

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE LAUREANO RUIZ SOCCER ACADEMY

Vince Lombardi said and sadly many repeat it and believe it to be the mantra of youth sports that: "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." With these views it is not surprising that during practices and games, sometimes the desire to win makes players become angry, grumpy, manifesting their disgust against opponents, referees and even their OWN team mates, coaches and their parents. Thus during games and practices this erroneously adapted attitude turns the game and practices into a dull, boring, rough, on edge encounter without any glimmer of quality.

If however; during play the players concentrate on, playing with courage and fighting spirit, bravery, fantasy, intelligence and sense of improvisation, chances are that a really excellent game will develop, which will in the end provide a lot of joy and great satisfaction.

In short, players at the camp and under my tutelage ingrain it in your minds; then express it: The more quality you play with the greater the enjoyment. And if a goal or a great play is realized, this is the closest thing to happiness. And achieving happiness on the field must be your greatest goal and not just winning the match.

SOCCER AND OUR METHOD

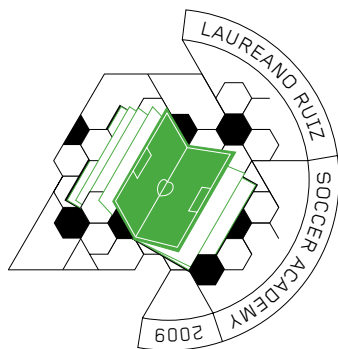
The game of Soccer was born in 1883 but as such it was a brutal and violent one where during games many fractures occurred which included broken, legs, arms, ribs, jaws because players were allowed to hit each other any which way they pleased. Naturally very few people wanted to participate in such brutal sport.

Very much later, around 1930 to eradicate the aforementioned violence the rules of the game were changed and little by little the game transformed into a more technical, creative and skillful affair.

But much is known about the history of the game there is very little known about the development of youth soccer. Even though the soccer playing giants at that time such as Hungary, Brazil, Italy, Spain, Argentina, and Uruguay all had professional leagues and teams none of them had youth teams or put any emphasis on youth soccer development. All the children played on the streets in many cases bare foot using a rag-ball. Throughout the soccer playing nations youth soccer development really took place and cemented in the past 20-30 years.

Before this clubs did not pay their youth coaches, some because they couldn't some because they wouldn't, therefore, the great majority of those who were great coaches of youth soccer and were passionate about the game could not dedicate the time needed for their passion and remained in their professional vocation in order to earn enough money to support themselves and their families. On the other hand those that remained in the game took great passion in imitating the drills and training of the professionals, which is the greatest mistake with regards to youth soccer. How will young boys and girls learn to play? The answer is; the way we learn everything from piano to Spanish and that is by methodical practice and constant repetition. But one thing has to be clear that to play great individually, and above all collectively, is much more difficult than playing a Chopin etude or speaking the language of Cervantes.

The greatest confusion, even today is that a player is born! Although this is only true for 1 to 2 % of all players in the world the reality is that a player is made and not born! "Expert coaches" and "Premier Clubs" put much



emphasis on physical make up, height and weight and physical conditioning. I say that a soccer player's knowledge and capacity should never be based on their physical condition and make-up. A chubby boy, little and big-bellied, using one leg and with no heading ability can become a great soccer player. With such poor physical make-up and conditioning players such as, Puskas, Gento, Platini and Maradona have gone down in the history of soccer as the best players ever. What were their qualifications? Their sense of play, their understanding of themselves, their football intelligence was the key to their success. Because you can have a greatest physical build, a great control of the ball and still not know how to play the game of soccer.

THE METHOD

I had the great fortune and honor to dedicate my whole life to soccer. Unfortunately the lack of good teachers today still makes them only apprentices to the game and not bona-fide coaches, although based on experience and many years of work and cooperation with the last great living European youth soccer maestro and ex-coach of FC Barcelona, Mr. Laureano Ruiz, I have perfected a METHOD for teaching the game of soccer.

