



Long Term vision and strategy in Football Development

A new Ajax Youth Development model



Ajax Youth Development



Ajax have a successful history of youth development stretching back over 40 years. Indeed 2005/2006 UEFA Champions League games, players developed at Ajax academy constituted the greatest number, ahead of Real Madrid (2nd) and Barcelona (3rd).

In 2002 Ajax were one of the first European clubs to install a FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR field and recently they have installed the latest generation of artificial turf – the FIFA RECOMMENDED 2 STAR. The Ajax coaching and management staff highly appreciates the FIFA certified installations quality as a playing and learning environment.

The Ajax Youth Academy

Ajax's youth academy is world famous. The goal of Ajax is to form talented young players into top football players. Only the very best will reach the top after a difficult and often long road. Johan Cruyff, Marco van Basten, Frank Rijkaard, Wim Kieft, Dennis Bergkamp and Patrick Kluivert are but few of the international stars that have successfully completed the training at the Ajax youth academy. At AFC Ajax, the training of top players takes centre stage. That is why the youth academy is also

known as the breeding ground of Dutch football. The further you get, the harder it becomes to maintain your place and to reach the ultimate objective – to play in the Amsterdam Arena. Only one or two players make it to the first team each year.

Ajax is partly dependent on players from its own youth academy. The youth teams are trained in exactly the same way as the first team and therefore the boys are already accustomed to Ajax's style of play, training, behaviour and house rules. Ajax strives to keep the way of playing football recognisable; attractive, offensive-minded, creative, fast, fair and preferably far away from the own goal on the opponents half.

Ajax has developed the so-called TIPS model, which stands for Technique, Insight, Personality and Speed. For each part there are ten criteria. P and S are generally innate properties, but I and T can always be developed further. All players own a special Ajax passport, in which all achievements are noted.



Vision – FIFA RECOMMENDED 2 STAR – Football Turf

In any corporate entity or football development strategy you need a vision, Ajax's vision is simple "To continue to be the most successful youth academy". With that vision there is a strategy, however to always maintain and achieve their vision over a long period of time, Ajax always need to challenge themselves internally to ensure they are always at the cutting edge of elite youth football development. Therefore to achieve their vision they always have to show a) innovation b) challenging the status quo c) strategic – defined as "the direction and development of Ajax youth academy over the next decade". By choosing FIFA certified installations as their youth training facilities Ajax once again proved to be forward thinking and living up to its visions.





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The Future?

The development and usage of FIFA RECOMMENDED 2 STAR artificial turf may become a norm in ten years. Looking back it would be Ajax again who led the way in seeing that their youth players would benefit further and the academy and Football club would benefit more with the installation of the FIFA RECOMMENDED 2 STAR field. Only in ten years time, will we see if this is reality but given Ajax's history and forward thinking approach in the last 40 years they are sure to be correct again. Time will tell.

Total Commitment

Managing change and upholding a vision needs total commitment. It is a well known fact that most professional and elite amateur footballers agree that their psychology has a large influence on their sports performance. It is further known that those who play football is that defeat often stems from the inability to manage anxiety, fear, anger or despair. Therefore with football turf being more prevalent and more widespread and challenging the traditional usage of natural turf many players could be sceptical about football turf and the issues of anxiety, fear, anger and despair. What was prevalent at Ajax was having a strong and committed coaching staff to the use and benefits of football turf (FIFA RECOMMENDED 2 STAR) with young players and that the commitment of all coaching staff to the benefits of artificial turf alleviate any negative psychological issues the players may have and prepare them to what the future may hold.

