

Professional Attitude Development in Football

Ian Maynard

In every situation that you face in life there will be some things that are outside of your control. Characteristics of many people, who have achieved a high level of personal success, are their ability to sort out those things that they can control, and to work at these, rather than concerning themselves with the things that are out of their control.

"Ain't no use worryin' bout things beyond your control, cause if they're beyond your control, ain't no use worryin'....."

"Ain't no use worryin' bout things within your control, cause if you got them under control, ain't no use worryin'....."

Ed Moses (USA - Athlete).

This may seem a very simplistic principle but it is fundamental to all aspects of football.

A PROFESSIONAL APPROACH ENTAILS THE IDENTIFICATION AND CONTROL OF AS MANY OF THE CONTROLLABLE VARIABLES IN YOUR PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCES AS POSSIBLE.

Good coaches should be aware of the implications of this principle for their own development as well as the development of the players, but their most important job is to sell this concept to the team. Each player's aim should be to try to cover every 'angle' in terms of his/her preparation, and that each 'angle' should be covered to the best of one's ability. In other words, players should score ten out of ten on all of the controllable factors that they identify, and not worry about those factors that they cannot control, because these uncontrollable factors will tend to induce anxiety that may be detrimental to their performance.

Hence a definition of a Professional Attitude in Football is 'CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLE' and the aim or long-term goal is complete and comprehensive preparation (or as complete and comprehensive as the coach or players desire, and the coaches' or players' life-style will allow).

This first activity, which coaches can either do for themselves looking at their role or with

their players if looking at their preparation, is designed to help in identifying just what is controllable. Examples for doing the exercise with a team are included, but of course the same principles apply to the coach or to individual players, if it is felt that this session is best completed with specific players, or in a one-to-one situation.

Activity 1: Compile a list of those aspects that you feel we as a team 'can and should' control in football. Remember that the list should take account of our work/school commitments, as well as time and facilities available to us. The list should be individually tailored to your needs or the needs of the team (20 minutes). I generally go around the room asking each player in turn to highlight elements they feel should be included, but get the support of the whole group, before recording the factor on 'our' controllable list. The exercise ends when the players, or you as the coach, cannot think of any further aspects for inclusion on the list. Remember there are no right or wrong answers, it is about what you and your team feel is important.

Included below for your information and as a guide, is a list of the kind of controllable factors that you might wish to consider (it is usually a good idea for you as the coach to have a clear insight into the kind of things you want on the controllable list, before you start the exercise).

You can control...

- Communication
- Taking Responsibility on the Pitch
- Temperament
- Systems of Play
- Hydration
- Fitness
- Positive Attitude
- Commitment
- Concentration
- Mental Toughness
- Enjoyment
- PERFORMANCE
- First Touch
- Punctuality
- Emotions
- Aggression
- Diet
- Dedication
- Strength
- Flexibility (stretching)
- Routines
- Workrate
- Rehabilitation

Coaches or players should record all those factors that they feel are controllable and

relevant to them or the team. NB This is not the 'definitive' list- it will be different from player to player and even with each player, it will change over time.

Activity 2: Compile a list of those aspects that you feel are not controllable in football (10 minutes) – Examples of the kind of things that you may wish to include on your list are provided.

You cannot control...

- Officials
- Injuries/Illness
- Luck
- Opposition
- Other people's opinions/expectations
- Weather
- Venue/Facilities
- WINNING/LOSING

You or the players should record all those factors that they feel are uncontrollable and be aware of what they should not be worried about.

REMEMBER: UNCONTROLLABLE FACTORS ARE USUALLY THE SAME FOR EVERYBODY, SO THERE IS NOTHING TO BE GAINED BY WORRYING ABOUT THEM.