The Method is based on 4 levels or phases and 5 "less" principles. The "less" refers the least appropriate measures taken when playing the small sided games: fewer fields, fewer players, less playtime, fewer balls and goal keepers.

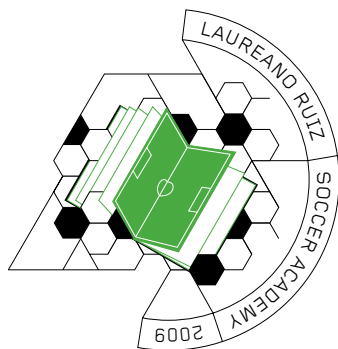
With regards to the sense of play with reference to logical ability and intelligence my method has the following levels or stages:

1st Learn how to play with the ball (size3 ball. 8-10 years old)

So, the players learn to dribble and control also run with the ball and be able to shield it if somebody wants to rob them of it. The game is absolutely individual as at this stage we want dribbling, dribbling and more dribbling of the ball. Many coaches at youth level forbid their players to dribble and compel them to just kick and or worst "just boot" the ball. Incredible but true, it is as if trying to teach a bird how to fly but clipping its wings before the process. (In soccer the wings are passing and dribbling)

Our method and my teaching is based on teaching the ability to control the ball, to run with it, when the opponent approaches have the ability and intent to beat this opponent by using fakes and dummies, and also teach the movements that are conducive to better, balance, breaking, changing of direction..... and all of these aspects are present in the small sided games. At this stage I do not like one touch, or even tell the players to raise their heads, to use both feet - these new players, apprentices really, have a hell of a time playing with their good foot, let alone using their weaker one. Let's not pretend that they are able to do what the older players do. That time will come through good training but it is not here now at this stage.

For all the above reasons at this stage the players are forbidden to kick the ball away or boot it up field. Doing so is very easy but this way the players will never learn how to play. A clear example of this futility and waste of time is to use the regulation goals. It is clear that any kid can boot the ball into it and many goals are scored during such a session or exercise but not one child will learn how to play doing so. On the other hand, introducing small



goals, asking players to go forward, dribble and engage and fake out the keeper will make them gain great knowledge and will arm them with great ability.

They need to be playing on small fields, not to make great physical effort, as this is very harmful to boys and girls at this age, teams must be composed of fewer players – 3 vs. 3 is the ideal – so that every one of them gets involved and can not hide during play. This is how they constantly learn and improve. However, if the game at this age is played 11 vs. 11 the great majority of the players on the field will never see the ball and/or choose to hide away in the forest of legs following it. This practice would inhibit their ability to learn anything about the game never mind improving their quality of play.

With the small sided games the children learn the fundamental elements of soccer movements such as runs, sudden stops, change of direction and so on. Combined with learning how to manipulate the ball these movements will familiarize all the children with the correct way to compartmentalize and progress in their learning of the game. Also the ground, rebounds and the understanding of spherical concepts (the round ball and its spin direction), they are taught to judge situations, distances, and the laws of impact. In other words to make and keep the children happy we involve them into the small sided games as quick as possible. This game will prove highly pleasurable, appealing and exciting, as the players: dribble and beat opponents and score goals. This tendency, really innate, takes place in all countries and continents, so that even coaches can have the pleasure to very easily enjoy and derive joy from the game of soccer.

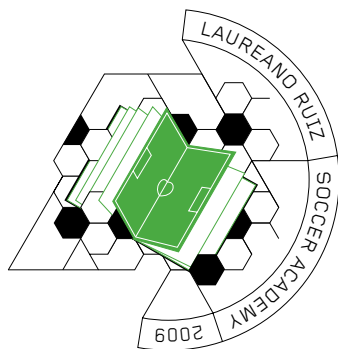
2nd Learn to play with teammates

(Training is carried out with a size 4 ball. 11-14 years old)

None of these children have yet (at this age) conquered the instruments of mutual understanding and they do not yet understand the concept of the self discipline and rules of reciprocity; as they believe that they are at and the center of the universe, both socially and physically. However; gradually, thanks to the coexistence and interaction with other children, they get over themselves and gain awareness of reality. Thus the children discover their personalities and that of others, while losing their ego trip. This phenomenon never occurs in children less than 10 years old.

