

'The Future Game'

Sir Trevor Brooking Speaks directly to F.C. Business as the F.A. reveals their Technical Philosophy for Player Development.

So the question is, will this document be what the F.A. hopes and could it be the catalyst to bring some harmony across the football stakeholder landscape?

By Ryan McKnight

On the day Fabio Capello faced the media to justify his thirty man World Cup squad there was a far more pressing interview going on under the Wembley Arch. Whilst the mainstream media obsessed over the 'Golden Generation's' last chance to realize their press given title, I was speaking with F.A. Director of Football, Sir Trevor Brooking about the release of 'The Future Game' document.

What will soon become a twenty three man squad, will head to South Africa and manifest the current playing ability of England's finest. Regardless of the outcome, England will return to a reality that looks thin on the ground in terms of quality players for future tournaments.

What 'The Future Game' document is, really depends on who you are. In its

simplest form it is 275 pages of text detailing a long awaited philosophy on how English players should learn, play and experience the game up to elite level, coupled with technical sessions to back up the theory. On a wider scale it is the produce (in part) of a man with sincere, honest and fair concerns about England's future capabilities to compete at international level.

"There is no doubt the game is changing. It's quicker, more tactical, the ball is in play longer, it is less about physicality and more about technique. We were/are in danger of falling behind" Brooking explains.

"There is no point hiding behind it - I am concerned about the depth of talent coming through."

Let us just ignore what 'talent' actually means for a second. Dr Richard Elliott of

the 'Lawrie McMenemy Centre for Football Research' detailed in the last issue of F.C. Business that the Premier League now plays host to 50% British players and 50% foreign players. The 50% British players of course includes 'home-grown' players and for the sakes of this particular piece Scottish, Welsh, Irish and Northern Irish players.

Although (as you'll also read in this issue of F.C. Business) there are new rules to improve that statistic from the F.A.'s perspective, what we need to appreciate is that regardless of quantity coming through at the moment, the quality simply isn't there to meet expectations at elite international level. Expectations that a self-assured (now departed) Lord Triesman laid out in the 'Vision Document' as semi-final finishes in the next two World Cups. No pressure then.

"Arsene Wenger told me that if we could

number of decades had a clear vision on the type of player they believed would meet their playing expectations and the style of football the team should apply. The England team has been at the mercy of the plethora of Managers' attitude to the game at his stage of his career rather than any 'National Style of Play' that the Brazilians and Italians hold.

"It is not like we haven't tried to do this. The 'Charter for Quality' was set up twelve years ago and in many ways this document is the findings of those twelve years and what the people within the academies and centres of excellence want to do. This isn't us preaching what we believe in its entirety, it has been a collective effort.

"This is a guideline, a blue print and a plan of what we need to do over a prolonged period (10-15 years) to produce the quality of players at sufficient quantities to compete at international level. If we are serious about developing world class players for England this is our starting point."

The document itself is a beautiful piece of polished work and has the popular backing of the likes of Howard Wilkinson. It covers all the areas on a descriptive level of what players will need to do to reach the heights of greatness but it is when it comes to implementation that the cracks appear.

"My experiences working with UEFA have given me the opportunity to see similar coach and player development guidelines. As I fully expected, The F.A. Future Game document is comprehensive, up to date and as good, if not better, than similar publications I have seen." said Howard.

It could be quite easy to fill the remainder of this magazine with the other issues that were discussed as to why this problem has arisen. Everything from young people preferring a game on the Playstation than a 'kick-about' with their mates, to the percentage of coaches in our game that are part-time compared with our European friends.

It is not for me to pontificate over the technical nuances/merits of this document from a coaching perspective (nor would it suit this magazine). I can, however, feel confident that it is well and truly a step in the right direction. The problem is it may all be for nothing.

You see, as we all know, the F.A. is broke. The after shocks of the collapse of Setanta are sadly still shuddering through the plush corridors of Wembley. Something Brooking appreciates.

"The fall of Setanta hit the F.A. hard and it has been well documented the issues it caused. What it means is that we have to look very hard now where we spend our money.

"It was a blow to lose Ian [Watmore] as him and I shared so many of the same ideas around this document and how to make the most of it."

The document is being sent to all F.A. Coaching Staff and Coaching Tutors (550 of them) as well as all UEFA pro-license coaches. In addition, each Premier League and Football League Club will be sent three copies.

