis affect what the player does in future training and in turn, their continued development.

During the match, we, as coaches, are socially wired to consume what we see before our eyes.

The bad news is that what we see before our eyes tends to be only 25% of what is actually there.

This limited view of what we think is complete is called “visceral vision.”

Research shows that visceral vision has a profound negative effect on a person’s ability to develop a correct, decisive and deliberate perspective on what they see.

Furthermore, visceral vision is the hardest perspective to lose, as it is the natural way

human-beings observe and is so rooted on our subconscious that most people never even know it is even happening.

VIEWING PERSPECTIVE

The perspective of which players see the game is very different from the perspective of coaches.

This huge difference in viewing perspective can lead to confusion for players when a coach tries to help them analyze their play.

Coaches see the game horizontally, while players see it from a vertical perspective.



That’s the primary reason why when I am recruiting, or trying to identify players, or evaluating, I prefer to place myself as to read the game from above and/or behind a team.

This is the vertical view that the players have and is the best perspective to see the game how they see it.

If someone is evaluating with me, I may have them positioned off one of the touchlines or caddie-corner off a corner-flag.

METHOD BEHIND THE MADNESS

So how does a coach enjoy the evaluation experience without gaining a boring impression of this vital and necessary skill?

The solution may be a simple balance of who you watch, when you watch and where you watch!

An average coach needs $\frac{3}{4}$ of a match to fully evaluate it properly; some will need to see even more.



Therefore, a match that is not exciting or enjoyable to watch can become quite boring, which adds to the coach's difficulty in paying attention, which in turn, can burn-out coaches in no time.

I knew a college coach who said he hated to recruit and never really did so.

He just waited for players to come to him and thus, his teams were always just average.

I also know coaches that will devote an entire day to evaluating one single, solitary player.

He admits he probably misses out on several other players yet, is it ironic that his teams are only slightly above average?

A coach needs to vary what they see, when they see it and where they see it from, in

order to stay fresh and focused on the task at hand.

A player, on the other-hand, needs only 35 seconds to see, read, process, recall, problem-solve and act upon any traditional stimuli that occurs within a match.

This difference in time-frames may sound intimidating, but the truth is, players do not have the luxury of sitting back on a chair or a bench and take the match in all at once, as coaches do.

Short spurts of action throughout the match add up.

Moving into space, calling for a ball, receiving the ball and playing from there is a much harder process to evaluate, even though it sounds simplistic, than seeing the same sequence from off the pitch.

I have learnt, for me personally (everyone has to make their own determinations), that I only need to spend 20-minutes at a time, initially, to evaluate a specific player or to watch a match trying to identify players.

This not only keeps me fresh, but supports the concept that if I am unable to see enough out of the player in that 20-minute span, the odds are heavily favoured against them.

I am able to see more players, more matches and am able to better maintain fresh eyes each time.

Now, don't misunderstand what I'm saying.

Initially, I only spend 20-minutes watching a match, a player, etc. at a time.

If that player is not in the match for the entire 20-minutes, then I always notate how long they were in and always come back to them to catch the rest of the allotted time.

Also, if a player does not "impress" or "stand-out" in the initial evaluation, yet also does not show anything that tells me

they are *not* what I am looking for, I will often try and return to watch them again.

I prioritize players I am either evaluating or ones that I identify in order of who I think is the closest to what I'm looking for.

That is the order I observe them in – Once I am through the entire list, I will take a second look, if needed.

I should also note that if I can tell that a player "doesn't have the goods" within 10-minutes, for example, then I will move onto the next player or match on the list even if it's before the 20-minutes are up.

As for my list, any players that I identify that I didn't previously know about, I add to the list and give them their respective 20-minutes, as well.

Sometimes this takes multiple days or even events, but I have found much success in this process.

How do I work it if I only have one match to watch and there are multiple players to evaluate in that single match?

That is a very good question and the





answer is quite simple – In order to afford each player their due time, I simply divide the number of players into the total length of the match and there it is.

As for players I identify during the match that I did not know about prior, I add them to the bottom of the list as always and if there is a possibility of seeing them in the future, I do so.

However, if there is not a chance to see them in the future, I just remove 1-minute from each player's allotted time and assign it to the new player.

Most of the time, there isn't much issue, as there will be players who I can tell aren't ready within a 5–7 minute span, which opens up some free time to allot as needed.

