

# IT'S TIME TO GET OUR KIDS ON THE BALL

This week, in a five day series, we consider the future of the Northern Ireland international team and assess how our country's chances of success can be enhanced. On day two, **Steven Beacom** speaks to a youth coach full of ideas and innovations.

**C**OACHING. With every passing year, it seems to have become more important in football.

Maybe that's because there are so many coaches around and they want all of us to think that.

Northern Ireland legend Harry Gregg will tell you that a lot of today's coaches make a simple game complicated.

And he'll be quick to add that many of those who pay the Irish FA for the opportunity to earn their badges, literally handing them a license to coach anywhere and anyone in the world, have never played the sport to any sort of level!

For years I've heard many people say that the coaches at the IFA have not got what it takes to (a) coach the future coaches and (b) more worryingly coach the future playing talent at Northern Ireland's disposal.

When you look at the dearth of genuine quality coming through in the last decade those "people" might have a point.

In time perhaps the shrewd introduction by Northern Ireland boss Michael O'Neill of Stephen Robinson and Stephen Craigan as under-21 and under-19 bosses respectively may change that.

Yesterday in this newspaper O'Neill stated better coaching

and a more professional approach was a necessity for Northern Ireland football to flourish.

With so much negative publicity towards the IFA and their coaching methods in recent years, it's hardly surprising that so many independent soccer schools for kids have sprouted up all over the province.

Cynics will say, those who run them are businessmen, more than football men, out to make a quick buck by charging parents of sports mad children for their time.

Some even call it 'glorified babysitting'.

Say that to one of those coaches, Tim Wareing, who hosts soccer schools day in, day out throughout Northern Ireland, and he takes the accusation as a personal affront to what he is trying to achieve with youngsters around the country.

Wareing has a Uefa A licence and previously coached the Lisburn Distillery under 18 and reserve sides.

He runs the TW Academy and employs coaches to develop kids from aged two to 16. He is not afraid to voice his opinions on youth coaching in Northern Ireland, the IFA and what needs to be done to improve things for the national team in years to come.

"We have 60 schools in



**Ball work: Tim Wareing demonstrates ball skills to some of the young players at his soccer school** PRESSEYE

Northern Ireland and have one in every county," reveals Tim.

"In a typical week we could coach between 500 and 600 children from the age of two taking their first steps with a football right up to young elite players who can be selected for Northern Ireland's Victory Shield squad.

"We had three players in a recent squad; Luke Fisher, who is flown over by Liverpool Football Club every other

weekend, Matthew Henry and Nathan Kerr.

"Our first introduction is our Toddler Soccer Programme. Boys and girls can start from two and that takes them up to four or five where

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The week's cricket news in **Around the Wickets Sport, Pages 52-53**

they can transfer to our mini soccer centres and if they are showing promise and interest in the game we invite them to the elite training and the academy."

Wareing is all in favour of the continental approach, adopted by the IFA for kids to play small sided games with small goals, but believes other philosophies have to change.

Put simply he wants the Northern Ireland players of tomorrow to get on the ball today.

"I think we have lost a generation of dribblers which is ironic because the most famous and finest footballer we ever produced, George Best, was one of the greatest dribblers of all time," says Tim.

"That's why when I'm coaching kids from, say, six to 10 I encourage them to dribble the ball because if they don't do it then they won't start in their teenage years.

"Too often kids here try to get rid of the ball because that's the first thing coaches or parents shout at them.

"If we can focus more on the individuality of players at a young age and they progress doing that then collectively as a team we will see better results.

"It's not just coaches that have to develop to help the kids, it is parents also.

"They need to be aware of

what to say to encourage their children.

"Northern Ireland don't have too many dribblers now perhaps bar Niall McGinn or Paddy McCourt and England are the same.

"The first World Cup I can really remember was in 1990 and back then England had John Barnes, Chris Waddle, Peter Beardsley and Paul Gascoigne, but they don't have many like that now.

"And that's because street football has disappeared.

"Of course there is increased traffic and we all have to be aware of 'stranger danger' but councils have played a part in that too with all those 'no ball games' signs going up and a generation has been lost to playing the freedom of street type football.

"What has replaced it is more structured football and kids don't get the chance to make their own decisions.

"Kids are told to do this, do that and I've seen it where a youngster will maybe try and take someone on and if he loses the ball the coach is shouting at him.

"So if a kid in football is brave and does something different and is shouted at when they lose the ball that negativity will hurt long term.

"Our kids, like those abroad, should be allowed to express themselves."



**On the ball: Tim Wareing encourages the next generation**

## Overhaul methods now and

**T**IM Wareing is one of those football coaches who forensically studies the game.

He looks to the methods of his hero Sir Alex Ferguson, as well as Jose Mourinho, for inspiration.

He'll read books and write books, watch DVDs and make DVDs on the subject.

He'll travel all around Europe to see what the latest coaching techniques are in an attempt to get ahead of the game and recently forged a relationship with Portuguese outfit Braga which could see gifted kids in his Academy from here benefit from what is going on over

there. Wareing says there is much to learn from our continental cousins which could benefit the Northern Ireland team in years to come.

"The Northern Ireland team is in transition at the moment," he says.

"We don't have enough depth. The amount of players going across the water to become professionals is decreasing and the amount of players returning from clubs is increasing.

"That's why we need to concentrate on grass roots football and youth levels now to give ourselves a chance in the future.

"We need the grass roots side

of football here run more professionally and to get the best qualified people working with the best kids and increase the contact time with those kids.

"Even Irish League teams don't have the most qualified coaches working with the most

important age group, which for me would be between the ages of six and 12.

"In England now there are kids getting four sessions a week which is something countries in Europe have been doing for years.

"It's no fluke that the Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and Germans are so technically gifted and are so good and it's no secret that if kids increase their contact time with the ball and contact time with proper qualified coaches then they will improve.

"If you compare the contact times between us and other

## SOUNDBITE

TIM WAREING

■ We need to look across to Europe to see what they are doing because they are leading the way

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