# Creativity in Football

## Guidance to equip you with an understanding of the concept of creativity and how to develop it in your players

**Good coaching makes people confident about improving their competence, and encourages creative and individual ways of performing. It leaves people connected to sport and physical activity and builds character through being positively involved with others.**

**Jean Côté, 2012**

#### When Jean Côté devised this quote, he was doing so to deliberately introduce the language of the ‘C’ system to British coaching.

The ‘C’ system helps coaches refine and develop their craft by suggesting ways in which they can build:

* connection
* confidence
* competence
* creativity
* character
* caring.

The football coach who is seeking to work in a creative environment with both players and coaches seeking new ways of approaching challenges will need to tap into many facets of the ‘C’ system.

Players connected with coaches and each other and playing with confidence will happily experiment appropriately and build up a level of skill to allow them to be creative. A key role for the coach is to create an environment where players feel comfortable when trying new challenges, thinking differently and being innovative.

## Defining creativity in football

There are clear differences between definitions of creativity.

Some focus on the idea of producing something completely new; others talk about creativity producing changes, and it is these types of definitions that are most useful to football.

The completely creative player happens once in a lifetime. Players who can produce positive changes should be on every single football pitch in the country. Here are some of the useful definitions:

#### Creativity is defined as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems and communicating with others.

**Franken, 2006**

#### Creativity is nothing more than seeing and acting on new relationships, thereby bringing them to life.

#### Anderson, 1992

#### Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. Creativity involves two processes: thinking, then producing. Innovation is the production or implementation of an idea. If you have ideas, but don’t act on them, you are imaginative but not creative.

#### Naiman, 2012

#### These definitions give us creativity as:

* generating or recognising ideas and alternatives
* useful in solving problems
* seeing and acting on new relationships
* turning new and imaginative ideas into reality
* thinking then producing.

And that last sentence in the quote by Linda Naiman really does define the work of coaches, as they are the people who are charged with giving players imagination and helping them act on it appropriately.

## A model for the creative player

A useful model for player creativity uses an ‘S’ system:

* skill
* spatial awareness
* sensing
* social awareness
* self-awareness.

This breaks down as follows:

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| --- | --- |
| **SKILL** | To perform the creative thought |
| **SPATIAL AWARENESS** | To understand the space required to produce the skill |
| **SENSING** | The ability to see and feel what is going on |
| **SOCIAL AWARENESS** | To understand whether the others around need to be involved or not |
| **SELF-AWARENESS** | To understand own personality, strengths, weaknesses and behaviours |

This fits well with The FA’s four-corner model, with the factors shown here aligning with the physical, technical, social and psychological development of players.

Creativity in football requires players to know themselves, work with each other, and understand the very best ways in which they can combine. Practising therefore has to include the development of skill, spatial awareness and an awareness of how individuals themselves and others play.

Alongside all types of practising is the notion of positive social bonds between players and within teams.

This not only helps towards players developing a good understanding of their individual and team playing style(s) but also contributes to helping create a good team spirit in which creativity can flourish.

## Redefining player creativity

here are multiple definitions of innovation, helping to define how different people can respond creatively.

This is helpful when defining creativity for games players. We tend to be stuck with the notion that the creative player is the brilliant stand-out person. You will see their goals, their brilliant passes, their touch of genius. But that is a problem: the media brings us so many moments of genius, it becomes difficult to see the generation of ideas and alternatives as genuine creativity.

What is offered here is a framework for creativity in football to enable every coach to see creative qualities and potential in every player.

The framework begins with three broad categories of player:

* building players
* organising players
* soloing players.

#### Building players

This type of player will have good spatial awareness and recognise the space in which a team can make progress.

#### Organising players

This type of player will help others perform at their best. They will have enhanced personal and social awareness, and understand how others play, how fast they move and where they like to receive the ball.

#### Soloing players

This is probably the old model of creativity – players who have a spark of genius and produce something all on their own.

Within these broad categories, there are more specific types of player.