Evaluation that requires more than what I have described above is needed at times, especially when dealing with final selections for a team, scholarships, etc.

Thus, there is no pedometer for the length of time a coach should spend in the identification and evaluation process.

It will vary for everyone; however, every coach needs to do it and do it right if the right players are to be discovered.

As I said earlier, most coaches cover a match in approximately 68-minutes.

I, as well as other experienced coaches, recommend working that down to more than half.

At that rate, you will be amazed at how many players you can evaluate and identify in the shortest amount of time.

CAN THE PLAYER COACH WITHIN THE GAME?

We, as coaches, are expected to be emotionally distant so we can be focused on "reading" the game for coaching purposes.

When we become too emotionally involved in a match it turns us into spectators.

As we all know, the structure of the game of football is such that once the whistle blows, there is very little a coach can do from the touchline.

Due to this, players who can play *and* coach (i.e., direct traffic, etc.) while on the field are very valuable.

Way too many players are silent!

Even some of the most talented ones are way too quiet on the field.

I have coached elite-level club football and was taken aback by the lack of talking, overall, as well as the low numbers of players whom were willing to step-up and be the on-field coach.

When I moved onto to coach at the college-level, there was much more talking when compared to some of the club teams I have had.

Now, as a professional coach, the type, quantity and quality of communication, both verbal *and* nonverbal, on the field was one of the first things to jump-out at me.

The difference in the level of communication from college to the pros is tremendous!

Even when I played, there was all sorts of talking going on and it was loud enough to be heard from out of touch (the camera would pick-up much of it).

However, my game was more between the ears than the feet, I was one of those players who directed traffic and was the coach on the field.

I know the value of and the impact that a coach on the field can bring to a team and, thus, I am always on the lookout for these types of players.

Players who are confident enough in not only their technical and tactical abilities, but can also read the game well enough to be able to coach their teammates in the midst of it, bring so much more to the table.

First, they help keep the brains of their teammates in gear – they force their



teammates to put their own analysis-skills to use.

Second, these players understand all systems of play as they relate to their individual strengths and weaknesses.

This allows them to guide their team prior to and during a match.

Thirdly, the level of anticipation these players show for issues that may develop during a contest and the prescription to cure it are so valuable to a team that it is immeasurable!

Finally, coolness under pressure is where this level of player can make the difference.

Someone will surely ask how many times I have actually been able to find a player of this type.

The answer is "not often", but more than others, because I feel as if I have a very efficient system to identify players properly.

LOGISTICAL MATTERS MATTER

An often overlooked element of a player's game is their mentality when it comes to logistics, especially minute and trivial ones, which many times are the most important.

It is for this reason why I will try to get to as many matches as early as possible, because



I want to see the player during their pre-game routine.

This is also the primary reason why I try to position myself where I can see and possibly even hear a player during half-time.

I also want to see if a player not only knows, but also understands & performs within the parameters set by the responsibility of their position.

Does the player know their area of responsibility and the duties that come with it?

If they don't have a grasp on this simplistic concept, then they are just not ready.

However, I also look for elements of the next-step, as well.

How does a player communicate with their teammates?

Is the communication of information to teammates thought through carefully?

Teammates *must* understand the first time.

In addition, does this player have a system of communication with teammates and coaches during the match?

A player with this ability is what I'm always looking for and only identifying one, makes up for all of the time spent doing so.

HOW IT WORKS AT THE PRO-LEVEL

All this talk about how to properly identify and evaluate players is all good and gravy, but besides me reciting the depths of my boring resume to add emphasis to manifestations of this process, allow me to pass on what it is I have learned pertaining to ID'ing and evaluating players from the eyes of a professional coach.

At the professional level, everyone is good – it's the best of the best!

Besides the normal things that you would look for, you have other external issues to consider, such as: salary cap, how many international players you are allowed, what nationality will a player with dual-citizenship be claimed under, identifying your project players and those players that

are considered what some call “franchise” players, etc.

We are always taking these pieces of the pie into consideration when we look at potential players at the professional level.

Here are some specifics that we look for:

We are always studying the individual player and what that player does within the constructs of both the ever-changing relationships between the players and their immediate teammates, as well as the player within the whole construct of the match.

Is the player always considering the shape of their teammates around him when they are both on the attack and when defending?

One very simple and very obvious situation that is evidence of this occurring is on a corner-kick.

When the opponent earns a corner-kick, very few teams will bring all 10-field players back to defend.

