

2007 WNT Programs
Completing the American Soccer Player
The Modern International Game

USA Strengths

Recently, in international play, the US National team has distinguished itself, and achieved victory on the international stage. Since 1991, the team has distinguished itself by having a unique blend of soccer savvy individuals who also were superior athletes, and dominated in the area of mental toughness. These traits have been consistent since victory was achieved in 1991.

However, recently, the rest of the world has caught up, and some have surpassed us in these categories. In particular, Brazil's team is characterized by superior athleticism in comparison to the United States. In addition, Brazil, along with other countries, surpass the United States in relation to technical competence and tactical understanding of the game.

USA Future Success

In order to achieve continued success in the international arena, the United States needs to focus on developing skillful, "soccer savvy" players. These two areas are falling behind in comparison with the other top soccer nations. This must be accomplished while maintaining the athleticism and mental toughness of the players.

American Player Profile

The following chart represents where we stand in our development as a soccer nation. As can be seen, there is a huge variance among the current and developing players in the tactical and technical areas. As a whole, we can not be characterized as a "technical" or "tactical" team.

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Potential</u>	<u>World Ranking</u>
Physical	80 → 95 %	Top 3
Mental	60 → 80%	Top 3
Technical	20% → 75%	5 th → 10 th
Tactical	20% → 75%	5 th → 10 th

Our Challenge is to develop players that are:

- Technically Gifted
- Tactically Sound
- Composed
- Creative
- Risk Takers

- “Own the Game”, are focused on solving the problems that the game presents themselves, instead of primarily thinking about coach imposed solutions to the game.

Evolving Coaches → Evolving Players

In order to affect change on the players a shift in coaching methodology may need to take place. The development of creative, intuitive players is greatly impacted by coaching style and demands.

When conducting training sessions, there needs to be a greater reliance on game centered training that is player centered and enables players to explore and arrive at solutions while they play. This is in contrast to the “coach centered” training that has been the mainstay of coaching methodology over the years.

Topically, there needs to be an emphasis placed on:

- Final 1/3 Skills
- Final 1/3 Tactics
- Team Defending
- Fitness in the game.

Game Centered Training Defined

“Game centered training” implies that the primary training environment is the game as opposed to training players in “drill” type environments. This is not to say that there is not a time for a more “direct” approach to coaching. At times, players need more guidance and direction as they are developing. However, if the goal is to develop creative players who have the abilities to solve problems, and interpret game situations by themselves, a “guided discovery” approach needs to be employed.

This approach taps in to certain essentials that are always present within the team. Players want to play and enjoy playing the game first and foremost. Since the “game” is used in training, this allows for players to be comfortable with the pace, duration, and physical and mental demands that the game provides. The reason why the players play is because they enjoy the game. They have a passion for the game. This is where they find and express their joy and creativity.

Games vs. Drills: a comparison

Game

- This is what the players actually face during competition. It is 100% realistic.
- Therefore, the players are more competent at transferring what they have learned in training to the game itself.
- Game Experience = 100% of Training Time

Drills

- Many “drills” are not realistic. Therefore, players find it difficult to transfer the things learned in “drill” environments to the game itself.
- Game Experience = ?% of Training Time
- This is not to say that “drills” that closely replicate one aspect of the game should not be used in training. Dynamic, demanding, “drill” environments, used at the beginning of the training times, often prepares the players to play the game as it breaks down the more complicated “picture” that the game provides in to manageable pieces. However, care must be given to making sure that the “drill” is active, and mirrors the demands found in the game.

Continuous Play in Training

- Reflects the real game
- Demands rhythm. The players can not go “all out” for an entire 90 minute stretch. They need to know how to control the rhythm of the game so that they can last the entire time.
- Demands focus. Players must stay focused for lengths of time, just like they need to do during the game.
- In order to have continuous play during training, the coach must coach “in the flow” of the game, and not interrupt play with stoppages to make coaching points.

Feedback on the Field

- Coaching “in the flow” provides immediate feedback for the players.
- Feedback applies to the real game and is therefore directly beneficial to the players.
- Allows Continuous Play.

Brazilians

The Brazilians have always been noted for their touch, creativity, dynamic and instinctive play. Their individual brilliance with the ball sets them apart from the rest of the world. Allowing for uninterrupted play during training times helps to develop these characteristics in the players. These characteristics are learned on the “streets”, without the guidance or even presence of a coach. This opportunity must be provided for the players as the prevailing culture in our society does not find players seeking out these opportunities on their own.

Fitness in the Game

Having said that we need to develop the creative side to the players, we must be careful not to ignore the physical dimension as well. Can we do both at the same time? Yes, if we choose the correct coaching methodology.

Use of the “games approach” to training can also be beneficial towards impacting the player’s fitness.

Using small sided games (4v4 → 6v6) can greatly improve fitness with adherence to the following parameters:

- High Intensity 90 – 100% Capacity

- Intervals 4m/5m
- Repetitions: 4 → 10 (Start Low)
- Measured: Heart Rate Monitors
- Benefits: Playing Soccer
- Vary the “rules” of the game in order to impact the fitness demands (eg: all players must be in the attacking half of the field in order for the goal to count. If a goal is scored before all defenders are in their defensive half, then the goal counts double)

Player Centered Training

Which type of player do we produce?

