

Terry Michler questions for ASET website-member profile.

You are recognized as one of the most successful coaches at any level in the United States; in your opinion what are the most important qualities for a player to possess if he/she would like to reach their potential?

First, it starts with talent. A player must have certain qualities that will allow him/her to have a chance to succeed. Talent encompasses many components, and most importantly it is the blending of them into the total package that makes the biggest difference.

Physical components of speed, quickness, explosiveness, agility, mobility, strength and endurance certainly make strong first impressions. At the highest levels, with all other things being equal, they can make the biggest difference. I remember being told by Miguel de Lima, Brazilian keeper and keeper coach, that in Brazil the scouts would go to the villages and line all the young players up at the half line and sprint them to the end line. They would select the fastest players, and then train them to develop skill. Speed and quickness can only be improved to a point -- those naturally gifted have a different starting point.

Technical component is crucial in order to excel at soccer. The game is all about using the ball in the most efficient way. The best players play in a way that looks effortless and they also play in a way that raises the level of the other players. They make everything seem so easy and natural, where the reality is years of dedicated training and a burning passion to be the best, is what is behind their success. They have become so comfortable with the ball as a result of the repetitions in training and the watchful eye of a dedicated coach who demanded excellence. When the big play needs to be made and the pressure is the greatest, it's the player with the confidence and the skill under pressure that will get it done. The confidence and the challenge of the moment fuel the competitive juices, and the automatic response of the application of skill, makes the difference. Many times the difference in the outcome of a game comes down to a moment of individual brilliance.

Tactical understanding, being able to see the game unfold, separates the good from the very good and the great. The application of skill at the right time and in the right way can be of thing of beauty. The brilliance of timing the play perfectly, of deceiving your opponent, of disguising your intent, and then with the swiftness of a dagger, the deal is done! Tactical insight is the most missing ingredient in players today. There is too much early emphasis in a structured developmental process where the young players are afraid to make a mistake. Thus, the chance for creativity is compromised as they are told how and what to do and fall in line as they do their drills. What is most needed is an environment of free play, where young players take risks, are allowed to make mistakes, to try new and exciting things, and not be corralled into the 'cookie-cutter' mold. The need for small-sided games is crucial to developing the necessary insight needed to play and be successful at the highest level.

A final component is the mental/emotional aspect - confidence and composure versus the panic and hurried approach. There is a borderline arrogance that the really top players possess that sends a message to the opponent to beware. The courage and determination to overcome the hurdles and obstacles along the way, gives a player a leg up on the rest. You can see it in the body language of players – they exude this mentality of confidence and composure -- they are very sure of themselves and are willing to do whatever it takes to get it done. They do not cut corners and don't expect any favors, they just get after it with grit and hard work, and it pays off. The competitive nature of the winner drives them to be their best and to give their all. They leave it on the field and you can depend on them.

This is the picture of the ideal player that everyone would like to have in their team. Combining all the key ingredients with the determination to fight through all resistance is the key. With all the distractions today, it is difficult for players to realize that they need to spend more time developing the total player. It gets too easy to just consider that you are good enough, where maybe you could be better. Sometimes, good enough seems to outweigh better. For the truly competitive player, they always want to be better – complacency is not in their vocabulary. Naturally, you are always looking for someone that makes an impression, a positive impression. There is something special that catches your attention, hoping that maybe that player may become a difference-maker. Experience helps in not getting carried away with the flash and finding the substance of the athlete. You must project to the most meaningful moments of the season to come, and see if this player will have it then, or will the flash turn to dash, and be gone.

Could you give a couple of the key aspects you focus on at training each week with CBC?

Our training is always geared to the game. We train in the elements of the game – attacking, defending and transition. Most of what we do is done going to goal – we always play with objectives! The majority of our training revolves around small-sided games with different objectives. We use neutral players to imbalance the numbers.

There is a high emphasis on technical play – quick, clean touch on the ball. We demand a high ball speed, which requires good receiving skills. The value of the first touch is critical to success – without it the game becomes a combat zone. Heavy emphasis is placed on decision-making, doing the right thing at the right time. The concept of 'the right moment' makes the difference in the outcome of the play – timing is crucial. The accuracy of the first and last touch are always scrutinized very closely as we demand high standards and maintain high expectations.

