

A Lesson in Humility

There was so much to admire in Spain's journey to the summit of world football during the 2010 World Cup: Vicente Del Bosque's wise management, Xavi's brilliant orchestration of the play, Andrés Iniesta's incisive running with the ball, David Villa's prowess in front of goal, and the goalkeeping exploits of Iker Casillas. But for those of us who observed the current World and European champions at close quarters, it was not only their football ability that impressed. Their human qualities, in particular the humility displayed by many of the Spanish players, gained them respect beyond their technical achievements. Was this positive behaviour just a lucky coincidence or was it the result of a culture within the Spanish game?

It is easy to see that this successful generation of Spanish footballers are modest, unpretentious and happy to promote a "we" mentality. As Xavi stated during the World Cup: "We are a group of very normal, very hard working people who love the game." The same can be said of their head coach, Vicente Del Bosque, who has won both the UEFA Champions League and the World Cup with his respectful, patient and unassuming style of management. What is not on public display is the process which has nurtured many of these gifted players, young men who have their feet firmly on the ground.

As Fernando Hierro, sports director at the Spanish FA (the RFEF), and Ginés Meléndez, RFEF coaching school director, informed the participants at UEFA's recent national coaches conference in Madrid, the aim in Spain is to educate talented youngsters to play, to compete and to develop a psychological balance. Ginés explained: "The players need to be really well balanced. A player whose behaviour varies excessively between euphoria and drama on the basis of the result will perform poorly in competitions." From the grassroots to the elite youth squads, the RFEF puts an emphasis on the teaching of values, such as commitment, comradeship, naturalness and modesty. Through selection, encouragement and training, they strive to produce top players and good characters.

Developing a work/family ethic and a down-to-earth attitude is a conscious decision of the technical staff at the RFEF. In their world, there is no place for arrogance, conceit or a feeling of superiority. Vicente Del Bosque, at the top level, fights against complacency and false pride. Of course, players need an ego, a determination to be the best that they can be, but this must not be confused with the negative face of egotism. When players or coaches succeed, there is no need to engage in self promotion. As the maxim says: "If you have to tell people you are, you aren't." If you have to tell people you are good at something, maybe you are not.

Spain won the World Cup in South Africa with superb technical quality. They also won the fair play trophy and this is testimony to a philosophy that values fast technique and positive attitudes in equal measure. When FC Barcelona's Xavi spoke about his national team captain, Iker Casillas of Real Madrid CF, he said: "He's a very humble, very normal guy." This statement could have applied to many of the players in Spain's national team, particularly those who have graduated through the youth ranks in the past decade and a half. Xavi, Iniesta, Casillas and company have won everything, yet they provide the next generation with a valuable lesson in humility.

**Andy Roxburgh,
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Vicente Del Bosque



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The Technician

Interview

The player resembled the coach. His game was unhurried, unflustered and full of elegant touches. He had a shrewd eye for the telling pass and was one of those creative midfielders who had the ability to make the game look simple. Although a native of Salamanca, he moved to the Spanish capital as a youth player and became an influential presence in the Real Madrid midfield from 1970 to 1984, with just a couple of spells on loan to CD Castellón and Córdoba CF in his formative years.

After 5 league and 4 cup titles, in addition to 18 international appearances for Spain, he began his coaching career within the Real Madrid youth system, stepping twice into the first-team technical area for a handful of games on a caretaker basis before being offered the job full time in 1999. He responded with a brace of Liga titles, one Spanish and one UEFA Super Cup, and the European/South American title. Most importantly for a club of such rich European tradition, he masterminded UEFA Champions League victories in 2000 and 2002. Released in 2003, he had a spell in Turkey before taking over the Spanish national team immediately after their UEFA EURO 2008 victory and led La Roja to South Africa on the back of ten straight qualifying victories. He is the world champion. He is...

Vicente Del Bosque

You won the UEFA Champions League twice with Real Madrid – how did that experience compare with your World Cup success?

