

The lost art of dribbling?

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There is nothing more exciting than watching a player dribbling the ball. The ability to manipulate the ball makes a player that can perform this 'art' special in many people's eyes.

Young Cristiano Ronaldo is mesmerising Manchester United fans with his ability and the 'tricks' he can perform to beat players. Joe Cole at Chelsea is a great dribbler too - and that was one of the main attractions to Claudio Ranieri: 'Without Gianfranco, I need a player who can dribble - and I think Joe Cole is that kind of player,' said Ranieri as he snapped up the England midfielder from West Ham last summer. 'In my opinion, he can play in any midfield position from the left to the right, or behind the front two.

'He's a fantastic one-on-one. He's very clever and passes the ball very well.

'I like him when a match is close. He can dribble, pass and score a goal. He's strong and an Englishman.'

Ranieri is not the only coach to appreciate such skills. When talking about Ronaldinho, Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard knew he has signed a player of pure quality. 'We all know Ronny has something very special,' said the former Dutch international. 'When he gets the ball he can create chances from nothing. He got the assist for our first goal and when he started to attack he looked very good.'

The skills demonstrated by Joe Cole, Ronaldo and other great stars such as Alessandro Del Piero (Italy), Ronaldinho (Brazil) and Ryan Giggs (Wales) are not only attractive to watch but such skilful players are seen as an essential ingredient in top teams. However, at youth football how do we encourage young players to dribble the ball? Well the answer is exactly that.

We MUST encourage them to dribble with the ball when the opportunity arises. Too often coaches actually discourage players to dribble the ball or stay on the ball. The reasons are that in game situations this can be a high-risk strategy and coaches too often look for the result over development. Youth soccer is about developing the potential of young players.

If young players are encouraged to pass the ball, or 'get rid of it', every time they are in possession then the skill of dribbling will be lost and potential nullified. Coaches MUST be brave and sometimes sacrifice short-term objectives in order to achieve long-term goals.

At a very young age players should be encouraged to 'stay on the ball'. This doesn't mean dribble or run with the ball until they lose it but that when the opportunity arises they need to maintain personal possession of it.

Over time and appropriate coaching these players will then be able to identify when to run, dribble or pass the ball. Therefore the coach is giving the players every opportunity to develop individually in all facets of the game.

England's 2002 World Cup defeat to Brazil is an interesting case. The first Brazilian goal was created by Ronaldinho. He picked the ball up just inside his half and ran with the ball dribbling past two defenders and supplying Rivaldo with a killer pass. If Ronaldinho were English he probably would have passed the ball when he first collected it. This comment highlights a concern that soccer-expert.com coaches have that young English players are encouraged to pass the ball too often and thus don't develop the skills we witness the Brazilians having.

In England it's often asked why we don't produce players like the Brazilians. The main reason is the culture in coaching. Too often players are NOT encouraged to stay on the ball in games and dribble with it. This is a mentality that needs to be addressed. To be fair some are addressing it but you can still hear professional coaches shouting from the sidelines 'PASS, PASS, PASS'. Whilst this continues the next Joe Cole will emerge despite of the coaching and not because of it.

Derek Broadly from soccer-expert.com writes:

The game of soccer is a series of one versus one battles all over the field - so whenever we see a player taking other players on with the ball successfully it sends a shiver down the spines of coaches.

All coaches should be trying to instill the ability to dribble the ball into every player they work with, as it is the most effective way to create an 'overload' situation (where a team enjoys a numerical advantage).

'Dribbling' is often mistaken for 'running with the ball' and it is often discouraged in the defensive area of the field.

Young players should be encouraged whenever possible to take on other players in order to create the overload situation from day one and over time the ideals of 'when' and 'where' to dribble can be introduced once the mastery is in place. The modern soccer world craves players that excite the crowds but in the junior ranks the so-called greedy players are outlawed for not passing.

The soccer-expert.com methodology will re-address the balance and create exciting dribblers - such as Wayne Routledge and Tyrone Berry from Crystal Palace and Craig Dobson of Cheltenham Town - who have been brought up in a culture that allows players to take risks from an early age.

Coaches must allow players to experiment the art of dribbling continuously throughout practise and game situations and by doing that they will excite the watching fans and put the fear into the opposition.

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