

This week a look at the future directions for player and coach development in Tasmania.

This has been an eventful week, with three seminars on the future of coaching and player development, one in Burnie, one in Launceston and finally in Hobart.

I wish to thank all those people who attended. It is great to see so many people passionate enough about football to hear my presentation. I would like to recap some of the important points.

At the youth level a huge emphasis, as required by the new national curriculum from the Football Federation of Australia, is being placed on small sided games.

Small sided games are the best way to recreate street football on the field and most of the world's best footballers honed their early techniques and skills from street football. It is the best learning tool of all for young players.

As coaches, we need to encourage our players to be creative. It is those players that can make all the difference during matches. The use of small sided games will promote that creativity and with minimum coaching during such games, players will also make decisions individually and as groups, another crucial process in the development of players.

The national curriculum calls on the nation to adopt a 1-4-3-3 system at all levels, gradually building up to it through the ages and building blocks of the small sided games.

Worldwide research by FFA has shown that this system provides the best way for players to learn the game and that it suits the competitive and attacking instincts of Australian sportsmen and women. Here in Tasmania, the state team programme will return on a full time basis with the state teams training twice a week and playing games under the FFT banner in a league that will suit each team competitively.

Following the guidelines of FFA and in order to get in line with all the other Australian states, the plan is for the Tasmanian Institute of Sports male team to enter the Premier Division, the under 15 state male team into the Premier Reserve League, the under 14 males into the under 19 division and the under 13 males into the under 15 division.

In the case of the females, the under 17 state team would play in the Women's Premier League, the under 15 females in the under 14 division one male league and the placing of the under 13 female team will be determined at a later date after selection of the players. The TIS female team will play on a train and selection game process.

It must be emphasized that the whole point of these placings is for player development. Our most talented players must be challenged. It is better to face stiff opposition and learn rather than beat weaker opposition and learn nothing.

It also has to be remembered that in most of the premier divisions around the world, a number of 16 and 17 year old players are already in the first team or the reserves. Wayne Rooney was just 16 when he debuted for Everton.

As we go forward, FFT will work very closely with TIS and there will be an interchange of players and resources for games and coaching. The two groups will work and train side by side.

Tasmania is lagging behind the mainland states in player development, with all the state teams on the mainland playing in high level leagues. We need to get ourselves on a level playing field with the rest of the nation. It may be difficult at first, but it will pay huge dividends down the road, especially when realizing that many of these players will eventually play in the Premier Division, thus raising the standards across the board.

In a further move, the under 15 state squad as selected will represent Tasmania at the national championships. In the past, some of those players have been replaced by TIS members for those championships. That will no longer happen.

The sports institutes have their own national tournament. By making this change, it will allow for more Tasmanian young players to have a chance to impress at the national level. It is interesting to note that Tasmania will be the first state to make this change, that FFA officials at the national championships welcomed it and that it will be adopted by other states.

The key to all these moves is player development. We must all work together to improve football from the grassroots up, to find and help coaches upgrade their knowledge and qualifications, to identify our best young talent, especially between the ages of eight and 12, and give them the opportunity to get on the best development pathway. Somewhere in Tasmania there are boys and girls who with the right development can become Socceroos or Matildas. Let's find the little devils.

To further help this process, FFT will soon introduce a full-time development officer in the north and one in the south.

In addition, **Nick Lapolla**, a well known former player in Tasmania, is being groomed by the FFA as the skills acquisition officer for the state. Once he has completed courses on the mainland, the first of which is later this month, Nick will travel around the state on a part-time basis delivering skills clinics to clubs and other organizations.

I also wish to announce the Head Coaches for the 2010 state teams.

Gary Slicer - under 15 males.

Dale Itchins - under 14 males.

Scott Gallagher - under 13 males. Scott is also an assistant coach with the TIS males.

Mike Edwards, the head of the female programme at TIS, will also coach the under 17 female state team.

Darren Cook - under 15 females.

Sandra Chisholm - under 13 females.

Dean May is head of the male football programme at TIS.

Assistant coaches for the state teams have yet to be selected. This will be an on-going process.

As Technical Director I will work very closely with all the state team coaches.