

Total Soccer Beats Title Soccer

Within the first few minutes of the broadcast of the Championship game of the 2010 World Cup, Martin Tyler mentions whether it will be 'total soccer' or 'title soccer' for the Dutch. Spain answered that question rather convincingly during the next 120 minutes of play as they put their stamp on the game. It was the Spanish 11 that demonstrated 'total soccer' that has forever been associated with Dutch football. The Dutch, in their quest of 'title soccer', failed to produce anything close to resembling the style of play that we have come to expect from the Oranje. It was a most inopportune time to produce such a haphazard performance. In each of the previous games, there was always the feeling that the next game would produce more of the Dutch quality in the game, and then when the Final rolled around, they fail to produce with their last chance.

It was the Spanish who played the 'dutch' game with fluid movements of passing and interchanging of positions. It was short, quick, crisp, meaningful passes that always landed safely on the foot of a teammate in an open 'pocket' of space. It was cat and mouse and the Dutch struggled to catch up with the passes. Positional play was also very important to the Spanish attack as they could always find a player with space on the wing, and at the right time, play a through ball to a player breaking in on goal. They defended with high pressure and forced turnover after turnover, never allowing the Dutch any chance to establish any rhythm in their buildup. The only chances for the Dutch came on the break, and then they failed to take advantage. So, it was the Spaniards who demonstrated the 'total soccer' that the Dutch had made famous in years gone by. Johan Cruyff said before the Final that Spain played more of a 'dutch' game than the Dutch themselves.

When Bert van Marwijk interviewed with the KNVB for the National Team job, he told them his goal was to win the World Cup. He knew all the history of the Dutch National teams and how they imploded over the years and he took the approach that a change was necessary to have a chance for the title. His approach yielded wonderful results as they did not lose a game until the Final. But the 'title soccer' approach only got them to the same point of disappointment that they have been before, but not beyond. So, at the end of the day, when the dust settles, it was Spain that produced the best soccer and even had Holland scored on one of their chances, it would have been an injustice to the quality that the Spanish produced, against all the recklessness of the Dutch.

On a personal note, being a staunch supporter of the Oranje, Dutch Vision and 'Total Soccer', it is extremely disappointing that they could not deliver the goods at the right moment. It is ironic because one of the biggest coaching points in the dutch philosophy is to play in the right moment - to do the right thing, in the right way at the right time to the right place. To pass the ball at the right time, with the right speed, to the right place, in the right way --- that is the basis of their play. Unfortunately, with the whole world watching, waiting and wanting to see the best of the best, they failed to hold up their end of the deal. It was a moment that could erase the emptiness of '74 and '78 and put that first star on their jersey, but to me, more importantly to show the world their quality. Maybe, when you deviate too much from makes you special, you come up short. 'Total soccer' carried them a long way, 'Title soccer' left them a bit short.