



Skill Acquisition Program

The Skill Acquisition Program



The SAP is a nation-wide joint initiative of the FFA and the Member Federations, supported by the Johnny Warren Football Foundation.

The Skill Acquisition Program



The objective of the Skill Acquisition Program (SAP) is to identify and assemble the most talented Australian 9-13 year old boys and girls in elite programs in order to teach them perfect functional game skills

World Cup 2010 Analysis



- Superior technical / tactical qualities were the deciding factors at the World Cup, not physical qualities (possession based football and 'match winning' players)
- The Australian focus must therefore be on developing better players instead of fitter players
- This is what the National Football Curriculum is about !!



Gap A: Deficient Technical Skills



Technical skills:

- all skills required when in contact with the ball
 - the ability to treat the ball as a coordinated extension of self
-
- Strong technical skills needed before developing strong game skills;
 - Australia's top players are seen as very competitive and physically effective footballers but not praised for technical excellence (FIFA technical reports);
 - AIS, NTC and national coaches find the players they receive weak on technical skills;
 - Current Australian football environment does not lead to development of strong technical skills;
 - Australia cannot produce a significant number of world class footballers until it is world class in developing technical skills, that persist under pressure, in its young players (while preserving their current strengths).

World's best players start developing skills at a young age.

Why the Skill Acquisition Program?



- In Australia there is still too strong an emphasis on results at too young an age.
- Therefore generally the biggest, strongest and fastest kids are being identified instead of the most talented ones.
- Although winning is the purpose of a game of football, the manner and importance differs per age group.



Why the Skill Acquisition Program?



- At the younger ages, youth development should focus on teaching children the skills to win a game of football 'the proper way'
- At the world's top level the most skilful players decide the games, not the biggest, strongest and fittest!



Rationale



The Skill Acquisition Program is about:

- Specialized age appropriate coaching
- The BEST with the BEST
- Short-term losing but long term winning
- Development over results
- Developing match winning players for Australia
- The “BIG” picture:

**Becoming a World
Leader of the World
Game**

The National Curriculum



13

age

9

Skill Acquisition Phase

- Providing the necessary technical 'tools' to be able to play the game at the highest possible level.
- Focus on FUNCTIONAL GAME SKILLS (as opposed to 'tricks')
- This is THE most decisive age group for acquiring the appropriate technical foundation (the 'Golden Age' of motor learning)
- FFA Skill Acquisition Specialists are being trained and appointed to prepare the most talented players in every State & Territory.

How to develop talent?



Study by Anders Ericsson:

“If you want to become an expert in your field, be that art, sport or business – you can. Contrary to popular belief, it’s not always innate genius or talent that will make you a success but the hours that you put in”



Golden Years of Learning (Wein)



- People that teach players between 10-12 years old have a rewarding field of operation.
- At this stage of their childhood, youngsters are in the 'golden age of motor learning'
- A sum of favourable conditions exist in their biological, psychological and motor spheres.



What does this mean for coaches?



At this stage of the young players evolution, their teachers must make a transition from ...

- simply presenting a great variety of multilateral and specific football activities, to ...
- preparing a more systematic, intensive and purposeful practice of technical- tactical aspects of the game.



How NOT to do it!



Research on Talent Development



- Parental behaviour may be crucial to talent development through: encouragement, the provision of opportunities, expectations and financial support.
- The low number of 'master' coaches and the lack of facilities may be constraints.
- The quality of practice is more important than the quantity. Training should be guided by research and developed through the consideration of developmental and sport specific factors.

*Parental behaviour
crucial to talent
development*



Research on Talent Development

- The motivational environment is crucial in allowing players to develop their full potential.
- The influence of parents and coaches on the motivational environment is high.

Allow players to develop their full potential

Research on Talent Development

- It is important for young players to develop in an atmosphere that encourages fun and motivation which will lead to a committed involvement.
- Research suggests that a moderate level of parental involvement is best to promote the interests of the child but there is little in-depth information on how families create a positive environment to initiate and maintain life long sport participation.

*Positive environment
is crucial*

What to teach?



The Functional Game Skills:

- Running with the ball
- First Touch
- Striking the ball
- 1 v 1 (defending and attacking)



Skill Acquisition Phase

What to teach?



