

Tech Notes

Random Thoughts and News from the TD's at Foothills

November 2007



Thoughts on Gymnasium Season

Winter is here and the perennial wait for green grass begins anew. I often refer to winter as gymnasium season because I seem to spend more time on a hardwood court than I do anywhere else. I have never been a fan of practicing in gymnasiums but over the years I have come to realize that there is a silver lining inside every gymnasium. The silver lining is that I must become more creative as a coach. With a 15x25m space and fifteen eager players, the demands for inventiveness and adaptability in coaching increase substantially. Indoor is a time to focus on individual skills like ball manipulation, receiving, short passing, individual defending and attacking, as well as the skills involved in playing quickly. The challenge with indoor training is lack of opportunity, or should I say space, to develop kicking skills like lofted, driven, chipped, and long aerial passes. The opportunity to receive such passes is also limited and this is perhaps why Alberta is known as a "short passing" province where players who can really "ping" a ball with both feet are rarer than they should be. I hope that Foothills can soon realize our dream of having our own synthetic field with lights where we can practice outdoors anytime the snow is clear and the temperature is above freezing – there are a lot of these days between mid October and April in Calgary.

What we learned in BC

Tommy and I took four teams to Vancouver on November 8-11 and played some fantastic competition and held some quality training sessions for the B14 Saints, B16 Crew, G14 Voltage, and G16 Freedom.

Saints in the City

I have traveled extensively in soccer and I have seen some creative ways to make training and games tours work efficiently, but I have never seen a slicker operation than the Saints. Tommy and I traveled to Abbotsford with the Saints on Wednesday night and we stayed at the same hotel as the Saints for the next four days. During this time we got a taste of what it feels like to be a Saint! First of all, you never eat out if you are a Saint. I mean never. Notta. Zippo. Saints make super heavy duty use of complimentary continental breakfasts and they bring along great chefs like Lorenzo Russo, Al Sosiak, and new club president Dennis Kwan. These men can cook. And grocery shop. We ate like kings in kitchen suite room 129 of the Best Western Country Inn in Aldergrove and we were stuffed. Pasta dishes, salads, lumberjack sandwiches, roast chicken, you name it, they cooked it. This room operated like a MASH unit and the Saints players managed to travel, eat, sleep, train for ten hours, play four games, host team meetings, and return home after four nights for under 500 bucks a player. The Saints are in Las Vegas this weekend, at a showcase tournament and staying in a thirteen bedroom mansion that their booking agent Suzanne Russo found, and yes they are using home cooking again. Heck, knowing the Saints, and the way their chefs play cards, they may *make* money on this trip!

Competing Against the Best

We learned a lot of other things on this trip. All four teams got to play against provincial, select and older competition. Every team played against the Vancouver Whitecaps Prospects. The Whitecaps Prospects are made up of the very best talent in BC, and many players are part of the Caps residency program. For instance, on Friday night the G14 Voltage and G16 Freedom got to play the Whitecaps under the lights at Simon Fraser University on a synthetic grass field. Every player on both Whitecaps teams is in the National Training Centre Program. These players train two times per week in the NTC and three times per week with the Prospects program. They are not permitted to train with their club team but they are permitted to play games with their club team. Simply put, they are fantastic. It was a pleasure to watch them play, and an even greater pleasure to watch our Foothills girls compete against some of the very best players in the nation. Several of our players competed well, but one in particular stood out for me and that was Luci Tansley of the Freedom who played centre back and was absolutely outstanding. Playing against a constant storm of attack all game, Luci showed her excellent tackling, heading and kicking skills and kept us in the game. Kelly Wong made a



highlight reel, goal line clearance that could make any TSN Plays of the Week episode! The score was 1-0 at half and the final score of the Freedom-Caps game was 5-0, but the result is not the important thing. Every girl will tell you that they learned something important that night about competing and performing at the top level. The Voltage were the only team to score on the Caps in a 5-1 loss, and their story was similar to Freedom – we can compete for the first half, but we have work to do if we want to compete for ninety minutes. We'll get there.