Most will leave at least two, and some

teams even more, higher-up the pitch as an outlet for a counter-attack, to relieve pressure, etc.

I was always one of the players who stayed out of the box on corners, unless I was absolutely needed.

This was primarily because winning the ball in the boxes was not one of my strengths, but also because I was more valuable higher up the park due to my ability to read the game.

Anyways, not to digress more than is necessary, when a player is out high on a corner, one of the first things they need to determine is are they needed in the box?

It’s amazing the number of players that I see who will literally turn around and count with their finger either the number of total (re: both teams) opponents or are trying to match everyone up in their heads as to ensure each opponent is marked.

While the motive is pure, this is actually quite stupid.

More often than not, once the high player determines there is a mismatch and they



are needed, they are unable to get there in time to help.

A player, who is always considering the shape of their teammates whether on the attack or defending, would handle the previous situation much easier.

All they would do is count up how many opponents are high up the field around them and then subtract from 11.

That is one, simple example that we can all relate to, but one that separates players from each other.

Does the player evaluate individual teammate's performances?

Players at this level not only evaluate themselves, but also their teammates.

This offers them valuable insight on how to help them deal with pressure, stress, disappointment, etc. as well as other unpredictable parts of the game that a player must take into consideration while they are coaching within the match.

Is the player able to analyze transitional issues?

If the ball is lost at any point on the field, how often is the player in the best position to be able to defend immediately?

In more simplistic terms, does the player understand how to defend if his team loses the ball at different points on the field?

Do they show the know-how and fortitude to make the immediate transition to defence anywhere?

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WHAT OUR PLAYERS KNOW

As we evaluate players, there is a plethora of things that could be listed as "what to look for."

This list would be longer than Santa's list.

Yet, there are some that we just can't leave to reside on a long, infinite piece of paper.

What are the structural strengths of the player when in different positions?

And, in line with that, what are the structural weaknesses of the player in different positions.

If a player can understand these two concepts, they only need to figure out what they are on the field and they will know what their limitations are.

Most players are so non-dimensional that nothing really changes as they move from one part of the pitch to another.

There are some players who are quite talented that still fall into this category.

How does the player adapt their game and in turn their team's rhythm, based upon what the opposition is doing?

Can the player recognize opponents' weaknesses and strengths; from both an individual and team perspective?

Knowing is only half the battle, though.

Does the player possess the ability to attack the opponent's weaknesses and defend against their strengths?

For example, if a player is out-wide and in the first part of the match, the opponent is able to get balls deep for a service from width.

Can the player recognize this as dangerous and push the opponent inside so that their wings don't have the chance to cross?

Something else that is quite important to determine, which also falls in line with what we discussed earlier, is a player's understanding of how to play within the game's key defining moments:

- First 5-minutes of the game
- Last 5-minutes of the half
- First 5-minutes of the second half
- Last 5-minutes of the second half
- When a player is red carded or ejected
- When a penalty is missed
- When a goal scored for or against

• Decisions of the Officials

It is an extremely valuable characteristic of a player to make strong opponents ordinary by taking away their strengths and, when facing a weaker opponent, be able to maintain focus on execution.

In this unpredictable and beautiful game that we all love, which team will win on any given day is determined by which players can exploit their own strengths, neutralize their opponents, minimize their own weaknesses and attack their opponents.

Every team needs their key players to step up and play their key roles.

They can't fade in and out of the game.

A coach, or rather a team's success, is directly dependent upon the coaching staff's ability to identify and evaluate talent properly.

MAKING CHANGES DURING A MATCH

When looking at elite-level players, there are times when very little separates one from another.

This is usually the case when I have to evaluate at the professional level.

I can't afford to make a mistake!

We only have a certain number of spots and a certain amount of money we can spend on salary, etc., so, I (as does the entire coaching staff) *must* do my homework, re-check it and then re-check it again, looking for the finest little details, etc. that help to really identify and evaluate players in the best, most beneficial manner.

Does the player you are watching possess the composure and confidence to make and necessary changes during a game based on what they're "reading?"

If you have a player of this calibre on your side, you need to allow them the freedom to make on the field moves at will.

Consider it like having Payton Manning as your quarterback.

The coaches don't call in the plays to Payton; he decides which play he wants to run, he can audible as needed, checks off, etc. all with the full green-light of the coaching staff.