I had the good fortune to enjoy winning both of them and there might be points of comparison between the two competitions. With a national team, the work is obviously different and the final tournament of a World Cup is more intensive, in terms of time and work, than the knockout rounds of the Champions League. But in both competitions you're talking about common denominators of managing a group, preparing a team for high-intensity competition and trying to maintain top levels of performance. For a World Cup, it's a question of trying to be physically and mentally on peak form during a critical period. The other major difference is that, whereas Real Madrid have been champions of Europe nine times, the national team had never won a World Cup. So the success in South Africa was something that went beyond the realm of sport. It

went right into the hearts of a whole nation. It had an enormous emotional impact.

During your preparations for the World Cup, what did you emphasise?

Well, you get your group together in May at the end of a long and tiring season when a lot of the players had been playing Wednesday and Saturday right through. What we decided was that we were not going to do a sort of pre-season schedule. We tried to find a good balance by playing a few preparation matches but also finding the right times and places to give them a rest. Like most of the other teams, we wanted to get to South Africa mentally fresh and I think it was very important to arrive with a clear mind.

Losing your opening game 1-0 to Switzerland was a blow. How did you set about rebuilding confidence?

There were very high expectations in Spanish football with regard to the World Cup, so it was a difficult moment



which caused a bit of mental anguish and anxiety. On the day after the defeat by Switzerland, and before we prepared to play Honduras and Chile, we made it clear that it was not a moment to start pointing fingers of blame. If anyone was to blame, it was all of us. We also made sure that we focused on the good points of our performance and put the result in the context of all the other games we had played on the way to South Africa. We knew we could play better, but I saw no reason to make big changes and, for the game against Honduras, I think all I did was to start with Torres and replace Silva with Navas. The main thing, as you say, was to rebuild confidence. We did that against Honduras and then consolidated it by beating Chile.

A coach can be a good talker – but what he says is more important than how much he says. If you talk, you need to have convincing arguments. The important thing was to stress that we had the courage of our convictions in terms of the sort of football we wanted to play – so the answer was the next game and then the one after that. It was all about playing football, not talking. I think the coach needs to find a just measure in what he says and to transmit firm conviction in certain criteria. I mean, if you overdo the talking, you run the risk of saying one thing one day and something different a couple of days later. We were fortunate to have a group of great people who readily understood the messages.

How would you describe your style of management? And your team's style of playing?

I think every coach has his own personality and his own way of going about the job. There are no two the same. Each man is a different universe. If I had to describe myself

The Spanish coach and his players were literally on top of the world in South Africa in July



Soriano/AFP



Michel Platini presents Vicente Del Bosque with a plaque commemorating his success in the FIFA World Cup and UEFA Champions League.

– and it's not an easy task – I would say that my style is based on human values and on sharing. And also on being friendly and positive. I don't know whether other coaches would agree with this, but my view is that it's a game, it's entertainment, it's fun, we all enjoy football, so I don't see any reason to be constantly upset, uptight and appearing to be on edge or angry. You have to be a leader, but I try to be a friendly leader. Coaches are judged on facts rather than words, so you have to control and direct a group in a way that is firm but also focuses on human values and a playing philosophy. We set out to play a possession game with a high tempo, a lot of mobility and a nice balance between short and long passing.

Going back to the defeat against Switzerland, the worst thing would have been to go back to the dressing room and say that the style which had got us to South Africa – winning every qualifying game – was not valid. You have to remain faithful to your convictions.

You mention 'sharing' with the players. What does this mean specifically?

It means that you have to be prepared to listen and to establish a good rapport with them. Some people might regard that as a symptom of weakness – the fact that you're ready to listen to the players – but I don't see it that way at all. I regard it as essential that a coach should have good communication with his players.

At a final tournament, man management is an important factor – to the extent that someone recently said 'if you only know about football, you're lost'. Do you agree with that?

Yes, I do. I've been fortunate to have played under some very good Spanish and foreign coaches who taught me how important it is to have other qualities apart from knowledge of football. They were well versed in other areas and I think this is important.

Which of them might have had an influence over the development of Vicente Del Bosque as a coach?

I would start with a coach that I worked with when I was 24. He came to Madrid after the World Cup in 1974.

