

Technical Capacity of a Football Player

It is well known that the primary assets of any football club are the players. They are the capital assets of the club, the goods they can exchange to get other assets. Football clubs, as opposed to most other institutions, have the enormous capacity of searching for and building up these assets, turning them into cherished sums of money that accrue in the form of capital.

A club with good players is very liable to be closer to achieving success at sports - and is also likely to get a larger amount of offers from companies willing to jump onto the bandwagon of this success.

There are several lines of reasoning and deductions that can be derived from this.

I believe what a club is paying for when it purchases a high-performance player is, generally speaking, the player's track record and current sports performance. However, when considered from a more specific point of view, the player's sporting technique, in other words, his coordination skill applied to this sport, is of superlative value.

While technical quality is one of the various resources available to a player during the competition, it is worth noting he will be more highly valued and sought after the more closely associated he is to defining results.

For over half a century Argentina and Brazil have been exporting this technical expertise, not only with the sale of players who have already made a name for themselves. There are countless operations involving 14 and 15 year-olds, which, for different and most convenient reasons, do not attain the media repercussions of contracts involving older and more experienced players. It is worth remembering that when Messi signed his first contract with the Barcelona F.C., he was only 13 years of age.

When it is declared and recognised that so-and-so is an extraordinary player, I believe a large part of the praise is the recognition of his technical capacity. However, fans are fully aware of the fact that this player has other conditions that are equally excellent.

I believe supporters still marvel at the beauty of the technique displayed by some players when invited to take part in the wonderful display of football.

What other quality could cut deeper into the heart and sensitivity of fandom?

Sporting technique is far from plentiful nowadays. The reasons for this are varied and I shall not stop to analyse them in depth.

I would like to mention, though, that for our children today, football as a game is simply one of so many options on the extensive menu provided by the leisure activities industry.

It should not be forgotten that sports techniques are a capacity born and developed by exercising, and the time during childhood not devoted to practising sport, at an age when there is still time to instil this skill, can never be recovered.

At the age of 30 a person can learn and even improve their sports techniques. There is no doubt of this. It is just that by that time the age for becoming a professional football player has gone for good. Football technique takes a great deal of dedication. Years, days, hour upon hour. And the more hours devoted to it, the more probabilities they will have of acquiring greater technical expertise.

The truth is, nothing is acquired by mere spontaneity.

The inherited culture and values of a society, the singularity of each history created in the heart of the family, and the game as the motivating force in the learning process, are elements to some extent responsible for the attainment of a technique for excellence consecrated as a virtue in elite players.

The social environment, culture and values

Living in a country like Argentina where football, statistically speaking, clearly outstrips any other sports discipline, even to the extent of relegating other equally interesting expressions and activities of cultural life to a position of scant or relative consumption, in addition to the historical value allocated to the distinctive technique of our own identity in our football-loving culture, it is easy to understand why the attraction and almost inevitable choice of a child will practically always tend towards this sport.

Against the background of this social framework characterised by the strong influence exercised by football, the number of children who practise this sport is categorically overwhelming. The same thing happens in Brazil. Wherever you go you will always see people playing football.

How can it be held, then, that the technical quality eventually acquired is not closely related to the number of children that practise this sport, and to the social value attributed to this skill?

When a child is born in Argentina... what other sport could he play?

The family environment, the source of the passion for football

It is not just any child that devotes all his free time to playing football. Football or anything else, for that matter.

One rarely comes across a boy who does not like football. The great majority of boys practise this sport.

But it is not just any boy who plays all day every day. And here is where the main difference begins.

When we discover one of these special cases, we immediately wish to inquire into what drives him to practise in that way, silently, relentlessly, and yes, I would say, unboundedly.

This internal strength, often foreign to the child's own will, is known as passion.

It is this passion that has taken hold of this boy in the form of an unconscious yearning.

Football is now his sole aim and also the very purpose of his existence, for there is no longer any feeling of exhaustion, or any time of day that could be viewed as a constraint.

We would not be mistaken in saying that it is in the singularity of the family event where this passion for football is sparked. For often clinging so passionately to this sport is what actually saves this child.

