



From the desk of the Technical Director – Number 3 – 9 October 2009

A report from the national championships for state under 15 and under 14 male teams.

COFFS HARBOUR, NEW SOUTH WALES: There are two things to watch here at this time of year – migrating whales and football.

This being the week of the national state championships for under 15 and under 14 males, my eyes have been on the games for the vast majority of the time.

I have to say that the championships are one of the best organized events of its kind I have attended. The facilities are superb and the tournament has run like clockwork despite the unexpected addition of some torrential rain. On Sunday, the rain was so heavy the two fields came close to becoming a mud bath.

On that particular day the two Tasmanian teams fared well, the under 15s beating Northern Territory 7-0 and the under 14s deservedly taking Queensland Country with a solid 3-1 win.

The previous day both teams had lost, the under 14s, 5-1, and the under 15s, 1-0, in both cases to Northern New South Wales.

That both teams bounced back after the defeats was a real boost for all the players and staff and on Monday the under 14s continued with another win, 3-1, while the under 15s came from two goals down to force a 2-2 draw. Both games were against Victoria Country.

When play resumed Wednesday, after Tuesday's day off, both teams faced very formidable opposition. The under 15s went down 7-2 to New South Wales Metro and the under 14s lost 7-0 to Victoria Metro.

In games yesterday (Thursday) the under 14s lost 5-0 to South Australia and the under 15s went down 1-0 to Queensland Country.

Both teams will play another game today (Friday) to determine their final standing.

Of course, while everyone wants to win, the crucial element for all coaches and technical directors to remember is that they are here to see how well players are progressing in their development. This is a tournament for identification, not results.

That said, it has to be noted that from a team perspective, the football on display from some states was pleasing; at other times downright awful.

Some state squads worked hard to follow Football Federation Australia's mandate of possession football within the 1-4-3-3 system and consistently worked hard at playing out from the back.

Other teams from around the nation simply booted the ball as far downfield as they could, to the point where I wondered if it would come down with snow on it.

Some teams could barely string more than two or three passes together before giving up possession and in one game both teams were unable to keep the ball for more than two passes at a time for the whole half.

This type of football is hardly what the watching FFA officials are seeking and the players involved in this up and under game will have done themselves no favours if they hope to progress to higher ambitions.

At state level, players need to be at least technically proficient enough to control the ball and keep it for much longer periods. No player has any chance of progressing if they do not have the confidence to receive a pass, control it and safely give it to a teammate.

As has been stated by Han Berger, FFA Technical Director, it is players with technical and creative ability that make the difference and it is up to coaches to try and develop players with that quality.

At the highest levels of international football winning is paramount, but unless a team has gifted individuals who can conjure up magical moments then the odds of that victory are greatly reduced.

It is from young players at tournaments such as the national championships that those individuals of the future have to come, so emphasis must be placed on development.

Try to win, of course, but not at the expense of abandoning the right kind of football and the right kind of encouragement and guidance that can give us our stars of the future.