



Little opportunity: Tim Wareing coaches young children at one of his soccer schools. He believes individuality has been lost from football
PRESSEYE

Tim's striving to take big steps with little ones

BY STEVEN BEACOM

GET them early and they'll enjoy it for life. That's the message from youth coach Tim Wareing in relation to bringing kids into football.

As well as his other programmes for older children, Tim runs Toddler Soccer Schools for those aged between two and five.

Too young? Not according to this coach.

"Our ideas behind it are for the kids to enjoy the session and for them to get fit, healthy and active. At that age, they are like a sponge, so they take information and ideas on really well," he says.

Having watched a session of this particular age group in an east Belfast church hall recently, he is right when he says the kids have fun.

Thanks to the skills and personalities of 'coach Garth' and 'coach Daniel', as the youngsters call them, every single one of the children left after 45 minutes with a smile on their face, having enjoying the experience of a ball at their feet.

The Toddler programmes are adapted to suit the age group.

Wareing explains: "Where you would find with older children they would get motivated by showing them the skills of Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney, what we found with the younger children was that story telling was what they enjoyed and we would use popular cartoon characters such as Buzz Lightyear and Woody from Toy Story to do different skills instead of Messi and Ronaldo.

"Also another of the games we do is pretend the ball is a puppy dog and that their foot is the collar and their leg is the lead and for them to take the dog for a walk. That encourages them to keep the ball nice and close to them and then we show them how the puppy dog can do different tricks, like rolling over so we have three year-olds doing dragbacks!

"With the Toddler courses, you have to be an entertainer as well as coach and be able to lose your inhibitions to ensure the



Youth first: Coach Tim Wareing says early development is key

kids have fun and bring the class to life.

"We like our coaches to have a bubbly personality and an infectious love of the game and children. I would always say to staff if they aren't enjoying it they won't be able to motivate 10 or 15 children to enjoy it.

"We have a programme for coaches to follow but we do allow them freedom as well, because I don't want them to become robots."

Wareing says that when he initially approached the Irish FA with this plan for the kids, he was knocked back.

"We went to the IFA with the idea and the concept but they didn't take it at all. I guess that gave us the incentive to go out and get kids interested in football at an early age and get them enjoying the game," he says.

"It does frustrate me with football in Northern Ireland that it seems to be 'our way or no way'. I wish the authorities would be more open minded and embrace new ideas. Certainly I would like to see people from the IFA to come and take a look at our centres and what we are doing.

"We make sure that our coaches are qualified, they are background checked, we have insurances for the programme and what we are trying to do is develop kids. Unfortunately though they look at us as competition rather than embracing what we are trying to do all around the country."

future can be bright: Wareing

countries in Europe it is enlightening.

"Ajax has one of the best studies — they bring their kids in aged 10 and work constantly with them and up to the age of 18 they will have had 8,000 to 9,000 contact training sessions with their coaches.

"Here, our best kids are lucky if they manage to get two hours per week!"

Wareing has carried out his own research, and insists things need to change.

He says: "I've compared how many touches kids get in various training sessions.

"I took one of those clickers you see air stewardesses using on flights and the results were amazing.

"In a typical training session of one of the national county IFA programmes in a two hour period this one boy, who we did the study with, touched the ball 224 times.

"We compared this to a one hour training session with his

own club and he touched it 307 times. In a session in our Soccer School he touched it 699 times which I think underlines the importance and value of specific training.

"For me in this country, too many coaches have not evolved. Kids will turn up for training and nothing new has been planned.

"Too often I have seen warm-ups consist of running around the pitch with coaches shouting 'left hand down.... right hand

down' and 'get up and head the ball'.

"Then the kids will go into a line drill which is a common thing where the coach will be at the top facing a long line of kids.

"The kid will pass the ball to the coach who lays it off and then the kid has a shot, so if there are 10 kids in that line for every circuit the kid completes he will get two touches and the coach will get 10!

"Surely the more touches kids can get on the ball the better.

"We need to look across to Europe to see what they are doing because they are leading the way."

TOMORROW: We travel to France to check out their ideas on improving their national team and how they could benefit Northern Ireland in the future.

What the IFA do...

THINK which footballers the Irish FA invest in and the senior Northern Ireland team will immediately spring to mind.

The governing body of football here, however, is in charge of many more teams and programmes than that, be it with the under-21s, under-19s, under-17s, women's teams, boys, girls and disabled footballers.

They are involved at primary school and secondary school level and have Centres of Ex-

cellence. The IFA also have 15 Grassroots Development Officers all over the country.

Recently a new four-year grassroots programme was announced between the IFA and McDonald's. This programme is designed to enhance the structure of the game and deliver a lasting legacy of benefits at grassroots level.

Despite that there are also many Soccer Schools around Northern Ireland operating outside of the IFA structure.