

1. INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH FOOTBALL COACH

In the numerous football clubs in Germany there are thousands of youth coaches, who are often volunteers. Two of them, Kosta and Freddy, will accompany us through the book. Kosta and Freddy are fictional characters. They embody many characteristics and modes of behaviour that can often be observed in youth coaches. Their intentions are good, but they lack knowledge.



Vasilijus Kostadinov, known as „Kosta“ changes out of his work overall and into his tracksuit, then leaves his company in his works minivan and heads for the football field. He has been a voluntary youth coach for twenty years and is well-known in the Main-Taunus area. For the past five years he has been a youth coach at Germania Frankfurt. It is the start of the new season and his team is already facing a difficult match in their first league game on Saturday. In the car Kosta is already planning the line-up and the tactics for the game, and how he is going to prepare his team for the match in today's training session. This season he has put a good squad together and he believes his team has a good chance of becoming the champions and moving up a class. He would really like that. He has recruited five new players from other clubs into his squad. He was really cunning about it. At the end of last season, he had already visited lots of tournaments in his area and watched talented players, then spoken to their parents and persuaded them to let their children move to his C-youth team at Germania Frankfurt. For that he had to drop a few children from last season's squad - they would only have slowed things down at training - and anyway, he has enough players.

What do you notice when you read the first section about Kosta?

Is it the main objective of a youth coach's job to get points, win titles, retain classification and achieve a good position in the league table? The answer is: No! Unfortunately, however, there are many youth coaches who think precisely that, and there are also youth section heads who judge the quality of their coaches according to the team's position in the league table, thus giving rise to false motivation on the part of the coaches in these clubs. This early pressure for success, especially with the younger players, can cause the children to stop having fun and enjoying playing the game. This unnecessary pressure to achieve causes stress and can in some cases even lead to a child leaving the team, either because the child no longer enjoys football, or, as in the case of coach Kosta, when children are dropped from the squad because they couldn't fulfil the expectations of the coach in the short term.

depend on their talent and potential. The frequency, content and quality of your training

Three months ago, when an injury put an end to Frederick Schneider's football career at 26, the head of the youth section of Germania Frankfurt took him aside and said: "Freddy, we don't want to lose you. You've played for us since you were a child, you've had many coaches, gained a lot of experience and you're good with people. I would like to entrust you with the F-youth squad. Do what you like, I trust you". So that it wouldn't be too much for him while studying for his Business Studies degree, he only accepted after his friend Julian had agreed to be his assistant.



The children love Freddy because he is usually in a good mood, follows their wishes and tries to ensure that they enjoy training. Now Freddy is standing in the container in front of the equipment and wondering what he will do in the training session today: "Hmmm, I'll let them run three circuits, then play "Piggy in the middle", after that practise shooting at the goal and then play a game. And to finish off, penalty shoot-out - they always enjoy that".

What do you notice when you read the first section about Freddy?

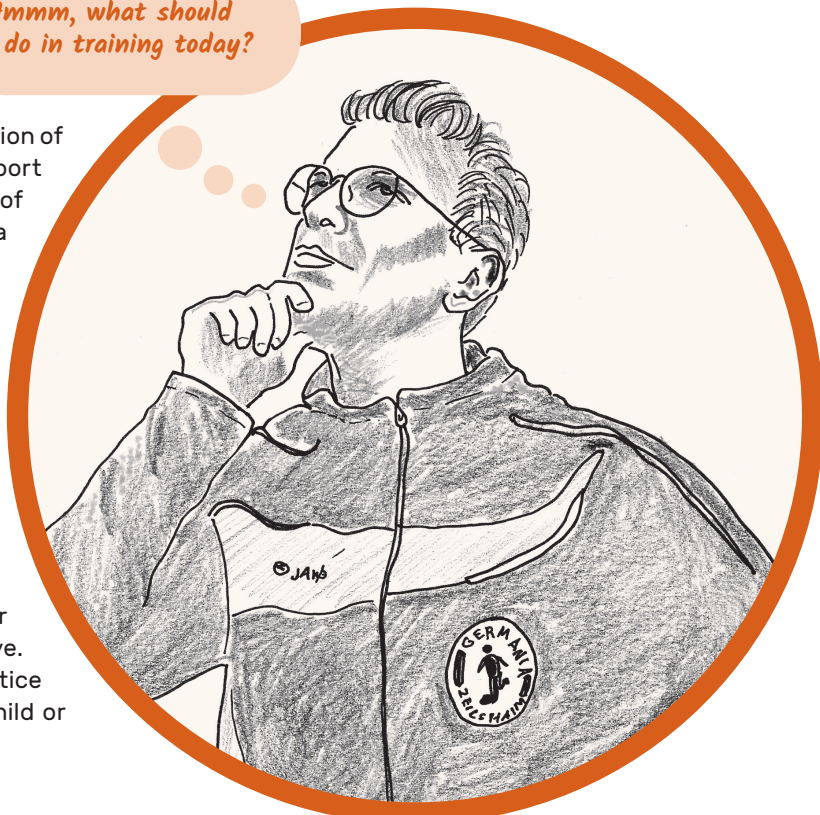
Should the training of the nine-year-olds he is coaching only focus on the fun factor? Is it enough to be good with people and to have some experience of playing to be able to do the task of coach justice? The answer to both questions is: No!

