

Creative Players – How and When Ideas are Forged

What is creativity in players, is it just the 1v1? Most times when we think about the creative player we think of Ronoldino, Demarcus Beasley, Diego Maradona, Ariel Ortega, Francisco Totti, and Kaka to name a few. But what really makes them creative? Is it just their 1v1 ability or is it more?

We regularly hear about the need for more creative players in the US game. However, much focus from the top level is a response to lack of education, more accurately the lack of early education, of players in the realms of structure, which is generally defending principles and offensive principles. These principles are vital to provide organization for teams to perform successfully. With this important focus are we missing filling out and teaching the most exciting part of the game, deceptive/creative players, groups and teams? Creative players seem to be born with the qualities of creation, rather than destruction. These individual characteristics seem to be validated and engrained in players by the way parents and the community raise them in relation to how they solve problems.

Creative players prefer to make things rather than break things and always needs to be in our long term player development plans. Experienced coaches understand that it is the combination of structure and creativity that equals a well balanced team. The balance of these concepts allows us to bring our past experience as coaches into play but also allows the players to bring out their own flavor, personality and instinct. As much as we focus on structure, let's explore and highlight the elements of creativity of the individual player.....

What are the Elements of a Creative Player?

- Ability to think ahead
- Deception without the ball
- Deception with the ball
- Ability to use the space off of the ground as viable space to use
- Ability to bend passes
- Ability to bend runs to opens space for oneself
- Quick Turning
- Field Awareness

Although on the outside these elements seem to be advanced elements, experience shows that even young individual players can enhance their own creativity through these ideas.

Thinking Ahead – Defining X2 and X3 Thinking

Many times successfully creative players have the ability to think ahead and to plan for what is coming next. Players who use their bodies and their minds to pretend to do things and do something else, X2

thinking, is a base component. As the game advances and the ability of defenders to not get sucked into deception, creative players respond by doing things in a further advanced way, like double fakes which is X3 thinking or they simplify and don't use any fakes which is also a viable adjustment.

Development in the Youth Game

As players develop capabilities to function as a group and then to the team structure the developmental shift goes from individual creativity/deception to a much more structured, pattern oriented offensive style. As this change takes place it is easy for coaches to rely solely on good structure and organization to keep them in the game.

U8/U10/U12

Individual – Developing X2 and x3 thinkers

- Deception without the ball
- Deception with the ball
- Turning
- Bent Running
- Bent Passing
- Ball in the Air – (improvement of measured first touch and angles)
- Use of the outside of the foot as a deceptive and creative surface

U10/U12/U14

Group – Developing creative players and creative group play

- Decoy running, complimentary running
- Second and third waves of players into the play
- Assessing opposition strengths/weakness/structure
- Combination Play
- Group X2 and X3 thinking
- A platform/beginning begins with structure around ball, right/left, and splitting options

U14/U16/U19

Team – Helping Teams understand the how and the WHY of team tactics

- Adjustments made based on the physical environment
- Adjustments made to amplify good qualities of team as a whole
- Systems of play
- Team X2 thinking