I'm talking about Miljan Miljanic. He and Vujadin Boskov were different from other coaches I had known. Both came from Yugoslavia, but they were also different, one from the other. They were more than coaches. These days, you can argue that we are only coaches and nothing more. But they were coaches and much more. They knew about football. But they also knew about history, geography... They

excellent people who made the 50 days together a very pleasant experience.

After UEFA EURO 2008, your predecessor often referred to the importance of what he called 'the captains'. Did you have similar relationships in South Africa?

Well, in principle, your aim is to treat all the players with total equality. But maybe that doesn't do some of them justice, because a group usually contains players who have more experience, who have 'captaincy qualities', are more senior in terms of national team appearances or have natural leadership skills. So you try to draw on those resources and get the best individual and collective responses to situations. I place a lot of importance on human relationships and if these are good, a lot is already won. Matches are usually decided by small details and none of our games were won by big margins. Human values are important in reacting to tight situations and the key is to assemble the individual qualities into a well-

organised and structured playing style. That's what we tried to do in South Africa and what we will be trying to do in the future.

What has been your greatest challenge since taking the job?

Most of the players were in the squad that won EURO 2008 and when I took over, I didn't want to delete or erase any past achievements. My predecessor had done an excellent job and I would say that the aspect of continuity has been greatly beneficial to Spanish football. On the other hand, I think the worst thing is to stand still. It would have been unrealistic to think that the 23 from Vienna would be the 23 for Johannesburg. So we brought in newcomers like Busquets, Navas, Javi Martínez, Llorente... All in all, we're talking about seven or eight new players who could inject new blood into the squad. So the challenge was to take tough decisions – some of which I feel bad about. Marcos Senna, for example. He was possibly the best player in Vienna and it was difficult to leave him out. But it's not about sentiments and emotions. You have to take sporting decisions and you have to take risks. There's no room for complacency.

What style of play do you favour?

I'm not a great believer in the drawing board. In other words, I don't regard a certain team structure as a guarantee of good football. I think it's more important to build a team that's well aware of the need to operate as a team in defence and in attack. People tend to focus on the Spanish team's attacking qualities, as if we were just raining shots down on the opposition. But we also have



Xavi Hernandez tries to get between Dutch opponents John Heitinga and Gregory Van Der Wiel in the World Cup final.

were educated people. These days, coaches are expected to know about football and nothing else. But they were cultivated men in other facets of life.

If you played for Real Madrid in the old days, you have to mention Miguel Muñoz and another coach who has a special place in my heart even if he is less well known internationally: Luis Molowny. I think the best way to talk about what he meant to me is just to say that he created and stimulated my desire to become a coach. I should say 'our' desire, because if you go back through that team you'll find names such as Camacho, García Remón... Players who, because of that influence, were keen to get into the coaching profession. So those are the four major influences I would highlight as the most important and I'm happy that two of them came from outside Spain, as I'm a firm believer that there are no frontiers in coaching. There are good coaches and there are bad coaches – and that has nothing to do with the country you're born in.

Since South Africa, you've often talked about the importance of managing a group that has to spend 50 days together...

That's right. 50 days is a long time and we were fortunate enough to have no hiccups, no problems, no conflicts. It says everything about a group of real sportsmen with very generous attitudes. Good harmony and team spirit isn't just about winning games – it has to be something that remains independent of results. My squad in South Africa was a group of 23 excellent players and

defensive qualities and if we don't do certain things well we become a vulnerable, almost weak team. It's important to react collectively and quickly to the loss of the ball.

Why has Spanish football had so much success in recent years?

I mentioned continuity and, of course, that is related to the teams and players who have been successful in Spain's youth teams. It was undoubtedly a contributing factor because they had come through those teams playing in a certain way. But you also have to look at what the players do on a day-to-day basis at their clubs and analyse the roles they play. Then you think about what they can contribute to the national team's style of play. People have compared us with Barcelona – which is logical if you have Xavi, Iniesta and Busquets in midfield – but we also have traces of other Spanish clubs in the way we play our football.

What facets of the tournament in South Africa have stuck in your mind?

