

SESSIONS WITH FRENCH NATIONAL TEAM (1998 WORLD CUP CHAMPIONS) COACH AIME JACQUET, JUERGEN KLINSMANN OF THE GERMAN NATIONAL TEAM, AND ALFRED GALUSTIAN, INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR OF COERVER COACHING

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At the 2000 USYSA workshop in Philadelphia, the State Directors of Coaching participated in a two-day seminar with Mr. Aime Jacquet, winning coach of the French National team during the 1998 FIFA World Championships. During this period, Aime approached several topics concerning youth development in France.

The French Federation's youth development scheme:

In France there are 222 clubs, 40 of which are professional. The National Team Coach/Technical Director is at the top of the pecking order. He has an assistant coach who is also in charge of the B national squad. There are eleven fulltime coaches for the U-15, 16, 17, and 18 national teams. The federation maintains a fulltime National Training Center in Clairefontaine for elite players, employing eight coaches for each age group (U-12/13, U-13/14, and U-14/15).

The Federation's objective is to prepare players early for the national team program. Six sport schools nationally are used to prepare them (Zinedine Zidane, Nicolas Anelka, Thierry Henry, David Trezequet, Lillian Thurman, and Marcel Desailly all graduated from these schools). The structure of French youth development exists because of its own success. So many talented youth players go abroad to foreign clubs each year that the clubs must constantly replenish for their own teams.

Aime Jacquet is in charge of 125 coaches within 22 regions and 102 districts. Each region (and district) has a technical director and is divided into sub-regions, each with three fulltime coaches. Aime considers these three as the most important coaches. These coaches must be very intelligent and have a physical education background. Their two objectives are 1) to educate the coaches in their area, and 2) to scout talent. They go to every club to train and select the best players. The best players are then brought to the Paris National Training Center. One hundred and twenty 11-year-old players may be invited and then cut down to 20 players by the U-13 age. The 20 top players will train for two years, preparing for the first national team level (U-15). The players spend their time attending school and soccer training, living on site all week and then returning on weekends to their homes. The objective is for the best players to compete and train with and against the best. When the players win a place in the U-15 through U-18 age groups, they come into direct contact with Aime Jacquet.

Thierry Henry began his training at Clairefontaine at age 13. In interviews it is clear that he credits much of his development to the training there. Within 8 years he has become a

World and European Champion. He stressed that he learned much about the technical and tactical aspects of soccer. Henry experienced very little physical work as the emphasis was on skill work, practicing over and over again until that particular skill was learned. If he performed incorrectly, it did not matter. The emphasis was on training, and no matches were played. He feels that in this way, he was allowed to develop new skills without pressure, and then was free to try these new things on the weekends with his club team.

At age 15 the Clairefontaine coaching staff increased the pressure by emphasizing that it was now important to train harder and to play at a high level in every game with your club or you would not be invited back. The result has young French players playing all around the world in the highest level leagues and enjoying great success.

In speaking with Christian Damiano (former French National team sweeper Jean Tigana's assistant coach at Fulham) talked about Clairefontaine. Henry and Anelka arrived at Clairefontaine when they were 13 and already had good balance and coordination. They were educated before they had bad habits and for three years they did technical work. The way the coaches improved them, and the other players, is **simple. They concentrated on technique and repeat exercises many times**"

In French soccer, work the same as in school. Players go through the alphabet and they have to learn each letter because if you put them into a group it can be discouraging. Also, players are never left alone, the coach always knows where they have reached with their training.

Up until they are 16, the French work only on individual technique. The relationship is just the ball and the player to improve control touch, and passing. Players need complete control over the ball before moving on to tactics and strategies, when to pass and when not to.

If you do not have a good touch with both feet, you will waste time with your head down, worrying about the ball and the moment is lost. This thinking is central to French soccer philosophy. The size and strength of potential players is not considered important until they are into their late teens when they are built up with specific exercises for muscles used in games.

This has been the long-standing criticism on English (and American) soccer, where there has been too much emphasis on a youngster's physique, not enough on technique.

Andre Morelle, the head youth coach at Clairefontaine says that France has a very good structure for spotting talented young players and have regional coaches so they are picked up early. This feeds into the development system and it works efficiently.

The National Team:

The full National Team was together for two years in a very strict environment previous to World Cup '98. Some talented players were dropped from the squad because of team chemistry, as it was important to have all 22 players on the same page. They were able to bring several players onto the field per position with the same result in performance (Blanc for Leboeuf in the defense as an example). If any player was not happy with his role, he was dropped. Aime Jacquet deals with all the psychological areas of his national team players.