Therefore; during the first phase the children were all totally egocentric, and there are many coaches who want to change that to find that this is a complete waste of time. I find that many coaches lose this important time to work on all the individual aspects of the game such as control, and technical ability. This is what I do at this age with children under my care. Now is the time to start the collective game, but not forgetting the individual, with strong emphasis on perfecting ball control, dribbling and feints and dummies. Yes, it is true a shot can be a goal as well as a pass. But if the control is defective, there is no pass or there will be no shot. Turning to Defend (dodge), when my team loses the ball, try to approach the opponents goal through passes between the players, to finally finish off with a goal. But many times, the opponent makes it very hard to pass and shoot. This is the time when the opponent must be taken on and attacked by dribbling at them and using feints and dummies to open up space and make the attack more positive. Once this is deployed, everything changes, clear lanes for passing will open and avenues will be available for shooting on goal.

At the same time the collective game commences, which prevails in to the magical world of passes, the sense of unity, astuteness, cunning and deceit in movements.



But at the end of this phase players will understand that the pass is king. Especially serendipity the feel and will to do the unexpected, is encouraged and sought for. At the end of this phase players will realize that making a superb pass to a teammate in the opponent's box where the defenders are caught by surprise and baffled is much better than taking the defenders on. Also, at this phase the players will understand that teamwork and aspects of teamwork also trumps dribbling such as dispersion (where our team draws one to several opponents into a false position) in order to make a killer pass to a teammate who has unexpectedly turned up in a position not expected by the defense.

3rd Learn to overcome the opposition posed by opponents (Regulation size 5 ball. 15-16 years old)

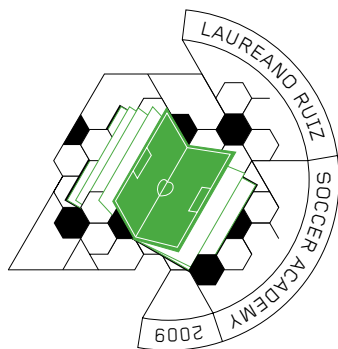
Many players who excelled at the previous two levels – managed the ball to perfection and understand the "logic" of the game – now think that they are complete soccer players, when in fact they still have a long way to go and much to learn. Talented writers always come through their work. Also this is true of talented painters. But in the game of soccer, a very talented player with great capacity in understanding the game and develop in it has to understand and overcome the opposition of opponents who in fact are all trying to remove him from his game. There are many players at this level who render themselves incapable of anything although they have great quality because their opponents displays more courage, bravery and physical conditioning.

An outstanding soccer player must "know", "love", and "want" to play this game. The players I refer here, "know" but the question is do they "want" to play? If asked they say yes, and that they give their utmost effort. But the reality is quite different. They are comfortable, have the "good enough" mentality and easily surrender to strong opposition.

We should not forget that these qualities such as courage, bravery, eagerness to produce, and concentration etc. can be inculcated and developed in these players. In the previous levels these boys constantly played, games, small sided games and rounds etc. and elevated their capacity and knowledge of the game. However; they have also developed some defects. They make their learned technique unilateral and they for example don't know how to shoot with the inside of the instep, are still lacking control of the ball from the air under pressure with – head, chest, thigh....-, here all domination is lost and they are "zero's" in aerial play and always hold on to the ball for the sole reason of the joy of the dribble losing the ball a majority of the time.