Demonstration

➤ Repetition

➤ Challenging and game related:

- With football specific resistances
- With a TIC:
- In football Technique, Insight and Communication are distinguishable but not separable



Skill Acquisition Phase

Football Specific Resistances

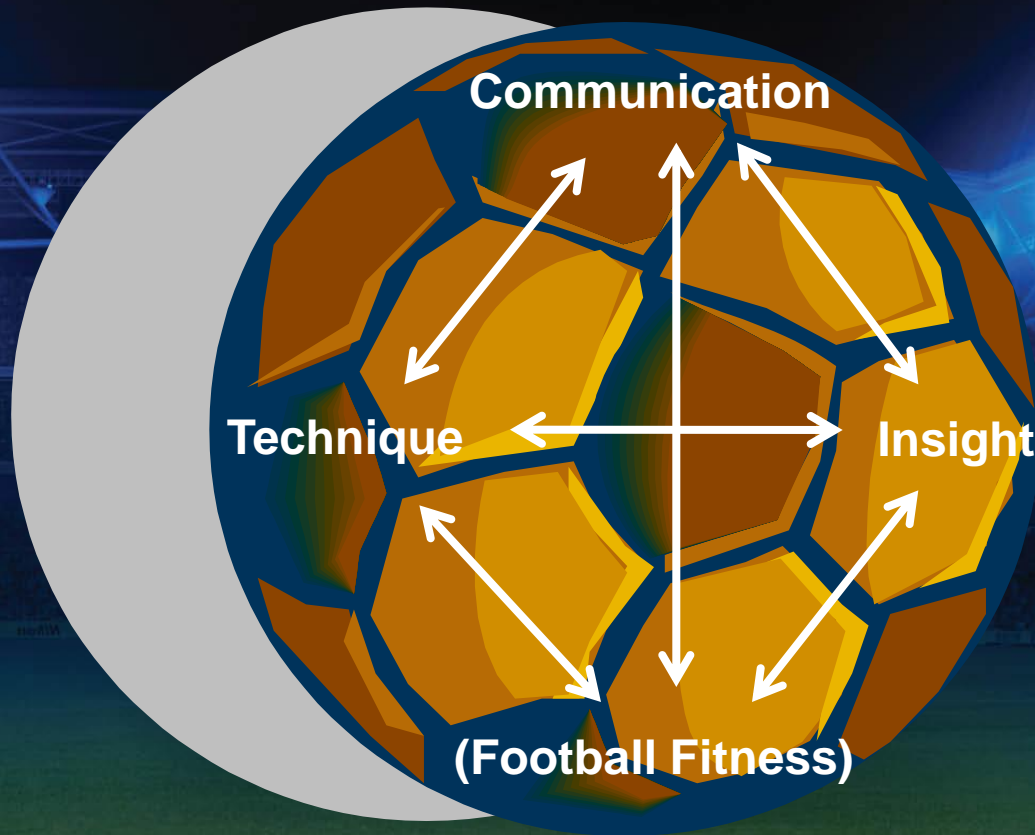


- The Ball
- Opponents
- Team mates
- The rules
- Direction
- Space and time
- Score
- Environment (field, climate, etc.)
- Crowd (parents!)



Skill Acquisition Phase

With a 'TIC'



“In football Technique, Insight, Communication (and Football fitness) are distinguishable but not separable”

