

Evaluation of the Women's Olympic final game. USA v Brazil

The American women showed great heart, excellent discipline and tremendous desire during the course of this hard fought contest (as did the Brazilians).

The USA had a definite tactical plan to utilize their resources in the best possible manner.

The Brazilians had so much individual ability that they were able to think for themselves and utilize different tactical options on each possession. They didn't seem to have a distinct tactical plan but didn't need a regimented plan because each player was better able to self-determine the best option at the time from those options available.

The USA's players had serious technical limitations and needed both the comfort of the tactical system and the immediate support of their team mates when in possession. Often the US players were unable to get open and support the player in possession therefore the US coughed up the ball very quickly and had a tough time stringing more than two passes together.

The Brazilians were individually far more capable of holding the ball under pressure and varied their game between quick passing and deceptive dribbling. This approach kept the US defense on the back foot because they couldn't set up to deny the dribble because the Brazilians would pass and they couldn't set up to deny the pass because the Brazilians would dribble.

The US players averaged in the region of two touches on each possession.

The Brazilians averaged closer to four touches on each possession. This difference may not sound like a lot but, in reality, it means that the Brazilians had double the number of ball touches on each possession.

The US team enjoyed the greater luck at crucial moments. The US goal came after a clear hand ball from Brandi Chastain who stopped momentarily after the incident as if expecting the referee to call it. The hand ball was discussed many times by the commentators and replayed two or three times for the benefit of the viewing audience. Chastain's subsequent pass to Tarpley was the assist on a goal that never should have happened. I have never believed those who subscribe 100% to the adage that, "you make your own luck". Some contests hinge on the referee's decisions and many games are decided by an official's mistake. This contest was one of those instances!

Moving on; historically the women's game in Brazil has been the victim of a more chauvinistic society than in the US. Only now is the Brazilian nation starting to embrace the women's game. This applies to many nations around the world where female athleticism is often regarded distastefully by much of the population. While this attitude is gradually changing the rest of the world is playing catch up to women's soccer in America. As a consequence the US women have enjoyed a great head start over the rest of world.

This head start however, is gradually being wasted by the US soccer culture that values team work over individualism from the earliest moments of player development. Because of their focus on the creativity of the individual, Brazil has been the world's dominant force in the men's game for over 7 decades. In the Olympic final we witnessed a Brazilian women's program that has developed from nothing two decades ago dominate the US women and fully deserve to win. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that it is only a matter of time before the Brazilian women overtake the US on the scoreboard in addition to the quality and dominance of their play. Yesterday we saw how bankrupt, stilted and frankly boring the US power game is against a team of creatively trained individuals.

Interestingly, Tiffany Milbrett, the US National team's most successful striker over the past decade, refuses to play in the system advocated by head coach April Heinrichs. Milbrett's beliefs led her to resign her position on

the team because she refused to play the robotic, non creative style advocated by Heinrichs. Thus the US lost its most creative player and perhaps its only chance to dominate high quality opposition defenders in the one versus one situation. The result of the focus on the direct, power game by the American coaches was clearly evident yesterday. In the first 90 minutes the U.S. created no clear chances in front of goal and were limited to one half-chance that Tarpley took advantage of.

An independent expert's take on the game:

Lori Walker the CBS play by play commentator and ex National team player under Anson Dorrance commented that, "until the coaching system in the US focuses away from winning and more on encouraging players to take individual risks with the ball, the US will be second best to teams like Brazil with players who are far more comfortable on the ball under pressure".

A parent's take on the game:

Parents,

I work at home so I have that advantage to take time off and watch this game. The time is 2:25 pm and they are about 25 minutes into the Gold medal game between the USA and Brazil. If you want to watch two very different styles of play turn on and watch this game. Part of Andy's philosophy is based on Brazilian teaching. It is so evident in this game. I have seen in the first 20 minutes about 8 moves from the Brazilians and maybe 1 or 2 from USA. I have seen the Brazilians take on US defenders at least 5 times to USA's none. I have seen the USA women kick it out of bounds 6 times to Brazils 1.

Brazil had 3 shots on the goal inside 6 minutes of the game and that Marta, for Brazil, is something else as well.

Now, I think the USA women are probably the most athletic in the world and that is why they do well. Just think, if our team used their fakes in moves, they would be even better then they are. That is what Andy is trying to do. Change the way soccer is being played in America."

Conclusion:

The US National team program and youth soccer in America has a major problem. Our culture is one of pursuing the statistical win at the earlier stages of development. This is at the cost of developing individual brilliance. Winning should be an individual focus before it becomes a team focus. The ultimate win is development. All the youth medals in the world will not compensate for a lack of comfort on the ball when a player is trying out for a high school or college team. The Brazilian culture develops creative players with the best touch and deception.

The problem revolves around inappropriate coach and parent expectations. Most coaches and parents believe that the statistical win is important. This attitude is the same as judging a child by the size of their bank account. It is simply not important for a fifteen year old to work in a fast food restaurant for minimum wage when that same child can use the extra time to study and develop abilities that, later in life, will pay dividends. Likewise it is simply not important for children to win the game at the expense of developing the skills and tactical speed that later on will enable them to compete at the highest level.

Every youth coach that encourages their defenders to kick the ball out of play when under pressure in their own half has one main objective....to win the game. This tactic is damaging to the players concerned because they lose an opportunity to take a risk and learn how to escape from pressure every time they take this expedient route. Coaches and parents justify this, (and other instant gratification tactics), by pointing to their team's win/loss record with pride. As a father of five and, over the years, the coach of thousands I have learned to care little about whether or not the team wins and choose to focus on the individual win for each of my players.

Eventually, (after a period of four to five years), my teams win more games than those who have been consistently coached only to win. This is because it's hard to lose when one's team is stacked with brilliant dribblers and goal scorers!!

As a final word of advice to all parents:

Look for the program that focuses on the development of the individual and has the track record of individual success to prove it. Cheer the players for their willingness to take risks and the coach for encouraging the players to step out of their comfort zone at the risk of giving up the ball and losing the game. Remember, in youth soccer the individual win is worth more than the "team win" because there is no reward without risk and many mistakes have to be made along the road to greatness.

Look to Brazil, the greatest soccer nation in the world, for your inspiration. Emulate their creativity and desire to make the big play and, like the Brazilians, you will eventually enjoy an inordinate amount of success and recognition for your exceptional talents.

Work daily on dribbling and shooting and remember that you need that great dribbling deception and touch to create space and set up the shot. And a shot is the most difficult pass so both your passing and shooting skills will become excellent.

If your current team or coach doesn't focus on dribbling and finishing join the Legends Academy, (players from other teams and clubs always welcome. You can attend on a month to month basis), and get what you need to be the best you can be.

Warmest regards,

:) Andy Barney

KC Legends Soccer Club ***BIG PLAY SUPERSKILLS*** Academy Director of Coaching

PS: Please remember that much of the success of our program is predicated on skill homework. 200 shots and 600 moves per day is strongly suggested as the appropriate daily quota.

For more information on how to be trained like a Brazilian please call or e-mail the Director of the Legends Academy – Dan Campione. 913-851-9898 or dcampione@planetkc.com. Web Site www.kclegendsoccer.com

All truth passes through three stages. First it is ridiculed. Second it is violently opposed. Third it is accepted as being self-evident. - Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)