



## From the Desk of the Technical Director

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**“Young players need freedom of expression to develop as creative players..... They should be encouraged to try skills without fear of failure,” Arsene Wenger, coach of Arsenal.**

**“If you ever lose your joy for the game, you may as well go home and water the flowers,” Holger Osieck, assistant coach of Germany when they won the 1990 World Cup.**

At first glance, the two quotes seem unconnected. In reality, they complement each other perfectly.

Creativity arises from having the freedom to play. That freedom promotes joy. Remove either and you destroy football.

For the past two weeks I have been at the FIFA Futuro III Instructors Course in Sydney, a requirement for those who want to run C-Licence courses in their own State.

The instructors are Osieck and Erich Rutemoeller. Both German, both widely travelled coaches and both world renowned for their expertise in developing players and coaches.

Coincidentally, I met Osieck in Canada some years ago when he was the national coach. Then a journalist, I watched several Team Canada training sessions and interviewed him for a feature in The Toronto Sun.

Both he and his colleague admit that some coaches have a fixed view of German players as robotic, never say die individuals who play in rigid patterns with no variety.

That may have been true decades ago, laughs Osieck. In reality, as he points out, the German player is still hard to beat and as mentally strong as anyone, but don't be fooled into believing that they have no individuals who can unravel defences.

Osieck and Rutemoeller have emphasised that with defences more organized and hard to break down, teams need skilful individuals who can work magic. Players like Ronaldo, Messi and Robinho.

“In the development of players we must make sure they do not do just what they are told. We have to have creative players who can exploit and assess a situation. Do not block decision making. Give them some space, “ said Osieck.

Players must be able to make decisions for themselves, he said, adding that it is a mistake to constantly stop training sessions to direct players.

"It is my favourite term – decision making," he said. "Learning is one thing. Playing is another. If you permanently interrupt, players will stop listening. It is like sitting next to a driver, you always know more than the driver. Then, suddenly you are sitting in the driving seat and it is different.

"Give players time. Do not break in the training all the time and frustrate players. They want action. If you interrupt too much and right away it becomes boring. Players will say he should be a preacher and not a coach."

Osieck also hates to see coaches forever praising players, especially when the outcome was a bad cross, shot or pass and yet the coach yells: "Well done, great effort."

"Only give credit when it is on," he said. "Too much praise and the effect is gone. Do not talk for talking's sake. We are not politicians."

Osieck also detests seeing teams training just for the sake of training.

"If you are not training in preparation for the game, then it is insane," he said. "The game is the teacher. You always have to consider what is required from the game. Drills have their place, but do not over emphasise them. Everyone should have freedom of expression."

It is no fluke that Osieck and Rutemoeller are echoing the Australian Football Federation national curriculum, which clearly states that training must look like football and that we need to develop more creative, free thinking players.

Canadian football fans should regret that Osieck left the national team in 2004. During his time as boss Canada won the Gold Cup, fending off Mexico and the United States in the process.

The team has won nothing since.

Footnote: With the FFT office closed down from next week until the New Year this will be the last column of 2009. May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.