I notice that many coaches still think that training technical skills can only be done during a warm-up or that it is only a small part of a larger whole. This thought process must be eliminated. Technique is the basis of everything. If you can see where you have to pass the ball to, but you don’t have the technical skill to pass the ball to the correct spot, then recognizing the correct moment is worthless. Without technique there is no tactic. At the moment I see a lot of tactical and result oriented youth coaches. They put up with the current technical level of the players and concentrate on developing team tactics and focus on results. I like to win as well, but want to win on individual qualities. The individual development must dominate. Coaches and the results must be subordinate to the importance of the individual development. For this reason the individual must dominate in training. I also believe we should spend more time on technique training, without changing course entirely by solely focusing on technique training. It must be a combination, today’s modern soccer coach is both a technical coach and a tactical coach.” This is Pepijn Lijnders full time technique trainer at PSV youth academy, coach of theU13s and the coordinator of the PSV youth plan.

By: Pepijn Lijnders
“This is the training method at PSV, it includes everything. Just imagine that you have a player who can beat his direct opponent, who can at times (technically) maintain the ball, who can cross each ball both left and right and who also has a smart through pass? Wouldn’t that be great? Isn’t every coach looking for that type of player? Is it not possible to train these players yourselves? Since I have come into contact with the coaching profession I have been specializing in all areas of developing talent. At PSV we are trying to educate these type of players.”

**Educating**

“We want to educate dynamic, creative and unpredictable players. Players who can (technically) maintain themselves on the ball in every game situation and continuously create better situations for themselves and their teammates. Players like Kaka, Zidane, Pires, Robben, Kalou, van Persie, Messi, Fabregas and Ronaldinho prove week after week in Europe’s best competitions that they are able to do this. They have the qualities to beat their direct opponent, to give that fantastic end pass at the last moment or initiate the deciding give and go combination. Every time they receive the ball they create space to shift the play, thanks to their amazing feel for the ball.”

**Choices**

“And when the ball is immediately in the right position, they will have more time to make the right choices. That is why these kind of players often make much better choices. Technique reinforces, or in fact blurs, the tactics in a sense. Speed is constantly increasing in international competitions, mainly because the spaces are becoming smaller. This is why it is especially important to completely master the ball. This is an important task for us, as coaches.”

**First phase**

“All these aspect can best be taught in the first phase of a soccer player’s career. In this phase it is very easy to technically improve players. Up to the age of 12 is the ideal learning age, this is why the major theme with the U12s at PSV is technique. We must use the available time optimally, so we are working on the qualities that can make a difference on a daily basis. Repetition of all techniques is necessary to further develop these techniques in relation to the lines and the team at an older age.”

**Player type**

“Every line demands its own type of player. When you look at the European top level you quickly notice which players make the difference. In offense these are usually strong, creative dribblers with scoring capacity. In midfield these are usually linking players or play makers, who will not – even in difficult situations – lose the ball. Players who can transition with their first touch. This type of players wants to make the play, because they are so comfortable on the ball. At the back it is the type of player who is unbeatable in the 1v1 situation that make the difference. All these players have in common that they dominate the 1v1, they have character, personality and have complete power over the ball.”
Complete

“We as coaches have to make the players as complete as possible. In my vision there are three central themes: personality, technique and explosiveness. These are the three accents which must come back in every exercise and in every age category. In order to shape such complete players you must ensure for a solid basis in the first years of a players career. In our vision we try to use the qualities of top players in a smart way. After all, which player doesn’t want to be like a soccer star? They want nothing less than to master these technique and apply them in the game. Every player at PSV is given the opportunity to give 100%, to excel and to develop in all facets during every activity. Everyone is allowed to make mistakes: or better said must make mistakes. Only then you can become better. Arjen Robben recently said in an interview that the reason he has excelled it because he was never afraid to make mistakes in his youth.”

Tickle

“During every training session a player might beat his opponent explosively 100 times. He may have to change direction a 100 times to get out of difficult situations. This way we are automatically training the players’ motor development, as we continuously tickle the explosiveness on the ball. Compare this to a possession game, meant to improve the team’s tactical aspects, whereby a player may only touch the ball once or twice?”

Types of technical skills

“In my vision I distinguish between five “types” of technical skills and I linked them to top players. We have the 1v1 Robben (beat your opponent from the front), the 1v1 Zidane (cutting moves to get out of the difficult situations), the 1v1 Kaka (all first ball touches), the 1v1 Beckham (shooting technique and smart through passes) and the 1v1 Ronaldinho (all moves). We use top players who apply these skills weekly in Europe’s top competitions. The players recognize this, because they like to identify themselves with these players and want to be like them. Furthermore, it is very tangible for the players when they see what they have learned back at the top level. When I tell these young players we are training the “1v1 Robben” it will mean more to them than when I tell them we are training the 1v1 frontal. We also frequently watch clips of top players in action before training. The players love watching the actions and moves in full stadiums. The theme of the corresponding training will be the top player we just watched on the video.”

