

INTERVIEW: PETER STURGESS

FA YOUTH AWARD, MODULE 1. DEVELOPING THE ENVIRONMENT

Q Why do we need Age Specific Courses?

For a number of years coaches have been gaining qualifications that are designed to improve their knowledge of the game and help them clearly understand how to structure practice to help players develop. This process has produced large numbers of coaches with great knowledge and a skill set that helps them work effectively with players. So the 'coach education' part is in place and doing an effective job. However, one factor that has emerged relating to most of these coaches who became well qualified, is the fact that much of the recognition and 'status' went to those coaches who worked with the older players (some might say U-14's and above). This is fine to a point and can be supported by the fact that the players are beginning to play a 'game' that closely replicates the adult game. As such the players need coaches who can help them develop the appropriate skills and tactical awareness.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason, there was not the same recognition for the coach who worked with players at younger ages. At its worst, working with the

youngest players was seen as 'baby sitting' or just occupying them until they were older when the real work could begin in earnest. Young players were being coached by coaches who, in some instances, were just waiting for the opportunity to work with an older age group when the situation arose.

We now know that many of the skills and much of the 'tactical' knowledge can be acquired during those early formative years. A skilled coach with a good knowledge of how players learn and, as important, a real understanding of the game, can begin to develop players who are technically proficient and effective decision makers and problem solvers – essential qualities in today's fast moving game. Hence, the development of 'age appropriate' awards.

Q Who are the Age Specific Courses aimed at?

The development of the young player can be accelerated if the coach has the right skills, knowledge and the ability to engage the player in "learning about the game".

The content in this course is suitable for coaches from both the grassroots and elite



programme and will enhance the work that teachers do in the primary sector. The content focuses upon the development, in all four corners, of the 5-11 year old player so all adults who are working with this age group would benefit from both the theoretical and practical elements of the course.

There are a growing number of professional clubs who are employing coaches who have a real expertise working with the youngest players. Indeed, a new breed of coach is emerging. Coaches who are capable of creating a vibrant environment where players are encouraged to be creative and imaginative. The kind of coach who will pose problems through carefully structured practices and games and then work with the players to help them come up with solutions. The kind of coach who understands the development of the young child and how this fits in with their development as young footballers. A coach who is recognised for the special skills and abilities they have when working with the youngest players. A coach who can now get an 'age appropriate qualification'.

Q So what will be included in the new FA Youth Award?

The proposed FA Youth Award will consist of three modules. Module one will look specifically at developing the right environment for the 5-11 year old player to learn and develop. Module two will look at developing and understanding practice and module three will focus more upon the development of the player across the whole spectrum of their development (from 5-20 years).

This is a very brief synopsis as modules two and three are still in the development stage but to whet your appetite I will now expand upon the content for the module one.

This course is 32 hours long and is non-assessed. The focus is very much upon the developing child and how best to create and maintain the right environment for development. There are modules that look at "How Players Learn", "Managing Mistakes", "Self-Esteem" and "Motivation". There is pre-course reading around the "Physical development of the young player". All of the workshops are then brought to life by the suggested practical activities that show how this new approach will work out on the training ground and pitch.

In addition, there are a number of activities that focus upon the physical development of the young player and examples of how to incorporate the important FUNDamentals of movement into your warm-ups. Coaches who attend will also get the chance to try out some of the practical games under the watchful eye of the tutor ready to take the games back to their teams.

Q Do these new awards embrace the ethos of "Let the game teach" and if so can you expand upon what this means?

The awards do introduce a philosophy of giving more ownership to the players and allowing them to make more of their own decisions. The course will show a number of "games" that have been carefully structured to create realistic game like situations, thus allowing the players time to practice these essential skills. If the game or the activity is 'right' then the coach can allow the players to play more while they observe. This may well reduce the number of interventions by the coach and should result in the coach giving specific coaching advice, delivered in the most effective way, to the players that need it. Let the game teach does not mean just throwing a ball in and letting the players 'get on with it'. The demands on the coach when planning sessions is actually greater if

they are to produce the right kind of activity. The new age appropriate awards will show lots of examples for the coach to try.

Q How does it compare to the existing Level Three?

The current UEFA B qualification is designed for use mainly with older players. The new FA Youth Award is aimed specifically at those coaches who work with the 5-11 year old player and the workshop and practical content reflect this. However, much of the content around player learning is still appropriate for coaches regardless of the age group they are working with and many of the practices can be adapted for the older player. Functional practices and phases of play may not be appropriate for the 5-11 year old player so there are obvious differences there. These have been replaced by age appropriate practices that will test technique, decision making and tactical awareness.

To produce the players of the future who can excel in today's global football market is going to require players who possess many skills and attributes. The FA recognises that this development can start at quite a young age but it requires coaches with specific skills and knowledge to work effectively with these young players. I firmly believe that the days when a coach had to work at the oldest age groups to get recognition are now over. The new FA Youth Award will reward and recognise those coaches who have the ability to connect and develop the young boys and girls of the future, helping them to reach their full potential, wherever that may take them.

[Full details on this qualification and how it fits into the qualifications matrix will be in the summer edition of Insight.](#)



FACTS

PETER STURGES

Peter is an FA National Coach (5 - 11s). He started his career at The FA as a Regional Coach for Yorkshire, a position which he held for 18 months. Prior to joining The FA Pete worked at Walsall's Centre of Excellence and at Derby County's Academy before setting up his own soccer coaching business.

Peter has an Honours Degree in English Language and Literature with Education which led him to a career in teaching before he moved into coaching.