



Whether you're 4-4-2 or 3-5-2, SEAN CONNOR talks you through the game.....

# Coaching through the Covid Lockdown



**A**s coaches, the current lockdown situation prevents us from being in direct contact with our athletes or fellow coaches.

What is the best way then to utilise this unprecedented amount of time we have on our hands? Normally we are busy planning, evaluation, analysing and dealing directly with our athletes and staff. In the absence of these normal activities, you may find yourself feeling a lack of direction but this is a unique opportunity to improve two aspects of our coaching that often gets lost in the rush of normal time: reflection and self-education.

These are two great ways we can use this unusual time to come back to our athletes better and more knowledgeable, both about the coaching process and ourselves as coaches.

The development of expertise is a continuous process of deliberate practice (i.e., learning by doing) and education. The skills required as a coach change and develop as we progress on the journey from beginner, to competent, to proficient and eventually to expert. When you reach expert stage you never stay there for too long. With the advancement of new theories and practices, every coach at the top level is constantly vibrating between proficient and expert.

It is this process of continual learning and growth that truly high-

lights an expert coach as one who understands that his/her competencies, knowledge and skill set must be constantly updated, re-evaluated and challenged on a regular basis. Simply knowing and understanding the qualities of an expert coach is not enough to become one.

Getting to the level of an expert coach takes copious amounts of passion, experience, knowledge and an innate love for coaching. Expertise demands both experience and effectiveness, working together for maximum impact. I believe that reflection, continuous searching for new theories and practices and constant refinement of one's coaching style are the key ingredients of becoming an expert coach. The amount of time one spends in this state is fleeting, as new theories, experiences cause us to keep learning and searching.

Expert coaches must have a thorough knowledge of the sport they coach, team management, coaching principles and planning skills. An expert coach, I believe, can offer his athletes an array of methods and practices to enable them to improve their performance in all aspects of their game (technical, tactical, physical and psychological). Expert coaches are never fazed by a change in environment or context in which they operate. They understand the importance of correctly assessing problems in context and this enables them to find an appropriate solution to whatever problem they are

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This is known as backward and forward reasoning. In other words, they do not look at the obvious problem, but rather the deeper cause of the problem. As American philosopher John Dewey said: “The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning.”

Expert coaches are always looking to learn new skills new abilities within the coaching sphere. Dewey also stated that we learn through engagement with the physical learning activity.

With this in mind, the situation we find ourselves in due to the Covid-19 pandemic provides lots of time in which we can reflect on our current skill set, coaching methods and knowledge. Seek out new ideas, and not just in your own sport. Reach out, be brave and explore. There is a world of knowledge at your fingertips, only a click away on Google or any search engine. Maybe you can reach out to a fellow coach or group of coaches and start a discussion around a topic you are interested in.

Whatever it is you do, make the most of the free time we have as coaches. Be an expert coach by engaging in the process of refreshing and renewing your knowledge around the coaching process. You will benefit from it and your athletes will benefit from it. After all, the reason we got into coaching in the first place was to get our athletes to reach their full potential and if you as a coach do not seek your full potential, how can your athletes?

encountering.

As coaches we face many problems (player behaviour or motivation, effective communication, planning, delivery, equipment, etc.) An expert coach will take time in reflecting on and analysing on each problem before reaching a solution.