There are many youth coaches who regard training as simply occupied with the game of football. In their planning they look on training as a bucket of time holding about 90 minutes, which they have to fill with some kind of input. What exactly they do is (in their opinion) not particularly important: "It should have something to do with football and be fun for the kids". And much as we like Freddy, that is not enough.

In order for you to get a better understanding of your duties as a youth coach, we need to explain the term training more closely. For this we will use the first lines of the definition of the term in the Röhlig Encyclopaedia of Sport Science: "Training is a complex process of action with the objective of achieving a planned and subject-oriented effect on the condition of sporting performance and the ability to achieve the optimal performance when put to the test." Simply put, this means for you as a youth coach: Training is a process with the aim of improving performance as much as possible. This applies both to the individual player and the team as a whole.

Hmmm, what should I do in training today?

With your training the children or teenagers should develop and improve. They should learn new things and practice the familiar. The extent to which each child or each team develops will of course also



will depend on their talent and potential. The **frequency**, **content** and **quality** of your **training** will influence how far your trainees progress. The talent of a child does not much change the role of the coach: for one, the prospect of the optimal achievable level of performance will be the regional league, for another it might be the first division of the national league and the national team. The frequency of training sessions according to age group and team class range between two and (usually) four times per week. The following table shows the number of training sessions usual per week, according to the clientele, the size of the club and the players' class:

Table 1: Frequency and duration of training units for children and teenagers (excluding matches)

AGE GROUP	AMATEUR CLUB/ LOWER PLAYING CLASS	PROFESSIONAL CLUB / HIGHER PLAYING CLASS
U-7 (Bambini)	two units of 60 minutes each	two units of 60 minutes
U-9 (F-youth)	two units of 90 minutes each	two units of 90 minutes each plus support training offers
U-10 to U-13 (E- and D-youth)	two units of 90 minutes each plus support training offers	three units of 90 minutes each
U-14 to U-19 (C- B- and A-youth)	two units of 90 minutes each	four units of 120 minutes each

The difference in frequency and length of training sessions between the amateur and professional clubs, i.e. the lower and higher classes, does not, of course, mean that players in amateur clubs should practice less than players in professional clubs. Reality shows that players in higher classes take football more seriously and are more prepared to realize their football dream. There the parents are also often more supportive. In the lower classes it is usually different. Football is often seen as a pastime by the parents and some of the players. Consequently, they are less prepared to spend time on training. Here the principle: "less is more" counts, i.e. two well attended training sessions per week are better than three not so well attended ones.

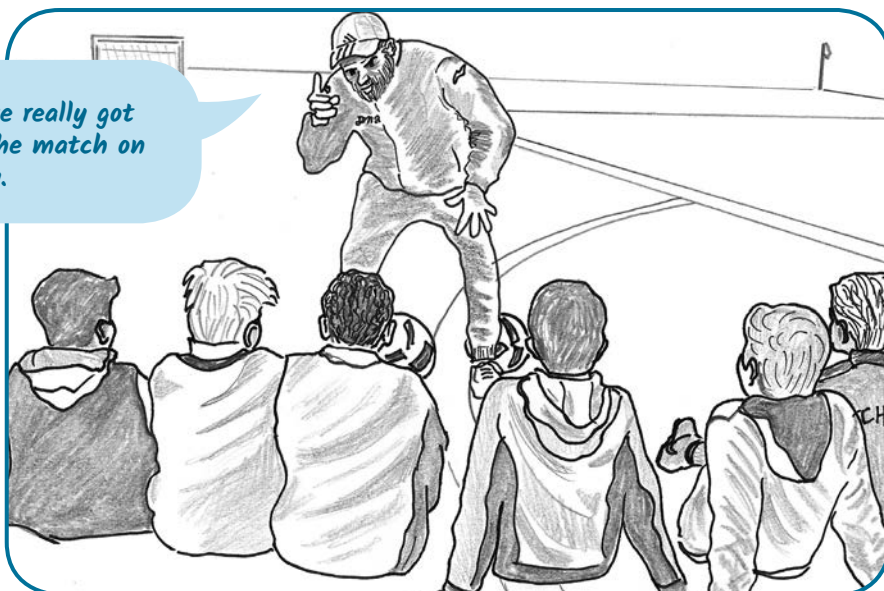
The following table illustrates how you should differ from Freddy and Kosta.