The clubs are in charge of the individual technical development of the players. Each club may have their own soccer academy and this is mandatory for each of the Division One Professional Clubs. These clubs must release their players to the federation when requested. Once a player reaches age 15 he is trained for a specific position. Prior to that, there is no positional training. The federation feels that the individual must have a lot of freedom to express themselves. The player is encouraged to deal with problems in training and in games themselves. The most important tactic stressed is the understanding of width and depth. The players are allowed to play!

There is lots of government funding for youth development since the success of World Cup France '98. When Aime was appointed the national team coach in 1994, the French Federation was in debt.

Tracking players and test and measurements:

The number one element with the tracking of players is in communication with the coaches. The players and coaches are constantly educated on what it takes to achieve success throughout the U-15 development scheme and what it takes to succeed at the professional level. The first selection to the national team takes place at U-15. In the next year 50% of those players will be gone. The players soon learn that it is good to be talented but that is not enough if they are not prepared to put in the necessary hard work.

Testing of a physical and psychological nature begins at the U-15 level. A dossier is prepared on each player hoping to show that the player will be a future national team success. Everything is computerized and the player does not have access to this information. The coach that starts with the players at age 15 stays with them throughout the 18 year program. It becomes obvious early that a player either has it or he doesn't. In this way it is easy to predict success.

The Federation emphasizes excellent communication with their coaches and players. They spend much time talking with Michel Platini (former world class superstar), Arsene Wenger (Arsenal FC head coach), and Gerard Houllier (Liverpool FC head coach), among others to receive input on what makes a player successful. Each day a meeting is held with the new national team coach Roger Lemerre. The French feel that it is their

responsibility to learn something new each day or they will become rusty. (At the end of our afternoon session, Aime was flying back to France and directly into a meeting with the national staff to analyze the previous night's match against Poland.

France's emphasis on youth development:

The federation has a calendar and program for each coach in each region to follow, ensuring continuity throughout the year. Once a year all the coaches in the country are brought together to look at last year's program and make their recommendations for the method of work for the next year.

The absolute, number one requirement in France is good **technique**. The players must spend two hours a day, five days a week on their skills. They must have the skills to play quickly and creatively. Ball mastery is stressed, this being the ability to "pass and control". French coaches also look for players with personality. Players who think of their teammates, who have team spirit as well as fighting spirit. One game a week is played with their club team. Physical play is not stressed as the players are maturing at different rates. They have very specific requirements that each club must adhere to in regard to the education of their players:

1. Respect for the players
2. Respect for the player's education
3. Respect for the player's families
4. Respect for the club team

The above mentioned regions must not be so big that the player's cannot see and spend time with their families, friends, and club teammates on a regular basis. As an example here in the U.S., it would not suffice to have Region 2 players living and training in California. When the players are training, nothing is scheduled prior to 4:00 PM due to school.

The development of coaches and a surplus of talented players:

Even though there are many talented players, the French federation sees it's most important task in the development and education of coaches. They are very specific and demanding on the training of coaches. If the coaches are well educated, they know that soccer success will follow. At the Paris training center, the federation has educated over 19,000 coaches, with the 400 best coaches being invited to the center for three weeks, twice a year. Aime Jacquet's most important job is to make sure these coaches receive information from the federation 340 days per year. They educate two types of coaches: 1) those at the professional level who deal with the stresses of winning and losing, and 2) those at the youth level which may stay for 10-15 years in the same program.

In coaching courses the coaches are given as much experience and information as possible. The coaches are placed in different situations in the field and given various topics to deal with. The emphasis is always on the individual's technique. The French

Federation feels that it is important the players are allowed freedom to express themselves. It is vital that all coaches are able to demonstrate techniques at a high level so they have the same feeling toward the ball as the youth. At the end of one week, the coaches are given a team to train and play matches with. They are assessed in all areas including psychology, pre-game, half time, etc. They feel that in order to become a high level coach, one must begin by working with youth players or they will be severely handicapped in their own developmental process. Understanding the youth process is an important part of the coaching evolution.

Psychologists are brought into the coaching course and work closely with the national team coaches to educate within the teaching of skills. The psychologists never work with the players, only the coaches

France has an abundance of talent because of the work these coaches have done. The Federation has outlined the development of all the coaches from the earliest years to the top level. They present this plan to all coaches to ensure that they are equipped with the proper information. It has taken over 40 years of work to get to the coaches to buy into this program and achieve their current level.

