

## THE FUNCTION OF A TEAM ORGANIZATION/FORMATION

“Youth coach: be ready for the future!” This was the theme for the National Coaches Day hosted by the KNVB (Royal Netherlands Soccer Association) a few years back. One of the workshops was conducted by Ruud Dokter and Albert Stuijvenberg, coaches of the Dutch U16 and U17 national teams. They raised the issue that perhaps young players have a lack of freedom and play too task-oriented. Do (talented) youth players get enough opportunities to develop themselves? In this article we will take a closer look at that.

In the Netherlands, many teams use the 1:4:3:3 formation as their starting point in their youth development. The Dutch believe that is the best way to educate youth players. It is called the ideal field occupation, both in the length of the field and in the width of the field. Most of the time a player has the possibility to play the ball in two directions, in other words to make a “triangle”. Besides that, it creates the opportunity for the “free player” in the four man defense, the one with the most space around him, to be used in the build-up. The playing style that the Dutch follow is focused on attacking, in which the build-up mainly happens through the midfield. They love to take initiative and talk about “attractive soccer”. Internationally the Dutch (youth) teams are confronted with completely different notions about how the game should be played. Team formations such as 1:4:4:2, 1:4:5:1 and 1:3:5:2 are often used and the playing style is more focused on counter-attack soccer than on a play-making strategy. During a Holland U17 national team tournament in Estonia most of the opponents were more focused on the defensive team-function than on the attacking team-function. Estonia used a 1:4:5:1-formation, Norway played in a 1:4:3:3 formation and Croatia decided on a 1:4:4:2. That meant that the coaches of the Dutch National youth team, prior to each game, had to prepare their players for the formation and different playing style of the various countries.

### DISCUSSION

During the workshop some lively discussions were held about the thesis that playing in

different team organization/formations adds to the development of talented players. Obviously the opinions were divided. Several coaches believed that players in the U-12 category should be confronted with different team organizations/formations. Other coaches believe that shouldn't happen until the players hit the U16 age group. One should know that a team organization/formation is a tool and not a means by itself. The 11v11 for U12/13's is the “real game” on the large field. Preferential positions in defense, midfield and offense now start to come to the foreground. These are exponents of specific characteristics and a player's own experience. For most players in this age-group 1:4:3:3 is complicated enough. The development of positional play in 1:4:3:3 on a large field is an important element in the training activities. It is important to constantly repeat the basic elements that look like soccer.



The late Rinus Michel's mentions, in his great book “Teambuilding, the road to success”, that he prefers the positional game 5v2 and several variations of that (5v3, 5v4 etcetera). These are ideal game related exercises to learn to master the varying game situations in

a very short time period. But the question remains if it is good for U12/13's to employ set positions ("once a right fullback, always a right full-back") and if this offers the players ample opportunities to develop themselves. If (talented) players are confronted with different views on how the game of soccer should be played, then we should prepare our players for that. Most of the time, that happens from the age U15/16. Developing the right game attitude, as an individual and as a team player, is then the most important objective. That is the right moment for some more conscious individual and team-tactical training. Which specific qualities belong to their task and functions, reflected against a specific organization? The U15/16 player must learn to execute team-tactical strategies and should be able to play against other team organizations/formations. This can be taught during practices, scrimmages and games. These days, the use of video and other modern analysis methods have a place in youth development.

to recognize which is the best solution. Instead of prompting and inventing complicated exercises, it fits the coach of the future to present practice situations in which players can develop themselves and search for solutions to the soccer-problems with which they are confronted. In relation to the Dutch playing style it's all about developing the insight in the cohesion between defending, attacking and the transition between the two. An understanding of the team-tactical aims goes hand in hand with that approach. And thus they will learn how to deal with different team organizations/formations and playing styles.



### SPACE

"We give talented youth players insufficient space to solve situations, which results in insufficient development". This thesis was also discussed during the workshop. The modern youth coach must, besides the various learning styles of players, also take the different cultures and background into consideration. We haven't even mentioned the personal style of the coach himself. In modern soccer it is a requirement to be able to solve complicated situations as quickly as possible. During practices one must constantly confront the players with situations in which they have