On the boy's side, the story was similar. The Crew and Saints played over their heads all weekend against the Abbotsford Mariners Super-Y teams, Whitecaps Prospects and select competition. The only club team that we played was Surrey Wally's Selects B14, reigning BC BU14 champions, and the Saints beat them 3-0. Several Saints players played up against older competition with the Crew on Saturday night against Richmond Selects (2-2) and again on Sunday against the Whitecaps (4-0). Under-14 players Jevon Westerbeek, RobbieOvenden-Kamkai, Keiran Hay, Sam Adekugbe, and Dominic Russo got a taste of dressing for the Crew. The younger boys were nervous, but as Tommy Jr. explained to them, "If you're good enough, you're old enough." It was fantastic to see how the older boys welcomed their younger Foothills brothers into the team. It really felt the way a true club is supposed to feel. The younger players played very well in very intimidating circumstances.

Overall, the trip was a fantastic soccer education for all of the teams that traveled and in our post-tour survey 100% of the players indicated that they "became a better player" as a result of the experience. You can't ask for much more than that.

Tommy and I did a review of the trip and our observations are summarized below.

Technical Overview:

All of the Foothills teams that participated worked hard and competed to the best of their ability on the day. However, there are a number of major technical challenges that need to be addressed over the coming six to twelve months.

1. First touch control. Receiving and securing the ball by moving the ball into safe space. We need to show more confidence and composure when controlling the ball and putting in the hours will improve this.
2. Passing quality. Moving the ball earlier and more accurately as well as increasing the speed at which the ball travels. The weight of the pass is also another area of focus needing attention, often either too hard or too soft resulting in an interception.
3. Attacking movements around the ball. Quick play in and around tight spaces depends on support movements along with items 1 and 2 above. Check runs, side-on-support, pinning (locking) defenders, timing of support, distance of support, angles of support.
4. Kicking techniques. More players need the ability to "ping it" over longer distances. Without this vital skill we cannot keep opponents back on their heels when they apply pressure, and we cannot exploit space behind them.
5. Individual defending techniques. Close down, delay and tackling techniques are not well developed. Players are not nicking off the front foot nor are they positioned properly to channel opponents into sidelines or second defenders. When the opportunity presents itself, we need to be more aggressive in the tackle, hard but fair... ring some bells!!!
6. General Athleticism. Our more elite teams need to be physically prepared for the demands of elite soccer, during the winter training period lots of focus should be placed on developing S.A.Q (Speed, Agility & Quickness), strength and stamina. This will improve their ability as a player immensely.

Tactical Overview

We made some strides in the areas of team attacking shape and team defending shape. However, neither of these is automatic for any of our teams and still requires a lot of coaching. Major areas of focus include:

1. Defending shape on stoppages - goal kicks, throws, corners, and set pieces.
2. Defending during the run of play. Dropping, sliding, and stepping quickly and at the correct time. Screening of opposition forwards and midfielders while sliding and immediately after stepping or dropping.
3. Defending against combination play especially in our middle and defensive third. Preventing penetration from an opposition wall pass and overlap.

4. Quick establishment of team attacking shape on a gain of possession. Centre backs dropping and getting wider, fullbacks and wide/attacking midfield pushing up, etc.
5. Midfield and forward linking and combining to penetrate. Timing, execution and angles of support movements by the forwards, whether in 4-3-3 or 4-4-2, is poor on all of our teams.
6. Quick forward play when opportunities are presented in order to generate crossing or finishing opportunities. We need to fail earlier and further up the pitch if we are going to fail (and we will), by playing forward more quickly and by being prepared and confident about going forward.
7. Commitment to win back the ball immediately on a loss of possession. This is nowhere close to where we want it. This may be as much a psychological/attitudinal adjustment as much as it is a tactical challenge.
8. Controlling the tempo of the game. We often played at one pace, either too fast or too slow and didn't control the 'ebb & flow' of the game. Once we have won the initial opening 15 minutes battle, we need to dictate the play to our speed e.g. "slow, slow, quick" (to penetrate).

Coaching

We are very pleased at the commitment level our coaches. We are also excited about the enthusiasm that our coaches show toward learning and improving themselves as coaches. Over the course of the games and training we have identified some areas where we can all improve.