I have to start with the organisation, because I thought it was excellent. Whereas so many people had predicted something terrible, I thought it was an extraordinary success. In terms of football, I will remember all our opponents. Germany, for instance, who were great with us. They handled defeat very well and their behaviour was exemplary at all times. They dignified our victory even more – and I say that from the heart.

In South Africa, were there some significant moments that made the difference and ultimately took your team to the title?

Yes, starting with the defeat by Switzerland. But we also had delicate moments in our matches against Chile

and Paraguay, for example. They were very strong opponents and their pressing was done with military efficiency. It was very difficult to play against them. But a player who aspires to being champion of the world has to be able to play against any type of opposition.

Where do you feel more comfortable? Coaching at club or national team level?

I'm comfortable in the role of national team coach, even though I think that the best results come when players and coaches get to know each other well. With a national team, you obviously have less time to do that because there's less contact. In a club, where you know each other well, you can often transmit messages just by the way you look at a player. On the other hand, daily contact at a club can give rise to more friction and more conflicts. In the national team, basically the only 'conflict' is that you have 23 players and only 11 can be on the pitch. Just think: Silva from Manchester City, Torres from Liverpool, Cesc from Arsenal, on the bench. It can be a problem. But I have to say that, as coach of Real Madrid and the Spanish national team, I've been fortunate enough not to have had major problems. What I have learned is that, as a general rule, the greater the player, the fewer problems he creates.

Is there one thing that, if you could, you would like to change in football?

That's difficult. If I had one wish, maybe it would be for coaches and players not to talk about referees. I know we live in countries of free speech, but I often think that some of the things said about referees do damage to the game. ●

Vicente Del Bosque in conversation with Andy Roxburgh and Graham Turner

Vicente Del Bosque with his players at a training session in South Africa



The Madrid memorandum

The 9th UEFA Conference for European National Team Coaches, to give the event its official title, was staged in Madrid barely three weeks after the 12th UEFA Elite Club Coaches Forum had been staged at UEFA's headquarters in Nyon. Inevitably, there were common denominators and many of the talking points were interlocked, bearing in mind that the UEFA Champions League and the major biennial events – the FIFA World Cup and the European Championship – set the benchmarks in international football.

In Madrid, the calibre of the participants from all 53 member associations could be measured by media interest. The open-doors session, when the conference ball was set rolling by Michel Platini, the president of the host association, Angel María Villar Llona, and Spain's secretary of state for sport, Jaime Lissavetzky, was recorded by 15 TV crews and 36 written-press reporters. But the high-profile list of national team coaches provoked reflection: many of the names were different. As reported by Jean-Paul Brigger, who directed FIFA's technical report on the World Cup, only 13 of the 32 coaches at work in South Africa have remained on the same bench, 8 of whom, as it happens, are European. This high turnover rate and shorter tenures mean that relatively few technicians go to final tournaments equipped with first-hand experience gained at previous ones. Hence the relevance of knowledge-sharing among the coaches and technical directors who took part in this unique event.

Two jobs in one

During the opening session in Madrid, world champion Vicente Del Bosque emphasised the importance of managing a group during an extended period of something between seven and nine weeks.

And, on the second morning, this thesis was extended by the silver-medallist coach in South Africa, Bert van Marwijk: "You have two years of seeing your players for a number of days and then not seeing them for weeks or months. If you succeed, you go to the final tournament and, suddenly, the pressure soars. It can't be compared with anything else.

You have a world audience. You have to deal with the world media. You have the group together for a long period – nine weeks in the case of the Netherlands. This means added pressure. The job becomes very demanding and you have to experience this to discover just how heavy the demands can be. You can only gain this knowledge by experience – and the same applies to the players."

