



FOOTBALL FEDERATION
TASMANIA

FROM THE DESK OF THE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

9 JULY, 2010

COFFS HARBOUR: The national championships this week turned to the under 15 and under 17 girls and just like those for under 13 boys and girls at Easter, the steps were in the right footballing direction.

All teams were trying to play possession football within the 1-4-3-3 system.

With the games taking place during the World Cup, it was noteworthy that the Australian girls imitated the philosophy of the vast majority of teams that have competed in South Africa.

At international level, a possession game is paramount. In Coffs Harbour, every team was purposefully trying to emulate that formula, with a good measure of success.

In each game the ball was on the ground far longer than it was in air, which has not always been the case in the past.

Goalkeepers were looking to distribute the ball to defenders so it could be played out from the back through midfield to strikers.

Midfield players, instead of invariably lofting the ball over the top of defenders for forwards to run on to, were also looking to play the killer pass between and around defenders

One young under 15 from Victoria, Jessica Au, was a joy to watch as she sliced open defences with her passing.

Strikers and wide players, among others, were taking players on to create room for crosses and shots.

Of course, players were making mistakes, some of them costly, without undue criticism, but they were also making adjustments and decisions on their own and encouraging each other.

At a meeting of coaches one evening, hosted by Matildas national team coach Tom Sermani and National Assistant Technical Director Alistair Edwards, issues were raised about whether the goalkeeper should always be looking to throw the ball to defenders and never kicking it, in essence, whether the pendulum had gone too far the other way.

While there will always be times when the goalkeeper may have to look for another option, the key to the keepers distribution is the movement and positioning of players, the confidence and readiness of players to receive the ball and of course, their first touch and subsequent pass. With a goalkeeper and four defenders, for example, against three attackers there is a 5 v 3 scenario. By persisting in educating players on the improvement of technique and positioning, 5 v 3 should not be insurmountable. Abandoning it at the first hint of trouble would be detrimental to eventually achieving success.

Why then do English Premier League goalkeepers more often than not kick the ball out and even at the World Cup, there are times when goalkeepers punted the ball down field.

The failings of the England team in South Africa have demonstrated the inability of being able to play the highest level of possession football.

You also need to take into account that, at the highest league levels, winning is everything, so whatever works for a team to win is what will be utilized, pretty or not.

At the youth development level, player development is everything.

Medals and trophies on a kids sideboard mean squat if none of the players made it to the professional ranks.

The world is full of ex-players with dusty medals from their youth who now work in factories. Every single one would give up all those awards for a place in a professional team.

If we want players to be able to keep the ball under pressure, such as the Spanish and Dutch, then such pressure eventually has to be faced and worked through.

A possession game for Australia will be impossible unless players are capable of receiving and passing under pressure.

At these nationals, both Tasmanian teams - under 15s led by Darren Cook and under 17s by Michael Edwards - played the right way, were competitive in just about every game and did their fair share of attacking.

They never spent all of any game penned into their own half, which has happened in most previous nationals, and in many cases had spells in which more illustrious opponents like New South Wales and Victoria were under the hammer.

The under 17 game between New South Wales and Tasmania, which ended in a 1-0 loss for Tasmania, could have gone either way and it was not uncommon for both teams to string 10 passes together moving down field.

Ellie Gavalas, for the under 15s, was one of the best strikers on show, and looked dangerous whenever she got the ball. With a bit of luck she would have scored three in her first game alone against Capital Football, one in which Tasmania lost 1-0, the goal coming with so few seconds left there was not even time to get the ball back to centre to restart the match.

Overall, the standard of Tasmania's football showed a distinct improvement and there were no shortage of other coaches stating just that.

Other news:

Preparations are under way for a Tasmania select v Central Coast Mariners game July 27 in Hobart. Premier clubs are reminded to send player nominations for this game to FFT by close of business today.

The national curriculum road show is coming to Launceston and Devonport. Registration details are on the FFT website.

Selections for the under 20 northern and southern squads for a curtain raiser to the A League game July 25 in Launceston between the Mariners and Melbourne Victory will be announced shortly.