1. Coach communication. Less is more. As a group there is far more over-coaching than under-coaching taking place at the moment. What we would like all of our coaches to do is to allow the players to learn how to solve their own problems. Your job as a coach is to create problems and ask questions (and have the patience to wait for the answers). Leave side-line coaching behind and speak to the players only when it is absolutely necessary. Players do not listen when you speak too much - think back to your playing days and time in school.
2. Routines and habits. We are considering the establishment of a club-wide team warm-up for games. It will include the ACL injury prevention program for girls. When warming up for a game, players should have an opportunity to execute all of the techniques that they will use in the game and the warm-up should be as short as possible. (See the Game Time Routine in the back of the technical manual that you received at the start of the season).
3. Using triggers. Rather than; "Pass the ball out to your fullback who is making a penetrating run," simply say; "Give it". The game is too fast not to use triggers. Players learn best when the instructions are short, quick and precise. The idea is for players themselves to start using the triggers. Introduce club 'buzz words' such as 'reset' (to play back and start again) 'drop, step, slide, hold' (when defending), 'channels' (when encouraging a long diagonal ball to turn the defense around).
4. Adopting a club philosophy. We want all teams in the club to play a certain way, The Foothills Way, and we need the coaches of our top teams to "champion" this. Our teams will play 4-4-2 or 4-3-3 depending on the team. We will play a flat back four and we will not use a sweeper. We will use a holding midfielder in both 4-4-2 and 4-3-3. Our strikers in 4-4-2 will play centrally when we have the ball, avoiding flank play and our centre forward in 4-3-3 will play the width of the 6-yard box. Lots more to this like multiple game styles etc., and we will discuss this later in the season as we approach outdoor.

Thinking and Planning Ahead

Recently, Tommy and I have had a few hours of brainstorming and spirited discussion about what this club needs to move forward and be successful. We have identified a number of key areas that we wish to focus on over the coming year.

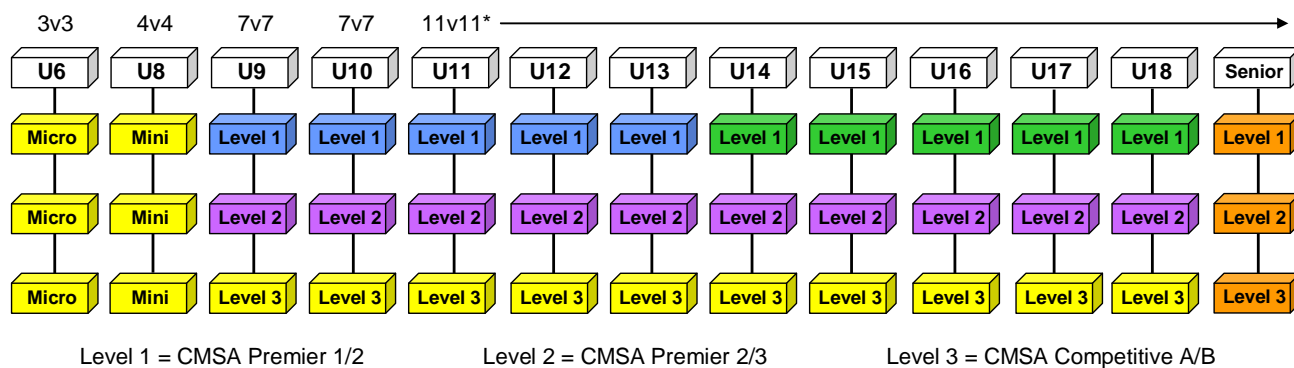
Club Program Delivery Model

We have developed and presented our new model for spring 2008 to the board and everyone is on side. The new program delivery model divides the club into three flights of play, simply called Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. Each level of play participates in one of five specific club programs. These five programs include:

1. Grassroots and Wellness Programs for U6-U8 and all Level 3 players.
2. Skills Academy for Level 1 players U9-U13
3. Training Squad for all Level 2 players U9-U18
4. Centre of Excellence for Level 1 players U14-U18
5. Soccer for Life programs for adults

The main force behind the new delivery model is the need to provide clear focus and attention to the needs of each level of play. Let's face it; the U16 recreational player and the U16 elite player have different needs and motivations. Our new model will be staffed by specialists and volunteers who will help us to deliver each program in the best way possible. We have already met with a number of coaches and administrators who will occupy a lead role in each program. It is our sincere hope that we can add efficiency and energy to each program to help us avoid some of the challenges that we currently face.