The Curriculum Building Blocks

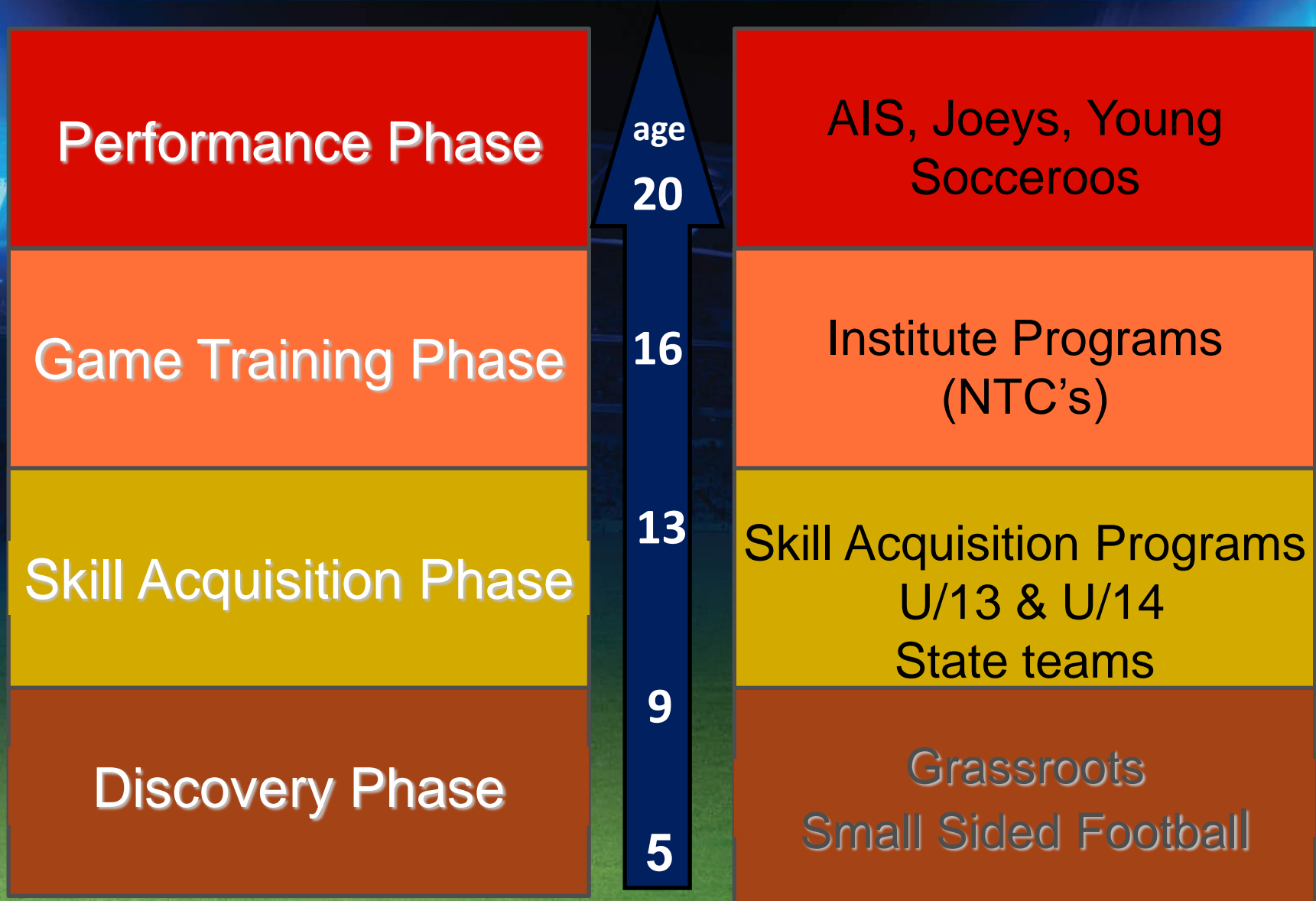


The Building Blocks methodology is the framework that provides the practical guidelines for coaches working at all levels of youth development.

The Curriculum Building Blocks



The Curriculum Building Blocks



The Curriculum Building Blocks



SAP Format



The preferred SAP format has 2 levels:

Level 1: 'Foundation'

Talented U/10-U/12 boys and girls are being identified and prepared. These programs should be non commercial and open to every talented kid (no financial 'thresholds').

Level 2: 'Skilleroos'

The very best U/13 year olds train and play under the guidance of FFA Skill expert coaches in a year round, free of charge Elite program.

The Skilleroos are the pinnacle of the SAP

SAP Format



Players that are selected for the Skilleroos program play as a team in local competitions during the weekend.

Parents of selected Skilleroos players are required to sign agreements which entails:

- **A code of conduct**
- **Prohibition of 'agent involvement'**
- **Prohibition of participation in other programs**
- **etc.**

The Skilleroos are the pinnacle of the SAP

How to identify a talented player?



Is talent measurable?

Are there test protocols?

Or is it just the expert's eye?



How to identify a talented player?



The separate components are probably 'testable' but:

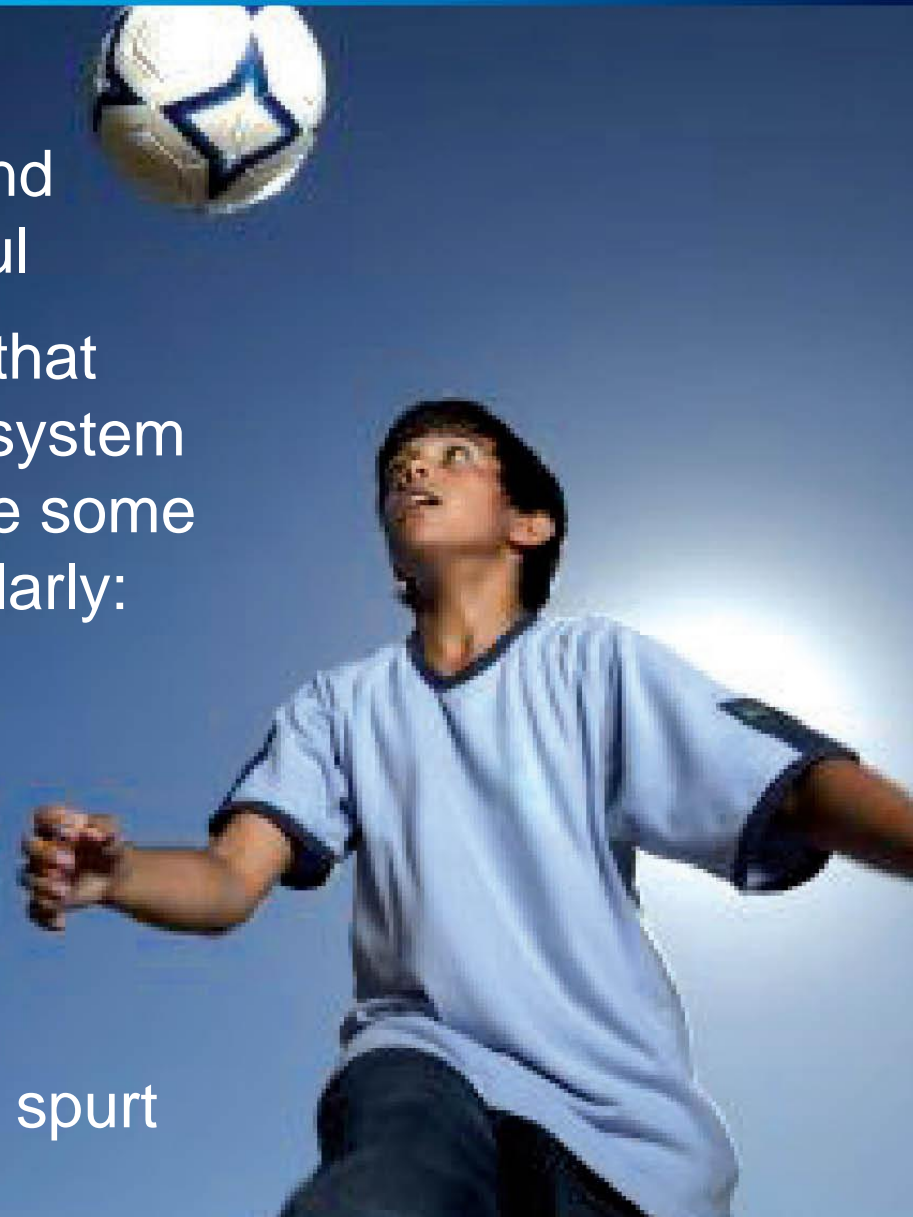
By isolating parts from the total context they lose their significance, in other words, the football structure is lost.