Education in playing

With the influences created in the child's social and family environment, the game is another of the features that contribute decisively to practising and developing the technique.

I believe any educational endeavour seeking to be successful should include playing as a teaching tool.

Playing is the setting par excellence in which a child unknowingly exercises this skill.

To him playing is simply playing.

I once heard a teacher say: when a child is a child he has to play. His world is centred on playing.

If, for instance, a trainer is in charge of a group of 8-year olds who want to be football players, and during one of the classes he gets them to run for 20 minutes to train them, it is because he believes he is gaining time in this way.

The boys will no doubt do it because they, in turn, believe this is the way to become better football players.

And, the truth is, these boys will be doing no harm to their health because of the physical duress, even though the training may feel hard.

What could be detrimental to them, though, is the time wasted doing things that have no value at all at that age. Absolutely none. Not even value for the future.

What can never be recovered is the time wasted that could have been devoted to developing their coordination skills, which are intimately linked to technique.

Nothing could be truer than this teaching.

It would be worthwhile asking how valuable it would be at this age to devote part of their training time to developing conditional skills such as resistance or strength when these are already being exercised with activities that stimulate the child's general or specific coordination.

Just as a pianist or a ballet dancer exercises his or her playing technique from a very early age and over many years, for a football player, the command of the game and the final quality of the technique will be the result of the greater or lesser quality or quantity of stimuli his coordination skills have received throughout his life, and most particularly during his childhood.

Of course nobody can deny there are people who have a natural gift and are more inclined towards acquiring a more refined technique.

Certain genetic biotypes contribute to some extent, but only up to a point. Natural predisposition on its own is unable to build anything.

It is the stimulation and exercising of this predisposition that optimises and contributes to building up this capacity until it is transformed into a virtue.

The same thing happens with the larger or smaller amount of fast fibres that mark the speed of an athlete. The larger amount of fast fibres is a direct result of a child's early stimulation.

When I refer most specially to childhood, it is because this is the time when the psychic system experiences the most avid need to incorporate information, the most avid need to configure a body structure of its own.

The information the system stores in its memory is provided by bodily experience with the world, and the experiences that will take up a privileged place in a person's memory will surely be those that were primarily recorded there.

What is first recorded in a person's mind is much more likely to create a habit in that person.

In countries where social planning is a reality and sports have a sense of their own and aim at providing recreation and pleasure in the overall formation of the inhabitants, it is very likely children's choice of sport will take place at the most appropriate time.

In Argentina, to provide an example, where football is openly considered as a way of breaking free of economic deprivations, this choice is liable to be made long before it should be.

By the age of 6, boys are already training and playing formally in neighbourhood club teams competing in very high voltage infant leagues given their young age. In this environment, children learn, and any inexperience and naiveté is toughened in trial-by-fire. Both the good and the bad they get from professional football rubs off on them and becomes part of them. It is here these incipient footballers are also subjected to the first signs of the inordinate pressure of having to win.

Undoubtedly the instructor should seek to create the largest number possible of occurrences to stimulate the skills in coordination specifically required for this sport, recreating and updating their body structure as regards time-space-object topics.

When this child reaches the age of 15, his sports technique should already have been acquired. The time for exclusiveness is over.

By the age of 15, technique will be sharing the field with the development of conditional capacities such as strength, resistance, speed and muscular flexibility.

To make an analogy, the same thing happens with people as with their skill for the game.

People cannot play beyond a certain age - not because they do not have the ability but because the time they have available is devoted to other things. Once responsibilities come along, work takes on more importance and the game is left aside. In a similar manner, skills are also gradually lost.

The same thing happens with the skills for coordination: the closer one gets to highly competitive circles, the longer are the times and loads devoted to strength, resistance, speed, flexibility or

tactical moves, and less those devoted to sporting techniques.

Those able to perceive the decisive nature of these facts will be better able to anticipate them and win extremely valuable hours off their childhood days. Precisely because it is this childhood that holds an amount of gold that could hardly be held in both hands.

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