

CBC Dutch Touch International Soccer Program

Spring Trip to Holland – March 24 thru April 3

On our most recent trip to Holland (March, 2010), Jan Pruijn arranged a meeting for us with Patrick Ladru, currently the Assistant Director of the Ajax Youth Academy at the Ajax Youth Training Center (Toekomst) in Amsterdam. The meeting lasted 45 minutes and was a very informative session. Following the sit-down session, we followed Patrick out to the training pitch and watched as he conducted a training session for the Ajax U 10s.

Terry Michler, Soccer Coach at CBC High School and Director of the CBC Dutch Touch International Program, Mike Freitag, Technical Director of the Colorado Soccer Association and former coach at Indiana University, and Tom Fairshon, assistant coach at CBC, asked Patrick questions about player development at Ajax and throughout Holland. Patrick provided very detailed answers and we were all very thankful and appreciative of his time, expertise and willingness to share.

Patrick has been a coach at Ajax for 19 years and has been in the Ajax videos, dating back to the Dreaming of Ajax video in the early 1990's. He is also in the current series, Heroes of the Future.

How do you choose players for selection in the youngest age group for the first time experience at Ajax? How many players do you have in the youngest age group?

Ajax will have players recommended from different sources. Ajax will bring in 20 of the youngest players for a trial. From the 20, they will pick the best 5 players, based on who they rated as the best overall, in all capacities. They will then bring in another 20 trialist and repeat the same procedure. All in all, they will repeat this process 4 times. Then they will bring in the second group of 20 for a final selection. From that group of 20 they will pick 10 players, to include 1 keeper. This will become their F level team (**U 9**). Ajax currently has only 1 team in the F level.

How many players are in the Ajax Youth Academy at the various levels? What are the various levels of the Youth Academy at Ajax?

From the youngest to the oldest **Youth** teams:

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|----|---------|---------|---|
| 1. | F level | U 9 | 9 players, 1 keeper |
| 2. | E 3 | U 10 | 9 players, 1 keeper |
| 3. | E 2 | U 10/11 | 8 player U 10, 3 players U 11, 1 keeper |
| 4. | E 1 | U 11 | 14 players, 1 keeper |
| 5. | D 2 | U 12 | 15 players. 2 keepers |
| 6. | D 1 | U 13 | 15 players, 2 keepers |

Patrick did not go into the older ages and levels, but Ajax continues with the following **Junior** teams:

- 7. C 2 U 14
- 8. C 1 U 15
- 9. B 2 U 16
- 10. B 1 U 17
- 11. A 2 U 18
- 12. A 1 U 19

The next step is the **Senior** teams: reserve team (Jong Ajax) and the First Team.
Ajax currently has some 60 players on professional contracts.

What do you and Ajax see as a natural developmental progression of activities (competitions) to gain the necessary soccer insight and proper playing experience?

Currently, the Dutch federation endorses 4v4, 7v7 and 11v11.

Patrick gave us his plan of competitive progression.

U 8	4 v 4	30 x 20m field	3 x 1m goal
U 9	6 v 6 (5 + keeper)	40 X 30m	4 X 2m
U 10	8 v 8	50 x 40m	5 x 2m
U 11	9 v 9	60 x 50m	6 x 2m
U 12	11 v 11	full field	full size

Why do you think that this is best?

It should always be about what is best for the children. You must take into account the variance in growth development – physical and mental. Growth is never a steady incline, but rather more like steps, with small and gradual progressions. The various levels of competition represent the various developmental stages.

What is Ajax doing to improve soccer in Holland beyond Ajax? What do you do in the same area?

Ajax has just launched a new on-line academy for youth coaches (www.ajaxonlineacademy.nl).
The website will be available in English in May of 2010. Ajax recognizes the need to help coaches of youth in general. From Ajax's point of view, it is also an investment in a better soccer product. The

youngest team at Ajax is U 9 – up to that point the players play and develop outside of the Ajax system. From the ages of 5-9, the young players must develop with their local amateur clubs. Ajax now has a solution to improve the product of youth soccer in the Netherlands.

Patrick conducts many coaching education activities for the amateur youth coaches to better help them develop the young players in Holland. When asked if Ajax is getting the same number of top young players as in the past, his response was that yes they are, but maybe not as many.

What exactly does the on-line academy offer the youth coaches?

The Program consists of 7 topic areas - each topic is presented through diagrams, animation, videos and a written explanation. Each activity is presented with the proper set up, objectives, rotations and progressions. The programs are age-appropriate and provide the coaches with all they need to carry out an appropriate training session, in the Ajax way.

The 7 topic areas are:

1. Pass / Receive
2. Technical Training
3. Positional Play
4. Heading
5. Finishing on Goal
6. Positional Game Play (functional training)
7. Games – many variations

Player Evaluation

Ajax is constantly evaluating their players and also looking to improve their teams. At different times during the year, usually around school holidays, Ajax will bring in selected players for a trial. They are looking to see if the trialist is better than the last few players on the current teams. Ajax decides on each player if they will be returned or released for the following year. The evaluation process is daily.

Video analysis plays a big part in the evaluation process. Three times a year Ajax will video a tactical session and rate the player's performance. The first video taping occurs in the first days of the season, the second in January, and the third in May. In addition to training sessions and games, Ajax will tape a particular activity per age group to measure progress and development.

1. U 9 3 v 1
2. U 10 4 v 2

3. U 11 5 v 3
4. U 12 6 v 4
5. U 13 7 v 5

At the end of the season, the coach will pass along all of his player information (reports and videos) to the next coach who will take over the team the following year. The players move to the next level, the coaches stay at the same level – this allows for greater consistency in the evaluation process. So the U 9 coach will send along all the information to the U 10 coach who then will be very informed of his players before they even take to the pitch.

At Ajax, it is very important that the records on player development are accurately taken and maintained. It is the coach's responsibility to maintain accurate records and to pass them along at the end of the season. Continuity is a big part of the entire operation. Everyone must be working in the same direction.