To correct these deficiencies, we devote this level of practice time, and include them in the "small sided games", to correct and perfect those gestures and techniques, that we have cited that, can not be mastered simply by just playing. Also, coaches at this level especially should continually suggest that players also train on their own and get used to self-training.

We still emphasize the dribble. In the history of soccer the extraordinary players such as; Puskas, Pele, Di Stefano, Maradona, Cruyff, Ronaldinho, Robinho, Ronaldo, Messi ...- were and those still alive and active are outstanding dribblers. So we should insist at this level to achieve the mastery of the players mentioned. Practicing and practicing, it is possible as I have seen in many young people. However, I was unable to teach adult players and for that matter professional players, learn how to dribble and/or feint. They tried, they repeated, but none succeeded.



**4th. Improve the reading of the speed of play and learn the hidden (occult) ways of using arms, shoulders, elbows and hands.
(17-18 years old)**

We understand as reading of the speed of play or gestural speed, the speed of analysis of the situation, the ability to decide quickly, the pace at which you receive or play the ball and also the promptness with which you perform the dribbling, passing and shooting, before the pressure of space and / or opponents.

Given the current speed of soccer - tight spaces, an increased pace of play, increased activity of opponents, and so on, - most actions are performed under severe pressure, so the players needs to increase their acceleration and improve their ability to read and understand the speed of play.

However, when the players begin their learning, they should be learning technical gestures correctly, without worrying about the speed with which they are running. Once they succeed they will gradually increase the speed of execution. We will do this with very specific training, based on swift maneuvers with the ball (spinning, la cuchara, sudden change in direction, acceleration, movement in limited small spaces ...)

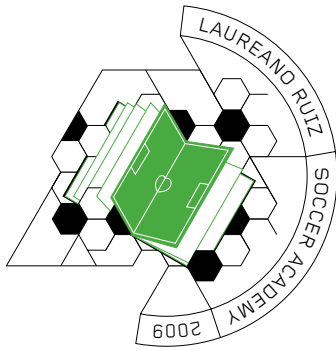
Speed of execution in the box is a crucial element in any great player's arsenal. Once an attacker receives the ball in the area the ideal is that they know what they should do with it. If so, you need an interval to record the general location: two tenths of a second to observe the situation of rivals, one tenth of a second to glimpse where your teammates are and another tenth of a second to send the ball. If the player is unable to carry out the move in these times - although the cast does well against weak opponents - will NEVER become a professional player. At the same time at this increased speed during training, the players must learn to play using their trunk/torso and arms. In a professional game, even scholars of the game perceive the quality and tactical movements of the game, but this very important game - the so-called "hidden, occult-football" - nobody will notice.

Because professional footballers have a series of plays, which use tricks - legal and illegal - that the referees seem to ignore. I've known many young players with great qualities in the game of soccer, who in their ascension came to play against professional players and then their big game disappeared, unable to beat a rival who underwent overlapping shifts with holding with the hands and a clear hidden interposition of the arms. Unfortunately; these "great players" never reached the elite. The players, who reach this level, must understand that, besides talent, quality and skill needed to fight shoulder to shoulder, arm to arm and sometimes body against body, the physical contact is excessive and a player must train repeatedly using exercises that teach them how to overcome or avoid the trickery and the pressure from opponents. During practices, players mark their opposition, they are gripping, pushing, hitting and sometimes are brought down sharply and violently. It is for this reason that young people must protect the ball "with everything" - trunk, hands, arms, elbows ...- and evade opponents to complete their move successfully.

And finally

We end this briefing with two very important ideas.

The bases of learning:



- Learn how to dribble.
- Learn how to pass.
- Learn to play.
- Learn to shoot.

(Understand that a player can shoot very well, but if he can not play well during the game he will never find the best position nor the opportunity to put it on goal and score a goal.)

Sport Psychologists have demonstrated that mental training should not be performed until players master the technical movements and sense of play. That is, when they are ready "to be" players.

Attila Nyiri

President of The Laureano Ruiz Soccer Academy