

For What It's Worth

For many years I have been an advocate of Dutch Soccer. It was 'Clockwork Orange', the Total Soccer concept of the 1974 World Cup that took the soccer world by storm as the *Oranje* played in a way that was mesmerizing – fast paced, interchanging positions, pressing in the opponent's half, unbelievable skill and just enough arrogance to give them the necessary edge in the mental battle. It was for me the beginning of the pursuit for soccer in a different form than I had ever seen before – it was the beginning of a long journey to instill a style of play and a mentality towards play that was different from what most of us had known. For me, it became the philosophy and the focal point that has shaped my approach to coaching and to soccer in general.

It was my good fortune in 1997, to attend a 10 day Coaching Symposium in Zeist, the KNVB headquarters in the Netherlands. The KNVB is the governing body of Dutch soccer. In a small group of 10 coaches, we were privileged to be taught by 2 fully licensed Dutch coaches – Jan Pruijn and Bram Braam. Jan to this day has remained a good friend and a business partner in the soccer camp and travel areas. We were inundated with every Dutch soccer influence possible – instruction, theory, practice, stadiums, youth and professional training and games – we experienced all that was there to be seen or done. It was a thrill of a lifetime and a learning experience second to none.

Having just returned from Holland with the Dutch Touch trip, I can honestly say that there is a significant difference in the development of players here and there at the same age groups. This was my sixth trip to Holland and each time I always visit and observe youth training and games. The difference is primarily in the approach, or the mentality, as they would call it. There is a higher regard for clean technique, faster ball circulation, better understanding of game situations – they call it insight – and in general they are more comfortable on the ball and with the ball. The Dutch coaches on this trip kept using the word *efficient* when talking to our players. Efficient in the use of the ball, time on the ball, playing without the ball, decision-making, closing down, communication and on and on. In a country as small as Holland, they must maximize every resource possible – efficiency is a way of life and it is the way in which they play. Efficient and effective, not always flashy and spectacular -- simple but to the point – these are definite characteristics of the Dutch style.

Training is efficient and effective. Technique is not isolated from tactics. The Dutch are big believers in small-sided games – combining technique with insight – playing with conditions to certain objectives. Every training session must have an objective – then the entire session is built around that particular objective. For instance, passing can never be an objective – it is always a means to an objective. So, if you are playing a small game – such as passing through a small cone goal to a teammate, passing is built into the game as a means to the objective. Is it short passing, long passing, diagonal passing, or transition passing – what is the objective of the exercise and how does passing contribute to the objective. It is never passing just for passing's sake – it is always passing in order to (go to goal, change the point of attack, or play a defender out)

It has been my ambition as a coach to have my teams play in the Dutch way, to play with a Dutch Touch. The fast ball circulation, the clean touch, the crisp pass, the early deep ball, the third man in concept, high ball speed, going to goal, scoring – these are staples to Dutch soccer. For the Dutch it must always be with a certain style - the trademark is in their quality of play, their insight, their ability to take the ball to the goal and in the enjoyment that they derive from playing. It must be fun and it must be effective, and oh yes, lest I forget – efficient !