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| --- | --- |
| **BUILDING PLAYERS** |  |
| Play designer | Creates situations for others where they can do their best work |
| Includer | Knows others’ needs and looks after them |
| **ORGANISING PLAYERS** |  |
| Director | Sparks the creative talents of others |
| Collaborator/ cross-pollinator | Helps bring things together, and leads from the middle |
| **SOLOING PLAYERS** |  |
| Hurdler/experimenter | Develops a knack for overcoming challenges and keeps trying new things |
| Weakness finder | Has a high level of intelligence, memory and strategic ability |
| Threshold breaker | Has the high level of skills necessary to be able to react during an important part of the game or in key space on the pitch |

The structure above offers coaches a different way of thinking about creative players. All players will have one, two or several of the qualities listed.The language should help coaches design practices that foster these talents, and give players direction on how they are trying to be creative and then an appropriate practice to try it out.

## TGFC not TFfu

The diagram below shows a game that is typically used in Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU). It is a game called the wing game in which players are encouraged to use the whole width of the pitch, and when in the wing channel, they can be unopposed.

Imagine we were Teaching Games for Creativity (TGFC), rather than Understanding. Looking at the types of player we are trying to encourage, this would make a great practice for the weakness finders and threshold breakers, encouraging them to use the wings and find different ways of getting the ball into the middle.

With some adaptation, space could be created in the middle of the pitch for the play designers and directors to try to build play and draw others in constructively.

The structure of TGfU lends itself to developing creative players. With a small change of emphasis and thinking of different types of creative players,TGFC is within the reach of every coach.



## High performing coach behavious

Highly successful coaches in both football and other sports are said to exhibit important ‘high-performing behaviours’ that set them apart from other coaches.

It is worth examining these high-performing attributes of coaches as they relate to the development of creative capabilities in football players because they are applicable across all age groups. Some of these bahaviours have been identified as follows:

* being self-aware, open-minded, visionary
* able to think laterally, be creative, be reflective
* always knowledge-hungry, educator-oriented, seeking solutions to complex problems.

The ingredients that enable coaches to exhibit some of these behaviours are grounded in, and come from, an ability to synthesise knowledge and understanding from various fields, as outlined in the table:

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| **THE WHAT OF COACHING** | A knowledge and understanding of football and player development |
| **THE HOW OF COACHING** | A knowledge and understanding of learning, the coaching process and practice |
| **THE WHY OF COACHING** | A knowledge and understanding of self in terms of coaching philosophy and ethics |
| **THE WHO OF COACHING** | A knowledge and understanding of personal and social context |
| **THE WHERE OF COACHING** | A knowledge and understanding of the environmental dimension |

It is clear that all these coaching ingredients impact on how coaches develop players, both in terms of their all-round development and focusing on creative play. For example, when looking at developing creative capabilities, coaches should focus on the following areas for their personal development:

* **Football and player development –** coaches should be aware of the readiness trends and factors associated with various age groups that suggest the most developmentally appropriate practice types and environment.
* **Learning, the coaching process and practice –** coaches should always look to differentiate and individualise practices during coaching sessions to maximise individual learning while recognising that participants can also learn through playing and practising in free play/guided play sessions, often without the input of the coach (and in other activities outside football that can make a significant contribution to overall long-term player development).
* **Coaching philosophy and ethics –** coaches should make it clear to participants and parents that they develop people through the sport and for the sport (ie apply a holistic approach addressing all aspects of the ‘C’ system, including creativity).
* **Personal and social context –** coaches should ensure that they develop relationships with players so individual needs and aspirations are fulfilled while also addressing issues relating to developing a common bond between individuals through a positive team ethic that is reflective of their creative style of play.
* **Environmental dimension –** coaches should be able, irrespective of where they are operating (ie primary school, junior section of football club, academy centre/centre of excellence etc), to develop players’ creative capabilities by matching the learning outcomes and learning methods/styles to meet the needs of players. In some cases, this approach can be compromised when a ‘win at all costs’ mentality is deemed more important than a long-term interest in player development.