Women's soccer development:

Presently the level of play in France is not good. The Federation is closely studying the U.S. model of development. Two schools are currently used on the women's side, training 20 U-16 players each. Presently there are not any women's clubs. The federation's four-year goal is to host the 2006 Women's World Cup.

The federation will implement coach's education for the first time this year. It will be the same curriculum as for the men, two times a year for three weeks at a time. They will only educate female coaches because of their physical, and psychological concerns over the development of young female players

The influence and role of the player's first coach:

The early coach is the most important psychologically, helping with outside problems the player may have. All the top national team players (Zidane, Desir, Deschamps, etc.) all remember and respect their early coaches. These coaches work with the players for so many years and have such an impact, that the players frequently mention them. Juergen Klinsmann spoke of his positive memories of his first youth coaches, remembering them always smiling and reinforcing good habits. Looking back, he realizes that he was on the way to trouble and was rescued by those same coaches who provided him with good role models. The clubs use outside help for drug counseling, etc.

The development of the U-11 player is somewhat different from the U.S. The clubs divide their fields into eight sections with each section supervised by up to 20 coaches. Here all the technical aspects, especially passing the ball are worked on all day. They play lots of competitions but no have winners or losers. Over the weekends two-day tournaments are held. These competitions are 8 versus 8, or 9 versus 9, but **never** 11 versus 11. These smaller sided games provide a maximum amount of touches for each player. Up to eight matches of 15 minutes may be played depending on the age group. U-13s may play two 20-minute games per day. The French Federation feels that **one game per weekend is enough.**

There is no focus on goalkeeper training before the age of 13. After this, individual clubs begin selective training with the emphasis on the development of foot-skills, not the use of the hands. It is important that the goalkeepers are good field players. The current national team goalkeeper, Barthez is an excellent striker and midfielder. The French Federation has excellent goalkeeping schools. Former high-level goalkeepers who are educated by the Federation in able to become good teachers and role models staff these.

The qualities of a good youth coach (answered by Juergen Klinsmann and Alfred Galustian):

The contents of each training session are important, as is how the coach communicates with the players, speaking in their terms. A German professor who was with the 1990 World cup squad did a study on the stresses and pressure (parents and environment) young players go through. He surmised that children would not develop as well under these conditions as they will when they have a chance to self-explore.

A good coach develops confidence in his players through the following elements in training:

5. The content of each session should revolve around technique. The success of the team comes down to the abilities of the individual player.
1. The players should work on both the left and right feet in “unbroken repetitions”. It is important to teach about the quality of the first touch and the speed of the pass. These come under the heading of “Ball Feeling” or “Ball Mastery”.
2. Skill without speed is not effective. These elements are easy to develop together when the players are young. Age 15 is too late.

The qualities of a good coach include:

3. They must like working with kids. Some coaches only work with kids in order to get ahead. They need to be committed to the young players
1. The use of their own personality
2. A genuine passion for the game
3. Good communication and open-mindedness
4. Focusing on positive things, and using “Buzz Words”. (Juergen was told that he was a bad juggler of the ball so he learned to hate juggling).
5. Spending time teaching the parents about success and the pleasure of doing things in the correct manner. Also understanding the family environment.

The coach should understand the entire picture of their player's lives and all the distractions and possible dangers those players have outside of soccer.

6. Demonstration of good technique. This includes being able to show all the various options they have in different situations

When communicating with the player it is important that the coach shows these concerns:

7. Safety of the training topic and facility
1. Enjoyment by the player of the session
2. The proper progression of each player, making sure that the training element is not too easy or too hard. The good coach is like a good Chef, learning to mix the pastas and the sauces together in an effective manner in order to make a great meal.

Juergen Klinsmann feels the coaches in Germany are stifling the player's creativity, therefore hindering their development.

Alfred Galustian stressed that professional clubs handle the youth development in Europe and Japan. Since this includes the buying and selling of players, it does not apply to the U.S. model. In Japan all youth player development is handled by the pros. Australia may be the most similar to the U.S. model, becoming very strong at the grassroots level. They have recently developed a professional Super League and currently have over 130 players playing professionally in Europe. The U.S. grassroots development program is starting to show progress as evidenced by the fact that Landon Donovan and DeMarcus Beasley were voted the top two outstanding players by FIFA at the 1999 FIFA Youth World Championships. Alfred and Juergen both stressed that in Europe people are closed to new ideas. In the U.S., Australia, and Japan the people are more flexible and open.

Australia does a lot of work in educating the parents as to what is happening on the youth level in terms of development. Before each season and several times throughout the year the parents are educated on sportsmanship, principles of training, etc.