Foothills Program Delivery Model



Program	Description	Personnel
Grassroots / Wellness	➔ Soccer in the community, soccer foundation and wellness, recruiting and keeping kids in soccer	➔ Grassroots Soccer Coordinator (1-2)
Skills Academy	➔ Technical training for level 1 players U9-U13	➔ Skills Academy Coaches (2)
Training Squad	➔ Technical training for level 2 players U9-U18	➔ Training Squad Coaches (2-3)
Centre of Excellence	➔ Advanced training for level 1 players U14-U18	➔ F-COE Team Coaches (10-12)
Soccer for Life	➔ Men's and women's soccer	➔ Senior Soccer Directors (2)

Team Formation

There is nothing more time-consuming and contentious than team formation. And to make matters worse, we do it twice a year to punish ourselves. We are working on a new model for team formation and although we do not have all the details finished, I can give you a glimpse of what it will look like come spring. Our evaluations will take place over a three week period.

Week 1: We will complete our team formation for Level 1 during the first week. During this week all Premier 1 teams will host team try-outs on a team-by-team basis. For example, on Monday night we may have try-outs for the B14 Saints and the G14 Voltage. On Tuesday night we may have try-outs for the G16 Freedom and B16 Crew. Any registered player who wants to try out for a Premier 1 team may attend these try-outs and at the end of the week we will announce the Premier 1 teams.

Week 2: During week two we will complete our team formation for Level 2 teams using a similar process that was used for Level 1 teams. Level 2 teams are those teams that play in Premier 2/3 of CMSA. Any player who has not been assigned to a Level 1 team may attend these evaluations. At the end of the week we will announce our Level 2 teams.

Week 3. During week three we will complete our team formation for Level 3 teams. Level 3 teams are those teams that participate in CMSA Competitive leagues. Any player who has not been assigned to a Level 1 or Level 2 team may attend these team formation activities.

Each team try-out will be overseen by the head coach of the team. And yes, this will mean that we need to know who most of our coaches are before the try-outs! Tommy and I will assist wherever we are needed and we will ensure that the process is fair and equitable from our vantage point – understanding that everyone, and we mean everyone, has an opinion on who should make the team and who should not.

Club Curriculum Delivery

A curriculum is not a set of practice plans for the season. Practice plans are the “lesson plans” that coaches construct to deliver the curriculum. A curriculum is a defined set of learning outcomes that correspond to the developmental age of the learner. Most clubs do not have a curriculum. At best, most clubs have a set of “drills” or practice plans that they provide to the coaches and in most cases the same set of practice plans are used across all ages and levels of play. At Foothills we have a clearly developed and documented curriculum that outlines our learner expectations for each developmental age and moving from skill familiarity to skill proficiency to skill mastery, and on finally onto to extended skill. Our coaches receive instruction on this curriculum at our spring and fall coach’s clinics.

The term *curriculum* has become a buzz word in soccer over the last five years and many think that the right curriculum is the answer to all of our player development woes. This is not meant to down-play the importance of using the right curriculum because the right curriculum is important. However, the delivery of the curriculum is what is most important. Over the coming twelve months Tommy and I will spend the major part of our coach development time working with coaches to help them understand and deliver the curriculum in a manner that optimizes player practice time.

Our curriculum is divided in to three main areas as shown in the table below. Each area is not exclusive to itself because each relies on the other – you can’t teach techniques properly in the absence of tactics. Skill, after all is defined as technique on demand, and the tactical situation creates the demands.