In Madrid, it was acknowledged that, from a coaching standpoint, a final tournament entails a different job description. The national team coach finds that his task is more akin to the club coach in that he becomes immersed in a day-to-day training, matchplay and rest-and-recovery syndrome. The difference, evidently, is that the players



Drawing conclusions together after the group sessions

don't go home. The unique element of coaching at a final tournament is that issues such as avoiding boredom and keeping the players mentally and physically fresh in a pressure-cooker environment take on fundamental importance. "Qualifying is like a marathon," Joachim Löw commented, "and you normally use a lot of different

players because of injuries, suspensions and so on. At a final tournament, you have a different situation – the same group of players together for weeks. In recent years, the German team has always gone to at least the semi-final stage, so you have to prepare to spend a long period together and the head coach needs to assemble a good team-behind-the-team – staff who are efficient, reliable and mentally stable and who set good examples for the players.”

How important is a ‘philosophy’?

The Spanish association’s sports director, Fernando Hierro, acknowledged that “winning the European Championship and the World Cup means that everybody wants to know what we are doing in terms of player development.” Structures, talent detection and youth development pathways were examined by technical director and long-time coach of Spain’s youth teams, Ginés Meléndez, on the final day of the event in Madrid. One of the interesting points he raised was that, apart from football abilities, selection is based on human qualities such as character, competitive spirit, the will to succeed and the levels of emotional intelligence which will equip players to deal with intense competitions of short duration. “Our philosophy is based on developing qualities in the youth teams,” Fernando Hierro explained, “while remaining faithful to a certain playing style based on wanting to dominate possession of the ball and a desire to carry the game to the opposition. We have changed our coaching staff in the last couple of years, but our philosophy hasn’t altered. The idea is to make the pathway to the top as smooth as possible. I know that, traditionally, a lot of national associations try to have the age-limit teams mirroring the style of the senior team. But our point of view is that it should be the other way round. The senior team’s play is based on what we do in the youth teams.”

At the club coaches’ forum, FC Barcelona’s Pep Guardiola was among those who applauded the German team’s contribution to the World Cup, remarking that “they had the courage to play in a style that moved away from their traditions”. When relayed to Madrid, the comment was a source of satisfaction to bronze medallist Joachim Löw. “After EURO 2004,” he said, “we decided to work on a new playing style with our young players, based on more possession play, more attempts to dominate and a more positive attacking approach, with greater willingness to take risks. The aim was to impose on opponents rather than react to them. When our Under-21s won the European Championship in Sweden in 2009, we realised that there were players who not only had enough talent but were also mentally mature enough to come into the

senior side.” Manuel Neuer, Dennis Aogo, Sami Khedira, Mesut Özil, Jerome Boateng and Marko Marin were in South Africa a year after playing in Sweden, while Toni Kroos, Thomas Müller and Holger Badstuber were even younger standard-bearers for the new German philosophy.

Shapes and structures

At the World Cup, the Spanish team were one of 12 who based their play on a 4-2-3-1 structure – with 8 of



Iker Casillas cuts in front of Toni Kroos in the Spain v Germany semi-final.

the top 16 clubs in the 2009/10 UEFA Champions League having also adopted this formation. On the opening day in Madrid, UEFA’s technical director, Andy Roxburgh, highlighted the diversity of a World Cup where 10 of the 32 teams often favoured a 4-4-2 system, (compared with only two in the Champions League), 6 deployed a 4-3-3 formation (the same number in both competitions), and a few non-European sides operated with 3 at the back. At the 2002 World Cup, 40% of the competitors fielded three-man defences. But this has become a rarity in recent Champions League campaigns and, in the 2009/10 season, none of the top 16 adopted this format.

Half the teams in South Africa started with a lone striker, compared with 85% in the Champions League. However, strikers accounted for 53% of the 145 goals scored in South Africa. The trend towards two screening midfielders was underlined by a percentage of 65, which tallies with the Champions League figure. However, there was diversity in terms of the personalities deployed in the screening positions: the combination of Sergio Busquets and Xabi Alonso in the world champions’ line-up could be contrasted, for example, with the combination of Javier Zanetti and Esteban Cambiasso in the FC Internazionale team which took the European title in Madrid.