The primary areas of concentration are:

- speed, quickness and mobility
- increased technical speed
- transitional activities
- training around goal -- attacking and defending
- creating an attacking mentality
- a competitive environment

Give your thoughts on coaching education and the importance it holds in developing today's modern player?

It is simply the lifeline of soccer. To coach in the way of the past puts a team way behind the game. With all the advances in the game – increased speed of play, livelier ball and lighter shoes, advanced technology, higher level of athleticism, changing and evolving systems of play, the lone striker, packed defenses, overloaded midfields, turf fields – wow, it makes a strong case.

The position of Director of Coaching Education should be the most important in any Club structure. The Coach Educator teaches the coaches and the coaches teach the players, and maybe even the parents, to a degree. There must be a knowledgeable, up to date person on the staff whose job it is to keep the club current in the latest trends and methodologies in the game. With the vast amount of material available – through books, videos and DVDs, seminars and the Internet – there is no excuse to be chasing the game. It takes time, that's for sure, but it is time that must be spent. If you stay the same, you fall behind. When everyone else is moving forward, standing still is like being in quicksand.

The demands of the game affect the training of the player and player development. The best teams and soccer countries in the world spend endless amounts of time researching new ways to improve themselves and to gain an advantage. I have personal experience with the Dutch, Ajax in particular, and I am aware of their attempts to stay at least even, if not ahead of the curve. For a country as small as Holland to represent itself as well as it does on the world stage is truly amazing. And the number of Dutch coaches throughout the world is staggering – from top National teams to Club teams to Coaching Education seminars – the Dutch have been in demand. It is a testament to the value they place in soccer education. We don't use that term very often, it is their credo. Soccer education affects everyone in the game – from the top through the ranks. It is necessary for everyone to be on board and to know the direction you are heading. One of my lasting memories of my experiences in Holland is how openly they share all that they know regarding soccer. Their reason is twofold: 1) to spread the wealth (knowledge) and improve the game overall, 2) it forces them to continue to improve themselves as well, lest they fall behind.

I don't think there is a more important component than Coaching Education. I would like to see our local clubs invest more wholeheartedly in the position. It helps for Clubs to establish and identify their DNA, their uniqueness, the characteristics that set them apart. It becomes the thread that links everyone to the same basic ideas. It is definitely a modern adaptation of the game that is extremely important.

You have your own player and coaching development organization called 'Dutch Touch'. Could you give a description of the player and coaching opportunities you provide throughout the year to coaches and players?

Dutch Touch is an International Soccer Program featuring Camps, trips, coaching education, and an informative website. In conjunction with Jan Pruijn, my Dutch friend, we have created a soccer exchange between the US (St. Louis) and Holland. Jan is currently the Technical Director of Ajax Cape Town, South Africa, responsible for the development of the U11 through the first team. Previously, he was a scout of Everton FC of the English Premiership. He is a fully certified Dutch FA coach and has travelled the world preaching the Dutch Vision message. I met Jan in 1977 when he was one of my instructors in Holland as I attended a 10 day Coaching seminar at the KNVB Headquarters in Zeist.

Dutch Touch offers an International Camp in July, a spring trip to Holland, a summer coaching course and all the information on the website (www.cbcdutchtouch.com). CBC hosts the Camp which brings young players from Holland and Germany to St. Louis to train with our local players in an intensive week-long Camp. In addition to the players, our staff consists of 4 fully licensed Dutch FA coaches. The coaches stay an extra week and are available for team camps and coaching clinics. It is a great opportunity to experience the world of European professionalism, as they bring with them their unique mentality that challenges us to think a little differently about the game.

In the spring, we take young St. Louis players to Holland for a 10 day trip to experience European soccer through training and games with players their age. We also reunite with our Dutch friends from our summer camp and experience life in another country, with its unique culture and history. We visit the Professional teams and attend training sessions and games, and when possible, watch the youth teams of the Professional Club. Spending time at the Ajax Arena, the Futuro (Youth Training Center), and at the Ajax gift shop is always a highlight to the trip, as well as the time spent in the historic city of Amsterdam.