- Structured or Instinctive
- Coach Dependent or Independent
- Carries out Instruction or Solves Problems
- Thinks about the Coach or Thinks about the Game

Roles Defined:

Coach's Role

In the player centered approach:

- Focus is the Player
- Creates a challenging game environment
- Provides options
- Asks players what they think
- Develops Players

In the “command style”:

- Focus is the Coach
- Creates exercises and directs session
- Provides solutions
- Tells players what to think
- Develops Clones

Player's Role

In the player centered approach:

- Primarily learn from playing the game
- Focus = Playing
- Solve Soccer Problems

In the “command style”:

- Primarily learn from the coach
- Focus = Coach's Expectations
- Execute coach's direction

The Goal:

The goal of all of this preparation is to produce players that:

- Are instinctive
- Are creative
- Take initiative
- Expresses individuality
- Thinks independently
- Understands options
- Solves problems
- “Owns the game”

TECHNICAL NEEDS:

What follows is a list of technical needs that have been derived from observations of National Team players playing at the Senior and Youth National Team levels:

- Receiving and Solving Pressure Individually
- Passing (Full “Bag of Clubs)
- 1v1, Dynamic Attacking Players
- Flank Service
- Finishing

Solving Pressure Individually: (Brazil)

- Receiving
 - 1st Touch
 - Next Several Touches to Free Player from Pressure
- Training: Small Sided Games Requiring Multiple Touches in Tight Spaces

Passing → Penetration: (Germany)

- Types of Passes:
 - Chipped
 - Bent
 - Driven
- Training: Small Sided Games with Restraining Lines (5 v 5 + 2)
- Training: 11 v 11 with Restraining Lines 30 Yards from each Goal
 - Must Penetrate Restraining Line with a Pass

1v1 → Penetration: (Brazil)

- Developing Instinctive 1v1 Players – Brazilian Street Soccer
 - Small Sided – Small Goals

- Even Numbers
- Tight Spaces
- Unlimited Touches

Flank Service: (Norway)

- Types of Flank Service
 - Driven Low → Near Post
 - Driven High → Center or Back Post
 - Chipped to Back Post
 - Curled behind back four and bending away from the goalkeeper
 - Pulled Back → 12 and Near Post
- Training: Repetitions to each specific spot
- Flank Play Games

Finishing: (Germany, Sweden, Norway)

- Placement Finishing: Bending, Chipping, Volleys
- Types of Finishing
 - Breakaways
 - 1 Touch from Flank Service
 - 1 Touch in a Crowded Penalty Box
 - Shots > 18
- Finishing a Higher Percentage of Shots

Tactical Needs

Attacking Play:

- Possession vs. Penetration
- Counter Attack
- When to Play Direct vs. Indirect
- Reading the Opponent's Numbers
- Making Decisions regarding Direction and Speed of Play

Penetration in the Final Third:

- Attacking Diversity:
 - 1v1
 - Combination Play
 - Penetration Passing
 - Flank Play
 - Endline Service
 - Early Service
 - Shots > 18
- Training: Games with Restraining Lines: 18-35 yards from Goals

Team Defending:

- Individual defending w/in team concept
- Zonal defending
- “Pressing”
- Variety of lines of confrontation

FITNESS PHILOSOPHY

- Physical dimension remains a strength of this country and can not be ignored. The rest of the world is catching up with us, or, in some cases, have even surpassed us.
- Critical Component of the Game.
- Will continue to have an impact on player selection but no more than technique, tactics or mentality.
- We need to change the “perception” that our primary focus for selection is fitness.

FITNESS TESTS

The following fitness tests will be used by the senior national team.

- Beep Endurance Test (US Men’s Team) More closely related to Aerobic Capacity
- 20-40 Sprint
- Vertical Jump
- T Test (Agility)
- Flying 200

Tests will help us provide feedback to players regarding their development

PLAYER SELECTION

Breaking the characteristics of players in to the following four components remains a helpful way of evaluating players as it helps organize our thoughts and approach.

- Athletic
- Technical
- Tactical
- Mentality

PLAYER SELECTION

Players that embody a “special quality” in one or more of the four areas listed above are able to have an impact on the international stage. This is not to say that there can be glaring deficiencies in the other areas. Rather, the player must be competent in all areas, but able to provide a “special” quality in at least one other area in order to be able to compete at the international level.

Examples of the special qualities of players can be found below:

- 1v1 defending: Markgraf
- Heading, Ball winning, possession: Boxx
- Goal Scoring: Wambach
- Final Passing: Wagner

Summary:

As we look towards to maintaining our highest standing in the international game, we must keep developing as a soccer playing nation. The stakes are getting higher, and the competitive level more intense. More countries are now providing the resources necessary to advancing the women's game. In order to continue to be able to compete, we must constantly be looking for ways to improve and advance. Hopefully, the thoughts listed above will help us to continue to achieve our goal of staying at the top of the game internationally.