

Lazy or Innovative?

A good friend of mine, Hugh Swan, is the volunteer Director of Coaching for the Winnipeg Youth Soccer Association which services almost 30,000 players in the greater Winnipeg area.

I first met Hugh when Bobby Lenarduzzi, former Canadian World Cup Coach, now President of the Whitecaps, put him in touch with me. As a consequence we then met over a couple of pints in North Vancouver some 10 years ago. Hugh was seeking better ways of coaching his girl's team. I don't know if I helped, but we have shipped many videos his way since that meeting. Not that I was doing the selling. He would be regularly on the phone.

"What do you think of the Coerver tapes?"

"What do you have about coaching girls?"

"Is that Set Play video any good for our girls?"

And so it went on:

Hugh is a B Level coach, but he does not coach by the book. He sent me an email last week saying that he is doing more and more prior to and during his practice with video and asked me if he was being lazy. I suggested he was being innovative, not lazy. Prepping video clips can be time consuming. I also suggested he write about his innovative approach. Here it is.

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by Hugh Swan

To put this commentary into perspective, I have played the game of football for over 50 years. I have coached at a high level for over 20 years and I am currently the Director of Coaching Development for the Winnipeg Youth Soccer Association. I currently coach a premier under 14 girl's team and have been with them since they were 11.

Several years ago I was able to entice Allan Churchard and Tony Waiters to come to Winnipeg to put on training sessions for players and coaches in our Association. During one of the sessions Tony remarked at how technically skilled my team of 12 year olds were and asked what training methods I used. I had really never been asked that before so I had to think about the answer. It was as follows.

"Years ago I was training a team and was demonstrating a particular technique when one of the players asked where on earth would she ever use that particular move. I tried to explain how and when it might be used and continued to work with them to perfect it. It was only after the practice that I realized that this group of young teenagers really didn't know much about the sport in any great detail and I resolved myself to change that.

That next week I took them to a senior women's game to observe, but when we discussed this same move at the next practice not one of them had actually seen it executed in the game. Several days later I was watching my favorite team on the television and realized that I was a lazy viewer. I was reduced to waiting for the instant replay to really see the detail of any particular play and that was when I realized that these girls were not brought up in the same soccer environment that I was and couldn't understand the niceties of the game. I resolved to remedy that.

I have a very large collection of videos on techniques and tactics that I have collected over the years. I looked through them and pulled out several that had game-like situations in them. One was All the Right Moves (Roby Stahl); another was the Alan Shearer tape; and another particularly good set was the April Heinrichs' tapes. The reason why they were good was that in two of them the drills were being done by young ladies, so my girls could relate, but more importantly before each move was demonstrated it was profiled in a real time event.

I had a portable TV that ran off the power source in my truck. So I took the tapes and the TV to the field. After their warm-up they gathered around the back of the truck and I showed them the move we were going to practice. It was then that you could see the lights go on. Now they could tell when, where and why a particular move would work and we had instant focus.

Since then I have integrated video training into all my practices whether indoor or outdoor. It has put what I teach them into a context that they can grasp and it has sped up the training process measurably. Over the years I have asked the girls to buy their own copy of some of the tapes so that they can practice these techniques on their own. We also video tape some of our games or practices and will break those down into Coaching Bits for individuals to watch and improve.

Now as we progress into game situations, set plays or systems of play, the team will review Coaching Set Plays and we'll spend time watching the video on Systems of Play. By doing this the players begin to grasp the concept of the game far faster than if they were just being instructed on the field. I have noted that the individual players begin to see how their position and particular ability fits into the whole picture. The term "garbage collector" takes on new meaning. Now when we have a Pizza Night watching a game, the players can dissect it on their own as their knowledge base is much higher and their understanding of the game is at a point where they can be critical of what they are seeing.

We all do things differently when it comes to training players. My goal has always been to find whatever method that works; to get the message across in a way that the kids can absorb. For me and my teams, it has worked as I have taken three different teams to the National Championships on 6 different occasions. Enthusiastic players who want to learn, a library of videos, plus a coach who can still demonstrate this great game of ours, has stood the test of time.

Lazy or Innovative? You can judge for yourself. It has worked for me!