If you're watching your team playing their team, or you're actually watching both teams play, then who is watching anyone from the player's perspective?

Someone needs to be watching from that angle and what a relief it is when a coach has a player that can do just that.

The major question I need answered when



evaluating a player is: how long do they go before repeating an error?

Notice I used the word "repeating."

The first error is not the issue; it is the second and then any further errors of the same type that will raise a red-flag as to either a technical or tactical deficiency or the lack of ability to make the necessary changes to not continue repeating the same error during the match.

In the second part of the article, we will take a deeper look at some of the other aspects of player selection from the coach's point of view! **CB**

PICKING YOUR FUTSAL SIDE.

Futsal is quickly becoming a popular version of the game coming up around the world. Teams and organizations are realizing the value of this sport, when it comes to development, and are beginning to organize more tournaments with the **Five-a-Side Futsal Format**.

There are many specialized requirements of this format of the game but none more so than the elements that improve a player's ability to play on the bigger pitch. After all, once you are starved for space and time, moving to the bigger pitch will suddenly make it seem like you have acres of space and eons of time.

Ever wondered what you need to survive on the Futsal pitch? Well, this should give you a great idea of what it takes to excel in Futsal!

The game of Futsal has been the biggest breeding ground football players around the world.

From Ronaldinho to Paolo Maldini to Lionel Messi, every single player has spent at least some time playing Futsal while the five-on-five format has probably been graced by every single professional player.

Fact is, the size and weight of the ball, the size of the playing field and the five-on-five format are all factors that set the perfect stage for the skill-development of the football player.

If you want to understand the art of playing or coaching Futsal, then understanding each and every player, their roles and the demands of the game are essential assets for every coach to possess.

INDIVIDUAL TECHNICAL ASSETS

The first and most important element for every player is to possess incredible **ball control**.

Every single Futsal player needs perfect ball control and unlike the larger format of the game, Futsal ball control is about keeping the ball close to the player.

Players need to be good with both feet whether it's dribbling, passing or shooting.

The incredible thing about close control of the ball, in Futsal, is that players need to control the ball with almost every single part of their foot, while maintaining the right body shape and posture.

In fact, there is nothing better to train close quarters football than Futsal.

Speed of thought is crucial in performing in the smaller format of the game.

The faster you are at thinking about the game, the quicker you will react on the pitch.

The body needs to transfer information to the brain and the brain needs to process that information and make a decision before the opposition counters you.





The more you play in the smaller five-on-five format, the more accustomed you will get to thinking at a greater speed and executing things on the pitch quickly.

Vision also plays a great role and most Futsal players have the ability to see things quickly.

Once again, the small space is crucial in creating the kind of vision they need to survive on the pitch.

Executing plans on the pitch, identifying teammates' movements, as well as knowing what to do before you get the ball is vital for a player to develop as a great Futsal player.

Then comes the most fascinating element in Futsal, the unique and mesmerizing art of **Finishing!**

The goals are smaller; there are equally competent goalkeepers and smaller spaces

to work in, so the art of scoring goals needs to be perfect.

The main mistake people tend to make regarding smaller goals is of shooting with power or shooting without really thinking.

Falcao, one of the greatest football players of all time, says, "When I train to improve my shooting technique, I make sure that when I get in front of goal, I get my head up, look where the goalkeeper is, relax, and always try to hit a specific part of the goal."

Visualization plays a massive part in the art of finishing so make sure you see things through in your mind before you put things out on the pitch.

Despite the incredible skill and fantastic finishing you see in Futsal, there is also an element of **Passing**, which helps open up the opposition.



The pitch is small, so passing has to be quick and precise because there is almost no room for error.

The ball can go out of bounds almost as quickly as into the hands of the opposition.

The small spaces also mean that players get closed down quicker, so passing needs to have an element of speed and "firmness" to it.

When receiving a pass, players need to know where they are on the pitch and where their teammates are, much like a regular game of football.

Again, knowing what you want to do with the ball before you get it is vital in Futsal, because the speed of realization, movement, receiving passes and releasing them is vital in maintaining possession and penetrating the opposition.

Then comes the part about **Talking or Communication** between the players!

The best players will always talk a lot and keep everyone on the same page.

Usually, there are more than one "best players" on the team – and usually, they tend to play at the back.

These players are constantly controlling the game with their mouths, telling when to pass, when a player is being closed down, where the team needs to move and so on.