The box-to-box full-back

The trend towards the use of twin screening midfielders with well-defined positional obligations and, generally,

defensive priorities created a demand for full-backs to become box-to-box performers. In the Champions League, two full-backs – FC Internazionale’s Maicon and Holger Badstuber of FC Bayern München – had emerged as the season’s chief purveyors of crosses, a trend which was exported to South Africa, where the likes of Spain’s Sergio Ramos, Germany’s Philipp Lahm and the Netherlands’ Giovanni van Bronckhorst made significant contributions to collective attacking. In the Champions League technical report it was mentioned that some of the most exuberant examples of the box-to-box full-back were Brazilian – especially Maicon and FC Barcelona’s Daniel Alves. The fact that both operated as right-backs prompted Carlos Dunga to fit both into his formation by pushing Alves into a more advanced role.

The net result

The closing balance in South Africa was a total of 145 goals (compared with 147 at the 2006 finals) and an average of 2.27 per game (compared with 2.56 in the Champions League). Set plays accounted for 23% of the total (26% in the Champions League), while 26 of the goals in South Africa were scored from outside the box. In the Champions League, the number of goals from long range increased by 38% during 2009/10 and this trend could be interpreted as a result of deep-lying defensive blocks and greater willingness to shoot from outside the penalty area.

Fast counterattacks accounted for 25% of the open-play goals at the World Cup, compared with 27% in the Champions League and 46% at UEFA EURO 2008. In

all three competitions, the ability to launch fast counters was an important weapon in the top teams’ armoury. In South Africa, Germany and Brazil were the outstanding exponents, followed by the finalists, Spain and the Netherlands. *“People underestimate this facet of Spain’s play,”* Joachim Löw commented in Madrid. *“We mustn’t forget that they were the best defensive team, with good ball-winning mechanisms and the ability to produce swift transitions in five or six seconds. You need to have instant reactions in terms of movement to launch effective counters.”*

In recent seasons, the ability to find antidotes has figured prominently on the agenda in the Champions League, where goals derived from counters peaked at 40% in 2005/06. From that point, formulas for ‘countering the counter’ have provoked a steady decrease and in South Africa, teams such as the two finalists who left spaces at their backs needed to develop well-drilled mechanisms aimed at reducing vulnerability when possession was lost. *“It was noticeable,”* said Carlo Ancelotti at the club coaches’ forum, *“that Spain, even with many players up front, didn’t suffer too many counters.”*

Collective game, solo solutions

One of the talking points in Madrid – and in Nyon – was that some of the individuals who had been expected to make a mark in South Africa were unable to do so. End-of-season fatigue aside, it was suggested that the sheer weight of expectations could raise psychological barriers and create levels of anxiety which prompted highly experienced internationals to admit, as one of the coaches in Madrid recounted, *“boss, I felt a tension I*



had never experienced before". UEFA's technical report on the 2009/10 UEFA Champions League mentioned that "soloists are often required to unlock defensive doors which seem to be securely bolted" – and this was endorsed in South Africa, where, even though the tournament was hailed as a showcase for collective virtues, 23% of the goals resulted from solo skills, compared with 26% in the Champions League. As Andy Roxburgh remarked in Madrid, "while collective attributes were indispensable, moments of individual brilliance often made the difference".

The decisive factors

Solo skills, concentration, transition speed and will to win appear on the list of factors which can be decisive at an intense, short-duration final tournament. So does the ability to bounce back. Vicente Del Bosque successfully steered his team back onto the winning path as Spain became the first to win the trophy after losing the opening game. Joachim Löw had a similar issue to address after defeat by Serbia "created huge pressures and tensions which the coach must try to relieve". Between fixtures, the coach has an opportunity to work on a 'rebound mentality'. But, in South Africa, few teams were able to bounce back during the 90 minutes. Whereas in the 2009/10 Champions League season, 14.4% of games were won by sides which had conceded the opening goal, only



Bert van Marwijk, Netherlands coach

three teams – all of them European – came from 1-0 down to win during the World Cup.