At the moment, that is pretty much when the project ends, unless funding can be secured to implement the ideas, philosophies and mantra within the pages.

"Of course, we are not going to solve our developmental problems just by sending it out. We have a detail plan of how we can implement the philosophy at every club but that requires man power, resources and in turn that costs money.

"There is no doubt the game is changing. It's quicker, more tactical, the ball is in play longer, it is less about physicality and more about technique."

I can't help but feel desperately frustrated for Brooking who clearly feels he is on a financial leash. It is Groundhog Day on so many levels as 'The Future Game' plan mirrors the issues the National Football Centre has, cash!

He also accepts that it is the F.A.'s responsibility to produce the framework, template and philosophy that will lead the clubs into producing the talent to populate the national sides.

Brooking hopes investment might come from a number of sources including the Premier League and the Football League.


"At grass roots level, we have been able to work with new sponsors and generate extra funding streams. The Football Foundation have worked with the

Time bomb - Brooking recognises England's depth of quality isn't what it should be.

get English players to match his foreign buys for technical ability then he would play the English players every time because of our additional emotional qualities. But we're not there yet.

"The 2008 European Championships were a tipping point. In many ways it was good that we were not there as we could observe the likes of Spain without the distraction of worrying about our team. We saw that the days of physicality over technique have well and truly gone."

Having interviewed Brooking a few times (as well as his coaching team such as John Peacock) and having lobbied for a detailed philosophy of what the F.A. Coaching team were aiming towards, why has this document taken until now to be created? Other so-called successful countries such as Brazil, Holland, Italy and Germany have for a



Key role in producing future England players? Too right!

professional leagues on community schemes, and as we focus predominately on the 15-16 age groups in the document, any related progress should come under non-elite funding packages."

Compared to the overall finance of the Premier League we would only need a tiny percentage. Until now we haven't been able to force that discussion because we haven't produced a clear plan, but now we have."

And he is confident too (in an almost Dragons' Den style remark).

"Yes, this is a ten to fifteen year project but when people see the impact full implementation would have on the game even after a couple of years, I know people would then only want more and more of it."

Whilst I can quite clearly see the economic and moral reasoning for going to the Premier League for cash (and also for the clubs to back it) what worries me are the fundamentals of it all.

In an issue that is completely separate to Brooking's role and responsibility, we now have a situation where we are suggesting (if you agree with Brooking's concerns) that without twenty Premier League Chairman agreeing to donate some of their money to the F.A. then we all need to significantly lower our expectations of any future international success.

Brooking is brilliant in temperament at the realization of the 'barriers to entry'

of his most important document to date. "Would I like to fund this internally, of course! You have to accept that that isn't your responsibility and work around it. All I want is to be given a chance at spreading a new football culture in this country that will benefit everyone."

Brooking is not without Premier League support. Ged Roddy – Director of Youth at the Premier League – states:

"The F.A. Technical Guide provides a well written and coherent resource designed specifically for Youth Coaches who are working with potential elite players of the future."

The Football League have also given their verbal support through Graham Hawkins – Head of Player Development for the Football League Trust:

"The Football League supports the publication of The F.A.'s new Technical Guide for Young Player Development."

Brooking is happy to admit that "the Premier League will need to play a big part in this – we've got something really exciting but we need a white knight."

As I have eluded to in my Editor's Letter this issue, with co-operation in the air through the Lib-Tory coalition, if that could be extended out to some of the big and obvious topics within football, not only could it address those issues but could also keep the 'wolf from the door' in regards to a football regulator being appointed.

However, the reality states that individual clubs are in no financial

position to be giving up more of their TV revenue unless it was in line with sweeping financial regulatory efficiencies, legislation and cost savings from the current Leagues' governing bodies.

I happen to unequivocally agree with Brooking's sentiments of a demise in playing talent in this country verses our international expectations. I am also acutely aware of the now unbreakable bond between the nature of how the game is financed and the quality of players we can domestically produce.

With the fall out from damaging bribery comments made by Lord Triesman in the national press and his subsequent resignation, the future of the national game will undoubtedly come to the fore.

How this will affect 'The Future Game' and its implementation is yet to be seen, but I'm sure we all agree that a strong national side is good for everyone, how we get that on a continuous basis is still very much up for debate.

You can purchase a copy of 'The Future Game' via the FA Learning shop for £20.



www.FALearningshop.com