For a detailed description of these five skills please visit the members area on our website.
**Moves**

“Within these five technical skills you will come across various moves. Within the Zidane 1v1 you will have to, for example, think of moves such as the step-over (Deco) and the outside foot cut (Henry). And when we are doing the 1v1 Robben with the Ronaldo twice, the players will know they will have to beat their opponent with a double scissor move. I categorise all movement this way.”

**Functional technique**

“Training players is obviously more than just cutting and turning in between cones or practicing moves in a square. All aspects of the game must return to a training session. We start every training session with exercises in which we can perfect the technical coordination. Every exercise has an equal amount of repetitions with right and left. In all, exercises have elements such as receiving, passing with the inside of the foot and taking the speed out of the ball with a wall pass. These can be repeated about 100 times at a high level and with high pace. This will automatically perfect the functional technique. I never use cones as resistance, this is always done by players. Players block, passively defend and above all help and stimulate the player on the ball to reach a higher level.”

**Technical coordination**

“I often train the technical coordination in a series of moves right after each other as well. The variation of different moves, right after each other, makes the players even more technically skilled, creating even more power on the ball. Furthermore it will make him more agile. In one of those series I often take one or two movement which the players must execute more frequently one after the other in order to perfect the movement coordination on both the left and the right side. Eventually there should not be a difference between right and left. We currently have about 10 different series with 15-20 movements in a row. Once the players perfectly master a series we will move to include an opponent who will provide resistance on all moves in the series.”

**Theme**

“We use a theme in every training session and go into depth with that theme. A theme can be Robben, Kaka, Beckham or Zidane. Furthermore, we also have one month in which a theme will come back in every exercise in order to continuously repeat certain details. We spend a lot of time on perfecting all techniques in simple exercises with the U9s and U11s, which they can later apply to more complex exercises such as 2v1, 2v2 and 3v3. With the older players we use more complex exercises in order to keep it challenging for them as well.”

**Resistance**

“We interchange these exercises with 100% game exercises that fit within the theme. When we are dealing with the Robben theme this can mean that we use an exercise in which the attackers try to beat two defenders who are defending the line. In this exercise the attackers can automate the moves they just perfected on defenders who are defending at 100%. This way they will learn how to initiate their moves and increase their speed at the right moment. After all beating your opponent is not about which moves you initiate, but more about the right moment of initiation and increasing speed. In this phase I tackle the basis of defending as well. Once a month defending in 1v1 is the central theme. The players will then have the opportunity to perfect the resistance exercises.”

“We are working on the qualities that can make a difference on a daily basis”
to apply defending techniques within all attacking facets in the following weeks. These defending accents will then be further trained, as this will also contribute to the offensive training. The stronger the defender, the more variations the attacker will need.”

Finishing
“I try to match every exercise to finishing. Such as left and right instep kicking, chipping, turning and shooting, etc. Once a month all finishing exercises with high crosses are central. We spend the entire training session on volleys, heading and even bicycle kicks. The players love it as they are allowed to let themselves go and volley the ball into the back of the net up to 200 times that session. Even this session has a methodological build up. We start with a player who volleys from a throw, the from a chip and then from a turning cross. The same thing applies to heading and bicycle kicking. From this theme, which obviously falls under the 1v1 Beckham, we have four flat goals. The best time to train this in spring after it rained.”

Small sided games
“Small sided games should be used in training, as it can apply the learned skills to a game specific situation. An example from the 1v1 Robben is to play 3v3 with goalkeepers. The players play a 1:1:1 formation and try to attack the spaces. This is a fantastic exercise at the end of the session whereby players can train at game oriented play. The players do not have a set position, but they must change so that all positions are occupied at all times. The objective is that players create space for each other by means of thought through running actions, so that the other player can attack it (with overview). Having a good view is important in your attacking actions, you must be able to create free space for other players at all times. In these small games it is easy to teach the tactical basics. Here you must be thinking of keeping all positions occupied, keeping the lines, providing cover, running action, creating free space, etc. I have been playing these exercises since the U13s. You can, for example, organize the threesomes in positions: such as the left wing, the right wing or the three central players together.”

Tournament
“Sometimes we end the session with a tournament, with a final and an election for ‘player of the tournament’ chosen by the players and the coaches. Every time there are different bonuses to motivate the players to reach a higher level and to accentuate the learned skills. We try to continuously vary with different organizations of games that will give the players the opportunity to further develop the skills.”

Organization
“Whenever I give the training session I will always be assisted by the trainers and coaches or the interns of that team. In the middle of the field there will be a ‘demo field’ where I will demonstrate or give pointers from. All players and coaches will gather around the field, where I will use different players to demonstrate something. With this setup it often happens that we train with 30 or 40 kids at the same time. The moments in which 4 or 5 of them demonstrate something with confidence and character in front of the entire group are the best moments. After a good demonstration everybody will be clapping and chanting!”

