

Demands of the Modern Game

It's every young player's dream to compete at the professional level. The fame, financial benefits and lure of life as a pro drives players from diverse backgrounds to achieve this ambition. It's commonly agreed that development to professional players takes about 10 years.

A report commissioned by FIFA titled *Trends of Modern Football* outlined the characteristics of the game and the qualities modern professional players must have.

PHYSICAL PROFILE OF THE ELITE PLAYER

Average height 181cm
Average weight 74kg

Fitness profile

Speed over 10m 1.78sec
20m 2.89sec
60m 7.43sec
Vertical jump 63cm
V02 max (beep test) 60-65ml (14-15 levels)

QUALITIES MODERN PLAYERS POSSESS

- Good ball control while moving.
- Ability to shoot and play long passes.
- Strength in one-on-one situations (on the ground and in the air).
- The technical ability to adapt to the modern game, which gives little time or space.
- Ability to keep possession of the ball when under pressure.
- High level of technical and tactical understanding, mental strength and self-control.
- Attacking players are technically skilled and have a variety of ways to get past defenders.
- All players are versatile and can play a variety of positions.
- Midfielders are mobile and are attack- and defence-oriented.
- From a fitness perspective, elite players demonstrate great speed of movement, are able to repeatedly produce and recover from short and intense efforts and demonstrate muscle power.

HOW AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS RATE

It's widely recognised that Australian players are physically strong, demonstrate a winning mentality, are determined to succeed and are highly competitive. Ex-Australia coach Guus Hiddink and the current national team head coach Pim Verbeek would certainly attest to that. However, if we want to make a significant impact on the world stage there are technical and tactical challenges that face future Australian players.

HAN BERGER AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

In a response to the challenge of raising the standard of Australian players to a world-class level, current Technical Director of Australian football Han Berger and the Football Federation of Australia (FFA) have formulated a plan for player and coach development. Of the six areas identified, at the top of the list was the claim that "...technical skills are deficient in players in elite programs and competitions".

Three areas were identified:

Technical game skills:

- Attacking qualities (greater creativity).
- First touch.
- Short passing.
- Handling speed in tight areas.

Ball possession/positional play:

- Playing out from the back.
- Controlling and changing the pace of the game.
- Having a variety of attacking combinations.

Technical maturity:

- Reading the game.
- Leadership and decision-making on the pitch.
- Game cleverness/being "street smart".

WHAT WE NEED TO FOCUS ON AT DEVELOPMENT LEVEL

The win-at-all-costs mentality at development level has a negative effect. As outlined by the National Curriculum, to take our football to top level, youth development will need to focus on:

- Development instead of results.
- The skilful instead of the powerful.
- Mistakes being learning moments instead of times for punishment.
- Encouraging individual play instead of forbidding it.
- Encouraging taking initiatives/risks instead of forbidding it.
- Playing out purposefully instead of simply hitting the long ball.

MASTERING TECHNIQUES THROUGH GAME-RELATED PRACTICE

Technical practice must be linked to small-sided or game-related play. Technique development done in isolation does not develop skill or complex decision-making ability. In essence, the National Curriculum advocates improving the technical and tactical level of future Australian players within a small-sided or game-related environment.

WHY GAME SENSE IS IMPORTANT

"By using a game sense approach, players are challenged to think about what they are actually doing, and why. Players are taught to use the appropriate technique at the right time and place in the pressure situations of a game." – Australian Sports Commission

"Game sense is vitally important as it is what football is about. It teaches game awareness and decision making and improves technical ability under pressure and in tight areas." – Ante Juric, Under 13 Boys Australian Head Coach