For me the most important factors to have in the correct list are Performance, Winning and Losing. You can control your Performance (as player or coach) but you cannot control Winning and Losing. Most coaches would agree with this and ensure that their players also agree with the concept. I think if you prepare consistently and correctly (by scoring ten out of ten on those factors in our controllable list), you are much more likely to perform to your potential and that is all a coach should ever desire of their players. However, because of things like 'how well the opposition perform on the day, a poor decision by one of the officials that goes against us or perhaps just because of bad luck', even the best team in the country can not always control the outcome/result of a match. Teams like Manchester United, Arsenal or Liverpool do loose occasionally. It is therefore important that we score ten out

of ten on controlling our performances and hence maximise the chances of fulfilling our potential. By maximising your potential you are much more likely to win the match and to maximise your potential you should only focus on controllable factors. Likewise, most of the factors in the controllable list are task relevant, in other words if the team is under pressure in a match situation it will help to focus on 'communication' or 'first touch', whereas all the factors in the uncontrollable list are task irrelevant and will not help in playing the game. It is natural, especially for younger players, to focus on things like opposition, winning and losing which because they are uncontrollables tend to cause worry and anxiety. Unfortunately, this situation is often reinforced by the well-meaning parent whose first question on arriving home after the match was 'did you win?', rather than 'did you enjoy yourself?' or 'did you play well?'. Hence, the sooner coaches can teach them to focus on relevant processes, the more likely football will be fun, rather than a source of stress.

OUR AIM IS TO FOCUS ON THE PROCESSES IN FOOTBALL WHICH HELP US PLAY TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY i.e. YOUR TECHNIQUE, YOUR DECISIONS, THE EFFORT YOU APPLY, ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR PERFORMANCE, THAT YOU CAN CONTROL.

Each of the factors identified as controllable, but not thought to be under your control, need to be systematically broken-down and strategies developed that will bring that variable into your control.

Activity 3: (As individuals or in small groups as identified by the coach). Take one factor that you or your group feel is outside your control at the moment, within the list of **CONTROLLABLE FACTORS**. List the strategies that may be used in preparation or training that will allow you to control that factor (20 minutes). (Coaches should prepare strategies for all factors in the controllable list, in preparation). If time allows, identify further factors and strategies for controlling these factors. Again, included is an example of one of these controllable factors (that may not currently be controlled) and typical strategies that coaches or players may use to bring that factor inside their control.

Factor currently outside MY CONTROL	Strategies for CONTROLLING that factor
FACTOR 1 Good Flexibility...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree an appropriate short to medium-term goal with the coach e.g. '10 minutes of stretching twice every day in addition to usual warm-ups and warm-downs'. - Identify list of appropriate stretches (for all the relevant muscle groups) with the coach or physiotherapist. - Learn the correct technique for each stretch. - Measure current flexibility (before stretching programme). - Try to get a member of the family or training partner to verify/witness stretching sessions each day. - Measure flexibility once a month during the programme to monitor improvements.

To help develop a 'professional attitude', incorporate one factor at a time into your goal-setting programme (perhaps every three months or so when you re-evaluate your goals, devise strategies to bring one further controllable factor, that is currently outside your control, to within your control). That is, over time work to gain a consistent, high level of control over all the factors you listed as controllable.

Do not expect immediate results. Mental and physical control skills take time to acquire. Nevertheless, by being persistent in your endeavours, results will come.

Professor Ian Maynard is based at the Centre for Sport and Exercise Science, Sheffield Hallam University. He is an Accredited Sports Psychologist who has extensive experience of working with elite athletes. He has provided support at both Olympic and Commonwealth Games and attended World Championships as a Sport Psychologist in eight different sports. He also coordinates sport science support for the English Table Tennis Association and Royal Yachting Association and acts as a consultant sport psychologist for Lawn Bowls and Diving.

SUMMARY

A professional attitude demands the identification and control of as many controllable factors as possible.

- 1 List controllable variables in your preparation for football.
- 2 Be aware of uncontrollable variables
- 3 Focus systematically on one of the variables that can be controlled:
 - Break it down into workable parts, if necessary
 - Identify strategies to help you learn to control the variable
 - Practice these strategies
- 4 Include the strategies in your goal-setting programme.
- 5 Work through each variable on your list until you are confident that you have each factor under your CONTROL.
- 6 Coaches and sponsors will prefer to work with 'Professionals'.