

THE FRENCH FOOTBALL FEDERATION TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD AND PLAYER SELECTION PROCESS

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This is the third article in a series that was started two years ago. Please refer to the previous articles for background information. Some items will be discussed again as things change in the world of soccer federations, curriculums and training methods. These articles can be found at www.osysa.com under the heading of coaching (“Sessions with Amie Jacquet” and “The FFF Youth development Program”). This article consists of conversations by Mr. Aime Jacquet, winning coach of the French National team during the 1998 FIFA World Championships and current FFF Technical Director, during the 2002 NSCAA Convention in Philadelphia, PA.

Roger Lemerre, the current FFF national team coach has 15 national staff coaches directly under him. These are all former professional players and over 50% of them have Physical Education degrees. This support group works with him in selecting and preparing the national team, and assists in the scouting of opponents. There are 125 coaches throughout the country working directly under these staff coaches at various levels.

The current FFF structure has the country split up into 21 regions, each with 21 support coaches. Twice a year these coaches come together at Clairefontaine, the National Training Center, to ensure they are all working on the same page and are all following the technical guidelines set down by the FFF. Together they plan the technical outline for the next year, implementing a new plan every four years for all the professional level clubs.

During this time four levels are stressed:

1. **The Coaching Schools** – This is the biggest strength the French have. Every player that comes through the French system has been or is currently coached by educators certified by French coaching schools. This ensures continuity in technical and tactical development. In order to obtain a professional license and therefore become a professional coach, an individual must coach or study in a foreign country with a club and write a research paper.
2. **The National Youth Identification Program** – Here guidelines are developed for the scouting of players for the U16, U17 and U18 national teams. Each team has three fulltime coaches, a trainer and a doctor.
3. **Youth Soccer Curriculums** – Coaching for the 6-11 year olds revolves around having fun with soccer. At age 12-16 it is more focused and the emphasis is on

technique and learning how to be a professional player. Players here train two hours daily on the techniques necessary at the top level.

“In big games, technical ability will make the difference” - Amie Jacquet.

An educator who specializes in youth soccer coaches each of these players. France is the only country in Europe that requires this certification. The best players from this group will become professional players, as the clubs know about the top players at age ten. The French are the current FIFA U17 world champions.

4. **Women’s Soccer** – two years ago the FFF opened a National Training Center based on the men’s set-up in Clairefontaine. Their U17 and U19 teams are still in qualification for the European Championships. The stated goal is to be competitive with the USA women at the 2006 FIFA Women’s World Championship.

The Technical Advisory Board and Team Selections:

For the senior national team, Roger Lemerre has three coaches; one assistant, a fitness/technical coach who also teaches licenses and a goalkeeper coach. Roger is responsible for the senior, ‘B’ and Olympic teams. The FFF feels that the Olympic team is the most important as it consists of the top young players who are their future.

The core of the 2002 national team is the same as in Euro 2000. Probably 17 of these players will remain on the 2002 World Cup roster. A new and very talented generation of strikers is now arriving on the international scene, providing more depth, and competing for the six new spots on the 23-player squad. Input from each of the 15 national staff will be in place before the selection is complete. One national staff coach is present at every league game (and most European games) in which a potential national team player is playing in. This is a different coach each time. Reports are then compiled regarding the technical, tactical, and physical states of the players as well as their behavior off the field. The lifespan of a French national team player is approximately six years.

The team comes together on every FIFA international play date. France will play at least one game per month until June in order to further evaluate the team. The players are constantly followed medically with weekly conversations with the club doctors. They are psychologically tested regularly. In this manner, the FFF can measure the progress of not only the player, but also of the person.

Each player must buy into the team policies, as the team is more important than the parts. The best players are not necessarily the most important for the team. Remember how Amie Jacquet did not pick Eric Cantona and David Ginolla for the last World Championships! In preparation for the 2002 FIFA World Cup the team will go into altitude at approximately 8000 feet to begin training, along with a recovery period from

the long European and domestic league schedules. Following this will be a one-week program at Clairefontaine and travel to Japan eight days before the opening game.

All the national staff will be working during the World Cup at the disposal of Roger Lemerre. This process allows the head coach to strictly worry about the players, tactics and upcoming match. There are very few countries that make this big an investment.

During a session conducted by former Scotland national team coach Craig Brown, several interesting observations of the development of French soccer were noted. France failed to qualify for the 1990 and 1994 World Championships. This caused the FFF to restructure their thinking and change some things within the professional soccer setup. At this time many of the top French players were leaving the country to sign lucrative contracts elsewhere. In order to ensure that young French players were being exposed to top-flight soccer, rosters were reduced to 20 players. This forced the professional clubs to develop their own players. Previously the professional clubs were not enthusiastic about the youth development schemes as it is easier to go and buy a new player than wait 10 years for one to develop. Monaco provides us with a great example of what happened. When two senior players were injured the coaches had to bring two young players up to train with the first team. The senior staff knew little about the abilities of these youngsters. Their names were **Sylvain Wiltord** and **Thierry Henry**!