However, decisive moments sometimes have nothing to do with mental, physical or tactical preparation. When asked to name an abiding memory of the tournament in South Africa, Bert van Marwijk responded "seeing Arjen Robben's shot come off the big toe of Casillas! Something like that can make the difference between becoming world champion or not." As Roy Hodgson had said three weeks earlier in Nyon, "over 30 years, luck can even itself out. But not in a Champions League or a World Cup." ●



Notes from Nyon

“Win or lose, in the UEFA Champions League, the coach becomes enriched.” This sentiment was expressed by José Mourinho when 17 top coaches gathered in Nyon to talk football and exchange views with UEFA’s president, Michel Platini, general secretary, Gianni Infantino, competitions director, Giorgio Marchetti, and technical director, Andy Roxburgh, during the annual forum.

The previous 11 editions of the UEFA Elite Club Coaches Forum had generated proposals, such as switching national team double-headers to Friday/Saturday and Tuesday, which were taken forward and have now seen the light of day. The 12th forum was equally fertile in ideas.

As José Mourinho’s comment illustrates, the aim of the forum was to review the past season of UEFA club competitions, the benchmark-setting UEFA Champions League in particular, and to set it alongside the football which was subsequently seen at the FIFA World Cup. Discussion focused on topics such as...

Away goals

The invitation to review home-and-away concepts had not been based on weight of numbers (only 19 UEFA Champions League ties have been resolved by the away-goals rule since the competition was launched), but rather by the consequences of the rule in terms of its effect on

Michel Platini and Sir Alex Ferguson enjoy the relaxed atmosphere.



games and attitudes. For example, there are ties where, although the away-goals rule is eventually not applied, a goal for the visitors could effectively spell ‘game over’. In addition, the rule was initially introduced (45 years ago) in response to conservative approaches by travelling teams, whereas the coaches agreed in Nyon that, these

days, the relevance of ‘not conceding at home’ can give rise to a cautious approach by the host team. “0-0 at home is not a bad result,” said one of them, “so maybe there is a temptation to not take too many risks.” During the ties played in UEFA’s two club competitions last season, the second legs produced 26% more goals than the first.

One of the variations on the theme was the suggestion of not applying the double value of away goals during extra time – but this produced the counter-proposal of applying the rule only during extra time...

The tradition of offering the UEFA Champions League group winners the advantage of playing the return leg of their first knockout tie at home was also questioned, bearing in mind that, in the 2009/10 season, 9 of the 14 home-and-away ties (including 3 of the 4 quarter-finals and both semi-finals) were won by the team playing the second leg away from home.

After thinking long and hard, the coaches in Nyon opted to endorse the status quo. “I think the public is comfortable with it,” said Sir Alex Ferguson, “and so are the players and coaches. We’re talking about a formula which has become one of the traditions in European football and I wouldn’t be in a hurry to change it.”

The state of the game

“There’s nothing to beat the Champions League for pace and intensity,” said Olympique Lyonnais coach Claude Puel. “Transitions have become faster and ball-winning mechanisms very efficient.” Sir Alex Ferguson agreed that, even within the short time frame of the last two to three seasons, the speed of counters has increased. Martin Jol reflected on whether the trend towards twin screening midfielders is threatening to split teams into 6-4 defensive and attacking units, while Roy Hodgson commented “with teams becoming more and more impressively organised, the harder and harder it becomes for individuals to shine” – an issue also addressed by the national team coaches in Madrid. “It’s possible that the individual becomes less decisive in the Champions League and World Cup,” commented Carlo Ancelotti, “because the most successful teams seem to be the most compact collective units.” “In the Bundesliga,” Thomas Schaaf added, “I think FC Bayern’s individuals made the difference. But in the Champions

League final, you could see that Inter dealt with this marvellously well. I think they won the title more because of their collective virtues than their talent as individuals."

Maintaining an identity

"In the knockout rounds of the Champions League, you look at opponents more thoroughly than you do in your domestic competitions," Sir Alex Ferguson stated. "There are different cultures to deal with and your tactical preparations become more intense because you know



Claude Puel, Didier Deschamps, Josep Guardiola, Carlo Ancelotti and Claudio Ranieri

that, at this level, one detail can make the difference. You try to make sure that you don't lose through lack of knowledge."

