

Fernando Brassard: Portuguese National Team Goalkeeping Coach

During his youth, Brassard played for SL Benfica and won many titles, among them, two youth World Championships, the first with Riad 89-Saudi Arabia (as a substitute) and the other with Lisbon 91 - Portugal (as regular first team player) in the so called "Golden Generation", featuring players like Luis Figo, Rui Costa and Fernando Couto. Since then, he continued to play at the top level in the Portuguese league, but due to a hand injury he had to retire at the age of 30. However, his goal was to continue to be involved with football, and with goalkeeping training. One year later, he was invited to join the Portuguese National Team to become their goalkeeper coach, under Luiz Felipe Scolari, where he has remained since. SoccerCoachingInternational talked to him about his view on goalkeeping training and the key areas on developing good goalkeepers.

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By: Hugo Vicente

I was a privileged player, because I worked at a top Portuguese team like SL Benfica. Many goalkeepers that are now playing at the top level, in Portugal, were only able to reach that level, due to their hard work and dedication, because there was no specific goalkeeper training at that time, especially for those who came from modest clubs, and the truth is, that it was not such a long time ago... The good thing is, things have changed, and they continue to change, and currently, almost every team, even at the lower levels, have a person in charge, of teaching and coaching the goalkeepers. It's a role that is finally seen as a real important piece of the team strategy.

Working at the top level

"I've had the chance of starting my coaching career right at the top level, and as you probably understand, at this level, you won't have that much impact on the abilities of a goalkeeper. We are talking about a national squad, where you don't have time to work, to really develop the players in the long term. In this case, there are other goals to reach, and we usually spend most of our time maintaining their quality, their fitness and technical levels. Most of our work is trying to cover aspects on our next opponent, and trying to recreate them in the exercises, for example, if we are playing against a team that usually delivers low crosses, we will focus our practice sessions more on those situations... In a Club, the goals are also the same, but there are long, medium and short term objectives, in order to maximize the player abilities or minimize their weaknesses...it's different when you are in a National Team..."

Youth training

"We have more and more people with quality working with youth players, which is great! It's at those ages that you can really be a reference for them, that you can really correct the mistakes, that you can really have a huge impact and develop all the basic techniques, because without them, they will never be able to reach the top level or be there for many years! If you look at the goals scored in our league and around Europe, because this is not just a Portuguese problem, many of them, happen due to small details, about positioning, about communication, about specific goalkeeping technique, and that is why I think that nothing is more important to work on than this kind of aspect. It's useless to create complicated exercises, if the player isn't comfortable with basic techniques! You can pick up a book, and make the perfect exercise, but if you don't have the experience or the knowledge to correct their moves, the way he approaches the ball, the way he makes contact with the ball, the way he positions himself inside the goal, that practice will not be of any good! Maybe it's better than doing nothing, but certainly, you will create bad habits that if they can reach a top level team due to innate abilities and hard work, he won't have the quality to stay there for too long..."



Therefore, I think that here is where the most valuable coaches should be! The coach that knows how to work with kids, how to communicate, how to motivate them, but above all, how to teach and how to correct them during the exercises. And this can really make the difference to the future of a player's career and this is why I love to work with youth players as well..."

Repetition and progression is the key

"You can ask me if I prefer to work more on this or that, but the truth is that what I really like is to see the final result of a goalkeeper in a game, confident, leadership, and totally blended with the team's ideas. This can only happen if there is confidence between them and you can earn that confidence with your quality! So practice is the key! And what should we do in practice? The perfect scenario is to have time to work with the players, and go in depth with all the basic techniques of the goalkeeper. Let's for example, think about how to defend a long high cross, we should

start by explaining how it should be done, WHY it should be done like this, other ways it could be done and the advantages of choosing this way, and then make them do the movements without the ball.

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The goal is to understand, to really absorb the technique, the do's and don'ts and only when the technique is fully understood, we progress. Then we will introduce the ball, and then the moving ball, and then an opponent, and increase in tempo, the complexity, the intensity and so on... Repetition and progression is the key! They must experience the situations as many times as they can, but experience them well! They will progress... step by step! It's useless in my view to work with a player crossing the ball right away, if they don't know how to move out of the goal to approach the ball... They must know how to move, how to fall, how to grab a ball, and repeat

everything... This is why the basic techniques should be the most important thing that all people working with youth players should focus on, because only with a good understanding of this “ABC” of such a specific position in football, will allow them to improve their skills and be prepared to face the demands of professional soccer.

The Dutch view and the Portuguese reality

“Before I started coaching the Portuguese national team, I visited many top clubs in Europe, and was fascinated in the way the Dutch teams work their goalkeepers. They have top quality coaches and they can work in a very fun and simple way, without being too repetitive... They put a lot importance on technique, but they also put a lot importance on the repetitions and progression. Why do a lot of exercises if the first one you have done is not yet absorbed? In Portugal, this is already happening, and coaches are more and more capable, people are much more interested, more worried in being references for the kids to their future, there is more information to look for, and that's what we need to develop our players more and more: information! We are a small country but with many great players, we love football, and I think that if we work on having a better structure for our coaches, Portuguese football will benefit, having more and more top players around the world. I think we are in the right direction!



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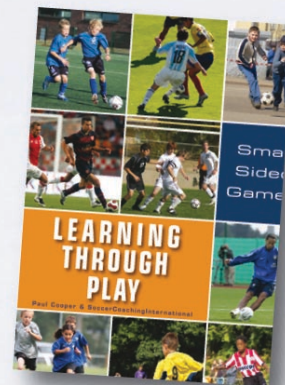
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