

## England's Coaching Dilemma

England's past and present, Sir Trevor Brooking and Frank Lampard, have been inside Wembley, gracing the famous turf, but yesterday the pair stood outside the stadium and coached the country's future, showing some youngsters the type of skills required to gain access to Wembley via the players' entrance.

Judging by the limited technical standards of the majority of English schoolboys, Brooking and Lampard have their work cut out. Some help is at hand. Brooking, the Football Association's director of technical development, and Lampard, the Chelsea midfielder, yesterday launched a £10 million 'Skills' programme: one million children aged five to 11 will receive tuition from 66 - the FA's favourite number - specialist skills coaches, including former players such as Mark Walters.

Catching them young, as Brazil and Holland do, and following Manchester United's impressive example of working in small-sided games, often four versus four, may nurture techniques that last a lifetime. "We have a group of very talented individuals with England," Lampard said, "but in big tournaments, when we come up against technical teams, they do have better basic skill levels which they have learned on the beach or in the street."

Early learning is essential. "As a parent, you wouldn't wait until your child was 11 to teach them good behavior because they would run amok," Brooking said. "It's the same with technique; you have to work on it early. Once you go into 11 v 11 matches (aged 11), with all these people running at you, you panic because you haven't the confidence to play a 1-2 to get out of trouble. We also have to change the philosophy of some of the people on the sidelines. We squeeze the flair out of youngsters because they are scared to make mistakes. A youngster also has to understand that step-over's are good, but sometimes a simple five-yard pass is the killer pass. Cesc Fabregas' reading of pass selection is as good as anyone."

Mention of Arsenal's gifted Spaniard raises another issue. "Only 40 per cent of starting XI players in the Premiership are English," Brooking continued. "In Italy, it is 74 per cent Italian. We want to go up to 70 per cent - but it has to be on merit

"Uefa's quota system is OK, but it is for 'home-grown' players, which does not help us, because that means being in the Academy system between 15 and 21. Fabregas is 'home-grown'. The challenge for us is to improve technical quality so at 16 more English youngsters go into the Academies. But most clubs are setting up European, and world-wide scouting networks, so it's going to get worse unless we can challenge that with schemes like this."



**Talent: Nedum Onuoha is one of English football's future prospects**

The presence of Sir Terry Leahy outside Wembley was significant not simply because the Tesco chief executive was investing £5.25 million of the supermarket's takings in the program. Leahy is close to Gordon Brown and the FA hope the new prime minister will expand the Skills program. "He [Brown] knows about this scheme," Brooking said. "We really need to do this scheme 20-fold to get the impact we want." Greater Government backing is required.

The FA scheme also targets troubled areas concerning Whitehall. "London has 16 per cent of the population but three per cent of the playing fields," Brooking said. "Some of the youngsters - the black and ethnic communities - don't even get a chance to play. And you can't tell me there isn't the raw talent in the inner cities."

The pressing need for developing talent was highlighted in the recent European Under-21 championships. England, all grit and running, reached the last four but too often squandered possession. "Holland had 70 per cent of the possession in the semi," Brooking argued. "Mark Noble and James Milner ran more than 15km, which means our work-rate and commitment was second to no country.

"But it does mean we are giving the ball away too easily and we have to work so hard [to win it back]. If you are playing an afternoon kick-off in the Far East with a humid atmosphere, you cannot close people down for 90 minutes." And so you lose to Brazil's technicians in the 2002 quarter-finals in Japan.

Brooking took positives from Stuart Pearce's juniors, from prospects such as Nedum Onuoha ("a real bonus"), Steven Taylor ("good") and Scott Carson ("experienced"). "You are looking for individual flair and I thought Ashley Young had his moments and has a chance," Brooking added. "Leroy Lita did really well."

The FA will next week offer Pearce a two-year contract to coach the Under-21s, liaise with Academies and "identify individuals to fast-track". If Pearce shines, he will be a leading contender to be Steve McClaren's eventual successor as England's head coach.

As for the proposed National Football Centre at Burton, a scaled-down version remains a possibility, according to Brooking. England might use it occasionally but the international home for Lampard will remain The Grove Hotel near Watford, and Arsenal's London Colney training centre. Just like yesterday, it is all about getting to Wembley.