FFA's Position on Talent ID



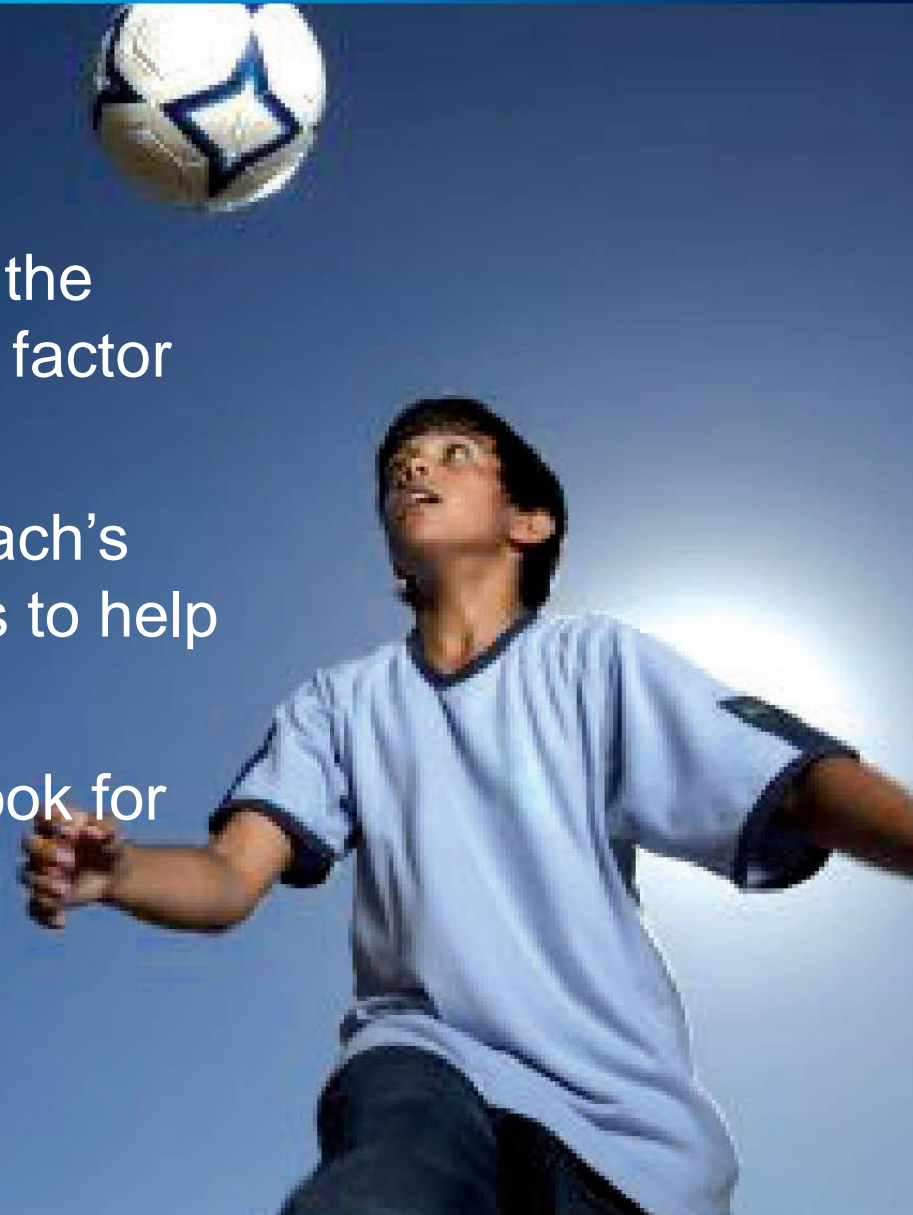
- The value of scientific and objective tests is doubtful
- The evidence suggests that nobody has the perfect system of talent ID, but there are some criteria that appear regularly:
 - Ball skills
 - Physical qualities
 - Decision-making ability
 - Other mental qualities
- Physiological tests are questionable pre growth spurt



FFA's Position on Talent ID



- Research suggests that the 'coach's eye' is a critical factor in Talent Identification
- We have to educate 'coach's eyes' to give useful tools to help in decision making
- The wrong 'eye' might look for the wrong things!



What to identify



- **Running with the ball**
- **Striking the ball**
- **First touch**
- **1 v 1**
- **Two footedness**
- **Agility, balance and coordination**
- **Game understanding and cleverness**
- **Ability to learn and be coachable**
- **Eagerness and perseverance**



Player Assessment



Name: Lionel Messi

E

A

D

remarks:

Running with the ball

X

Striking the ball

X

First touch

X

1 v 1

X

Hog!

Two footedness

X

Agility, balance and coordination

X

Game understanding and cleverness

X

Ability to learn and be coachable

X

Eagerness and perseverance

X

Xavi interview in the Guardian



“I like the fact that talent, technical ability, is valued above physical condition now. I'm glad that's the priority; if it wasn't, there wouldn't be the same spectacle. Football is played to win but our satisfaction is double.”



Xavi interview in the Guardian



“Talent has to be the priority. Technical ability. Always, always. Sure, you can win without it but it's talent that makes the difference.”



Xavi interview in the Guardian



“Have you seen [the Villarreal winger] Santi Cazorla? You think I'm small, he's up to here on me [Xavi signals his chest]. And yet he's brilliant. Messi is the same and he's the best player in the world.”



Xavi interview in the Guardian



“Maybe it's the culture, I don't know, but in England you're warriors. You watch Liverpool and Carragher wins the ball and boots it into the stands and the fans applaud. There's a roar! They'd never applaud that here.”



The Skill Acquisition Program



It is easy to produce ‘big’ statements such as ...

‘becoming a World leader of the World game’

and

‘strive to win the FIFA World Cup’

But if we are really serious about achieving these lofty objectives, we must start doing things more effectively in order to produce the necessary changes and improvements.

Everybody is ‘talking’ about taking the game to the next level but only by appropriately developing young (potentially) exciting players we can make this possible.

**That is what the
Skill Acquisition
Program is all
about**

Together for the future
of FOOTBALL



Thank you