

Technical Dept Football Overview

(NZ Soccer Annual Report, 2002)

Paul Smalley, Director of Football

Since taking up the role as Director of football for New Zealand, life has been somewhat hectic, frantic, but with a degree of challenges awaiting us all. My approach is one of enthusiasm and positive thoughts with high expectations for the game in this country.

2002 as I understand from listening to people since I have been in New Zealand has seen yet another year of continued transition for the game, the sport and the people within it. Once again the game of Soccer has seen a continued increase in participation levels for both girls and boys. The involvement of more volunteers, parents and interested parties into the game, the development of junior clubs and schools and the emergence of a Coaching and Development infrastructure at Federation level are clear signs that the game is progressing at a quick pace.

Effecting and influencing change for the good of the game is the fundamental objective we should all be working towards. The progression of the game has seen the acceptance of the National Youth League and Women's National League concepts, the consolidation of the Southern Trust National League and the continuation of a professional club in New Zealand competing in Australia's domestic competition. Once again the National programme for academies provided a pathway and opportunity for elite performers to progress towards International Football. Also of significance was the continued success of the nationwide 'grassroots' initiative designed to have a positive impact on all soccer-playing children under the age of 12 entitled "Small Whites".

This journey of discovery poses many questions. Questions we all aim to answer in order to raise the standards of teaching and learning throughout the game. Joined up thinking and strategic planning is paramount to maintain the vast developments in the game. Therefore, New Zealand Soccer developed a long term Business Plan. Federation consultation and contributions were sought over a period of time, and then towards the end of 2002 an agreement was reached, a common purpose approach was explored and an enthusiastic stance was taken to drive the game forward into 2003.

The role of the Director of Football position is to embrace and develop specific strategies linked very closely to that Business Plan. I took the stance that an independent review was needed. In the early months consultation and deliberation was sought from all seven Federations. From that review, specific National Strategies were developed.

1. International Team Coaching
2. International Player Development
3. Coaching & Educational Scheme
4. International Talent Identification
5. Girls & Women's Football
6. Junior Club Development
7. Schools Development
8. Grass Roots Development

My approach will be to invest in and up skill people, educate people to become better at what they do, involve everyone with opportunities and set clear pathways for people to follow. Long term planning is essential to that:

- What do we want to achieve?
- Where do we all want to go?
- How do we therefore get there?

If you want to compete against the best in the world, in all directions, long term planning is crucial, investment in people, investment in facilities, investment in players and more important than anything, the investment in the coaches. What I have witnessed so far is that there is a great foundation to work from, technically equipped players, open-minded coaches, enthusiastic volunteers and suitable resourced facilities. In order to be at the forefront New Zealand Soccer will invest (sic) in a number of National Positions

- Director of Technical Development
- National Goalkeeping Coach
- National Women's Development officer
- Technical Coordinator

These positions will be charged with driving certain areas forward, with experienced people appointed who can take the game to the next level. The challenge is to discover how best to responsibly target the teaching and development programme so that individual needs can be met. Programmes have been put in place going forward to cater for both players and coaches within nationally and regionally focused development programmes. In order for us all to achieve this there is a need to enlist the support of coaches, clubs and schools to establish a clear philosophy and coherent set of protocols for teaching the young people.

Girls & Women

The importance of Girls and Women's Football in New Zealand is both crucial to the development of the game and a priority within the list of National Strategies. Without hesitation, the decision was taken to place greater emphasis on girls and women's global initiatives in New Zealand.

The 2002 international year saw the International Under-19 Women's team contest the Oceania qualifying tournament in Tonga for the inaugural Under-19 Women's World Cup Finals. The Under-19's recording four solid victories against island opposition. Samoa (10-00, American Samoa 92-0), Fiji (8-0) and Tonga (15-0, including five goals for Amber Hearn) were swept aside, but the team froze in the final against Australia, and suffered a humiliating 6-0 loss.

The inaugural FIFA Under-19 Women's World Championship of Football took place in Canada in August, with the USA defeating the host nation 1-0 in the final. Australia was ousted at the quarterfinals stage by fourth place-getters, Brazil.

Why should the USA dominate Women's Football? The answer lies in sound investment, effecting development programmes, effective pathways for the talented, experience for the elite and an investment in coaches to work with the best. NZS has plans to introduce all of these aspects to the game here.

The Women's National league is a great concept for the Women's game to receive

not only the credibility and profile it deserves, but is seen as a step in the right direction to not only have a truly National competition but also to provide an environment for Women to perform regularly, deal with the challenges and develop.

National Academies for the girls took place, with the U-14, U-16 and U-18 players coming to King's College in Auckland for the National Development Courses. The potential was there to be seen, smiling faces and a real affinity for the game. The plans for future developments are in place, increasing more opportunities for girls to get involved at National level.

Experienced and talented players performed well in 2002; Maia Jackman and Simone Ferrara sampled the professional environment during three month playing contracts in China's inaugural Professional Women's League. It is only a matter of time before other players begin to interest countries from around the world. In addition American University scholarships have provided opportunities for Rebecca Smith and Rebecca Sowden. These experiences can only raise the profile of the game in New Zealand and enhance the players International Development.

The potential for girls and women in New Zealand is huge and as yet largely untapped. I regularly compare the present achievements and climate to that of the World Champions eight years ago. The evolution of the game for girls and women in countries like China, France and Sweden has seen tremendous advances. With effective planning, a collective approach and a realisation of our potential, I can see New Zealand competing against the best.

Sitter! editorial comment:

Okay, so Paul Smalley hadn't been here long when he wrote this. But I was disappointed in his "overview". Glibly listing the likes of "junior club development" or "schools development" as "national strategies" is meaningless bollocks unless at least the kernel of the idea behind the strategy is explained. Why even announce "strategies" in an annual report if you're not going to explain them. We are no wiser as to how such strategies have changed under Smalley, or even if they have.

Far too much of this report was undiluted coach-speak waffle, and Paul needs to be taken to task for it, even if only by Sitter!.

In terms of hard information, we learned more from the spartan but at least literate "Youth Development and Academy Report" from Ricki Herbert in 2001.

Where the 2002 report did at least provide a summary was in the "girls and women" bit, though this only served to highlight the lack of a similar overview of what has been happening in men's football, by far the largest sector of the game.

If we are to review women's Oceania tournaments and national competitions in such a report, I'd argue there is a duty to do likewise for the men's, where events were arguably even more topical. Given our woeful international efforts at men's age group level in the last three years (since federations came in, actually) it's time we started scrutinising technical dept reports more closely.

Readers, particularly those with a coaching background, are invited to forward their own critique to the usual address. **-- Bruce Holloway.**