Technical Curriculum	Tactical Curriculum	
	Attacking and Transition Play	Defending Play
1. Athlete foundation 2. Ball mastery 3. 1v1 Attacking 4. 1v1 Defending 5. Receiving and passing 6. Finishing 7. Group Play	1. Team organization and shape 2. Transition and counter-attacking 3. Playing out of the back 4. Playing through midfield 5. Linking and combining with forwards 6. Framing goal and finishing 7. Attacking set plays	1. Team organization and shape 2. Reading play and transition 3. Retreating and screening 4. Pressure, cover and balance 5. Creating pressure pockets 6. Defending near goal 7. Defending set plays

New Technical Staff

We are very pleased to welcome Christine Latham to the Foothills family. Christine grew up hating Foothills because she was a Celtic! I know what you all are thinking; “How could we let this happen?” Well, I can tell you this: Christine is now one of us. She has seen the light, and the light is green. Take the time to read Christine’s press release and you will see that we have one of the best female players in the world coaching in our club. Christine will be with us until the end of January so let’s learn from her.

Skills Academy and Goal Keeping

Shortly we will be starting our U10/12 Skills Academy for the indoor season. We are currently hiring extra help for the task. In addition we have just hired Brian McDonnell as our new goal keeper coach. Brian has just finished a stellar varsity career with the University of Calgary and he is becoming a teacher. What a fantastic combination – teacher and coach! I am slightly biased on this one, having been a teacher for ten years.

Tommy is currently putting together the Academy Schedule and the Goal Keeper training schedule. We should have this up and running in the first week of December.

National Team Picks from Foothills

We have large number of players in the club who play on Alberta provincial select teams. We have about ten players who are members of the prairie National Training Centre. Members of the NTC can be selected to the nation team and recently Robyn Dutton of the Foothills Colts 91's has made the jump to the Canada U17 junior team.



Robyn is currently participating in international friendlies in Florida. The team plays three matches: the first against U.S. Region IV (an 0:1 loss on 19 November), the second against the United States' U-15 national team (a 4:1 win today), and the third against the Chilean U-17 national team (23 November). The 23 November matches are the first full international matches for this Canadian team.

Robyn was a key member of the national champion Foothills G16 Colts. Robyn is a grade twelve student and is attending UCLA in the fall of 2008 on a soccer scholarship.

Looking back and Déjà Vu

I can't believe it, but Larry Poirier is back! Larry is a Foothills icon folks. He has been around Foothills since the beginning of time. I owe much to Larry. He called me in 1997 after a conversation with former Foothills coach Keith Coulsen who I had met earlier that year. Larry is relentless when it comes to recruiting coaches and when he called me we spoke for almost an hour. Larry was boy's director back then and I could sense the pride that he had in the club. I agreed to meet with Larry at his home, and it was there that I first heard about a young Foothills player named Owen Hargreaves. Larry was Owen's coach and along with Burk Kaiser, they were making a name for the Foothills United 81's on which Owen had played. I never got to see Owen play however, because he moved to Bayern Munich just before I arrived at the club to coach the Foothills United 84's.

The club was different back then. Foothills was one of five zones in CMSA and we only had teams at U15, U17 and U19. There was no office, no Betty-Ann, and no paid technical directors. The club didn't use e-mail and I didn't know anyone who owned a cell phone. All of the communication was done via telephone and we kept the entire set of club equipment in someone's garage. Volunteers were easier to find and people seemed to appreciate them more. The most expensive gymnasium was \$15-20 dollars per hour and we all thought that this was highway robbery.

Our most expensive gym last year was \$85-90 per hour, and we now have up to six or seven part-time and full-time staff, we have an office, computers, phones, photocopiers, equipment rental space, and best of all we have Betty-Ann. We also have Larry and this makes me very happy. If we were a hockey club we would say that Larry is a "good hockey man", a term that is common in the frozen ice world. On the green grass, Larry is one of the finest and to call him a "good soccer man" would be selling him short. Larry has just joined the Foothills board of directors and is heading up our adult programs. He has helped us to successfully merge with the Darts FC men's soccer club who have teams at premier, division one, two, three, six and over-35. Our club now stretches from U6 to the grave thanks to great volunteers like Larry Poirier.

Well, that's all the major news I have for now folks. Many thanks to the coaches, managers, administration, board and volunteers for being so supportive of Tommy and I as we get started with the club. We are really enjoying the work and we have lots of optimism about where our club is heading.

All the best for a happy holiday season in December. I will get another news letter out to you all in the New Year.

Go Green!

Graham