Table 2: Your view and attitude towards training compared to incorrect points of view, like those of Kosta and Freddy.

NAME	PLAN	POINT IN TIME FOCUSED ON	QUESTION	SELF-IMAGE
Kosta 	The training unit serves to prepare for the next competition. Everything is geared towards short-term success.	The next match, the end of the tournament or the end of the season	What can I do at training today so that my team win the next match?	Winner of titles and bringer of success
Freddy 	The training unit is seen as an activity with or about football. The trainer is guided by the interests and preferences of the players.	None	How can I fill an hour and a half with exercise and football fun?	Group leader, joker
You 	The training unit is a step on the way to improving performance. It triggers ability and is a step forward in development.	The end of time as a youth player; interim goals: the end of a part of vocational training	What new things should the players learn today, or practise and improve?	Teacher, guide, instructor in a training institute for footballers

There's no question that in the training sessions you have to include the needs and wishes of the players. There's also no question that when there is a league or cup match, you should aim for a victory or a good result. However, "fun" and "victory" should remain by-products of well thought out and systematic youth training work and not an end in their own right. It is also highly likely that the players with a good coach often experience enjoyment and success while learning - the one does not exclude the other.

But we've really got to win the match on Saturday.



Playing football is a skill that can be learnt, like many other things in the world, i.e. playing a musical instrument, speaking a foreign language, playing chess, etc. It can be taught and learnt.

For this, four components are required:

- 1** a motivated trainee with certain qualities needed for the matter
- 2** a dedicated instructor with specialist knowledge
- 3** the physical requirements (guitar, language book, chess set, etc) and...
- 4 time**

Beyond a certain level you even become an expert and will be honoured and rewarded. However, whereas with the other abilities and activities like playing a musical instrument, learning a foreign language or playing chess it is also possible to start them later in life and still become expert. The tricky thing about playing football is that in this case it is not possible. If, for example, a player aged 18 is still not able to deliver a cross with his weak foot or go into a tackle, the gateway to professional football has most likely closed. This is the responsibility you, as the youth coach, have towards your talented players. They, especially, deserve a youth coach who knows what he is doing.

In many developing countries children and youths get together almost daily on the street, the football ground or the beach and play football – they don't really have many other leisure options there. They have no coach, no boots often not even a proper pumped-up football. But they have time and enthusiasm and that alone makes a lot of difference. They experiment, compare new tricks, divide into groups, set up their own rules, play little tournaments and improve. It is not a coincidence that many experts with the ball come from poorer countries, nor that the Youth Coaching Team of the DFB recommend that 'aspects of street football' should be included in the training of children. Even Germany needs to have ball experts.

Often the coach has very little influence on the frequency and the extent of the training sessions. Constraints, like when it is possible to use the ground, the players' outside interests and the restrictions of his own job afford the coach little leeway regarding the frequency and extent of the training sessions. This only goes to underline how valuable training time is and that it is a resource that you should put to sensible and effective use.



CONCLUSION

As youth coach you are responsible for training the children in the subject of football. A good training session is one where something new was learnt or something familiar was practised and improved. Short term success like points, cup, championship, maintaining class or promotion belong mainly in adult football. Until they reach puberty, you should look after the development and progress of your players, in small steps and age appropriate, paying attention both to the individuals and to the team as a whole. Avoid pressure to achieve until the age of B-youth, then proceed with sensitivity. If you and your team work well together, you will experience success on the way again and again. There should always be fun, though not as an end in itself, but as a by-product of a pleasant working atmosphere. Accommodate the needs of your players and always bear them in mind when you are planning training sessions. However, you are neither a joker nor a simple group leader: you are the instructor of your players and time is a resource you shouldn't waste.