They help maintain the overall level of concentration within the team and, therefore, are the acting coaches on the pitch.

Finally, **Fitness** plays a major role in what's happening on the pitch.

Not only is there a lot of quick back-and-forth sprinting on the pitch, just like basketball, the movements are, in general, quicker with a lot of change of pace.

The bursts are extremely quick and the shorter distances generally mean that players work a lot harder on the smaller bursts than in an 11-v-11 game.

However, the constant change of pace requires a lot of interval training and only players who are fit can survive on the Futsal pitch.

THE TACTICAL ASPECTS

It might seem like a small pitch but the game of Futsal is all about **Organization** –

organization saves a lot of energy on the pitch!

The less you move, when you are defending, the more difficult it is for the opposition to move you around and break you down, as well as it is to drain your energy.

Ideally, teams defend zonally and the most essential aspect of defending in Futsal is to try and create a quick counter upon winning the ball.

So, you conserve energy while defending by staying organized, but when it comes to attack, everything needs to be a quick & precise with speed & power.

Understanding your teammates and moving up the pitch in speed also comes from organization at the back.

The more you are organized, the better you are at breaking out and attacking the opposition with speed.

The spaces are tight so the opposition has time to get back easily and cover spaces.

However, if a team is quick, then they can really catch the opposition in the transition phase and score before the opposition can organize themselves at the back.

When playing in a five-versus-five format, every player needs to **Play in the Right Position**.

Starting from the player in goal, to the man up-front, you need to have the right player in every single position.

According to Arsene Wenger, the quiet and efficient personalities tend to make the best strikers, the cool and friendly ones are most likely your midfielders while the brash and bold ones are your defenders.

In five-a-side Futsal play, getting the right players in the right positions is vital to the overall performance of the team.

Most players have the ability to play anywhere on the Futsal pitch but you still cannot generalize in the way the team is picked.

You can play with two at the back in a 1-2-1-1 formation or with two in the middle, in a 1-1-2-1 formation, or if you are really up against it, with three defenders in a 1-3-0-1 formation.

No matter what formation you pick, every single player needs to move up and down the pitch, providing support to each other and creating the space needed to move the opposition around and create scoring chances.

Picking your Team is crucial and you need to start looking for your player with a goalkeeper – someone who really wants to stand in goal and perform – not someone who's in goal because they can't play elsewhere on the pitch.



If you are playing development football, then let players rotate their roles but if you are building a team for competition, you need a permanent and willing goalkeeper.

Defenders, in Futsal, have to be more versatile than a 11-v-11 defender.

They need to be more agile, as skilled in building attacks as they are in blocking them, perfect in tackling, intercepting and anticipation, and all the while have the ability to dribble or pass the ball with perfect control.

Anyone who has played 5-a-side football knows that the game is about speed and quickness, which means that holding onto

possession isn't really going to work for a long time.

Like what you see FC Barcelona or the Spanish national team do, in the bigger version of the game, you will rarely see a side holding onto possession.

Why?

Well, the playing area is small, substitutions are rolling, so tiring out the opposition is really out of the question.

Instead, possession is about **Creating Scoring Chances** as quickly as possible and this means, much of the game happens on the counter-attack.

When you have the ball, you are quickly heading towards the opposition goal and trying to score.

If you do, great; if you don't, then you quickly need to get back because they will be starting the game as quick as you did and charge at your goal with guile and pace.

Most of Futsal is about **Counter-Attacking Football**

and therefore, a lot of transition-based training is vital to make the team perform at a high level, consistently.

Teams that pass the ball around and keep possession are doing nothing but giving the opposition time to organize.

Quick, precise and ruthless play brings the greatest success in Futsal.

Finally, the key element about Futsal is that players need to be **Extremely Grounded!**

This is a game where every single player is a defender, a midfielder and a striker, so

every player must be capable of scoring or tackling, when required.

You cannot have players who just want to play up front and score goals, and you cannot have players who are right-footed but with two left feet when it comes to passing or controlling the ball in tight spaces.

The five-a-side format of the game is very demanding but it is also about being a great team-mate.

Players need to support each other to play well and if you are trying to get your team to perform, then every player needs to enjoy the team's victories and goals, while thinking about the goals conceded and losses.

The game of Futsal is a fascinating teacher and whether you are talking about becoming a professional in the shorter version of the game or just playing for fun, you need to be quick and precise.