Fun
“The experience and fun that players radiate determine how effective a training session is. You will see players increase their level during every session. At the end of every passive exercise we will play a game to determine which player has the best execution. We do this to motivate the players collectively to achieve...
an even higher level. We pay attention to the following three aspects. First of all on stimulating each other, secondly on the personality of the player; how he demands the balls and how he processes them and last on the technical execution in combination with explosiveness. Every group will have an individual champion. Players have to evaluate each other, especially what went well. Players have to know exactly what they are good at. They have to learn to accept positive criticism from each other and above all they must understand that they need one another in order to excel in their own qualities.

**Self activity (1)**

“While some clubs start one touch play from the age of eight years old, our players will explosively beat one, two and sometimes even three opponents about 100 times even before the training starts. This, in turn means that the defender will also be places in a situation whereby he will have to try to steal the ball 100 times. The moment the U9s through to the U15s arrive at the ‘Herdgang’ (PSV’s training complex – ed.) they will immediately start training themselves without any coach or trainer present. I try to teach these kids that they don’t need anybody, not even a coach, to become better players.”

**Self activity (2)**

“We have eight different self activity exercises where the players train themselves before every activity over a period of two weeks. All 1v1 facets are processed in exercises 1 through 6. Exercises 1, 2 and 3 are exercises with passive resistance, with a partner functioning as the opponent. Exercises 4, 5 and 6 are active exercises with 100% resistance. The players may choose themselves which exercise they want to do in exercise 7. Exercise 8 is a street soccer exercise (3v3/4v4/4v3) which they are allowed to do over a period of 4 weeks instead of 2. After all our objective is that the players learn how to apply in complex situations. They must become responsible for their own development. We create the developmental conditions, and they decide themselves how far they take it. This greatly stimulates the self activity process. I enjoy watching how the players pick this up every time. They can’t wait to learn and perfect the techniques of the top players. They are friends, make each other better, but also want to do better than their teammates and become the best. They are training as if Koeman, or the Barça, Arsenal or Man United scouts are watching them.”

**Goals**

“We use flat goals at every training sessions, these goals can be located on a separate technique-training-field. The flat goals are goals in which you can score from both sides. We have exercises in which the balls circulate instead of the players. The attacker who has just got out of a difficult situation twice and managed to shoot the ball on goal doesn’t have to get his own ball, but must immediately become a defender. Every team will have 20 balls and I will have another 20. So when I am training the second year U13s and the first year U15s together we will have 60 balls for approximately 25 players. The flat goals provide a fantastic and ideal starting point to commence the training. I am constantly looking for organizational exercises in which the players can give 100% and whereby the labour/rest ratio is perfectly balanced.”
Homework

"Up to the U12s we give the players homework which is checked the following week. From the U13s up to the U17s I try to make them aware that they should use the time before and after the training session to practice and perfect certain techniques. The U17 striker must understand that he will become even more dangerous when he can execute the scissors move on both the left and the right. The homework will get more specific with the older teams, aimed at their position on the field. The homework usually involves a certain series or out of one or two moves which they must perform both left and right sided. Every youth player will receive a small size 3 ball and a jumping rope at the beginning of the season. All homework assignments I give them can be done with either a small or a normal sized ball. They can then try these homework activities during small sided games on the street. The following week I always use an exercise which involves the homework activity. We decided to give these small assignments, because a lot of players would ask us for new moves after every training session."

Enthusiastic

"The players reacted very enthusiastically, so we decided to design a complete schedule for them to perfect themselves in technical coordination during the winter and summer breaks. The schedule has four exercises which they should practice during four days of the week; they may choose their own exercise for the other three days. The schedule is made up of two move series which we teach them during the week prior to the winter or summer break: a juggling series with challenging technical exercises and a series of exercises involving a jump rope. It turned out to be a coordinated program which will help us to make the players even more dynamic. They will improve their footwork in order to execute the exercises with even more explosiveness. This last break we gave them the Aissati and Afellay series. By giving the series names the kids are motivated to learn them. After all these kids want to be like Aissati or Afellay (2 of PSV’s first team’s young talents)."

Development

"Every player must have a certain recognizable characteristic by means of which we as coaches and teammates can recognize him. An identity, game after game. Subsequently we want the players to further develop the characteristics they master. This development doesn’t stop at the age of 18; it’s an ongoing process. You need a lot of patience and we need to in every day; win on individual quality. As a coach you should ask yourself every day whether or not the player had the opportunity to develop optimally. This is an ongoing process. You learn every day both as a player and as a coach as long as you continuously take every opportunity to develop yourself. I continuously take every opportunity to develop myself as a coach."
You can apply the vision described above to all levels and age groups. It is an all encompassing practical vision with technique as core subject, but geared on the technical, tactical and personal development of both players and coaches. Especially for amateur clubs, where there are usually only 2 training session a week it is important to utilize this time optimally.

“A lot of coaches know technique is the basis of everything, but in order to implement this vision with their club it is important to have sufficient support from the people with enthusiasm, will and character. A lot of coaches still don’t think about the individual development of the players, but about team tactics and results. In order to change this a club should educate their own coaches, who will need to familiarize themselves with the material. These coaches should receive demonstrations and clinics on the field, so they can see their players improve technically and personally within one training session.”
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