His comments sparked off some interesting reflections among his colleagues at the forum. José Mourinho was among those who felt that analysis of rivals could easily lead to over-focusing on the opposition and a loss of team identity. This line of thinking was extended into the World Cup, where other factors such as anxiety and fear of defeat can also prevent teams from expressing themselves. As one coach later put it in Madrid, "during the first half, I looked at my team and thought 'this is not us'. At half-time, my priority was to persuade them to be themselves." In Nyon, one of the newcomers to the UEFA Champions League technical area, FC Basel's Thorsten Fink, felt that this was a key question: "it's important to encourage players to express themselves and not to lose the fun element." As one of his colleagues remarked, "players have fun when they're encouraged to do the things they're best at."

Setting the scene

Coaches are notorious for their attention to detail – but, as Arsène Wenger has always insisted at these events, some aspects are not 'details' at all. They are fundamental. The coaches in Nyon this year renewed their call for greater attention to be paid to the condition of playing surfaces, not only during the competition proper but also (and maybe especially) when crucial games in the qualifying and play-off rounds take place at the height of summer.

This was followed up by discussion of other logistical elements such as warm-up timings, pitch watering, yellow-card regulations (is it fair that teams from the qualifying rounds should start the group stage with players missing, while the automatic qualifiers have full squads?) and the media arrangements attached to UEFA Champions League fixtures – which, it has to be recorded, seem to be structured in a manner which is very acceptable to the coaches.

Extra eyes

After extended debate on how best to support referees in dealing with penalty-box issues, the outcome was a positive response to the ongoing experiment with extra pairs of human eyes. The coaches were keen to see the five-referee system tested in the current UEFA Champions League – and the item will stay on the agenda for next season's forum.

International calendar

This was another issue addressed in both Nyon and Madrid soon after the round of international friendlies in August had created something of a 'discomfort zone'. The feeling among the coaches – club and national team alike – was that this represents an area in which the international calendar might benefit from some fine-tuning. Club and country compatibilities for youth development competitions were also reviewed, with the result that plenty of material was generated for further debate. ●



Vicente and other victors

The annual roll of honour which allows UEFA technician to recognise and salute the coaches who've won medals over the spring and summer is, this time round, a case of hats off to Spain. Their national teams reached four finals, at senior, Under-19 and Under-17 levels, one of the country's club sides lifted the inaugural UEFA Europa League (going on to take the UEFA Super Cup), and the Spanish capital provided the venues for two club competition finals.

FIFA World Cup, South Africa

Gold: Vicente Del Bosque (Spain)

Silver: Bert van Marwijk (Netherlands)

Bronze: Joachim Löw (Germany)

UEFA Champions League, Madrid

FC Internazionale Milano v FC Bayern München 2-0

Gold: José Mourinho

Silver: Louis van Gaal

UEFA Europa League, Hamburg

Club Atlético de Madrid v Fulham FC 2-1 after extra time

Gold: Quique Sánchez Flores

Silver: Roy Hodgson

UEFA Super Cup, Monaco

Club Atlético de Madrid v FC Internazionale Milano 2-0

Gold: Quique Sánchez Flores

Silver: Rafael Benítez

European Under-19 Championship, France

France v Spain 2-1

Gold: Francis Smerecki

Silver: Luis Milla

European Under-17 Championship, Liechtenstein

England v Spain 2-1

Gold: John Peacock

Silver: Ginés Meléndez

FIFA Under-20 Women's World Cup, Germany

Germany v Nigeria 2-0

Gold: Maren Meinert

European Women's Under-19 Championship, FYR Macedonia

France v England 2-1

Gold: Jean-Michel Degrange

Silver: 'Mo' Marley

European Women's Under-17 Championship, Switzerland

Spain v Republic of Ireland 0-0 after extra time

(4-1 in penalty shoot-out)

Gold: Jorge Vilda*

Silver: Noel King

* Also bronze medal at the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in Trinidad and Tobago

UEFA Women's Champions League, Getafe (Madrid)

1. FFC Turbine Potsdam v Olympique Lyonnais 0-0 after extra time

(7-6 in penalty shoot-out)

Gold: Bernd Schröder

Silver: Farid Benstifi

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