The one thing about Futsal is that the game is not forgiving

in the least and if you are not prepared for the speed of the action, then you might find yourself losing possession a lot or simply giving it away.

Thinking speed is important and if you are not ahead of the game, you will be behind it.

Focus training around speed of thought and execution, but only if technique is great!.

Fast, Unforgiving, Technically demanding, Speed, Accuracy and Lethal – for us, that is what **FUTSAL** stands for! **CB**



DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PLAYERS?

When you are picking your players for the team or a match, your decision needs to be based on their ability to carry out your instructions on the pitch.

Keith Scarlett continues his piece on player evaluation and in this section, he speaks about another important aspect of the process – the need to **Focus on Transition** and more!

Players need to be evaluated on the pitch, outside of it and with & without their teammates. If you can ensure that everyone is on the ball, 100% of the time, you give your team a better chance to win.

Can the coach do a lot more to give their players the information they need to survive and succeed at the highest level? Not only do we think so, but we also know that most of the coaches aren't doing this so this is for you!

Here is a list of things to look for when evaluating whether a player has the ability to make changes within the flow of the match.

Ironically, many, if not all, of these items are also basic, simplistic things that are involved in the initial identification and evaluation of a layer.

This is evidence that the player identification and evaluation process is one continuous circle that always brings the coach back to the same place.

Does the player seem comfortable with their defensive performance?

Are their passes textured, weighted and paced properly?

Can they penetrate forward with the ball at their feet?

If they are one of the best players on the team, are they playing a central role?

Are they doing their respective job reasonably well?

Are they functioning efficiently within their team's shape and system?

How are they dealing with their respective match-ups?

Are they able to recognize problems with their team's style of attack and how they are defending?

How does the player deal with personnel changes (i.e., substitutions)?

How does the player deal with situational issues?

Is there something the opposition is doing that is causing the player some problems?

If the player's team's formation or system is wrong to control the opponent, does the player do anything to rectify it?

How do they respond when a teammate is ejected and they have to play shorthanded?

DON'T LEAVE EARLY - THERE'S ALWAYS MORE!

One of the biggest mistakes I see coaches make when evaluating players is the same critical mistake I made for years until I came upon it by pure chance.

I was one of those coaches that would try to get out of the facility as soon as I could, to avoid parents, players, traffic, etc.





However, one-time, for some reason, I had this compelling feeling in my coaches "gut" to not leave early, but to stay around a little longer after the match.

I parked myself in the top right corner of the bleachers where I could "hide" to a certain extent, and I just sat-back and watched.

What I saw next has re-shaped my player identification and evaluation practices forever and exposed me to one of the hidden gems in the art of identifying and evaluating players.

The player I was looking at, had been impressed by and had already decided that I was interested in seeing play again (all positives), came off the pitch at the final whistle, went immediately to the bag and pulled out some chewing tobacco.

They then proceeded to just stand there and talk with friends, all the while "*chewing on the tobacco*" and not even joining-in with their team as their coach brought them together before releasing them.

Needless to say, my interest level in the player dropped drastically and I never would have known this about them if I had not stayed after the match.

This player went on to sign at another school in our conference, but only played one-year as they were dismissed from the institution for alcohol and drug issues.

In that situation, my "coaching gut" was trying to tell me something.

(It seems that as my 'gut' hangs more over my belt-line, the more it helps me out!)

So, my thought process was rather simple: if I could see something negative that would affect my evaluation of a player by observing after the match, then the same could be said for observing something positive, as well.

Now, what is so valuable that can be learned about a player after the match is over, you are probably asking?

I've found four key pieces of information that can be gathered after the match is over (this information can be picked-up elsewhere, but right after a match tells a lot).

Was there anything that occurred in the game emotionally, mentally or psychologically and how does the player respond to it once the match is concluded?

Did the flow of the match impact the player in any way?

Is there anything different that the player does after an away match that they don't do at home?

What is the player's attitude towards teammates, coaches, officials, fans, etc.?

CATCH THEM IN TRANSITION

Before we cover one final piece of this puzzle, we need to address another set of important facets that need to be considered when identifying and evaluating players.

The tell-tale sign of a player's true-self is what they do and how they handle the small transitions that occur ever so frequently that most aren't even aware they exist.

These "watermarks" of a player, as Anson Dorrance (Head Women's Soccer Coach at the University of North Carolina) puts it, really separate the best from the rest.

First, what is the player's physical body shape when their team is in possession of the ball?

Are they opened-up to the field of play and the ball's playable area?

Are their hips square with the frontal position of the ball allowing them both lateral and vertical movement to attack, penetrate and support?

Secondly, what is their momentary-reaction at the moment their team losses possession?

Do they rest for a split-second?

Do they use this physically painful and excruciating point of transition to take a break?

Third, what is the player's physical body shape when their team is defending?

How often are they sideways on and are they in that position at the right times?

Do they cross their legs when moving vertically?

Do they ever turn their back to the ball?

Coaches; you're part of this equation too!

I've learned that coaches seem to come in two different types:



General Coaches who make general comments about the situations the team encounters.

They don't make comments that are actually instructional statements to an individual.

Functional Coaches who give exact corrections or instruction to a player or several players about

what needs to be done to achieve what they train to do.

We need more coaches to work at becoming better functional coaches.

Functional Coaches are more-in line with the types of elite-level players I have been describing.

What would be the use of identifying and evaluating top players, only to have them squander about into mediocrity because their coach is too General and not Functional enough.

Thus, it is vital that we take some time to discuss some aspects of how coaches can improve their training sessions to better



compliment the type of players they seek to obtain.

When you adopt a system of play for your team, all aspects of training need to be focused directly at how that system works.

We need to continue teaching our players their roles by position and working to develop the individual in the specifics of their role in the portion of the training session that impacts their position.

If we see a team as having three different units, then we can train each unit to perform its role better and then teach the individual players to interact well within the constraints of their respective unit.

However, the first thing that needs to be done is to teach each unit to do its job well.

We should be trying to structure our training-sessions to focus them around using fields that are only 25- to 45-yards long, because that is how long the field actually is at any point where the ball is.

We need to begin more efficient training of each of the three units of the team as to where to be in various match situations.

Once we have the units functioning together, than we can coordinate them with each other.

It is also essential to teach counter-attacking from the different portions of the field and from different situations (i.e. a turnover in their defending 1/3 or a stolen throw-in).

The most successful teams are excellently disciplined counter-attackers (corner-kicks are particularly susceptible to the counter-attack problem).

In summary: How do we deal with unexpectedly regaining possession?

When looking at players, always ask, "If the player loses the ball now, what are they ready to do?"

When training your own team, always ask: "What if we lose it now? What do we do?"

Effectively, you come to the point where you need to put your players out there and know that they will do the right thing.

Picking the right players for the job will help you ensure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to strategy! **CB**

PROTECT THE GOAL.

As the ball enters the final third of the pitch, both teams need to be at the top of their game. For the attacking side, possession becomes more meaningful as they try to penetrate the defence and create scoring chances.

For the defending team, the job of containing the opposition and trying to win possession becomes top-priority!

It's always about scoring goals and when it comes to the final third, space is a liberty as is the ability to work your way through the opposition and get to your objective.

With time and space at a premium, the game quickly becomes about decision-making!

This small sided game is about **Playing in the Final Third** of the pitch where the attacking side needs to open up the defence while the defending side needs to hold steady and try to win the ball back.

When a team reaches the final third of the pitch, space is tight and movement & passing requires precision and perfection.

As the attacking side, you need to be quick and sharp with your passing and movement, creating space with runs that drag the opposition out of position and exploit the space created.

This game is about playing at the edge of the box and using passing, dribbling, positioning and movement to launch an attack at goal or repel it, depending on which side you are playing on – attack or defence.

The game is about creating that tight and tense situation when the attacking side is approaching the opposition goal and putting both the attack and defence under pressure – one to create & score and the other to delay or defend.

THE OBJECTIVE

This **Small Sided Game (SSG)** is designed to create the kind of problem your team would find themselves facing were they approaching the final third of the pitch to score.

This situation is also to train your defenders

in the art of delaying the opposition attack, repelling it or even turning over possession when possible.

For the attacking side, the ultimate goal is to, obviously, score a goal but the emphasis is on how that scoring chance is created.

This is where you can try out different passing patterns or work on passing & moving to create a shooting opportunity at goal, or maybe a crossing option.

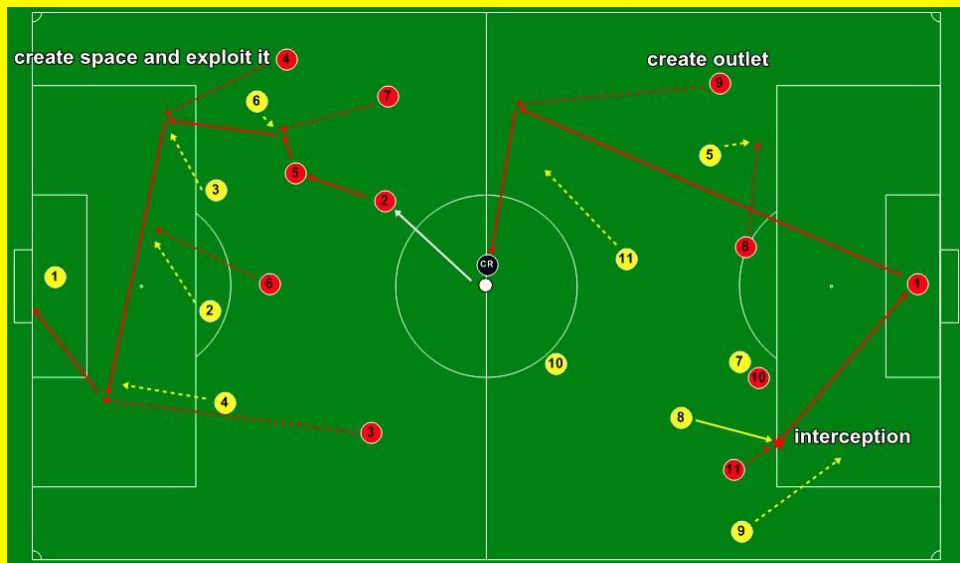
Let your players be creative and find solutions themselves with numerical advantage being key to their decision-making.

Appropriate Age Group: 12-years to professional players

THE SETUP FOR THE GAME

The playing area setup is as follows:

- The playing area is less than one-third of the playing pitch or about 70 x 40 yards
- The defending side (**D**) has 5-players including a goalkeeper
- The attacking side (**A**) has 6-players
- The coach acts as a feeder (**CR**) to start the game after every move or as the ending point of the move for the



defence

- A set of balls to keep the game going
- One full-sized goal

THE RULES OF THE GAME

- The game begins with the coach (**CR**) passing the ball in to one of the attacking players on the pitch
- The attacking side need to try and create a scoring chance
- The defending side need to try and win the ball back
- If the attacking side scores, they receive a point
- If the defending team wins the ball back and can get the ball to the coach or feeder (**CR**), then they receive one point
- The attacking side needs to try out different attacking techniques and patterns to try and score
- Offside rule is applicable

Total time: 25- to 30-minutes

PROGRESSIONS FOR THE GAME

- Play specific passing patterns for the attack
- Add extra defenders who run back from near the feeder/coach (**CR**) to offer reinforcements – this will force the attacking team to try and score as quickly as possible to prevent neutralization of the numerical advantage

KEY COACHING POINTS

- The attacking side needs to control the pace of the game and constantly move the ball around in an attempt to move the opposition and create space to finish
- Every single attacking player needs to be on the same page regarding the plan of attack
- Decision making is key so players need to analyze the situation and choose the best option to attack
- At all times, even when the route chosen isn't working, the worst case

scenario for the attacking side should be to maintain possession

- The defending side needs to try and delay the attack, cutting off passing lanes and marking players in dangerous positions
- They need to try and win possession back but without committing themselves early to tackles
- Patience is key and while maintaining their defensive shape, they need to try and force the attacking side to change their attacking strategy by keeping a narrow, tight back-line

In every match, there are several occasions when the ball is near the goal and both teams are restricted in terms of space and movement.

The attacking side, in such cases, needs to try and maintain that level of pressure on the opposition goal, forcing them to make decisions about coming out of their solid-positions and breaking their defensive shape.

As a result, the attacking side always looks to spread the play as wide as possible, trying to get the defenders the follow.

The defenders need to move as a unit, staying tight and closing down the opposition.

Their main aim needs to be to try and delay a shot or attack as much as possible, which in a real match would lead to reinforcements coming in, or try to win the ball back, which really is the secondary goal.

Make sure your focus is on decision-making because in this situation, execution is largely dependent on what your players think and with it comes the idea of thinking ahead of the moment.

In the end, it always comes down to coordination and team-work.

If your players are working together, then the final third can be their playground. **CB**

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